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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ADJOURNMENT

White Balloon Day

SPEECH

Wednesday, 24 August 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Wednesday, 24 August 2011 Page 9292 Questioner Speaker Mr ROBERT</p>	<p>Source House Proof No Responder Question No.</p>
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(Fadden) (NaN.NaN pm)

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (20:00): Mr Speaker, I request that you receive, in a spirit of great generosity, a white balloon on behalf of the parliament. As you would be aware, 7 September is White Balloon Day as part of Child Protection Week. Bravehearts started White Balloon Day 15 years ago, in 1997. This year marks the 15th anniversary of White Balloon Day. Following the first White Balloon Day, there was a 514 per cent increase in disclosures of child sexual assaults. I hope that you will accept the balloon as part of the nation's realising our responsibility for the protection of children and to commemorate White Balloon Day.

The SPEAKER: I would have been happy to receive the balloon, but it has gone 8 pm and the debate is interrupted. Nevertheless, we all join with the member for Fadden in wishing White Balloon Day every success in its work on behalf of a worthy cause.

House adjourned at 20:01

Wednesday, 24 August 2011

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper) took the chair at 9:31 am.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There being no quorum present, the sitting of the Main Committee will be suspended until a quorum is present.

Proceedings suspended from 9.31 to 10.01

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Hume Electorate: Wollondilly Shire

Mr SCHULTZ (Hume) (10 : 01): I rise to speak on the issue of small business confidence in the electorate of Hume and in particular the Wollondilly Shire. The Wollondilly Shire is a growing region of the electorate I represent. Of the 98,000 constituents I represent, nearly a quarter reside in the Wollondilly Shire. The region has every possible advantage for continued investment. It is located at the edge of the Sydney basin and is only 30 minutes away from Port Kembla. It can also boast the advantage of having

both the Hume Highway and the Sydney to Melbourne southern railway running directly through it. Despite these advantages, small businesses and townships such as Picton are still struggling. Driving through Argyle Street in Picton and seeing the empty shops and 'for lease' signs gives a stark illustration of how small business in this country is struggling under this government and this economic climate.

If the government introduces a carbon tax, even under their own example of assistance for small business, a cash-strapped cafe owner would need to find \$6,000 for some new equipment to receive a one-off earlier tax benefit of \$1,800. Any additional one-off tax benefit will not relieve the ongoing and unavoidable increased operating costs due to escalating energy costs under the carbon tax, particularly electricity prices.

I congratulate the Wollondilly Shire Council and Mayor, Councillor Michael Banasik, as well as the new state Liberal MP, Jai Rowell, for convening a strengthening local business forum last month, with participants from the Wollondilly Economic Development Advisory Group, the Macarthur Business Enterprise Centre and the shire's six chambers of commerce—Picton, Appin, Menangle, Bargo, Tahmoor and The Oaks—to talk about issues affecting businesses and how to overcome them. Reports from this meeting are encouraging and are an illustration of how local communities are uniting to develop solutions to overcome the issues.

Before entering politics, my wife, Gloria, ran a nursery and gift shop business in Cootamundra. We both understand the sacrifices that small business owners make on a daily basis. There are rarely holidays, good staff are hard to find, you do arduous hours of unpaid overtime and then there is always the paperwork and the government red tape. At every opportunity government needs to get out of the way of small business and certainly does not need to introduce a new carbon tax.

Petrie Electorate: 2011 Petrie Future Leaders Essay and Public Speaking Competition

Mrs D'ATH (Petrie) (10 : 04): It is my pleasure to rise and speak about the 2011 Petrie Future Leaders Essay and Public Speaking Competition. This is a competition that I run each year. This competition is

the second time the event has been held. The 2011 competition was launched in March of this year at the Petrie Schools Summit, with the final event being held in July at a gala evening. Entrants to the competition were required to prepare an essay on this topic: 'If you could talk to the Prime Minister, what local or national issue would you discuss?'

There are two categories of entry—primary school students and secondary school students. Primary students were to write no more than 1,000 words and secondary students no more than 1,500 words. From these essays the finalists were selected to give a speech on their essay topic at a gala evening. There were seven entrants this year—four in the primary school category and three in the secondary category. Essay topics ranged from wildlife conservation and the importance of quality teachers and resources to the creation of a small-cap stock exchange to support Australian businesses.

Our youngest entrant this year was Sophie Beddoe. She is in grade 3 and is seven years old. She spoke about the need for improved public transport so that her grandmother could be more independent. Sophie was not only our youngest entrant but was also runner-up in the primary school category. Our runner-up in the secondary school category was Kate Walker, who was our runner-up in the 2009 primary school category, from Clontarf Beach State School. We had two accredited public-speaking adjudicators judging the speeches. Over 60 people attended the gala evening, with all of the students delivering passionate speeches that kept everyone engaged.

In addition to individual trophies for the winners and a perpetual trophy to be held at the winners' schools, the main prize was a trip for the two winners, accompanied by a parent, to Canberra to spend a day behind the scenes. I would like to welcome here today the two winners, Frederique Bloomfield and Sheng Huang, together with Isabelle Bloomfield, Frederique's mother, and also Sheng's mother, Angela. We hope you enjoy your day in Parliament House today. Frederique is 11 years old and in grade 6 at Grace Lutheran Primary School in Clontarf. Frederique won the primary school category talking about the dangers of food additives. Sheng was in our secondary school category and is from St Paul's School at Bald Hill, is in Year 10, is 15 years old and talked about the small cap stock exchange.

It was a great evening with fantastic essays. In conclusion, I acknowledge the Brisbane Airport Corporation for sponsoring the flights for this competition. I hope both students take away from today's visit an enthusiasm to participate in public debate and to ensure that the youth of today have a

strong voice. Frederique, Sheng, Isabelle and Angela; welcome to Parliament House.

Stirling Electorate: Balcatta Soccer Club

Mr KEENAN (Stirling) (10 : 07): Balcatta Soccer Club, one of the great soccer clubs within my electorate, was on the Sunday before last presented with the All Flags League—the highest league of soccer in Western Australia—winner's trophy after their match against Perth Soccer Club at Grindleford Reserve. Balcatta Soccer Club sealed the premiership with four games left to play, and in only their second year in the premier league, which is quite an achievement. This is the first time that a team has won the premiership in their second year in the premier league, and to top it off Balcatta remains 11 points ahead of the team in second position. I might add, for the record, that I am the No. 1 ticket holder for Balcatta Soccer Club and very proud to be so.

This achievement has capped off what has been a fine year and the team is still tipped to claim end-of-season honours. The coaching staff, consisting of Michael Roki, Peter Vastistas, Saul Contera and Johnny Vastistas, has done a fine job this season, as have the dedicated and passionate volunteers who keep the club afloat. Captain and leading goal scorer Ashley Rosindale and vice-captain Adam Tong, along with his teammates Bobson Karoma, Lewis Italiano—who I have been told has had an exceptional season—Adam Stillitano, Chris Thakray, Jack Clisby, Spencer Harris, Daniel Micevski, David Micevski, Moe Atak, Daniel Neiderberger, Stephen Burton, John Migas, Veo Human, Paul Vastistas, Jovo Pavlovic, Luke Palmateer, Michael Black and Simon Elton.

Balcatta Soccer Club goes far beyond what is expected of any normal sporting unit, especially when it comes to community support and engagement. Balcatta Soccer Club has donated over \$10,000 to various charities in Western Australia, including a \$2,500 donation to the telethon appeal. Similarly, the club collects new and used soccer equipment and uniforms to send to an orphanage in El Salvador.

A true testament to the club is last year's winning of the fair play award. The award was won by the men's premier league and was accompanied by a prize of \$2,000 for the club. Balcatta was the only team in both the premier league and first division to not receive one red card. Pat Luca, the club's president, who is generally a human dynamo, continues to do an excellent job of engaging the players, members and sponsors in every aspect of the club. He is a very difficult man to say no to.

I am sure the Balcatta Soccer Club will continue to set a fine example in the league as an exceptional community grown and driven organisation, and I wish all the players, members, coaching staff, committee members, sponsors and fans all the best for the coming end-of-season honours and the season ahead.

Child Care

Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (10:1 0): Today I rise to speak about an issue of growing concern in my electorate and call upon the state government to do their bit in this space. I speak of the issue of universal access to child care, and issue on which the federal government is incredibly proud of the initiatives that we have put into place. Some \$955 million has been given to the states and territories over five years to achieve universal access to early childhood education. This will ensure that all children have accessible, affordable, quality early childhood education in the year prior to entering formal schooling.

It has been demonstrated time and time again through every education survey across the country and indeed across the world that getting that important year prior to school in an educational setting, in a kindergarten setting, will set you up for life. As we know, education does not begin when you go to school or university; education begins the day you are born and travels through with you to the day you die. You are constantly learning. That first year before you begin school is vital, and that is why, as a federal government, we sat down with states and territories and said, 'Let's introduce 15 hours for that year before people start school.' Money was given to the states and territories and a significant lead time to ensure that universal access was set up.

Now the state government in Victoria is stepping away from these concerns and saying that it is not enough, that they do not have time, and that they are not prepared to do it. This will put in jeopardy a wonderful initiative for all children and for all of our communities. We are blessed in Victoria to have some of the highest rates of kindergarten enrolment. We have access to both three- and four-year-old kinder. I know there are concerns about it, but that is why the time lines were introduced—so that these issues could be measured out.

Some \$210 million is going to Victoria alone to deal with this issue. They came to the table via COAG and said they were prepared to engage in this process. They accepted the issue and were doing it. Now they are saying that there is not enough money. They also talked about the occasional care and Take a Break in our neighbourhood houses. Wendy Lovell, the state minister, is not being honest about the money given

by the federal government. She has been given \$210 million towards a process. Yes, money was taken out by the federal government, but it was a small proportion. A much larger proportion was given to the state government. They should be honest about that in their discussions with individuals. This is a state government failure to operate in this wonderful space of occasional care in neighbourhood houses. (*Time expired*)

Manufacturing

Walk for Autism

Mr HUNT (Flinders) (10:1 3): The government's buy Australian manufacturing campaign is a sham. Let me be clear about this. This campaign will proceed, but 10 months from now the government will introduce a massive new manufacturing tax and impost on Australian manufacturing. Whether it is a firm such as Carroll's Injection Moulding in Hastings, run by Mick Carroll, a member of the Mount Martha CFA, who has staff members who are members of the CFA, an all-up an employer of six people, including himself and his wife—it is a small business—which will face higher electricity costs or whether it is BlueScope, from the small to the large every Australian manufacturing firm that uses electricity or gas and relies on road transport will face significantly higher costs immediately. According to the government's own modelling, there will be a 10 per cent increase in electricity bills. This is irrespective of whether the firm has a direct emissions responsibility. Every Australian manufacturing firm will suffer a 10 per cent immediate increase in electricity costs on the government's own modelling and higher on the New South Wales government's modelling. This has rendered the government's buy Australian campaign a sham. Not only that; we understand the steel industry advocate position has been vacant for nine months. Again, this makes the campaign nothing more than lip-service in the face of real job losses.

Having said that the government should drop its carbon tax if it is serious about Australian manufacturing and adopt the better way of direct action through incentives rather than taxes, I want to speak more positively about a local matter. I recently met two brilliant young Australians in my electorate, Liam and Lachlan Martin. The elder brother has Aspergers. They were part of the Walk for Autism and were joined by a third brother, Callum, who is currently completing his VCE studies. As part of the Walk for Autism, they indicated that they were keen to work but did not have work. I was fortunate to be able to link them up with the Green Jobs Corps program, which is a successor of the Green Corps program largely established by the now Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott. Already

the two brothers have been enrolled in a Green Jobs Corps program on the Mornington Peninsula. They will study for a Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management. I am delighted at that outcome. This is a great program. I fear that the government is set to terminate it, and it should not do so. Instead it should adopt our model of a broader green army. *(Time expired)*

Lyne Electorate: Roads and Timber Bridges

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (10:16): I rise to talk about local roads and timber bridges in the electorate of Lyne, an ongoing issue of concern. On 7 September last year an agreement was reached to provide a stable minority government for Australia until the next election. A key part of agreements reached was around roads and timber bridge funding. The first in regard to the electorate of Lyne is the perennial issue of the Pacific Highway, with a billion dollars of federal funding brought forward in the May budget. If and when matched by the New South Wales government in their first budget in September, we as a community will be on track for a 2016 upgrade completion. National funding of vital national infrastructure does make sense in every way.

The second is the \$12.7 million secured for various roads and bridges in the Manning Valley, and the third is the \$17.6 million that was secured to upgrade Bucketts Way between Gloucester and Taree. As all members are, I am certainly determined to get a fair share for my electorate. I have had visitors to the area break their drive along the Pacific Highway to visit my electorate office just to tell me how bad local roads are, and I can only concur. Report cards from Engineers Australia back up this assessment.

To be frank and honest, I think it is absurd that fixing a timber bridge on a council road was a key element in determining who governed Australia. Something is wrong when the Prime Minister of this country is helping to set road maintenance budgets for Greater Taree City Council or any council. I certainly stand by the result, but I despair of a funding model that makes beggars one and all of local members of parliament. Vertical fiscal imbalance is alive and well in Australia today and is, in my view, best exemplified by funding inequality in regard to timber bridges and local roads.

Yet, as always, there is hope. Over five years we have had the Productivity Commission, the Henry tax review and the COAG road reform plan all sketching out a new approach to pricing and funding road use. Ken Henry was born in the Manning and I hope Manning roads are certainly better now than when he was a boy. That tax review said that fuel taxes and registration charges by themselves

cannot adequately price or fund road use. Instead it recommended pricing that takes proper account of the mass, distance and routes of heavy vehicles, pricing that correlates with road congestion and road damage. Better pricing and funding promises substantial productivity improvements to be realised and shared as general economic gains and specific road improvements.

These are important considerations for the future of Australia and addressing this problem of vertical fiscal imbalance. I hope the experience of other members of parliament in chasing road funding will make this a priority issue and we do get this important issue resolved sometime soon. *(Time expired)*

Private Health Insurance

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (10:19): When you are a cash-strapped government looking for every cent you can, you can understand why having a go at the 30 per cent private health insurance rebate is attractive. Like most shortcuts in public life they can look good at the time but there is a very good reason why they have never been done before. Today I am going to talk about the regional cities and towns around Australia because they are at the forefront, at the battlelines, where we will see significant economic pain, which has not been modelled by Treasury, if we see a continued molestation of this 30 per cent rebate by the government.

When you take out the 30 per cent private health insurance rebate, the first thing you do is give incentives to downgrade to cut-price insurance. That may well mean not so many people pull out because of the Medicare Levy Surcharge but more importantly—and I note the Australia Physiotherapy Association's statement yesterday—it is the ancillary cover that starts to disappear. It is the revenue model for physios, dentists, podiatrists and other allied health providers that starts to suffer. It is the specialists who devote their services to regional towns and cities as you go from Sydney north through Port Macquarie, Taree, Coffs Harbour and Ballina who say, 'Maybe I am better going back to the city where there are more people who are privately insured.' These are the specialists who do honorary sessions in public hospitals. These are the specialists who while they work at a private hospital are doing the on-call arrangement at the public. These are the specialists who if they go will leave a dangerous situation with on-call cover in some of these larger towns and smaller cities. This starts a perpetuation of the underskilling and the workforce shortages that we already face.

It is always attractive to find a quick, easy solution to this perennial problem, but usually that easy solution is

wrong. It is time that we started to get over this notion that you are paying PHI to millionaires from poor people. No-one on an income of under \$800 a week pays any net tax. No families under \$900 a week pay any net tax. It is called the net tax threshold. Secondly, if you take a dataset from the ATO and actually look at it, people who are insured are only \$100 or so a year more wealthy. When they pay their health insurance premium they are actually hundreds of dollars poorer.

If you hate the rich, as half this chamber appears to, take it out in the tax system and raise taxes, but stop cutting off social services to Australians. We are proud of what Medicare delivers to every Australian. We are proud of what the safety net delivers to every Australian. We do not charge rich people more to send their kids to an independent school. We do not charge rich families more to send their kids to university. Back off the 30 per cent private health insurance rebate. It keeps 51 per cent of Australians insured and it is something that should be protected and supported in Australia. (*Time expired*)

Australian Volunteers Overseas

Mr MARLES (Corio—Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs) (10: 22): Every year many hundreds of Australians head overseas to volunteer in developing countries. In my role as parliamentary secretary I meet many of these people throughout the Pacific and see the benefits of the wonderful work that they do. These are men and women who take time out of their own lives, away from their jobs and their families, to share their skills and expertise to help improve the lives of others. Today I would like to pay tribute to the work of volunteers from Geelong. My office has recently been given the opportunity to extend a thank you on behalf of the Australian government to 15 local people who have returned from volunteering missions to Asia and the Pacific during the last 12 months or so. The work they did is extraordinarily varied and says a lot about the huge range of skills needed by many of our nearest neighbours but it also says a lot about how we, as Australians, are prepared to pitch in and help wherever it is needed.

For example, Peter Hudson is known to many people in Geelong as the former executive director of United Way and also formerly of the Lord Mayor's Foundation in Melbourne. Retired now, Peter has years of experience in fundraising and business management and his task as a volunteer with Australian Business Volunteers during two months in Cambodia was to help a team at the Bright Hope Institute improve their own fundraising and management skills and secure the future growth of the institute. In doing this he was assuring the educational future of the 400 students from remote and rural areas of Cambodia who attend

the institute in any year, gaining valuable skills in agriculture and business management.

Geoffrey Moss from Geelong spent six weeks in East Timor training biomedical technicians how to fix medical equipment in the country's hospitals. X-ray machines, suction pumps, heart monitors, blood monitors and incubators used to save the lives of newborn babies were all fixed by Mr Moss and his trainee team. The equipment itself had been donated by countries around the world, but it is no good to anyone if it is not functioning properly.

A retired bookshop administrator, Margaret Tembo spent a month in Tonga last year lending her expertise to the Friendly Islands Bookshop. It is the only bookshop in the capital, Nuku'Alofa, and employs 20 people across its main street retail outlet, book warehouse and small shops on outlying islands. As part of the Uniting Church's international mission, Margaret played an important role as a fresh pair of eyes and ears during the bookshop's critical rebuilding phase. The shop and all its stock was destroyed by fire during the 2006 riots and its staff have been working to restore the business since then.

Volunteering comes in many shapes and sizes, but the constant in all these stories is the desire to give of oneself, to make a difference and to do some good. Perhaps Margaret Tembo summed it up best when she said, 'We are a caring community in Geelong and it is something to be proud of that we are prepared to look outwards and help others whose lives are much more difficult than ours.' As you can see, there is no single set of skills needed by volunteers except perhaps for an open heart. I would like to acknowledge Zach Power in the audience, who is on work experience with me from Geelong High School and will be preparing my next constituency statement.

Live Animal Exports

Ms SAFFIN (Page) (10: 25): I have with me four different types of petitions all dealing with live animal export. They were given to me to bring to the parliament. They went before the Petitions Committee. I got a notice back that they were not in the proper order. I want to do justice to the people who put their signatures on them so I shall talk to them.

There are three different petitions from three different sources but with hundreds of signatures calling for live export to be banned outright. Then there is another petition which states:

We demand government take the needs of animals, farmers, meatworkers and Australian jobs seriously

by supporting the local slaughter industry and chilled/frozen meat export.

I will speak to the last point. I have just come from a forum in this place from WSPA, the World Society for the Protection of Animals. They were handing over a petition along the same lines, talking about banning live export and phasing it out. They had a meat processor with them, a plant operator whose name if I remember correctly was Peter Cody, from Western Australia. He was talking about the issue and the idea that the live export industry has grown up at the expense of the domestic meat industry. I said, 'That is an idea that we need to test and I want that tested in this place.' It is an idea that I have taken up in my local area, where I have a large meat-processing industry as well, Northern Cooperative Meat. That is what they were talking about. It is always the plea from the locals.

We have heard the debate that has taken place on live export recently. I know that all members in this place have been overwhelmed with emails and with commentary. It was an issue that really ignited people right across electorates with an outpouring of feeling. I live in an electorate that is rural and it has a very strong and viable agricultural industry and beef and dairy. I am conscious that it is not in live export but in that sector. In my seat the overwhelming feeling of people was that, whilst this industry exists, we have to do this in a humane way and animal welfare has to be the primary goal. Secondly, a lot of people want it phased out.

I have had a few private member's motions before the House over the last parliament and this parliament. One of them was quite lengthy. It talks about that and it talks about a renewed consideration. (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Has the honourable member taken that petition to the Petitions Committee?

Ms SAFFIN: I have, and I got a note back saying they were not in order, and I was doing justice to the people who put their signatures on just to—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: You could seek leave to table them as a document and if no-one objects they can be tabled. Are you seeking leave?

Ms SAFFIN: I am.

Leave granted.

Electorate of Chifley: No School No Play Program

Mr HUSIC (Chifley—Government Whip) (10 : 29): I have said in this place a number of times that one of my big passions within the electorate of Chifley, where nearly a third of the people who live in the electorate

are under the age of 19, is education. It stands at the forefront of the issues that I take a particular interest in within the electorate. This is in terms of not only public education but also the non-government sector, which is operating very well within the electorate. I am also pleased to see the growth of trade training schools. We had the pleasure of seeing the opening of the Tyndale Christian School's trade training centre recently, which will provide support for students learning the hospitality trade and getting involved in that trade, and seeing their last two years of secondary schooling being counted as an apprenticeship, which I think is a tremendous initiative that will ensure that students who want to move into a trade have support. I am very happy to see that. Obviously, the University of Western Sydney, my old university, is doing a lot of great work.

Besides providing the opportunity for students to take on further education, they also need to turn up. They also need to balance out their education. By that I mean that their attendance is strong, that their engagement in school is strong and that they are engaging in healthy lifestyle and wellbeing, particularly through sport and taking up physical activity. It is for those very reasons that I was keen to see the federal government's \$2 million No School No Play program rolled out in the seat of Chifley. There are about six schools in the electorate that I am really pleased have agreed to participate.

Another pleasing aspect of what has gone on is the fact that we have been able to get private sponsorship, chiefly through Woolworths and a shareholder at the Sydney Kings, Greg Bundy, chipping in to ensure that the program can roll out. Basketball Australia is participating in the scheme. Six schools in the Chifley electorate through the Chifley campuses, Plumpton High, St Clare's Catholic High School, and schools in Bidwell, Shalvey, Mount Druitt and also Dunheved will take part in the program. For one hour a week over six weeks 120 students will engage in the sport and on the commitment that they will turn up to school that they will be engaged in school and that, through the support of Woolworths, they will have healthy breakfasts and snacks and learn the value of physical activity. It is a tremendous program. I am very happy that a number of people have banded together across corporate, school and community sectors to be involved. I commend the program. I am very happy with the support it has received so far and look forward to reporting on its progress.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper): In accordance with standing order 193, the time for members' constituency statements has expired.

Same-Sex Relationships

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper): Pursuant to the resolution passed on 5 July 2011, as amended, we now move to constituency statements on ways to achieve equal treatment for same-sex couples including marriage.

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (10 : 33): Today is a good day for those who believe in love and the power of love to change things for the better. It is almost a year since I successfully moved a motion to ask members to take the temperature of their electorate regarding marriage equality, and since then the push for equal love has really warmed up. As a result it seemed to me that it would make sense to have time set aside to hear from everyone about what their constituents have said in the last few months, and I am glad that the government agreed to make time and we were able to secure space for everyone to express their views and the views of their electorates. I congratulate all the other honourable members who choose to participate in this discussion today, regardless of their position, because it is very important that we continue this debate.

It is a very important day today in the life of this parliament because I believe it represents another very important step along the road to full equality and to finally ending the legal discrimination that faces same-sex-attracted people. I am confident that it will not be long before marriage equality is achieved, because love builds bridges where there are none. Love thaws hearts and warms minds. Love is a powerful force for good and a force for change, and I believe that it is love that has brought us to this place in the debate and it is love that will carry us over the threshold of discrimination and fear to marriage equality. This push for equal love is not just important for those who want to get married. It sends a powerful message to the boy in a country town struggling with his sexuality or the student who wants to take her girlfriend to the high school formal that this country believes their love is equal.

The people of Melbourne support equal love and want marriage equality. Support for marriage equality was a key issue in my successful election campaign for the seat of Melbourne. The Greens were the only party to have marriage equality as part of our election platform and I was the only lower house candidate in the country who was elected on such a platform. During the campaign and subsequently, I have had such strong feedback and almost universal support for the Greens' stance on marriage equality. I have received several thousand emails on the issue and over nine in 10 have expressed support for marriage equality. In a survey I conducted in my electorate in Melbourne in November last year marriage equality was one of the top priority issues for respondents and, of the 475 people who responded to the survey, only one respondent expressed opposition to equal marriage

rights. When out at listening posts in my electorate I have had great public support for our stance.

Melbourne has hosted numerous meetings, rallies and other events, all expressing support for marriage equality. From around the country I have also received many messages of support for the Greens' push for equal love, and a number of opinion polls reflect the fact that the overwhelming majority of Australians support ending discrimination. The universal feeling expressed in these messages is the same: why shouldn't someone marry the person they love? The Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, out of step with public opinion, have said their parties will vote to continue discrimination, but already cracks in the wall of indifference placed around the old parties by their leaders are starting to show, and I want to commend the backbenchers and ministers that have been seeking to expand those cracks and break down that wall of indifference.

It seems to me that if you come from a party that believes in equality, that must be equality for everyone, and if you come from a party that believes in an individual's right to do as they wish with their own life, so long as it does not harm someone else, then that should extend to the most fundamental of rights, the right to be able to marry the person that you love. I believe it is not sustainable for the government or the opposition to hold back the floodgates of public opinion that wants Australia to come into the 21st century. I have great confidence that we will achieve full equality in the life of this parliament and, after all, if it is something that Catholic Spain can do then Australia as a 21st century advanced democracy should be able to do it as well. The Greens have a bill before the parliament ready and waiting to overturn the marriage ban. We are ready to move forward with that bill when it becomes clear that the barriers to love have been removed. This is not going to be the last time that this matter is debated in this House. We will, as I have said, press ahead in the Senate with our proposal to remove marriage inequality once one of the major parties steps into the 21st century and steps into line with mainstream public opinion and we can remove one of the last areas of discrimination in this country. *(Time expired)*

Mr NEVILLE (Hinkler—The Nationals Deputy Whip) (10:38): I am pleased to speak to the resolution put forward by the member for Melbourne that members consult their electorates about the matter of same-sex marriage. It is a very vexed issue for many on the other side of the chamber and I understand the tremendous pressure that has been brought to bear on members of the Labor Party regarding the Marriage Act. Nevertheless, the member for Reid has been on the record as saying he does not believe there is

overwhelming public support for same-sex marriage, despite proponents' claims, and I believe he is correct. I also believe Australia has far more pressing issues which warrant the parliament's attention at this time; issues like the cost of living, the burden of new taxes, the management of our immigration and, indeed, the economy.

Nevertheless, last year by way of resolution the member for Melbourne asked every parliamentarian to go back to their electorates and gauge the level of support for same-sex marriage, and I did just that. I have always found my newsletter was a very good way to get feedback from my constituents, so I placed it in my Christmas newsletter. The results may be disheartening for the member for Melbourne: only 14 people were supportive of same-sex marriage; 595 opposed it. That is roughly two per cent of the respondents in Hinkler being in favour of same-sex marriage. Quite frankly, I was surprised. Even though it is a conservative electorate, I thought the result would have been closer. Along with this I received 232 letters from my constituents in the form of an open letter to the Prime Minister protesting against any move towards same-sex marriage.

Like the vast majority of my constituents, I believe marriage is, and should remain, the union of a man and a woman. It seems there is a great push in some sections of society for change for change's sake, that what was good enough for centuries is no longer good enough today and that a culture's symbols, traditions and ceremonies should make way for the holy grails of political correctness and individual gratification. I read a column by Miranda Devine on Sunday, 14 August, a very interesting piece lamenting the fatherless society which we are creating. There are a couple of sentences that resonated with me very strongly:

Tolerance has gone back to front. Now we have to downplay traditional marriage for fear of causing offence. No-one can be a wife or a husband anymore; everyone is a partner.

From time immemorial—and certainly in the Judeo-Christian tradition of 30 or more centuries—marriage has been the framework from which other aspects of orderly society have been regulated. Inheritance, the transfer of wealth in past times, the alignment of nations and international treaties have all revolved around marriage, but one overriding factor in Western society is that marriage always took place between a man and a woman. It is a framework recognised by society, by law and by the church, which sees it as a sacrament. It is the formal expression of love and commitment between two people in which children are conceived and raised. Back in 2004 when we debated the Marriage Legislation Amendment Bill, I argued

that no minority group had the right to attach traditional symbols to their own situation and turn the institution of marriage into something it is not, and I hold that view today.

Do not get me wrong; I am not homophobic and I am certainly against all forms of discrimination. I strongly believe that Australians should be able to live their lives without prejudice, discrimination or bias. I have staunchly defended the rights of same-sex couples—whether they are in a physical relationship or not—to be able to transfer property and enjoy superannuation and insurance rights and the like, but I do not believe that the legal union of a same-sex couple should be classified as marriage, and I do not believe that protecting the traditional status of marriage is somehow discrimination; that is a ridiculous proposition. At a rally in Sydney on the weekend the New South Wales Greens MP, David Shoebridge, said that the push for marriage equality was now a mainstream issue with 'the majority support across Australia'. This is certainly not the case in my electorate of Hinkler and I would suggest not in Queensland as a whole.

Mr HAYES (Fowler) (10:43): For an issue gaining much media attention and public discourse, I welcomed the opportunity to consult with my electorate concerning their insights into, and opinion on, this particular issue. Proponents for the legislation for same-sex marriage argue that it is simply a change of wording in the Marriage Act, citing that it currently discriminates. I fully support the government's reform over the last few years which has seen the removal of all forms of discrimination against same-sex couples. As a result amendments have been made to 85 pieces of Commonwealth legislation, now ensuring that partners of same-sex relationships are not legally discriminated against. However, changing the Marriage Act in my view violates the sanctity of marriage and allows same-sex marriage to, in fact, redefine the meaning of marriage itself.

Prior to the 2005 by-election, when I was elected, I used to lay down a series of markers for the electorate as to who Chris Hayes was and what he stood for, irrespective of party politics. I felt it was important for the community to be able to gauge who I am as a person. I advised that I did have a union background. I advised also that I ran a small business. I spoke of my then 29-year marriage to Bernadette, about raising a family locally and boasted proud of being a grandfather. Importantly, I also advised the community that I personally hold religious beliefs as I am a practising Catholic, and I shared this information with people so they could sense who Chris Hayes was as a person. Clearly, a person's background has a measure of influence in terms of their views into the

future. Having said this, I in no way believe that my personal views on an issue such as same-sex marriage overshadow the views of my constituents. In fact, I strongly believe that I was elected to the parliament to reflect the views and values of the residents of Fowler.

With this in mind I report the results of my consultation with the local community. I liaised with the members of my local electorate directly, both formally and in street meetings. I certainly received extensive correspondence on the matter. I received four petitions and I conducted an online survey. The feedback that I received was overwhelmingly in opposition to same-sex marriage. In the survey that I conducted on my website I invited people who visit the website to answer the question, 'Should the federal government legislate to recognise same-sex marriage?' Of the 395 votes cast, over 90 per cent said no. I received three petitions which contained over 350 signatures and a fourth containing 150 signatures. Furthermore, I have received over 400 personal letters from constituents stating their wish for the preservation of the traditional definition of marriage and have requested I highlight the importance of the stability it provides, not only for children but for society at large.

The overwhelming majority of emails received in support of same-sex marriage, from people involved in the marriage equality campaign, were in fact sent from outside of my electorate. Irrespective of my opinion on this matter, I say that I acted impartially in my liaison with constituents. At one request for a personal meeting I met with Jessica. Jessica is a lesbian who is in a long-term relationship with her partner. Enabled by the fact that she is transsexual, Jessica and her partner are planning to have children in the future. I came away from the meeting thinking that she is a very open and honest young woman, very passionate about her beliefs and certainly genuine in her regard about family. I accept on good faith the reasons why she did not register her relationship: that she believes that a civil union differs greatly from the meaning of marriage. I say that on the basis that I was very impressed with her candour, notwithstanding the fact, as I indicated to her, that I could not personally support her position.

I note that this debate is highly controversial. However, everyone is entitled to their view. Following the expression of my view at the last New South Wales Labor conference I was written up as a vile, right-wing politician. I do not apologise for my beliefs and I certainly will not apologise for the overwhelming view taken by my electorate. I thank the House for the opportunity to participate in this debate and I thank the member for Melbourne for moving his motion and making it possible. (*Time expired*)

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson) (1 0: 48): For most of us a marriage proposal might be a momentous, exciting event, but you will have to forgive me for not getting too excited about the proposal that I and 148 others received in this place last year. My lack of excitement perhaps stems from the fact that it was an indecent proposal, or at least a pointless proposal. A motion directing members of the House of Representatives to represent the views of their electorate suggests we have been told how to do our job. Did we really need to be asked to canvass our constituents' views on the issue of same-sex marriage? Let us not mistake what is going on here. This is a motion that is one gutless step towards trying to change the law on marriage. It is a motion that says, 'I have not got the guts to put up the same-sex marriage bill because I know it will be defeated right now, so I will just throw the concept out there so you will get used to it.'

When I am talking to people in my electorate of Dawson they have more important concerns than this—concerns about the carbon tax, concerns about the poor state of local roads and the state of the Bruce Highway—and they think the government should have those concerns too. However, I did throw it out there through the media that I was happy to get people's views. We have had GetUp pushing this cause—the Labor-Greens' front GetUp attempting to skew public opinion. Emails generated by GetUp remain few and I was able to personally respond to those emails as they came in. I responded because I wanted to determine if they were actual constituents, because there were no names or addresses to verify if they were. In many cases they admitted they were not from my electorate and in one particularly worrying case the owner of the email address knew nothing about it at all. So, GetUp—this paragon of grassroots social democracy—has been out there trying to subvert the democratic process with fake emails coming in from people who know nothing about what they are supposed to be signing up to. What a disgrace!

With all the verified constituents who commented to me on this issue, tallied up as of 10.20 this morning, 78 were for same-sex marriage in my electorate; 456 were against. That signifies two things to me: one, there is a lack of interest in my electorate on this issue and particularly that people see it as a side issue; and two, from those who do take an interest in this issue, there is strong opposition from the electorate of Dawson. While I have my own view on this matter, the view that I hold here today is shaped by those genuine concerns from people in my electorate. The only time same-sex marriage garners anything in terms of support is when it is dressed up as something that it is not.

When opponents are called homophobic, when they are attacked for discrimination or being a religious nut or a

dinosaur, to me it just shows how weak the arguments in favour of same-sex marriage actually are. The issue has been dressed up as discrimination but that is not what it is. It is not about religion, either. It is actually about marriage, and to talk about same-sex marriage—I am sorry, but that is just not what marriage is. Marriage is a legal, exclusive and permanent union of a man and a woman, and that is by its definition. That is what marriage is. That is what marriage is in just about every country in the world and has been before Christianity. That is right: the religious nuts did not invent marriage. They simply recognised, revered, encouraged and supported what has always been the foundation of society.

Marriage is the very foundation of humanity. It is the bond from which families are born, the basic building block of society. To water down the definition of marriage is to weaken the foundation of our society, and that is what the Greens would have us do. Marriage is between a man and a woman, not between a woman and a woman or a man and a man, or a man and three women for that matter, or a man and a woman and another man. The definition of marriage is the only argument we have against polygamy. If we would open the door to same-sex marriage, no valid argument remains against polygamy or the multiple other type of unions that could be out there because the term 'marriage' becomes meaningless. So, although a majority of members accepted this marriage proposal, I am afraid this is one issue that my electorate of Dawson is very happy to leave at the altar.

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (10 : 53): I am pleased to ever so briefly summarise the electorate of Denison's views on marriage equality. The motion of this House to gauge the views of the electorate I applauded and went to some trouble to comply with, including advertising in the *Mercury* newspaper and in my newsletter, as well as by meeting with all constituents interested in discussing the issue. In total, I received over 1,300 emails and letters, mostly from people in the electorate. I have met personally with some 50 constituents and over 350 people packed into the main lecture theatre at the University of Tasmania to attend my public forum on the issue.

The one point both opponents and supporters of same-sex marriage agree on is the enduring value of marriage. Both marriage equality advocate, Rodney Croome, and Presbyterian minister and opponent of same-sex marriage, Campbell Markham, described marriage as a bedrock institution during their contribution to the public forum. However, Mr Markham and many others who share the view that the current definition of marriage as a union between man and woman should be maintained do so based on the belief that marriage is intrinsically linked to bearing

and raising children, arguing the bedrock of society is family and the bedrock of family is marriage between a man and a woman.

Many constituents expressed the view that marriage should not be about the emotional or sexual connectedness of adults but ultimately about the needs of children. They pointed to a number of studies to argue that the needs of children are best served if they are brought up by both biological parents. Moreover, there was strong support for the widespread Christian belief that same-sex marriage 'will undermine the very fabric of God-ordained marriage' and ultimately have a very negative influence upon families, children and, therefore, our society as a whole.

Some constituents said homosexuality is unnatural, and therefore same-sex marriage is unnatural. One gentleman quoted the English bishop and philosopher Joseph Butler to make his point, saying, 'Everything is what it is and not another thing.' Occasionally concern was raised at the consequences of loosening the definition of marriage, citing the risk of polygamy, paedophilia and even bestiality. Some constituents voiced concern about the possibility of legal action being taken against churches opting to exclude same-sex marriages, even in the event where safeguards are put in place to prevent such an eventuality. That governments have removed discrimination of same-sex couples in most legislation and that Tasmania, among other jurisdictions, allows same-sex unions, was cited frequently as going far enough.

On the other hand, constituents supportive of same-sex marriage believe that without the right to marry same-sex partners are unable to live as free and equal citizens. They argued such a denial equates to discrimination and rejection of their most basic human rights. Mr Croome argued:

Denying us the right to marry the person we love sends out the message that our love is not as good and our commitment is not as strong as it is for those couples who can marry. It says we are second-class citizens against whom it is okay to discriminate.

This was illustrated by a mother who expressed disappointment that her heterosexual child was free to marry, while her child who was in a long-term same-sex relationship was not. In many cases, concerns were not with the churches, which are seen as having the right to decide who they marry, but with the inequity in the Marriage Act which is legislative discrimination.

Law expert Dr Olivia Rundle noted that while recent legislative changes in theory allow same-sex couples to access certain legal rights, the ability to enforce these rights remains uncertain. She concluded that marriage

remains the only universally recognised relationship that allows couples to formally commit to lifelong unions.

Some constituents were of the view that legalising same-sex marriage would, in fact, strengthen the institution of marriage by reinforcing its value in modern society. Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, Robin Banks, even suggested that by challenging us to rethink traditional gender roles same-sex marriage has the potential to lead to greater equality of the sexes.

While many people in Denison feel strongly about marriage equality, I dare not hazard a guess at the numbers for and against, not least because both camps claim a majority and have polling to prove it. What I do know for sure is that the government needs to find a way to address this matter that will recognise fundamental principles and respect both sides of the debate.

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (10 : 58): Central to this motion today is the idea that members of parliament in this place should consult with their constituents on important issues, including that of same-sex marriage. The member for Melbourne, Adam Bandt, said in his speech in the House:

We want those who are still stuck in the old way of thinking to go out and engage with the people in their electorates to find out where they are now at.

Imagine my surprise when I went to look for Mr Bandt's survey on his website. Nothing. I looked for his community forums. Nothing. Don't get me wrong. There were a lot of 'click here if you agree with me' petitions, but no survey about how you could tell him what is important to you. He has asked members in this place to do what he himself is not prepared to do, and that is to genuinely consult with his electorate about the issues important to them.

When challenged on this issue on JOY 94.9FM, Adam Bandt said, 'We did have a consultation. It was the election.' He said:

I went to the election saying 'I want to make this an issue.' I stood on this as a platform and I expressly said, 'One of the reasons I asked people to vote for me was so it was understood that this was an important issue.'

I could be stating the obvious here, but I thought that everyone in this place was elected on a platform. Tony Abbott, Leader of the Liberal Party, ruled out a carbon tax at the last election. Warren Truss, Leader of the Nationals, also ruled it out. The Prime Minister herself, only six days before the election, said, 'There will be no carbon tax under the government I lead.' The only

person in the House who explicitly ran on a platform of imposing a carbon tax was Adam Bandt. He is one representative in this place amongst 149 others. If you take Mr Bandt's argument to its logical conclusion, that is that he has a mandate to implement his platform, why then does he ignore the mandate provided to all other members of this place on the issue of the carbon tax? Why does he get to pick and choose?

Mr Bandt said in his original speech on this motion that 'recent polling shows the majority of Australians support a move to full equality for marriage'. He reiterated this again today. Greens Senator Sarah Hanson-Young has stated that such surveys are 'proof, or evidence, that the law needs to be changed'. Yet again they do not apply the same test on other issues, including the carbon tax. Both the recent Newspoll and Galaxy polls clearly state that the majority of Australians are against the carbon tax. Yet the Greens refuse to listen. This is hugely hypocritical of them.

As the federal member for Higgins I did not need a motion to tell me how to do my job. Unlike the member for Melbourne, since becoming a member of parliament I have sought the views of my electorate by conducting 10 community forums in different parts of Higgins, by regular listening posts at my 23 train stations, regular mobile office meetings at shopping strips and regular meetings with my constituents and community groups.

I also have a survey on my website and have directly mailed this survey to 17,234 people in my electorate. In my newsletter that is distributed to every household, I have also asked people to fill in my survey online. My survey asks people to let me know about the top four issues that concern them. There are 15 issues listed, including same-sex marriage, but I also give constituents the option to fill in their own issues or to provide more detail. The result of my survey to date is the top four issues that people identify are government waste and mismanagement, investment in mental health care, choice in education, and securing Australia's borders. That is not to say that same-sex marriage is not an important issue to many people in my electorate; it is. For some it is a decisive issue and the one that will determine their vote, but there are also other issues in my electorate of Higgins that are important to the people who live there.

There can be no question that social change is complex. There is a need for those who want to make change to take the community with them. I think it is important for representatives in this place to have time to reflect on social issues. I will always do just that. This reflection is something that should be ongoing, assessed and reassessed.

It is my view that arbitrary deadlines have more to do with political grandstanding than achieving genuine community consensus. In my view the Greens have done more to put back this debate and discussion than to move it forward, to coin a phrase, because they have tried to play politics with it. They have stood on platforms with people who have denigrated those who have a different view as homophobic. While there are some people in the community who are, sadly, homophobic, this is not the majority view. Name-calling will never be a persuasive argument. It will not convince people. It is, ultimately, dishonest. It does not go to the core arguments. And can be used as a tool to silence people.

As I see it, there are two aspects to this debate but only one element that has received the headlines. The first is whether we should recognise a union between two loving adults of the same sex. The second is about children and whether same-sex couples should have the same access as heterosexual couples to IVF and adoption. I know that there are people with goodwill and deeply held personal views on both sides of this debate. Unlike Adam Bandt, I have met with these people. I do not denigrate them for their view. I have listened. And I have also shared with them my personal view that I do not believe that the churches, mosques or synagogues should be forced to marry anyone that they do not want to. I have shared my view that strong and stable relationships are the building blocks of any society. Like my colleagues in the coalition, I support measures to end discrimination against same-sex couples in Commonwealth legislation. I have shared my view in support of civil unions for same-sex couples. And I have also shared my view that there are legal implications that flow from same-sex marriage. And those legal implications affect children. As a society, something that has serious consequences for children and for family deserves very serious scrutiny. As a result, the threshold for making change to existing laws on this issue is, in my view, high.

It is my view that the people who want change bear the onus and responsibility for making the argument for that change. I have not been convinced by the need for change at this time.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (11 :03): In speaking to this motion, I say that I received 2,270 survey responses from people who completed my web survey, met me on street stalls, met me in my office or sent me a letter or an email. After removing non-electorate folks, I was down to 1,373 responses. I note that I do not include my constituent Carl Katter, Bob's brother, in my numbers, as he came out, so to speak, in the media last night and I closed my survey yesterday. The breakdown from the survey is as follows: support current definition of marriage, 604 or 44 per cent; do not support current

definition, 728 or 53 per cent; and unsure, 41 or three per cent.

Before I detail how I shall interpret my constituents' votes I shall provide a brief history of marriage. The best available evidence has marriage at 4,351 years old, as my advice is actually a year old. Beforehand, families consisted of loosely organised groups with several male leaders, multiple women shared by them and then children. As hunter-gatherers settled down into agrarian civilisations, society needed more stable relationships. From this, there is evidence of marriage ceremonies uniting one woman and one man in Mesopotamia. Marriage was then embraced by Hebrews, Greeks and Romans, although male Hebrews could take several wives and Greek and Roman marriages were not monogamous for men.

In ancient times marriage had very little to do with love or religion. Through marriage a woman became a man's property and was used to produce heirs. If wives failed to produce offspring, their husbands could give them back and marry somebody else. As the Roman Catholic church blossomed in Europe, a priest became necessary for a marriage to be legally recognised.

In 1563, at the Council of Trent, it was written into canon law. This change improved the lot of wives, as their husbands had to respect them more and divorce was forbidden. Romantic love crept in as a reason for marriage only during the Middle Ages. With the surname Perrett, I am proud to say that many scholars believe that it was invented by the French. Love did change marriage and wives no longer existed only to serve men, although in many cultures they were still owned and gave up their name to symbolise this surrendering of identity.

Sources of English law relating to marriage include the common law, ecclesiastical courts and the parliament. In English laws, marriage was a civil contract that required a religious ceremony, so if the elements of the contract were met there was then a union of a man and a woman for life to the exclusion of all others. Obviously certainty about the bloodline of heirs flowed from these civil contracts but love was not a contract requirement.

Statutory marriage laws were not passed in the UK until Lord Hardwicke's Act of 1753. We jump forward 100 years to my home state of Queensland where the Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages Act was passed in 1855. Like the state of Victoria, in the 1860s most colonial governments were obsessed with controlling who Indigenous Australians married. In Queensland it was to prevent miscegenation by preventing black-white unions. In Western Australia it was to absorb blacks into the white population by preventing black-black marriages.

When women gained the right to vote in Australia in 1901, marriage became a union of two full citizens, and the notion of ownership of women has gradually faded ever since. Since Federation, race has intruded into personal marriage arrangements. For example, during World War II men in our occupation forces in Japan were refused permission to marry the women they loved if they were Japanese because of the White Australia policy.

In 1959, during the Commonwealth parliamentary debate on the first national Marriage Act, the media ran hot with the news that in Darwin the Protector of Aborigines refused Gladys Namagu permission to marry her white fiance, Mick Daly. Under pressure in the House, the Menzies government promised such discrimination would never be written into Australian marriage law. Marriage law remained unchanged until 2004. But it is worth noting that other laws changed around it, such as no-fault divorce by the Whitlam government and the law recognising marital rape. Before this such a charge was inconceivable as the husband owned his wife's sexuality. In 2004 the Marriage Act was changed to refer exclusively to a union between a man and a woman.

Nearly 20 constituents came to see me and assured me that marriage only existed so that people could have procreational sex—that is procreational and not recreational. As a Catholic I am familiar with this framework, although I did marry an Anglican. When I asked these constituents if men and women should be able to marry even if they could not have children, they were untroubled. So when I consider that what the nation states approach to marriage should be, I must reject for logical inconsistency the notion that only people who can naturally have children should be allowed to marry.

I reject out of hand the fecund versus barren test; we are talking about humans, not cattle. I know that faith is illogical. That is why it is called faith, not logic. Thankfully I do not have to explain my faith to the Pope, to Pell, to people like David Marr or to anybody else. It is a private matter between me and my God, so while my faith informs any decisions I might make about marriage, it does not dictate how I decide. The main reason I believe that I should be guided by my survey results is that a change will cause less harm to young people. Too many constituents told me their children were bullied and belittled because they were same-sex attracted. Some were even driven to suicide. I cannot sit idly by while the nation is complicit in this harm. It is time for this nation to protect committed, monogamous relationships, whatever the gender of the adults who wish to have their relationship recognised by the state. (*Extension of time granted*) Today is Wednesday. If we change the Marriage Act right now

and tomorrow same-sex attracted people were able to get married, how would my world be different on Friday morning? Will I wake up next to my beautiful wife of 16 years and say, 'You look cheaper'? I will not be doing that for a lot of reasons.

It has been put to me that bringing in marriage equality will somehow cheapen my relationship because it is supposed to be only between a man and a woman. I am sorry, but I will not be thinking about same-sex couples, my neighbours or anybody else when I wake up in the arms of the most beautiful woman in the world. I will not be thinking about my neighbours—hi to Grant and Norma, Jenny and John—or anybody else. I will be thinking only about my wife. It is time for everybody, every adult in Australia, to be given the same opportunity, to wake up with their own loved one—obviously not with my wife. It is time for everyone in Australia to be given that opportunity.

Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (11:10): I also rise to speak on the motion of Mr Bandt, the member for Melbourne, in relation to same-sex marriage. I note and I am very grateful that the member for Moreton has committed to bringing up his children as Anglicans and as Parramatta Eels' supporters. It is fantastic to hear. We enjoy a good role of the football field.

This is a very important issue and, unlike some previous speakers, I do not have an intrinsic problem with being asked to consult with my constituency. I think it is a bit of a moot point because that is what we all should be doing in the House of Representatives. This is not the Senate; we do not need to be instructed to talk to real people. We spend our whole lives doing it. Indeed, in my constituency I have the highest rate of couples with dependent children of any electorate in Australia, according to the last census. I have one of the highest rates of mortgages, one of the highest rates of McMansions, the lowest rate of single parents in the country and one of the lowest proportions of renters. It is a very homogenous society. Unsurprisingly, of course, that would lead people to come to me and speak about the value of marriage as being between a man and a woman.

One thing that I did not hear in the member for Moreton's presentation—I am a great studier of history and I think he made some good historical points that there have been inequities and injustices in our past societies—is that there has still not been a good argument put forward about why we need to go down this particular path that is being advanced about redefining or doing something to marriage as an institution itself.

We live in a secular society. I am a strong Christian myself and I have strong views about marriage. But I

do believe that in a secular society we have to have legal recognition of unions of all kinds, without fear or favour on religious or other grounds. That would lead us to the conclusion that we have a civil union in Australia today. I have presented that view to the activists that have come to see me in Australia, and I have no problem with civil unions or legal recognition of partnerships between same sexes or otherwise. That would be the next practical, logical step for us to take at this point in society today. However, I think these activists that are seeking to make change today are not looking for that. They are looking to do something to the institution of marriage, an institution which has served us so well historically. Yes, it has been for procreational purposes, historically speaking. Marriage has had an important foundation and value and it is not always that way, but it has a historical societal reference that you cannot remove from it—nor should we seek to remove it. It has a great value going forward to have marriage defined as between one man and one woman. It does not mean we do not recognise other unions. It does not mean that we should not give them the same legal status or rights, but we can preserve that great historical institution that has meant so much to us and will continue to provide so many benefits to our society.

I can tell you that my society functions very well in the electorate of Mitchell. We do have families with kids. It is a great place to live. Crime is low, people work hard, things go well there. I see well-functioning families of all shapes and sizes as the bedrock of this country. It does not necessarily mean there is always a man and a woman. I came from a single-parent household myself. But well-functioning families and family units, we all agree, are things that we should seek to encourage and maintain by government policy. I do not think it would be a step forward for us to redefine the Marriage Act and change what has been a working, functioning and successful institution in our country today. I think it would be a step forward to ensure that discrimination and other forms of not recognising other legitimate unions between people are removed. There is broad support for that out there in the community. There is broad support in my community. Most of the same people who are very strongly in favour of traditional marriage recognise that it is practical, responsible and sensible to move down this path of having legal recognition of same-sex unions. But that does not mean a redefinition of marriage itself or attacking marriage as a concept. I think it does have a great historical and important role in Australia's future and in nations in the future. I think this is a foolish attempt and that we get a lot of the division and problems that we are seeing in our society today with this attempt to redefine marriage.

I am not sure why that is an objective of the activist movement. We should move towards legal recognition of same-sex relationships in a civil way and treat everybody the same way. People come back with these spurious arguments and say, 'I do not want to go to my partner and say, "I want to civil union you."' We are not going to rewrite thousands of years of human history or change everything overnight. We are not going to do that. But the next logical step at the point of society we are in today is to move down the path of legal recognition of same-sex relationships and afford them the same rights as any other kind of relationship. That would be a positive step forward. Even if I would not personally seek that, or personally not encourage people to do that, that would be a responsible view from a governmental level for us to proceed with.

Dr LEIGH (Fraser) (11 : 15): In a representative debate mocracy parliamentarians have a responsibility to do more than simply reflect opinion polls. If that were our only job, you would replace us with machines that phone polled the electorate and voted accordingly.

Leadership is about careful judgment. But you cannot exercise that judgment without listening. On this issue I have been struck by the willingness of hundred of Canberrans to share their stories with me by email and in person in my electorate office, community forums and mobile offices, stories told with dignity, grace and humility. Some people who have contacted me oppose changes to the Marriage Act. They argue that marriage has a long history of being only between a man and a woman. They say that marriage should protect the reproductive relationship and as much as possible give children the opportunity to be reared by their biological parents.

Brent and Wendy Budarick came to my Jamison centre mobile office to speak with me and gave me a petition signed by 146 people that opposed same-sex marriage, and I thank them for that. From a similar perspective Gordon of Ngannawal told me that the family unit 'is inherently and naturally based on the procreation and raising of children by their natural mother and father'.

But most people who have contacted me would like to see a change to the law on the basis of equality, removal of discrimination, and social justice and acceptance. Cheryl of Downer wrote of her gay daughter who has had a number of friends suicide over a period of two years because of the stigma placed on gay people. She wrote:

I believe that the strength of marriage will not be undermined by the equality of all people in seriously committed relationships to have the right to this recognition and the legal protection it offers. My heart cries for the young people who have been placed in

circumstances so severe that the loss of life is the only course of action they can see as a way forward.

Another constituent, who preferred that I not use her name, related how her six-year-old asked, 'Mum, why aren't you and mummy married?' She wrote to me:

I want to celebrate the relationship I have with my partner fully in the way heterosexual people can in our country. And my kids should be able to celebrate with us! And it is very sad to have to tell them that the only reason was because our government would not let us despite a lot of people in our country having no issue with it.

Alan Verhagen of Watson has lived with his partner for 15 years and told me of the couples he has watched stick by their same-sex partners for decades. As long as marriage excludes same-sex couples, Alan said:

I feel it devalues those relationships. It sends a message that those relationships are not as real or valid as different-sex relationships. I feel it is time to send a message that same-sex relationships are as real and valid as same-sex relationships.

Dianne and Ian Hinton of Palmerston told me about their son, Ivan. I would like to welcome them to the public galleries today. They wrote to me:

He has found a wonderful man, Christopher. They bought a home in a typical family-oriented suburb, Ainslie, a home that they are renovating within a wonderful community that has not once treated them specially or separately because of their sexual orientation. They are registered foster carers and will make wonderful parents. In 2008, after being together for six years, they were married in Montreal, Canada.

Sandra from Page urged me to amend the Marriage Act so that same-sex couples can marry because, in her words, 'Marriage should be about love and commitment, not exclusion or prejudice.' Sandra wrote that in those countries where same-sex marriages are allowed 'the fears of those who opposed reform have proven unfounded'. As the mother of a gay son it broke her heart to see what she considered 'segregation and discrimination against him'.

Finally, we should not assume that this debate simply pits believers against atheists. Brendon from Page wrote to me after returning from mass on Sunday to say that he would like his friends who are in same-sex relationships to have their relationship recognised as marriage if that is what they choose. A serving army officer who is a practising Catholic wrote to offer similar sentiments, as did Lin Hatfield Dodds, National Director of Uniting Care Australia. I note that there is even a Christians & Equality group.

In closing I would like to thank all of those who have taken the time to share their stories with me and apologise that in five short minutes I can only relate a small portion of the deeply moving stories that have been shared with me. I hope we can continue to deliberate this important issue with the dignity and respect it deserves. I thank the member for Melbourne for moving this motion.

Mr CHESTER (Gippsland) (11 : 19): In joining this debate the first point I would like to make is that really, as members of this place, we do not need to be told by the Greens or the member for Melbourne in particular when we should consult with our electorates on issues and what issues we actually need to raise with local people. I think that is something as members of this place we do on an ongoing basis. I personally often distribute surveys in my electorate. I attend many functions. I have street corner meetings, like a lot of other MPs, and am available to people to raise any issues of concern whatsoever. For their own sake to avoid being seen as hypocritical on this issue perhaps the Greens will submit a motion calling on all members to consult their communities on the carbon tax and then provide that feedback to the parliament.

Whilst this motion is not about whether MPs are for or against same-sex marriage, I want to state my position from the outset. I support the recognition of legal rights within same-sex relationships but I do not support changes to the Marriage Act. Although there is no legislation currently before the parliament, if such a bill were presented, I believe that all political parties should grant their members a conscience vote. It would be my intention to vote against such legislation.

Having said that, I hasten to emphasise a few other points. I believe it is also extremely important that we continue to work as a community to eliminate discrimination against people on the basis of their sexuality, just as it is important to eliminate discrimination against other minority groups in our communities. I think it is also critical that we support homosexual people, particularly younger people, as they often grapple with their sexuality in regional areas and are heavily overrepresented in incidences of self-harm, mental health issues and, most tragically, in taking their own lives.

Finally, I would like to make the point that today's debate is not the end of the issue and I do not believe it should be. There are many people in my community who will be bitterly disappointed with the views that I have expressed and there are others who will see this as a cause for celebration.

It is a divisive issue in our community and I believe we need to respect each other's views as we discuss

the merits of same-sex marriage and other issues facing homosexual people in our communities. I think it is particularly unhelpful for people on either side of this debate to descend into name-calling and abuse. We need to have a very moderate and a very respectful discussion in our broader community. I believe it should be possible to be opposed to same-sex marriage and not be typecast as being bigoted or homophobic, as some in my community have tried to portray my position. I do reject that assertion and argue that nothing could be further from the truth. I have several gay friends and gay relatives and I respect them as I respect people who support the traditional definition of marriage. Even amongst the gay people that I know there is a divided view on whether same-sex marriage is actually that big an issue for them. If I can recall conversations where we put that forward as an issue of debate amongst ourselves, their feeling was that there are other, far more important, issues facing homosexual couples in the community than this issue of same-sex marriage. But as I said, there are divided opinions in the community.

In terms of undertaking my own consultations in Gippsland, any person who has contacted me and asked for a meeting to discuss this issue has been given that opportunity. I have listened to their concerns and accepted many of the valid points that they have sought to raise with me. I have met with parents and I have met with friends of gay people and listened to their views as well.

I also note the formation of an online forum, a friends' group for supporters of same-sex marriage in Gippsland, which has several hundred followers and has been a constructive debate, I believe, in my community. Like other members, I have received petitions both for and against same-sex marriage. My own recent survey distributed in newspapers throughout the electorate of Gippsland attracted 700 responses.

I will stress at the outset that being a newspaper based survey it should not be construed as some sort of scientific opinion poll, but I did receive strong feedback from the community and 64 per cent of respondents were opposed to same-sex marriage. I do not use that to justify my position in any sense, but merely to indicate as a matter of interest in the electorate of Gippsland that 64 per cent of respondents to a survey preferred to keep the current system in place. That varies very significantly to other opinion pools I have seen in other electorates around Australia.

I stress again that I have also received many emails and petitions on this issue. The majority of people who have contacted me from actually within my electorate have been opposed to same-sex marriage. As I have

done so to date, I intend to continue to participate in this public debate because I think it is an important one and I will participate in a very moderate and respectful manner. I am hopeful that the issue will not become unnecessarily divisive in the wider community.

My position on this issue is not meant to be disrespectful to people who hold strong views to the contrary. Having consulted with my community I believe that the majority of Gippslanders support a more traditional view of marriage. I thank the House for the opportunity to provide that feedback.

Mr NEUMANN (Blair) (11 : 24): Since the last federal election I have conducted 96 mobile offices in my electorate from Springfield in the east up to Moore in the north-west. Since this motion was moved in parliament I have conducted 16 mobile offices where people have raised issues in relation to it. I have had 700 constituency contacts—emails, phone calls, letters, faxes and people coming to see me to discuss this issue.

There are 580 in support of retention of the current definition of marriage between a man and a woman and 115 people supported a change. Overwhelmingly, the majority of people in my electorate support the position that marriage should be between a man and a woman. That is the definition under the Marriage Act. That is the definition that is supported by the Australian Labor Party, and I have been a candidate in three elections as the candidate for Blair on behalf of the Australian Labor Party. I have supported that position at national conferences. I have supported that position in branch meetings and regional meetings in my electorate and beyond. I have always taken that view. That is a personal view that I have accepted from my religious convictions, a personal view that I think accords with the history of human experience. It is a position which is supported by people of many faiths, including the many Australian Christian leaders who have come out today in relation to the issue; 50 Australian national leaders of Australian churches have endorsed a document on the importance of marriage as a legal institution that promotes and protects the identity of children and interdenominationally recognises their right to know, have access to and be nurtured by both a mother and a father. It is not just people of the Christian faith but people of the Islamic faith and Jewish faith and other religious viewpoints who support this particular position.

I have many friends who are gay and lesbian. I have good mates, like Andrew and Clinton. My sister-in-law Rhonda has been in a relationship with Marion for about 15 years. I get on famously well—in fact, probably better—with Marion than I ever got on with Rhonda's husband previously. I love Marion. I love

my sister-in-law Rhonda, and I respect the right of all Australians to be included in Australian life.

I have supported change in the reform of family law and other areas to support the rights of gay people. In fact, I supported that with motions at party units in Queensland and at regional conferences. I am pleased that this government has seen fit to protect individuals through changes in relation to superannuation, taxation, family law and other areas with more than 85 pieces of legislation amended to end discrimination for people in gay and lesbian relationships.

That is the position adopted by this government. It should have been done by the previous government. I do take umbrage at the fact that this motion demands that we, as federal members, are responsible for consulting with our constituents. I do this all the time and you cannot remain in this place unless you do so. I think it is important that we do that. I rejected the idea of an online survey because I feared it would be susceptible to manipulation. I checked every single person who contacted me to make sure they were on the electoral roll, so I am confident that of the 700 people who contacted me every single one of those lives in my electorate.

I think it is crystal clear that the majority of people in my electorate of Blair, which makes up 70 per cent of the population of Ipswich and all the rural area known as the Somerset region, believe that we should include people from gay and lesbian relationships in the fullness of Australian life but that marriage is an institution by definition between a man and a woman and that should be retained because they believe it is a fundamental institution. I do not believe that there is consensus in this country to change the definition of such a fundamental, familial institution as the family unit with a man and a woman being married.

The motion is that what we should do in relation to this issue is listen to our constituents. We do that all the time, and I have in my electorate of Blair.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (11 : 29): I also welcome the opportunity to make some comments, although rather briefly, on this motion today. At the last federal election I received just over 50 per cent of the primary vote, which I think is probably the first time that has happened in the electorate of Cowan. So I would like to believe—and certainly from the times I have been out on the streets and in shopping centres and doorknocking— that in most respects I represent the interests of my community very well. Although I am as regular as I can be at the Warwick Church of Christ I do believe that the way I feel about things is pretty much the way most people in Cowan feel about things.

On this occasion I certainly take the opportunity to thank the people of Cowan who have expressed their views to me on the issue of same-sex marriage. Many have done so. I still have emails coming in to me today on this day set down for this debate. I state that those who have made their views known have done so strongly and utterly supporting the existing definition of marriage. The results have been overwhelming, with 903 supporting the definition of marriage as it is whilst 103 supported a change. Yet, despite the overwhelming result, I do thank those that did make their views known on both sides of the issue. However, it is worth saying that most of those who supported a change in the definition sent form emails which of course then required verification as to whether they were actually local people. Some then, realising what it was about, recanted on their support for same-sex marriage when we questioned where they were and their support for same-sex marriage.

In a lot of respects what was involved was a ticking of a box on a website. But on the other side, when you looked at the emails—and I looked at them as they came in—there was some more personal involvement in the writing of the emails. I think that this is possibly a lesson for those advocates who encourage contact with MPs by ticking boxes on websites that you need to try to engage people so that they can personally express their views rather than just clicking so that it is exactly the same email time after time. Again, for those that on both sides put a passionate and motivated individual effort into their contact with my office, I do appreciate that, because those matters are heartfelt. I certainly put more confidence in those sorts of views than in those who just send a form email.

I have just received a contact from a constituent named Eleanor. She sent an email just as I was waiting for my opportunity to speak. She told me that she had tried on many occasions to send an email and she was using it through a particular website—to which I understood she has added some personal comments—and she was under the impression that the website was under a cyberattack because it was in support of the current definition of marriage. It is unfortunate that people have chosen to take their fight and their beliefs to those sorts of extremes that they tend to try to undermine alternative views. As has been said already in this place, it is always a cheap shot to use name calling to try to denigrate people on the other side to make them feel their personal viewpoint is not legitimate because they might be called homophobic.

As I have said in the past, I personally support the current definition of 'marriage' as being the union of a man and a woman. I believe that the natural family needs to be supported and the definition of 'marriage' as being between a man and a woman does this, and this

special position should not be watered down under any circumstances. This is my report from the electorate of Cowan.

Mr SYMON (Deakin) (11 : 35): As a member of the House of Representatives, I am constantly gauging the views of my electorate on many varied subjects, not just over the short term but over the long term, as I know many of us in here do all the time. Therefore, it is a pleasure to report to the House from the electorate of Deakin on the motion moved by the Greens, the motion that says that this House calls on parliamentarians, consistent with their duties as representatives, to gauge their constituents' views on ways to achieve equal treatment for same-sex couples, including marriage.

I have received hundreds of letters and emails as well as local petitions on the subject, in particular from constituents who have longstanding, if not lifelong, views on the subject of marriage. Indeed, many people who wrote to me confided that they had never contacted a politician from either side in their adult lives. An issue such as a debate about same-sex marriage causes such people to pick up their pens or hit their keyboards to tell me their views and beliefs.

The statistics in the correspondence did not surprise me, but the volume most certainly did. I received correspondence, met with or received calls from 1,080 people in the electorate of Deakin who have identified themselves as living within the boundaries of the seat and who have been verified on the electoral roll. As usual with any debate these days, I also received a large amount—over 300—anonymous and completely identical emails from multiple and often duplicate email addresses. I also received more than 100 emails and letters from outside the electorate of Deakin and from lobby groups from both points of view.

The terms of this motion called on members to consult with their constituents and it is for this particular reason that I have excluded lobbyists from this report as they are not based within the electorate and will always try to present their collective case in the best possible light. I have also in particular disregarded anonymous and unaddressed chain emails that are clearly the work of various lobbyist groups or their supporters from both sides of the debate.

This motion is about gauging the views of constituents, and in my case the constituents of the electorate that I represent, Deakin. I have tried to provide responses to everyone who has written to me on this issue, but I must admit that I still have a backlog of nearly 200 responses that I have yet to send through, although I have read each and included their views in this report. As the numbers are large, these responses will continue

to take many days to complete and send out, but they will be done.

In total to date I have received 65 contacts in support of same-sex marriage. Many of these personally addressed emails went into detail as to why the case for same-sex marriage should be supported, and that number is some 6.02 per cent of the total. On the opposite side of the argument, I have received 1,015 contacts against same-sex marriage, each and every one different in content and with various reasoning and views supporting this position—a percentage of 93.98 per cent. Interestingly, the correspondence received from constituents who do not support same-sex marriage revealed that quite a number support civil relationship recognition.

I would like to note that the federal Labor government's action to introduce reforms that removed discrimination from 85 Commonwealth laws has certainly addressed some of those views—reforms that were presented to federal parliament in 2009 that removed discrimination and equalised treatment for same-sex couples in areas of taxation, social security, health, aged care, superannuation, immigration, child support and family law. I have lived in the electorate of Deakin under various boundaries for 25 out of the last 26 years and I have lived just outside those boundaries for the rest of my 46 years. I am not surprised in the least by the results of this gauging of community views, as it reflects my experience of dealing with issues in the local community over the previous parliament, the term of the current parliament and my time in that community prior to coming to this place. What I find surprising is that some of those in lobby groups are so keen to launch attacks on me for expressing my own views on the subject after they have requested my personal views on the issue of marriage. I believe that marriage can only be between a man and a woman, and I do not support same-sex marriage. That is entirely consistent with the ALP platform that I was elected upon and I will not be changing my personal beliefs or principles for the sake of others' differing views or perceived political gain.

I thank everyone in the electorate of Deakin who has contacted me in this matter and look forward to hearing the contributions of others members to this motion. *(Time expired)*

Mr SCHULTZ (Hume) (11:4 0): I rise to speak in relation to the responses I have received regarding the altering of the definition of 'marriage' to cover same-sex couples. Regrettably, the request for statements to be made by members of this House in relation to this particular issue are an instructive illustration of how this parliament, under this government, continues to lurch further and further away from taking time

to address the concerns affecting the majority of Australians.

I have been receiving calls daily in my electorate and parliamentary offices from constituents concerned about the introduction of a carbon tax and the Gillard Greens government's march backwards towards a controlled economy. They are also concerned about matters closer to home, such as families and seniors in the electorate of Hume who are struggling to keep up with the increase in the cost of living to feed, clothe and keep themselves warm. Rather than the democratically elected government of the day focusing on the issues that affect the majority of Australians, we are here to indulge the fantasies of the inner-city elites. This is not a bill before parliament but a motion instructing members such as me to go out and listen to our constituents on a particular issue. After 23 years in state and federal politics and a stint in local government, I am deeply offended at being told by the recently elected member for Melbourne how to do my job. I am not sure what the Greens member for Melbourne does, but apparently he was not aware that as a member of the House of Representatives our role is to represent, advocate and listen to the concerns of our electorate every single day. It is not beneath me to return the favour. Might I suggest to the new member for Melbourne that he spend less time fantasising about neo-Trotskyist social engineering projects and more time in his electorate amongst his constituents.

As I said back in 2004, when I was part of the initiative by the Howard government to amend the Marriage Act to cement the definition of 'marriage' as being a union between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, I will not be intimidated by individuals in this place or by individuals or groups out in the electorate into moving away from the things that I grew up with—the things my father and my mother taught me about honesty, integrity, principles and my Christian beliefs, which I hold very dear.

Despite this motion's appalling inference that we as members need to be instructed to take on board the views of constituents to extend the definition of 'marriage' to cover same-sex relationships I am on this occasion willing to oblige. From the date this motion was passed by the House, in the electorate of Hume I have had 46 verifiable constituents contact me either by phone, letter, petition or email to express their support for the definition of 'marriage' to include same-sex couples. I thank them for taking the time to share their views with me. By contrast, I have had 636 verifiable constituents contacting me, expressing their desire to see the Howard government's definition remain in place, unaltered. I take from these results that the overwhelming majority of people who are concerned with this issue and who have taken the time

to contact me are in favour of maintaining the current definition of 'marriage'. Their view is concurrent with my own.

I represent the majority of my constituents knowing and adhering to the reality that marriage is an accepted bond between a man and a woman. Marriage is a bedrock institution worthy of protection under law. There should be no doubt about what the word 'marriage' means. However, there is a growing evidence to suggest that the commonly accepted definition of the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others is under threat.

Traditional mainstream marriage is an enduring social institution that benefits family members and provides for stability in society. More specifically, it benefits children by ensuring their welfare not only is maximised but is paramount. It is my belief that moving away from the traditional definition of 'marriage' would be to the detriment of our society. Marriage provides stability and a solidly built roof under which children can grow and be nurtured. Quite obviously, we as Australians still hold dear the traditional family values that marriage implies and would like to see those values maintained and protected well into the future.

In conclusion, some homosexual friends of mine for over 30 years agree with my concurrence, and do not agree with what is being proposed by the member for Melbourne.

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (11:44): In late 2010 the House resolved that members should seek the views of constituents on a specific matter—the ways to achieve equal treatment for same-sex couples, including marriage. I was pleased to speak in that original debate, and I welcome this debate. It is good for members to hear the views from all around the country. We have different electorates. I have an inner-city electorate, and I welcome the opportunity to hear other people's viewpoints from the people they represent.

Like the offices of many members, my office has received many passionate representations both in support of and in opposition to same-sex marriage. I believe it is important to acknowledge there are very genuine and often very deeply held views on both sides of this debate. In my own electorate, since November last year, those that have approached my office in favour of same-sex marriage have outnumbered those opposed. In that time, approximately 800 individuals have contacted my office in writing, by phone call, in person or by email to express their support for removing discrimination against same-sex couples in marriage. In the same time, around 470 people

have registered their opposition to allowing same-sex marriage. These results, of course, are not scientific, but there is evidence of substantial community support in my electorate for same-sex marriage, and it comes to me as no surprise. Newcastle is a city that has experienced hardship over many decades and it seems to be able to cut life down to the basics. They believe in a fair go. People who are positive and leading good lives are always given respect.

My own support for marriage equality is clear and longstanding. In 2006, I was the first member of parliament to sign the Marriage Equality Charter, which supports the legislation of same-sex marriage, and since that time I have consistently restated my support, both privately in internal ALP debates and publicly on the floor of the parliament. In my first speech on this matter, I made the point that I do so as a heterosexual mother of two heterosexual daughters. I do so because it is a mainstream issue. It is about the dignity of life, the dignity of love and that ongoing quest that mankind has for some partnering, support or a wonderful relationship that many people have the blessing to share.

I do say it is an issue that goes to the core of the human experience—the need to be loved, to love and the need to have a bond for some people formally recognised in a union called marriage. I have also said that as a public representative, as an individual within my family, my community and with all the people I deal with every day, I address people's issues and concerns, not their sexual preferences. We should not discriminate against people.

I also said in my first speech that I was moved by parents who said to me that of their two children, two sons—and I praise Michelle Latze in my electorate, who started the Parents and Friends of Lesbian and Gay Children—the heterosexual one can marry and the other cannot. It is really important to know that for loving parents the gender nature of their children's relationship is secondary. They want them to be happy. They want them to experience the support of a loving relationship.

My support also runs to the core of my beliefs that made me become a member of parliament and a member of the Labor Party, and that simply is that legislated discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation whether in marriage law, superannuation law, social security law or any other law is unconscionable and should be removed. Labor has a very proud and unequalled record of combating discrimination across-the-board in Australian society—the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 and our removal of 85 pieces of discrimination against same-sex couples from

Commonwealth laws. I do not think any other political party has done so much, but we all know that this is the big one. This is the one that people pine for and people express concern for.

I am very pleased to share the views of my electorate. I am very pleased to hear their views, to discuss those with them and to then stand up for my judgement and my personal belief. I will continue to stand up and be counted in support of marriage equality for all Australians. *(Time expired)*

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (11 : 49): Madam Deputy Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to lend some comment on the debate on the member for Melbourne's motion on seeking feedback from electorates with respect to the concept of same-sex marriage.

In terms of consistency, I am on the public record, indeed from the time of my maiden speech, of supporting the time-honoured institution of marriage between a man and a woman as the basis—the bedrock—of family values on which children are raised and nurtured. I will continue that degree of consistency in supporting the family; indeed, backing that up having had an enormous volume of calls, emails and petitions through to my electorate. As it stands, it is four to one in favour of traditional marriage for a man and a woman. As to the last minute Get Up campaign, a flood of emails that actually had no names and addresses attached to them, making it a little difficult to verify when they said, 'I'm from your electorate', but with a Gmail account, if I were to exclude those it would take those in my electorate in favour of traditional marriage to 16 to one. I intentionally did not want to skew results by going to my own local church, the churches in my electorate or indeed the very large Arundel Mosque in my electorate. If I were to do that, it would rise from 16 to one to over 30 to one.

In terms of reporting back to the parliament what my electorate is saying with respect to marriage, it is overwhelmingly saying that marriage should remain between a male and a female, which coincidentally aligns with the view that I have held all the time in the parliament. I thank you for the opportunity to share the feedback from the hardworking men and women of Fadden on the Gold Coast.

Ms KING (Ballarat—Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing) (11 : 51): On Thursday, 18 November 2010 the House of Representatives passed a motion that called on all parliamentarians to gauge their constituents' views on ways to achieve equal treatment for same-sex couples, including marriage. Labor supported the motion, but many of us thought it was a somewhat odd suggestion

given that the very job of a local member of parliament is to talk through issues with those who voted for us, weigh the often competing views and advocate for change both within our own party processes and within this parliament. That being said, out of respect for the people who have taken the time to contact me about these issues, I want to share some of the views that have been put to me not just over the past six months but over the course of many years. I also want to put on record the action Labor has already taken in its relatively short time in office to address the inequality directed at same-sex couples across a raft of policy areas.

On the passing of the motion by the House I put up a survey on my website and have had contacts via phone, letter and email as well as petitions. I have also had personal representations from same-sex couples as well as church organisations based in my electorate. It would be fair to say of the 1,800 contacts—and I emphasise that they are contacts; some of them are double, triple and in some instances quadruple contacts from the same person, so the statistical significance of any of those figures would be highly questionable if you were going to analyse them—the views are divided. On the one hand, there are those that deeply believe that the Marriage Act should be changed to reflect the broad diversity of family structures including marriage between same-sex couples. Those of this view believe firmly that the definition of marriage contained in the act discriminates against same-sex couples and is a significant barrier to achieving full equity.

On the other hand, there are those that have a firm conviction that marriage as defined in the Marriage Act can only ever be between a man and a woman and that any change undermines the tradition of marriage and the values that they hold about it. Many of these views, but not all, have come from those who have a religious base. Related to this, some church groups have also raised with me a concern that, should there be any change to the definition of marriage, they could face legal action should they refuse according to their beliefs to marry a same-sex couple.

The views on both sides are passionately and strongly held, and I respect that. I respect that for those with firm religious beliefs the existing definition of marriage is fundamental to those beliefs and they cannot under any circumstances countenance a change. But equally I respect the views of those who firmly believe that just because they are in a same-sex relationship they should not be precluded from having that relationship legally recognised as a marriage under the Marriage Act.

Whilst I have had representations from same-sex couples about this issue, there are two I particularly

want to reflect on. The first couple I have known for many years. They have supported me through election campaigns, including attending many fundraisers and even on one case making a frock for me in a campaign. They have been together for many years, raised children together, been through illness together and survived work and family stresses together. They are a couple who, if you ever wanted to point to a loving, successful and deeply supportive relationship, would be it.

The second couple I met more recently and they have been together for some time and were very new, proud parents when they came to see me. Their daughter is now almost three. It was hard as a parent of a child just a little bit older than their daughter not to compare notes on our children's milestones, the constant nagging anxiety you feel about whether you are doing a good job and just how different the world now was and looked with the care of a small child in our hands. I could not help reflecting on what extraordinarily beautiful parents they were and how lucky their little girl was at having such strong, caring, engaged and loving parents. Both of these couples would like to marry but are precluded from doing so under the law.

The issue of same-sex marriage has been raised at successive national conferences and will be the subject of debate at our upcoming national conference. I have been a delegate at the national conference for the past three ALP conferences. I will not be at the upcoming conference. I am acutely aware of the significant work and efforts of the left of the party and Rainbow Labor in particular to progress this issue through our party processes.

Given the time I will just briefly conclude that the constituency statements here are just that. Despite some of the emails we have been getting over the last couple of days, it is just that: an opportunity to place on record the views of our constituencies. It is not a vote on changes to amend the Marriage Act itself. I want to thank those constituents who have contacted me about this issue. From my own point of view I recognise that there are divided views in the community I represent on the issue. I have tried to outline that I have not as yet formed a view on this issue. I am on the public record as supporting the current definition of marriage, but I have to say that belief has been fundamentally challenged by the representations I have had by same-sex couples. Despite not being a delegate at the national conference, I will watch with great interest the debate. *(Time expired)*

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (11:57): While I need no reminder from the member for Melbourne about the need to consult my constituents, I am happy to report on what is important to my constituents. I regularly

consult them on all issues and prior to the last election I conducted an electorate-wide survey that received more than 2,000 responses. Eighty-four per cent felt the government's border security controls were too soft; 79 per cent were concerned about the level of care available for senior Australians; 63 per cent were concerned about the size of the government's debt; 62 per cent were concerned with traffic and the condition of local roads; 59 per cent were opposed to the government's changes to the private health insurance rebate; only 17 per cent believed there should be a carbon tax to tackle climate change, while 88 per cent believed it would increase electricity prices. The issue before us today did not feature.

Today in my electorate my constituents are concerned about the future of more than 5,500 small businesses who employ between one and 20 people, more than 400 manufacturing businesses and the future of Qantas and Caltex, which each face a difficult future under this government's policies, in particular their carbon tax and increased regulation. My constituents are concerned about the incompetence of this government, their mismanagement of the economy, the rising debt and their addiction to taxes and spending. They are concerned about the bungling of everything they touch, whether it is border protection, pink batts or school halls. They are frustrated that this incompetent government has been placed and kept in power by the Greens in return for pursuing their own agendas.

While the member for Melbourne is out consulting, perhaps he would like to listen to the millions of Australians who are opposed to his carbon tax and his party's alliance with the government or perhaps he thinks, like his leader, they are just whingers or, like the minister for transport, they are of no consequence. It strikes me that the member for Melbourne has some selective hearing.

Since entering the parliament and before I have held a very clear, consistent and public view supporting the current definition of marriage as a voluntary union for life of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others. I maintain this view and issued a statement to my electorate on 19 November last year to initiate feedback from my constituents. In my statements I have always consistently supported the view that no Australian should have to pay a dollar more in tax or receive a dollar less in benefits or superannuation because of their sexual preference. During the last parliament laws were passed to give effect to this objective with the support of both major parties.

The fundamental reason for my position was well summarised by former Prime Minister John Howard, who stated when legislating the current definition:

Marriage, as we understand it in our society, is about children ... I think if the same status is given in our society to gay unions as are given to traditional marriage we will weaken that bedrock institution ...

For me this is fundamentally about a child's natural right to a mother and a father. I believe that this right should be protected in all Commonwealth laws, especially the Marriage Act. I am extremely disappointed by the decision of the New South Wales parliament to legalise same-sex adoption. However, I do not consider that this error should be compounded by the federal parliament.

Religions and cultures over centuries have held that family is ultimately based on the union of a man and a woman. I do not believe that the tested wisdom of centuries has been overwhelmed by more contemporary arguments. I acknowledge that in today's society too many heterosexual marriages fail. Family breakdown is the primary cause of poverty, disadvantage, mental illness and related conditions in our society today. The biggest victims of marriage failure and family breakdown are children. The social and economic costs of family breakdown are incalculable. This is a genuine national tragedy, not an argument for same-sex marriage. Legal recognition of same-sex unions does not, and should not, require the redefinition of marriage.

Marriage, as I have said, is a union between a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others for life. Legal recognition of a same-sex union should be termed something else. I have no objection to some other form of legal recognition of such relationships in the form of a type of civil union provided such unions do not provide any automatic access to adoption. I appreciate there are many in the community who hold a different view to those I have expressed in this place. Of those who contacted me by mail, petition and email who I was able to identify in my electorate, more than 850 were against changes to the Marriage Act, while over 50 were in favour. I do not seek to represent this as a representative poll—my position will not be determined by such polls—but it would appear that of those who feel strongly about this issue a majority were in favour of retaining the current definition rather than changing it.

As we look at this issue, though, I think we need to be mindful of what the real threats to marriage are in the context of this debate, and I believe that such threats are posed more from within than from without. This debate should remind us that anniversaries in marriage are earned, not arrived at, and we should all work on the sanctity of marriage. (*Time expired*)

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler—Leader of the House and Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (12 :02): The Australian Labor Party, of which I am a very proud member, has a long and proud tradition of advancing the cause of equality and social justice in our society. We recognise that all men and women are born equal regardless of their sexuality. In my very first speech in this parliament in 1996 I talked about the need to remove discrimination where it existed, whether it be on the grounds of race, gender, class or sexuality. In my first term in June 1998 I introduced a private member's bill to give same-sex couples equal rights aimed at removing discrimination with regard to superannuation in terms of the parliament. I introduced this same bill a further three times without success. I could not even get it debated on the floor of the House of Representatives. Indeed, when I first raised it in the ALP caucus there was some shifting of people on the seats; people were uncomfortable with even a discussion about the issue of sexuality and discrimination.

The world moves on very quickly, and indeed I am very proud that in our first term of office the Labor government amended some 84 Commonwealth laws to eliminate discrimination against same-sex couples and their children in a range of areas—reforms that meant people were treated equally in line with that great Australian tradition of a fair go for all, reforms that it took a Labor government to deliver. At the last ALP national conference the party platform was changed and further progress made. In addressing the conference I acknowledged that history was moving forward on this issue. I said this to the conference:

I have a view that my relationship, because I happen to be heterosexual, is not undermined by someone else's relationship because it is homosexual.

I remain very much of that view. The Australian Labor Party will be debating the issue of marriage equality at our upcoming national conference later this year. There are widely held views within the Labor Party, as a broad based political party, as there are in society. Each and every person is entitled to their opinion and entitled to have their opinion respected. I have long been an advocate of change, but I have also been an advocate who has stressed the need to bring the community with us. This is about inclusion and the debate must be conducted in an inclusive way, one that respects different opinions that are deeply held. I also want to make it clear that I do not support the state imposing its will on particular religious communities in relation to these issues. I think that particular groups of people, if they have that view, have a right not to have the state impose their views on them.

I certainly did not need a motion from the parliament to discuss these issues. I have been engaged with the

community, whether they be people from the gay and lesbian community or people from the heterosexual community, who have views on these issues for a very long time. I did not need the motion; I have been doing this for 15 years across a range of issues and I am very proud of the fact that I think people see me as being open and accessible.

In recent times, of course, the number of people wanting to make representations to me has increased. I have met with people, whether they be advocates of marriage equality or opponents, and I respect their views. I have made my views clear at ALP conferences as is appropriate under our rules and I will continue to do so. People know the position that I will take at the ALP national conference. But I think change is difficult for people, and that has to be respected. As the debate goes on, I look back at same-sex superannuation and say, 'Who today says that was a bad reform?' There is now consensus on something that was radical when I introduced that bill in 1998. I think that society is moving forward in terms of giving people equal rights and I look forward to further debate in this parliament. (*Time expired*)

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth) (12 : 07): I conducted an online survey on this question of gay marriage and posed the following questions: whether respondents were in favour of gay marriage—that is to say, amending the Marriage Act so that a union between two people of the same sex would be termed a marriage—whether they were in favour of such an arrangement being recognised as a civil union but not defined as a 'marriage', and of course whether they were opposed to either or both. There were 4,000 responses filed in a little over four weeks and of those 2,333 were in the electoral roll as being Wentworth residents. This was not one of those online surveys that people can just click on. Respondents were asked to provide their name and their address so we could check their residence, and were given the opportunity of making comments. I thank all of my constituents and those from other electorates who responded to the survey, and in particular thank those who provided comments, most of which were extremely thoughtful and considered. We have published on my website a representative sample of those.

Of the respondents from the electorate—and the figures for the overall survey were not materially different—72.7 per cent were in favour of gay marriage, that is, 1,698. There were 16.8 per cent—that is to say, 394 respondents—who were not supportive of gay marriage but favoured civil unions. There were 168, or 7.2 per cent, who were against both gay marriage and civil unions, and then there were 73, or 3.2 per cent, who were against gay marriage but did not express a view on civil unions.

Let me share with you some representative comments. The former Premier Nick Greiner said that he supported gay marriage 'as it is self-evidently a matter of justice'. He said:

It in no way stops religions or individuals acting in accord with their conscientious views. Also [it is] not a left/right issue. Support for proposal is consistent with conservative support for marriage and for stable long-term relationships as well as individual freedom.

Ashley Thompson wrote that gay couples' love is of equal value and worth as that between heterosexual couples, and said:

Who are same sex couples ? Daughters, sons, cops, doctors, businesspeople, politicians, artists, parents. In short – Us, We, people, humanity. Love is love.

Dr Alex Wodak, the very distinguished physician from St Vincent's Hospital, said that there were real public health benefits to ensuring same-sex relationships are recognised as marriage. He said:

I have spent the last 30 years in efforts to try and reduce the harms of HIV. We should also do everything we can to help gay couples stay together to protect public health.

There are many other examples of these on my website.

In terms of those who supported civil unions but not gay marriage, they really took almost a semantic view and agreed—as I think, if not all, certainly most members of this parliament would agree—that same-sex couples should have equal rights in terms of fiscal matters and equal rights generally, that there should be no discrimination. They take the view that marriage is, as a matter of definition, a union between a man and a woman, that it is sanctioned by millennia of tradition, that it is of enormous importance to many people on account of that history and their faith, and therefore an equitable balance is to recognise it as a civil union. I guess that is the sort of pragmatic point of view.

Some opponents of gay marriage came from a religious point of view. There were very few that you could describe as homophobic. It boiled down in large measure to this issue of definition. I would simply note that in countries in Europe where recognising what we could call gay marriage has not been a problem it is because they have had a tradition of distinguishing between the role of the state in recognising that union and the role of the church, whereas those functions have in large measure been fused in our tradition. (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms S Bird): I encourage members to keep a close eye on the clock. I am trying

to give them the chance to finish their sentences, but please watch the time.

Ms HALL (Shortland—Government Whip) (12 : 12): The issue of same-sex marriage is important and I have taken the opportunity provided by the motion to actively engage with my community on it. The views of my community are very important to me. I have an open-door policy so that people in my electorate can discuss their views with me in any way they choose. I have run an online survey and publicly encouraged people to communicate with me on this issue. Like the survey of the member for Wentworth, the survey that I conducted was not simply a yes-no survey but one that encouraged people to place comments and a variety of views. People can view that on my website. I had 505 responses to the survey. They came out very strongly in favour of supporting same sex-marriage. It was 86 per cent to 13 per cent, and in Shortland electorate that figure came down to 78.4 per cent to 21.6 per cent.

I appreciate that this is only 505 people, but I have engaged with my community in a number of other ways, and that survey will remain there for people to continue to complete. Some people as young as 14 years and others over 60 years of age have completed the survey. The most disheartening thing were a few comments which said that it would not matter what they said or that their views would not be read. In particular, I would like to quote a 14-year-old boy who submitted a very well-researched comment:

I'm fourteen. I should be studying. I know this isn't going to be read and this is an absolute waste of my time, but I'll write it anyway.

I am here to assure you that I take all issues in our community seriously and your views have been heard, along with everyone else's views. That is what this exercise is about: ensuring people's views are heard.

I have received hundreds of letters, emails and phone calls from my constituents expressing their views and I have also used social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter to further encourage community conversation on this issue. I have conducted mobile offices, met with people in their community and had personal meetings with people who made appointments to come and see me to talk about their views.

A wide range of views have been expressed to me and many issues have been raised, such as discrimination, equality, human rights, preservation of tradition, the needs of children and the religious underpinning of marriage. These are some of the comments made by people supporting same-sex marriage:

The definition in the Marriage Act is discriminatory and needs to be changed to reflect the diversity, tolerance, understanding and equality that Australia is striving towards in the 21st century.

Restricting the definition of marriage to one man and one woman elevates heterosexual relationships to a privileged status, thus stigmatising and marginalising gay people.

Marriage is about love, not gender.

The current definition speaks nothing of commitment, love and dedication.

One's marriage does not define another's.

Marriage is whatever society says it is. Our society is ready to widen that definition to include any loving couple.

The definition also includes 'entered into for life'—obviously we've done away with this bit!

And on the other side:

Homosexuality is a curable disease which must be discontinued.

I am all for same-sex relationships that have all the benefits of a heterosexual marriage, but we can't call it a marriage.

If homosexual marriage becomes accepted in law, what is the next perverted barrier ...

Marriage was originally something to celebrate a commitment before God. I feel same-sex unions should have something different to celebrate their commitment.

Surely a marriage is for the purpose of procreation.

Civil same-sex marriage is an issue where people on both sides have very strong views, and I acknowledge that. But I am also aware that there is a silent majority in the electorate whose views are difficult to pinpoint at this particular stage. I will continue to gauge the views of my electorate in the lead-up to the ALP national conference at the end of this year. In participating in any debate on this issue, I will be mindful of the views of people in my electorate. Their voices are important in any discussion about this issue, and all voices should be respected. I will continue to engage, as I have said, so that I fully understand the many viewpoints. I seek leave to table a copy of the survey that I have conducted.

Leave granted.

(Time expired)

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong) (12 : 18): Last year the House passed a motion calling on parliamentarians to gauge their constituents' views on the issue of marriage equality. I do not believe that such a resolution was necessary. As a parliamentarian, I consult and meet with constituents on a regular basis to discuss a broad range of issues, including same-sex marriage. Since my election last year, I have responded to hundreds of pieces of correspondence and met with many people on the issue of same-sex marriage. As one would expect, I heard a diversity of views.

I am very proud of the fact that the Australian parliament has legislated in recent years to remove areas of discrimination against same-sex couples. Discrimination has no place in our society. Significant changes have been made to our laws regarding financial and work related arrangements, including reform of our superannuation legislation to introduce the concept of interdependency, giving same-sex couples the same rights as heterosexual couples. These changes were the product of bipartisan support and were a significant step forward.

At issue today is whether we should amend the Marriage Act 1961 and its existing definition of marriage as 'the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life'. This definition was formalised following a coalition amendment to the act in 2004.

I fully acknowledge that there is a growing list of foreign jurisdictions, including Belgium, South Africa and Canada, where gay marriage has been legalised by the state. I, too, fully acknowledge that within the Australian community and within my own electorate there are many people who passionately support an equivalent change for Australia. Their reasons are varied.

I listened to a lesbian couple from Kew in my electorate whose love for their two children and the family they had created was only matched by their love and respect for one another. I received a letter from a local Anglican minister who implored me to support gay marriage, arguing that the state should not impose on the broader community a strictly Christian definition of what constitutes a marriage.

I was emailed by parents of gay children whose single motivation was to see their child happily marry the one they love. The same could be said for the young man who wrote to me on behalf of his gay brother, or the woman who wrote to me on behalf of her gay sister, for all they wanted was to see their sibling get married.

These were all powerful pleas that had an impact on me. I, too, received many visits and letters from advocates in favour of the status quo. Some constituents quoted holy scripture. Others referred to longstanding traditions and nearly all referred to the sanctity of the family unit comprising a mother, a father and children. These arguments were as honestly and as passionately delivered as the views they sought to counter.

It should come as no surprise that in this place there is a similar dichotomy of views between members on this difficult topic. My view is that marriage is a unique relationship between a man and a woman. It is much more than a simple debate about preferred terminology. Relationships between same-sex couples are equally special but nevertheless, by definition, different. These relationships are to be respected and valued for the love that they bring and the families that they build. However, the term 'marriage' should not apply. Civil unions, however, should be an alternative.

I know many people in our community, particularly those younger than me, will not agree with my view on same-sex marriage. I hope they respect my view as I do theirs.

Ms O'NEILL (Robertson) (12 : 22): I take this opportunity to also report back to the House on the views of the constituents of the seat of Robertson regarding the issue of marriage and calls for a change to that definition to allow for same-sex marriage.

There are so many issues on which my office received serious and careful representation. The matter for discussion today is one on which I have received a considerable number of emails and letters, telephone calls and conversations. I can assert that, since my election, this is not the issue about which I have received the most emails or letters, but it is very clearly an issue on which there are very different and strongly held views. Where people have contacted me on this matter, I have responded to their correspondence with a letter or email in which I have articulated my personal view, which, for the record, is in line with the Labor Party policy and the position articulated by the Prime Minister—that is, that marriage is, as it is defined in Australian law, a union between a man and a woman. With no disrespect to those who hold a differing view either in this place or in the broader community, it is the view that I retain here today.

In my electorate, I received 560 communications on this matter from identifiable constituents. Seventy per cent were for retaining the current definition. I want to acknowledge the 30 per cent who hold a different view and took the opportunity to participate in this debate and to communicate with me.

I spoke on this matter at the recent New South Wales state Labor conference. Part of my speech that day was reported in the Sydney Morning Herald. I received hundreds of emails and letters from right across Australia. They commented particularly on one part of my speech that was reported, because I believe it expresses one of the real challenges to all participants in this debate. I said then and I say again that it is too often the case in this debate about same-sex marriage that all people who oppose it are maligned as homophobic, intolerant, bigoted, brainwashed by religious indoctrination or intellectually inferior to those who support it. This is not the case.

I want to put on the record that such a view is of itself intolerant and other-phobic. It does not advance anyone's interest to silence the voice of others. I also want to put on the record how proud I am of the federal party for undertaking, following the election victory in 2007, a substantive program of change that saw more than 80 pieces of legislation amended to give LGBTBI Australians the same practical rights as other Australians before the law.

With that as my position, what are the reasons for opposing what I call gay marriage and others here call marriage equality? I will attempt to get a couple of them on the record. Firstly, regardless of culture, time or place, the organic nature of the family unit that is the natural consequence of the union of a man and a woman is the key social unit on which a stable society is built. Marriage is almost universally viewed as a legal and social event that is life-generating and understood to be, much more often than not, linked to children. This is a commonly held position in the broad community. It is the position expressed by our Prime Minister and the position held by many people of faith. Many, but not all Catholic people—like me—Islamic people, Jewish people, secular humanists and Indigenous families think of marriage in this way. We prize it. We understand it very certainly as a union between a man and a woman. There is no intention, in holding that view, to slight the view of others. But the depth of belief in the notion of marriage as a union between a man and a woman is not a matter that can be overturned by legislation. No matter how this matter advances or falls, legislation will not change what 70 per cent of the people in Robertson who have contacted me on this bill actually believe.

I want to read into the record the correspondence received from the Organisation of Rabbis of Australasia, who oppose any legislation to legitimise same-sex marriage. They say:

This is not intended to show any discrimination against the gay community, but simply to uphold the sanctity and purpose of marriage, which is the union of a man

and a woman in not only expressing their love for one another, but in also bringing future generations into this world.

Ms Gabrielle Tesoriero from my electorate wrote me a single sentence which summed up the views of so many:

It's important that the definition of marriage remains the union of a man and a woman.

This brings me to my final point. The claim that is made here today that the community is already in support of a change to gay marriages is overstated and that community opposition to such a change—as it is in my seat—is understated. As a teacher for many years, I supported all kinds of families. I always knew that was my responsibility as a human being, let alone as a teacher. Yet I hold for myself, and for 70 per cent of the people in Robertson, the right to hold firmly to the view that marriage is that union between a man and a woman. *(Time expired)*

Mr CROOK (O'Connor) (12 : 27): As the member for O'Connor, it is my primary responsibility to represent the views of my constituents in parliament on all issues. Over the past several months I have invited feedback from the electorate regarding their views on same-sex marriage. I regularly send a newsletter to my constituents containing information on a variety of issues taking place both in Canberra and through the electorate.

In my newsletter, I requested that constituents contact my office and share their views with me on same-sex marriage. I also advertised this issue in a number of newspapers throughout the electorate. I note, after listening to many of the speeches this morning, that the results that I received were indicative of those in many electorates across Australia. I received 612 responses on this issue, and I thank those people who felt compelled to respond. To break the figures down, I received 373 letters, 138 emails and 12 phone calls, a total of 523 responses, from the constituents of O'Connor highlighting that they do not support same-sex marriage. I received 71 letters, 13 emails and five phone calls, a total of 89 responses, from constituents who support same-sex marriage.

An overwhelming majority of responses felt that marriage is a permanent union between a man and a woman. I would like to acknowledge that the feedback I received by no means represents all constituents of my electorate. That said, I do believe that the comments and feedback I have received broadly reflect the attitude of the electorate towards same-sex marriage. I hope that this position can be understood as being without any disrespect to same-sex relationships. I

believe our society needs to continue to have a civilised discussion around this issue. It is vitally important that our society works to remove discrimination against sexual preference.

Many speeches that we heard earlier today reflect that members of parliament right across Australia welcome this discussion, regardless of their political preference. My position is not meant to be disrespectful to those who support same-sex marriage, and I respect the loving relationships that they may share with one another. I believe the electorate of O'Connor is supportive of removing discrimination against sexual preference, while still maintaining the sanctity of marriage as a permanent union between a man and a woman.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Lyne) (12 : 3 0): I certainly welcome the motion that was put before the House previously and, as part of an ongoing reflection of consultation with community, this is another opportunity to do that. From my perspective on the topic of same-sex marriage, there are times to lead and times to follow the community. Picking when and why is very much the challenge for all of us in a representative democracy in our Westminster parliamentary system. At all times, right or wrong, a member of parliament should make their own best judgments. On an issue like pricing carbon through an emissions trading scheme, I have chosen to lead community with the national interest in mind. On the issue of same-sex marriage, I am choosing to follow community, again as a matter of judgment and again with the national interest in mind.

Ordinarily I believe in the classical and conservative exposition of representative democracy, that we are elected to exercise our judgment as a vote on the basis of fact and reason tested in debate. We are dealing with customs and traditions in this case that have been built in Australia over a long period of time under the rule of law.

This conversation certainly tests the moral code of not just 150 MPs but of all Australians. After consulting widely and listening closely I still have not heard a satisfactory consensus about what the state's role itself in marriage actually is, nor what it should be. I note, for example, that there are even incursions from traditionally right-wing, conservative proponents such as Tim Wilson from the IPA identifying jurisdictions like France where the state's only involvement is to maintain a register of accredited marriage agencies and it is then up to each religious or cultural institution to determine their level of comfort with the definition of marriage, essentially, and somewhat controversially, removing the statue law of the Marriage Act and

relying on a long history of common law interpretation of our norms, traditions and cultures.

The fact is in our jurisdiction and in my electorate as well there is a deep cultural conviction that the state's definition of marriage does matter. Yet at the same time we seem somewhat universally comfortable allowing this same state to interpret that definition broadly for the purposes of administration and interpretation of modern society. As an example I quote from a bill before the House right now—the Fairer Private Health Insurance Incentives Bill—which states:

'Marriage' includes people who live together in a relationship as a couple on a genuinely domestic basis even where they are not legally married.

That is somewhat of an oxymoronic definition.

Marriage is interpreted widely in common law and defined broadly by many statutes and, as far as I can find, narrowly defined in only one statute, that being the Marriage Act. This reflects a process of law reform over decades, based on a growing public rejection of discrimination in age, gender, race and sexuality. Successive parliaments have removed the substantive legal discriminations against de facto couples, whether heterosexual or homosexual.

In 2008, laws on defence, migration, taxation, superannuation, social security and workplace relations all changed to accommodate this principle. Legally sanctioned same-sex marriage is seen by many as simply the last extension of this principle, but for others that I also listen closely to, it is where they draw the line. They see same-sex marriage as an offence to our language and history and an affront to Australian custom, laws and traditions. Despite the reality of same-sex couples legally adopting and having children, some see same-sex marriage as offending nature because children cannot yet be conceived without the biology of both genders.

Unfortunately, even in this place there have been disgraceful attacks and distortions in this debate. I refer to an event in the Great Hall of Parliament House on 16 August which saw a personal attack on one of our colleagues, a member of parliament's individual and private circumstances. More disappointing in my view was that other members of parliament present chose to bear witness to that attack on a fellow member without objection or without clarifying that the issues that were the basis of the attack had nothing to do with or without changes to the Marriage Act. Alongside this, in my view at that same event there were irrelevant, misleading and emotive fears presented as if they were plausible that marriage may become the province of

paedophiles or close relatives of the same sex. This is nonsense that diminishes this important debate.

In my community it is roughly a split on the ground. It is anecdotal; about two out of five are strongly opposed, about two are indifferent and about one is strongly in favour. For the proponents I will continue to listen closely, but there is plenty of work on the ground still to do. (*Time expired*)

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (12 : 35): I spoke when the original motion was brought forward by my colleague the member for Melbourne and put forward some thoughts which I must say were catalytic in receiving many other thoughts in response to my contribution. It is quite clear to me that there is a strongly held, but very divergent, set of views about this topic in the community that I represent, and might I say all sides of the argument have been quite vigorous in advocating their position.

I said at that time and I still hold the view that it is entirely appropriate and reasonable for same-sex couples to declare their commitment and devotion to each other in a public ceremony before friends and family in a way that is recognised by the broader community and the state. I hold that view. I advocated that the parliament turn its mind to civil union legislation to achieve that outcome that would capture the durability, the very particular commitment to each other, the public celebration and declaration and the formal recognition of the relationship. Many people thought my speech was measured. A number thought it was far short of what they were looking for and yet others were saying it was the start of a slippery slope. There were even more strongly and stridently held views that I cannot fathom or factor into a reasonable way forward that would have the broad community support that I think people would be looking for.

What I have learnt is that there is no straightforward answer here. What I have learnt is that the definition of a relationship as a marriage matters profoundly to many people. It is an ambition that is profoundly significant to same-sex couples seeking to have that term used to characterise their relationship. For those that are in what is more traditionally recognised as a marriage, and what the statutes of Australia capture as a marriage, they are profoundly committed to that being the appropriate description of their relationship, so clearly the term matters. The concept of marriage matters greatly and the power of that word matters a great deal to many people.

What is clear to me, though, is forcing a group that have long held the view that that characterises their relationship to expand the kinds of relationships to also be captured by that term is no way of taking people with

you. To say that in the spirit of tolerance we should reject the strongly held views of one group about their passion and their sense of connection with the term 'marriage' and they should suck up the fact that others would like to use that term and they should just come to terms with it is not my idea of tolerance. That is a 'it will be this way or no way approach' and I can understand why people would be aggrieved by that. Where that takes me is back to where I started. For those that have entered into a marriage, and the statutes of Australia characterise that, there is a significant proportion of the community that I represent that would like their relationship to continue to be characterised that way and the nature of the relationship which that term conveys to the broader public they connect with, they have a very strong sense of association with and they do not like to see that changed.

For those in same-sex relationships wanting a formal public recognition of the durability, the deep personal commitment to each other, we need to find a better vehicle for that, but I do not believe expanding the term 'marriage' to incorporate those relationships will take the community with everybody.

It was put to me that no-one in a moment of great romance and hope for the future walks up to someone and says, 'Hey would you be in a civil union with me?' I accept the fact that there is no music in the term 'civil union'. I accept the fact that there is no queuing of music and of hopes and ambitions in the future when people talk about a civil union. I think we can find a better characterisation. I would like to see the parliament turn its mind to something along the lines of a committed life partnership that shows the durability, passion and nature of the relationship, that it is about the existence and their being and that it is a partnership that lasts into the future. We need take all views with us as best we can into the future. (*Time expired*)

Mr MURPHY (Reid) (12 : 4 0): In addition to my report to the House on this matter last Thursday, I now further report on the feedback from my constituents and I thank them for so doing. I have received messages of support for my stand on this issue from a wide cross-section of the community, including the religious, non-religious, heterosexuals and homosexuals, the left and the right, men and women. Equally, I have received messages of opposition from others in the same categories. Importantly, the feedback extended well beyond the churches, coming also from the business community, ethnic associations, sporting groups, clubs and so on.

There is no unanimous view in any of these groups of people, even in the gay community, as I have discovered. A number of gay people who contacted me said they opposed all marriage, whether

heterosexual or homosexual. Within my electorate, most of my feedback supported the retention of the current definition of marriage. Importantly, most of the feedback supporting same-sex marriage came from outside the electorate.

I have been personally targeted by a campaign that has wrongly assumed that I would simply change my mind under pressure. Some of the emails and letters have been abusive and downright intolerant. One would expect that people asking for, and needing, community tolerance would exercise more tolerance themselves. They assume, wrongly, that anyone holding a position against redefining marriage to include same-sex couples is automatically a bigot. I am not a bigot.

In terms of the member for Melbourne's motion, I also report that despite this campaign against me most of my electorate does not see marriage for same-sex couples as a matter of equality, discrimination or human rights. All of my electorate agree that all individuals are equal. Most of my electorate does not accept that all relationships are equal. My support for same-sex civil unions has also drawn some criticism from sections of the Right in this debate, although they have acknowledged and appreciated my defence of the institution of marriage. I remind members that in 2009 I, too, supported and voted for 85 amendments to Commonwealth laws to remove discrimination against same-sex couples in areas such as taxation, social security, aged care, superannuation, immigration and family law.

My meetings with lesbian couples and single male homosexuals in my office have often started with a little tension, but have always ended cordially with mutual respect, even when we agreed to differ. For example, here is a response from one of my constituents who is gay:

Mr Murphy, I thank you for taking time to meet me Friday last so to discuss the upcoming vote on gay marriage. I entered the meeting with a view that had been formed by reports from press and advocacy groups on the matter. I wanted to hear your views, in person, as I believe disagreements should be met face-to-face and not by means third hand, especially when such matters under discussion are close to one's heart.

Your support in the house for readjustment of federal laws aligning same-sex couples to different sex couples in terms of superannuation and laws is much appreciated. Your stance on rights of an individual to be homosexual when challenged by members of your electorate looking for your support on attitudes with an antigay agenda illustrates that you are an MP that holds dear the rights of a human to be different and are willing to be counted when it comes to defending such rights.

The opinion you have encountered within your electorate in regard to same-sex marriage is understandable, although not welcome by myself, but your attitude in backing civil unions and recognising the same from those joined similarly overseas is very welcome and very much appreciated by me. I realise that we do not live in an ideal world and it is unlikely that the rights of a minority will be wholly recognised as a democracy. However, as you are a product of the democratic process, your efforts on homosexual rights are very much appreciated and I look forward to you carrying on the traditions of Labor representation for the foreseeable future. (*Time expired*)

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (12 : 45): This motion is being debated because a weak Labor government is once again dancing to the tune of the Greens. Faced with a deep division on their own side, the Labor Party negotiated a compromised motion to request members to go off and consult with their electorates about the issue. I wish to make just three comments about the motion. First, this motion is presumptuous. Members of parliament on all sides consult their constituents on all manner of issues on a regular basis. They do it in a variety of ways and if they did not then they would not be elected in the first place and they would not be re-elected.

The purpose of the motion is really different. It is to provide a voice to the Greens and their left-wing supporters to promote their cause and, like clockwork, the left-wing lobby group GetUp emails its supporters with draft petitions to MPs. In the absence of the GetUp campaign very few people in my electorate had urged me to support changing the long-held definition of marriage, despite regular surveys of my constituents. The number increased after the campaign, but it is still small compared to the many people who responded by writing and emailing their support for the traditional definition. If letters, emails and petitions from my constituents are any indication, the overwhelming majority support the longstanding definition of marriage.

While all Australians are encouraged to express their views, the reality is that there is no widespread agitation in the Australian community for changing the definition of marriage, and if, to the extent I have been able to follow this debate today, I think it is reflected in the debate in this place.

Moreover, the GetUp petition is open to manipulation. A person can enter any name, any email address and postcode, real or fictitious, and an email is generated to a member of parliament. When I responded to the anonymous GetUp generated emails asking the correspondents to indicate their address so that I could check that they were, indeed, constituents of my electorate, just a handful responded, yet the member for

Melbourne would have us make laws on this basis. This brings me to my central objection to this process. This parliament is a deliberative assembly, not a congress of delegates. In the famous words of Edmund Burke to the electors of Bristol:

It ought to be the happiness and glory of a representative to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence and the most unreserved communication with his constituents. Their wishes ought to have great weight with him, their opinion high respect, their business unremitting attention.

He then set out what I believe to be the duty of a member of parliament:

Your representative owes you not his industry only but his judgment, and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion.

As Burke said:

Parliament is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests, which interests each must maintain as an agent and advocate against other agents and advocates, but parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation with one interest that the whole, where not local purposes, not local prejudices ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole. You choose a member indeed...

he said to the electors at Bristol:

... but when you have chosen him ...

and we would add these days, 'her':

... he is not member of Bristol, he is a member of parliament.

The idea that whatever group can send the most emails to MPs should be the determining issue when making national decisions is misplaced. Equally, the idea that a poll should determine our decisions is inadequate. The member for Melbourne tells us that we should listen to polls. If it is proper that polls should determine our position then I would expect him to vote against the carbon tax, as polls indicate a majority of Australians are opposed to it.

I expect that the member for Banks' motion on the notice paper on the death penalty, if it comes to a vote, the member for Melbourne will vote against it, as polls repeatedly indicate, over many years, support for the death penalty in this country. If, as I suspect, he votes for the carbon tax and against the death penalty, his argument about polls is exposed for what it is, nothing more than a self-serving argument for his cause.

We do not need to be instructed by the member for Melbourne to consult our constituents. I have been

doing so for 20 years and I will continue to do so. When the leader of the Greens, Senator Brown, condemns people who come to this place to voice their concerns as whingers, it exposes the hypocrisy of this motion. It seems that the Greens only want to hear the opinions of those who share their views. It is another instance, regrettably, of their totalitarian impulse.

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (12 : 50): I have been watching this debate throughout the day. It has been quite instructive and I am somewhat relieved as to the way it has gone. I, too, have issue with the sanctimonious nature of this motion moved by the member for Melbourne which conveys the idea that democracy is as simple as clicking a mouse rather than engagement. I have met with many people in my electorate on this issue and I have not refused anyone access to me.

I say at the outset that I believe marriage is between a man and a woman. At this point in time that is clearly the majority view of Australian society. As time travels on that may change, but at this particular time that is the position. What I have been concerned about during this debate are some of the more right-wing aspects of society and some of the comments that are being made about gay people, which I find regrettable. I have met with quite a few gay couples in my electorate and, while I appreciate their circumstances and fully support civil equality in matters of law, I cannot support their position for same-sex marriages at this time. I am regretful that I cannot help all my people or agree with all of my people all the time, but at this stage I am not in support of same-sex marriage.

Before this motion was moved by the member for Melbourne I was getting no correspondence or email traffic on this matter. Clearly, the overwhelming vibe coming out of my electorate is that the Australian parliament should be concentrating on matters that are far more relevant to the people of my electorate. They are concerned about issues regarding the cost of living, obviously the upcoming carbon tax, education, roads, health and all those other things. They believe that the reason they sent me to Canberra was to represent them on things that are of the utmost importance to them. They resent having the Australian parliament hijacked by one member. We must not forget that there are 150 members sitting in the House of Representatives. I find it deeply confronting that one member, one 150th of the representation of this place, seems to generate the publicity and promote the agenda. I have spoken about this before. I have spoken about the fact that the member for Melbourne and the Greens urban elite are quite happy for people to go snow-skiing and build chalets in the mountains but are opposed to cattle grazing. While they are happy to have exclusive restaurants, they are opposed to people who raise cattle.

In conclusion, I will restate that I do believe that marriage is between a man and a woman. I do respect the gay couples and the gay people in my electorate and acknowledge that they have a different view. But at this stage I stand by what I have said.

Mr FLETCHER (Bradfield) (12 : 55): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak here in the Parliament of Australia about the consultation that I have been able to conduct in my own electorate of Bradfield regarding the question of marriage for same-sex couples and whether that ought to be permitted under Australian law. I might add that I certainly did not require a motion from the Greens to encourage me to consult with my electorate. Like every conscientious parliamentarian, I consult with my electorate regularly on a very wide range of issues and I am blessed with constituents who are articulate, engaged, interested and are always eager to consult with me. I absolutely welcome that.

One might wonder why the Greens chose to bring this issue forward. Obviously, one possibility is that they have a genuine desire to review the current legal position on its merits. Another possibility is that their overriding interest is to wedge the Labor Party by exposing tensions between the inner-city Left and the traditional working-class base and the right wing of the Australian Labor Party which has tended to represent them.

All that being said, I have certainly carried out significant consultation on this issue along, of course, with the many other issues which have been on the public policy agenda over recent months. I have met with a number of constituents on this question. I do note that almost all of those who have made the effort to make an appointment to come in to see me in my electorate office to speak to me about this issue have expressed the strong view that the current legal definition of marriage should be maintained.

I have received a substantial number of petitions from local church congregations in support of maintaining the current legal definition of marriage such as: the Parish of Corpus Christi, St Ives, with about 110 names on it; St John's Anglican Church, Asquith, with about 20 names; and Ku-Ring-Gai Chase Catholic Parish with about 250 names. I have also received a substantial number of letters and emails on the topic. My staff and I assess those as reflecting significant bodies of opinion from both those who are in favour of maintaining the current legal definition of marriage and those who wish to see it changed, but with the supporters of the status quo a little more strongly represented.

I do want to take this opportunity to thank all of my constituents who have made the effort to contact me to put their views on this very important issue. I have been struck by the sincerity and depth of feeling of those who have engaged with me on this issue regardless of which perspective they take. I think that perhaps may be because marriage and partnership are such critically important aspects of life and of personal identity.

The consultation I have conducted on this issue has fortified me in my views on a number of aspects of this issue. I am very pleased that in recent years Australia's laws have been changed to remove discrimination against homosexuals and same-sex couples. These include changes to laws in the areas of superannuation, taxation, social security, aged care and immigration.

The Howard government reformed the law in several areas in this respect and it was the Howard government that began the process that led to the 2008 legislation of the Rudd government that substantively removed discrimination for same-sex couples. These were all appropriate and necessary reforms. They have taken Australia in a very positive direction and, thankfully, a very long way away from the time when homosexual acts were criminalised.

However, the institution of marriage has a cultural and religious significance developed over many centuries. Traditionally, the institution is based on the union of a man and a woman to the exclusion of all others voluntarily entered into for life. That is the definition set out in our law and it continues to be my view that this definition should remain.

This in no way seeks to diminish the committed and loving relationships, both heterosexual and same-sex, that exist outside of the institution of marriage. In reaching this view I have very much benefited from the perspectives of the people of the electorate of Bradfield, particularly of those who were sufficiently engaged by this issue to reach out to make contact with me on it. While this consultation does not constitute a statistically valid survey it has given me a useful qualitative sense as to the balance of opinion in Bradfield.

In my view, the Howard government accurately reflected the preponderance of community opinion in inserting into the Marriage Act the current definition of marriage and my consultation leads me to the view that this definition continues to reflect the preponderance of community opinion in Bradfield.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs D'Ath): Order! In accordance with standing order 193 the time for constituency statements has concluded.

Proceedings suspended from 13:00 to 16:00

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Vietnam Veterans Day

Debate resumed.

Mr GRIFFIN (Bruce) (16:00): Two days ago, before this debate was interrupted, I was going through a range of matters relating to Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. I talked about a number of individuals who have crossed my path who can be very proud not only of their contribution at the time but also of their contribution since in honouring the memory of, and supporting, those they fought alongside so many years ago. I mentioned before that it was not just the Army; it was also the Navy and the Air Force. When you talk about the Army, you have to mention the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam, the AATTV, our first troops on the ground in 1962 and there for over 10 years. They fought with distinction with troops from South Vietnam throughout the conflict. A number of their members received gallantry honours, most deserved. We cannot talk about the Vietnam War without talking about conscription. Not only did many conscripts serve with distinction; it was a very divisive issue back here. We must not forget the fact that Australian women were also present as nurses in the Army, RAAF and SATO. They performed with distinction supporting our troops.

We cannot talk about Vietnam Veterans Day without referring Long Tan. And we should not forget the many other engagements: Coral/Balmoral, Binh Ba, Operation Bribie, Operation Coburg and the many patrols conducted by others who served with distinction as part of our ground forces. We also have to remember HMAS *Sydney*—the Vung Tau Ferry—and the excellent work done by the Navy in supporting our troops. Many ships served on the gun line. I particularly mention HMAS *Hobart*, a guided missile destroyer which was tragically hit by three missiles from a US Air Force Phantom. Two RAN sailors lost their lives and seven were wounded on that occasion. The Air Force also made a significant contribution, whether through forward air controllers or those who operated caribous, helicopters, Canberra bombers and a handful of Phantom fighter jets, and, in one of the last acts of the war in 1975, the Hercules aircraft helped ferry people away at the time of the fall of Saigon.

They should all be very proud of the courage, dedication and the professionalism of those involved. They did their duty at a time when their duty was sometimes very unfairly questioned back here. I take this opportunity to apologise for what happened at the time and in the time since. As a nation, we have

grown since that time and we have learnt from it. I am very pleased that we have not had to face that sort of situation over issues we may sometimes disagree about with respect to our involvement in wars since. We unanimously, and in a united fashion, honour the commitment, courage and sacrifice of our troops and the work that they do.

I will finish with two points which are very relevant and are something to be remembered with respect to our contribution. The first is the Children of Vietnam Veterans Health Study. The former minister played a significant role in kicking that study off in his time as minister, and the study is ongoing. It is a very ambitious study looking at the long-term impacts and effects on the families, particularly the children of those who served in Vietnam. The study has results coming through now and will continue to have over the years ahead. To all those who worked hard to get it going, I salute you. It is an important and difficult exercise but something needed to better understand how to properly deal with the long-term impacts of war not only on the individuals who fought but also on the families who suffered with them. The final thing I will put in as a plug, and that is for the Vietnam Veterans Museum down at Phillip Island in my home state and the former minister's home state of Victoria. I would urge anyone who is travelling down that way to get along and have a look at that museum. It is a fantastic developing work in progress that shows so much of what took place during that war, and it gives an opportunity for Australians of other generations to better understand what occurred at that tumultuous time in our history. Lest we forget.

Mr BILLSON (Dunkley) (16:05): I join with other colleagues in paying tribute to our Vietnam veterans and the broader Vietnam veterans community, and to thank all those involved in making Vietnam Veterans day on 18 August the ongoing and unbridled success that it is in bringing the Vietnam veterans community together for a day of commemoration, reflection and camaraderie.

I should declare a pecuniary interest as a former veterans' affairs minister and patron of the Vietnam Veterans Association—Frankston District. It has always been an honour and a privilege to be associated with our Vietnam veterans' community.

It was often said that people knew there was something strange about my judgment when I actually sought the position of veterans' affairs minister under Howard government. Some have suggested that the veterans' affairs minister's role is a bit of a career cul-de-sac. It is a very challenging role when the broader nation has such understandable and well-deserved affection for our veterans' community, and the veterans' community

are not terribly shy in advocating for their interests. If you are caught between that strong public sentiment to do all that one should do as a grateful nation for those who have served for our country and a very vigorous advocacy movement in the veterans community, you know you are in for some interesting times. But they were very worthwhile times.

To Ray Weston, the president of the Vietnam Veterans Association—Frankston District, to Frank Matons and all the team down at the Southern Peninsula—(*Quorum formed*) I was just paying tribute to Vietnam veterans' organisations in the Dunkley and Mornington Peninsula area. I particularly want to mention Cheryl Myers, the secretary of the Frankston RSL, who works very closely with the Vietnam veterans' organisations and who always is a key part of a very successful occasion at the Frankston cenotaph, notwithstanding our concern about broken fingernails when she approaches me.

The occasion of Vietnam Veterans Day is a very important one. Some 60,000 Australians, including ground troops, Air Force and Navy personnel served in Vietnam for over a decade from 1962. As my colleague and successor as veterans' affairs minister, the member for Bruce, pointed out many others were involved in that exercise of supporting our national involvement in Vietnam: the SEATO nurses, the courageous media personnel, the Qantas crews and many other civilians involved and associated with that effort.

The loss of life was very substantial: 521 Australians paid that ultimate price. We today continue our work in supporting those who returned with injuries, with wounds and with scars from their experience. Many helped secure that region and to shape its trajectory in a positive way but have carried deep personal scars as a result of that service. I also want to pay maximum respect to the partners of our Vietnam veterans. They have endured much over the years and are incredibly important as a cohesive influence in the Vietnam veterans' community. I support all that they do and the love and care that they provide to the veterans.

There was a point about this year's Vietnam veterans' commemoration which was particularly significant for those of us involved in ensuring that there has been appropriate recognition afforded to the Long Tan veterans for their remarkable deeds so many years ago. The Vietnam veterans' community itself chose Long Tan Day as its commemorative day and that shows you the strength of feeling and respect that Vietnam veterans have for their colleagues who served at Long Tan. But there was a long unresolved issue that was very much to the fore in my time as minister.

Some years earlier my friend and colleague Mal Brough had guided through the Howard government an overdue recognition of having medallic recognition upgraded. It was belated but his recognition that decisions to downgrade recommendations in Canberra were in contradiction to what was recommended in theatre was a courageous thing to do and that happened at the time that we were involved with Vietnam. Those on the ground, the command structure and hierarchy in Vietnam, had the best feel for what acts of gallantry were being undertaken by our personnel and for recommending appropriate recognition. At that time though those recommendations landed in Australia and people a long way away from the frontline in a number of cases decided that those well-grounded, well-informed recommendations should not be implemented and downgraded some of those medallic recognition recommendations from the field.

Thankfully that wrong was righted and Mal Brough was crucial to that making the simple point that for whatever reason—and often it was concepts of quotas and the like—if people had earned the recognition and that was a grounded and informed recommendation from the field it was a bit tough to have people a long way from the battlefield override those recommendations without the benefit of the context and the command structure on the ground. I am pleased that Mal dealt with that.

That only partly resolved some of the issues. It left open the question of recognition for the extraordinary gallantry at the Battle of Long Tan. It was an issue quite close to me. Dave Sabben is a friend of mine, he was a platoon commander in the battle. He is recognised within his peer group for his remarkable gallantry but, in the informal structure of medallic recognition, he and a number of others that were involved in the battle were not given, in my view, appropriate recognition for the gallantry and the remarkable deeds that they displayed on that historic day. Just what to do about it was a question that landed in my lap as minister.

It is very hard to revisit recommendations for the recognition of gallantry when all the core material that may have been available at the time is no longer available. What, let's say, a force of nature in the shape of Harry Smith was able to do was to make sure as a commander of the battalion in that contact that he persisted. He knew what he had recommended. He knew what he saw and he understood the context vividly because he was there. His recommendations had not survived the in country hierarchy and therefore had not been implemented in the way that he had hoped. This differed somewhat from the category that Mal Brough dealt with because the recommendations in country were clear and where they were changed back here in Canberra was also clear but all the core

material was available to action. The difference in the case of Long Tan was that Harry's recommendations were not supported by his command structure in country which meant that a lot of that input, a lot of that source documentation, had disappeared. It did not move any further and it was substituted with other recommendations from the command structure in country. That meant that the base material on which to revisit that subject was not readily available. That in large part accounted for why over many decades revisiting that wrong was not undertaken by successive governments.

I and many others felt that a wrong had occurred. The question was: what to do about it? It was a decision of the Howard government in my time as minister to create the panel of three generals who would objectively look at all of the available information and arrive at a conclusion about whether Harry Smith's recommendations needed to be revived and whether we could bring together adequate material to make that a sound and justified action and then evaluate that material.

I am pleased that for this Vietnam Veterans Day those wrongs of years ago were put right. Harry Smith, a remarkable soldier, an extraordinary man and someone I greatly admire, was in receipt of what he had earned so many years ago during the Battle of Long Tan. Harry was awarded the second highest medal available under our current structure to recognise his extraordinary gallantry—the Star of Gallantry. Harry Smith was then the commander of D Company 6RAR. He earned that. I am pleased that this Vietnam Veterans Day he was in possession of that.

The platoon commanders at the time, Dave Sabben and Geoff Kendall, had also been offered a medal of gallantry, which was equivalent to the Military Cross that Harry had recommended at the time under the imperial system. Those two remarkable soldiers were also in possession of the award and medallic recognition they very much deserved. It was a long journey for those three men to get the nation's recognition they had earned, but they finally got there. I was pleased that work that was kicked off in my time as minister saw that wrong being righted.

I know in the eyes of Harry there is still work to be done. I have never met a man so single-minded in his approach to these issues. At the time of the battle he held no higher obligation than to look after the men he commanded. He still feels that passion today. There is more that needs to be done in his eyes. There are some discussions still going on with the overriding concern of how we can fairly and equitably deal with these wrongs so many years after the event. I talk particularly around some anomalies concerning Roberts and Sharp.

But that was a good outcome for this Vietnam Veterans Day.

I would briefly like to touch on another area. When the war started I was not alive, I had not been born yet, but I did grow up with a lot of people whose dads had fought and I feel a very deep affection for our Vietnam veterans. I hope we have learnt a lesson. When I was minister I apologised to the veteran community for the way they were treated on their return. I hope our country and our citizens never again take out their disagreement with the government of the day in terms of the nature and the timing of a deployment on those who did all that their country asked of them. If people have a truck or an argument with the nature of a military involvement, they should take it up with people in this place; they should not take it up with the people in uniform. When they come back we should be proud and give them as much recognition and support as we can because they did all that their country asked of them. My simple belief is that the country should do all that it can to support them as a result of that service. That was something we sought to address. I hope we as a nation and a parliament continue to address those issues.

For me that has played out in some interesting ways. For the six Australian soldiers we did not bring home, I could not look their families in the eye and say that we had done all we could to find them. I pay respect to some incredible people at Operation Aussies Home, including Jim Burke. I do not know whether you have met Jim. Some think I am his love child. I can put on the record that that is not the case. He is far more gruff than I would ever be. He is a remarkable former soldier and he is still soldiering for those he served with.

Jim was instrumental in making sure that the Commonwealth and the defence forces, the Army and the Air Force, got off their backsides and did what they needed to do to find the remains of the Australian MIAs. I was incredibly honoured and blown away to be there on that tarmac to receive the remains, to fly there with family members and to return home and see those service personnel under my watch brought home and laid to rest. We needed to do more to find those brave Australians and I am pleased that the nation got around to doing what it should have done a long time earlier.

My colleague the member for Bruce mentioned the work we had instigated on the Children of Vietnam Veterans Health Study. This is another area where we need to remain vigilant. There is quite a body of evidence that service impacts on the next generation of a soldier's family, and we do not understand enough about that but we need to. That is why having that study commenced on my watch was again something I thought extraordinarily worthwhile.

We should continue with that work and encourage families to participate because we can and need to keep learning.

The other area was in the Vietnam Veterans Counselling Service, which we reshaped as the Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Services, again for that simple fact that serving the nation as the nation asks can have an enormous impact not only on the service personnel but on their families. In imagining some of the scenes that our serving personnel see, in realising that in places in the Middle East there can be a car swerving towards you and you have to decide if it is a threat to your people or just a bloody awful driver, in realising that you can then be called forward to help with a humanitarian response such as in an area that I was associated with after the tsunami—being involved in the clean-up of the hospital up in Bandah Aceh and recovering the remains of infants in hospital wards—you see that this stuff messes with your head. We need to realise that, just as our hardware needs through-life support so it can continue to perform at an optimum level, our people need that as well. Just as important as preparing people for deployment is bringing them back into a civilian world where they can go from being a combatant to being someone's Casanova all over again. This is a difficult transition and we need to keep working in that space.

My last comment is to the government around changes that are happening. I hope the savings that have been talked about with best funding do not undermine the veterans community's capacity to support themselves. I fear that it will. Our system revolves around volunteer support for service personnel bringing forward the injury, the impairment or the harm and the hurt of their military service where that has detracted from their quality of life and their capacity to earn, and appropriately recognising that and compensating for it. We make sure that ex-service organisations are the allies of veterans and serving personnel as they go through that process. If we undermine the capacity of the veterans community to support claimants for compensation and benefits to obtain all that they are deserving of and require then we weaken the foundation of the support system that is there to support serving and ex-service personnel.

I say that in the particular context of Vietnam veterans, many of whom are now approaching retirement age and many of whom have carried emotional scars and impairments from their service but have soldiered on. They have soldiered on in their careers and through that have continued to earn a livelihood and supported their families. But as they near the end of their working lives they may in fact put their hands up for support that is justified as a result of the impact of their service.

If a veteran retires prematurely, perhaps because of an injury or an impairment, that has a profound impact on their eligibility for TPI and other benefits. Why? It is because those benefits are available where the capacity to work is impeded solely as a consequence of the impairment or the injury that relates to their service. If there is a sense that there are other factors at play, such as retirement, redundancy or some change in their life trajectory, that can undermine their capacity to access the benefits to which they are entitled. Right now is a critical time for the Vietnam veterans community because they are in that retirement age. I would hate to think that the trimming of the support in the BEST program would undermine people's capacity to access that help.

Finally, I want to put in a plug for a book I launched when I was a minister, *Vietnam: Our War—Our Peace*. So often Vietnam veterans share with me what a defining part of their life journey and their character their service is and was. But they also want to make sure that people realise that Vietnam veterans are doing remarkable things in our community, in our economy and in our nation day in, day out. This book captures a little bit about their service but it also captures a story about what Vietnam veterans have achieved for our nation as they continue to serve. They continue to serve not only their peer group but also the broader Australian interest. So I say to our Vietnam veterans: thank you most sincerely for your service. We are a grateful nation that made some mistakes that we are seeking to fix, and those remedies might not always be what they might hope to be, but we have to persevere in that effort. Also, thank you for what you have done as citizens of Australia not only in the broader community but in the veterans space, teaching so many of us about what we need to do to support the serving community that we ask so much of—how to keep them healthy, how to keep them happy and how to make sure the quality of their life is positive and the opportunities in the future are still there. We have learned that from our Vietnam veterans. So they are still serving and they have my utmost respect.

Mr CLARE (Blaxland—Minister for Defence Materiel) (16:26): Last Thursday, 18 August, was Vietnam Veterans Remembrance Day; 18 August is also the anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan. In that battle members of the 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment engaged a much larger Vietcong force. One hundred and eight soldiers from Delta Company fought a Vietcong force of more than 2,000 in driving rain near the village of Long Tan in South Vietnam. Supported by Australian, New Zealand and American artillery, as well as Royal Australian Air Force Iroquois helicopters, they withstood the Vietcong attack and through their actions established Australian dominance in the area, which was never again seriously

challenged. In the battle 18 Australian soldiers lost their lives and 24 were wounded. As other members have noted here, Long Tan has long held a special place in Australia's military history. The memorial cross at Long Tan hidden amongst the rubber trees where the battle was fought is visited by many Australians each year. Last week Delta Company 6RAR was awarded a Unit Citation For Gallantry for their actions at Long Tan—something long overdue. A Unit Citation For Gallantry recognises the collective extraordinary gallantry in military operations—gallantry that was recognised by our ally the United States in 1968 when the unit received a Presidential Unit Citation for extraordinary heroism from President Lyndon Johnson. The text of that citation reads, inter alia:

While searching for Viet Cong in a rubber plantation northeast of Ba Ria, Phuoc Tuy Province, Republic of Vietnam, D Company met and immediately engaged in heavy contact. As the battle developed, it became apparent that the men of D Company were facing a numerically superior force. The platoons of D Company were surrounded and attacked on all sides by an estimated reinforced enemy battalion using automatic weapons, small arms and mortars. Fighting courageously against a well armed and determined foe, the men on D Company maintained their formations in a common perimeter defence and inflicted heavy casualties on the Viet Cong.

The enemy maintained a continuous, intense volume of fire and attacked repeatedly from all directions. Each successive assault was repulsed by the courageous Australians. Heavy rainfall and low ceiling prevented any friendly close air support during the battle. After three hours of savage attacks, having failed to penetrate the Australian lines, the enemy withdrew from the battlefield carrying many dead and wounded, and leaving 245 Viet Cong dead forward of the defence positions of D Company.

The conspicuous courage, intrepidity and indomitable courage of D Company were to the highest tradition of military valour and reflect great credit upon D Company and the Australian Army.

That is part of the citation from President Johnson dated 28 May 1968.

The anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan has also become the day on which we remember all Australians who served in Vietnam. We remember the nine infantry battalions of the Royal Australian Regiment who saw service in Vietnam and the seven who carried out two operational tours. One of those men was my grandfather Jack Clare, who fought in the Second World War and did two tours of duty in Vietnam.

At times like this it is also important to remember the role played by the RAAF, which provided a squadron of Iroquois helicopters, a squadron of Canberra bombers and a squadron of Caribou transport aircraft. It is also important to remember the role played by the Royal Australian Navy, which provided gunfire support to American forces and a clearance diving team for port security and mine clearance, as well as transporting our troops to and from Vietnam. We also remember the Australian military nurses who served in operating theatres and hospitals across Vietnam. We remember the sacrifice of the 521 Australians who lost their lives in Vietnam and the more than 3,000 who were injured in service to our nation.

More than 17,000 national servicemen served in Vietnam, and 212 of those lost their lives there. Of the 60,000 Australians who served in Vietnam, approximately 47,000 are still alive today. It is our Vietnam veterans who run many of our ex-service organisations and play a very important role in kindling the Anzac spirit.

It is also important in motions like this that we remember the bravery of those whom we fought alongside, the soldiers of the South Vietnamese Army, many of whom had to flee their own country when Saigon fell and many of whom live in my electorate today.

We are all indebted to those who serve our country and it is appropriate that this House pause to recognise and remember the sacrifices of those who served so bravely in Vietnam and ensure that the courage they displayed and the sacrifices they made, like all who have fought in our name, are never forgotten.

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (16:32): Last week on 18 August our nation commemorated the 45th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan. This battle proved so symbolic of Australia's service in the Vietnam War that we now use this date to commemorate Vietnam Veterans Day. For anyone of my vintage, we will never forget the nightly pictures zoomed into our living rooms of the horrors faced in Vietnam. The stories of the courage of 108 soldiers from D Company of the 6th RAR, fighting in a rubber plantation at Long Tan against a Vietcong force of up to 2,500 strong, have been recounted many times today in this place and over recent years. Despite being outnumbered by nearly 10 to one, the Australian soldiers stood their ground in atrocious monsoonal weather, without any radio support, for hours on end and halted the progression of the dogged North Vietnamese force towards a position of great strategic strength.

The record shows that 18 Australians were killed on that day and another 24 wounded. After the battle, more than 245 enemy combatants were found dead on the battlefield. It is with great pride that we retell the stories of our national heroes. It is also with great shame that we accept the fact that, in the 15 years immediately following the Vietnam War, there was no recognition for these diggers and their heroic acts in the face of fire—the equal of their forefathers in the two world wars.

This lack of acknowledgment and appreciation for such incredible human sacrifice is not limited to this battle or just to this war. We in this place cannot change history but we can make sure that we learn from it to ensure that it does not repeat. Last week in this place I spoke on a condolence motion for our nation's greatest war heroine, Nancy Wake. I referred to the travesty that our nation refused to formally honour this World War II legend as, technically, she fought against the Nazis under the banner of our allies rather than in an Australian uniform. The fact is that the post-war governments of France, Great Britain and the United States all separately gave Nancy Wake high military honours, yet it took until John Howard in 2004 for Australia to bestow an award upon Nancy. It was not lost on many who defend our nation.

Last month, I spoke in this place in support of my first private member's motion to recognise this year's centenary of the Royal Australian Navy. I highlighted that none of Australia's 97 Victoria Cross recipients served in the Royal Australian Navy, despite incredible stories of heroism and self-sacrifice that have been recounted about many of our sailors over the past 100 years. In a speech last week, the shadow minister for veterans' affairs described the 15-year gap between the actions by those at Long Tan and our formal recognition of their bravery as a dark stain on our nation's history. Such stains do not erase easily.

As a group, the efforts of the men of D company 6RAR were finally honoured last week when they received our nation's military's highest honour, the Unit Citation for Gallantry. In the provision of this recognition, I echo the shadow minister's sentiments that, as a nation, we should not limit our thoughts and our appreciation just to those who carried a gun. For every life lost there will invariably be a parent, a sibling, a partner and, tragically, sometimes a child who will mourn this loss and carry a scar as indelible as the national stain I spoke of.

To those lost in the rubber plantation on that fateful day 45 years ago and to those who came back, irrevocably changed from the experience, to everyone else who has served, to the tens of thousands who have served more recently in Samoa, in Timor, and now in Afghanistan, and to the families, friends and local communities all

impacted by the tragic loss of our finest in their prime, this Vietnam Veterans Day and all veterans days are our nation's way of saying thank you and we will never forget.

Ms HALL (Shortland—Government Whip) (16:37): I rise to speak on this very important motion and to acknowledge the contribution that our service personnel made in Vietnam. The Vietnam War was a war like no other war. In practically every other war and every major conflict where Australians fought, our service personnel had the support of this nation. The Vietnam War took place during my teenage and early adult years and it involved a number of young men I was associated with. I know it had an enormous impact on them and has had a subsequent impact on their lives. Those young service personnel who served in Vietnam did so based on a decision of their government. Unfortunately, when public opinion in this country changed and the war was no longer supported, those young service personnel felt the brunt of that lack of public support.

I have a very strong Vietnam veterans community within the Shortland electorate. I like to sit down and talk to the guys and to their wives and partners about what it meant to them and how it impacted on their lives. The partners of Vietnam vets is a very strong organisation. It started in the Shortland electorate. Those wonderful women have provided enormous support to their husbands and partners over a very long period of time. I think the type of support that they have needed to provide has to a large extent been determined by what happened during that period of time.

It was the longest major conflict that Australia has been involved in. It covered the span of years from 1962 to 1972. The start of it is just a very vague memory to me. The concluding stages of it are very vivid to me. Sixty thousand personnel were involved in the conflict. Every one of our service bodies were involved: the Army, the Navy and the RAAF. All of those had casualties and all of those had soldiers, sailors and airmen injured. The highest casualties were within the Army and then the Air Force; the Navy also lost eight personnel. There were 521 lives lost all up. The actual casualties are greater than those who died in the conflict. Those people who were involved in that war have had to come to terms with a very different type of war that was fought in Vietnam, the reaction to that war at home and then the reaction that they had when they came back and tried to resume their lives in Australia.

It is important to note that there were a number of national servicemen involved in the Vietnam conflict and in my area a number of them were involved in

Vietnam. They have told me about what it was like and how it impacted on their lives.

I have attended two Vietnam veteran services following Vietnam Veterans Day on Thursday, 18 August. One was before and that was at Doyalson RSL, where they celebrated victory in the Pacific and Vietnam Veterans Day; it is a tradition within that RSL sub-branch, a very strong sub-branch. The guest speaker there really portrayed what it was like to be involved in that conflict and how it affected him and his fellow Air Force buddies. He also managed to bring out very clearly the camaraderie that existed between all those who were involved. That camaraderie has extended beyond the battle and has in some cases been the very thing that has helped those Vietnam vets to survive their involvement in that conflict. Those Australians who served in Vietnam showed courage and they made enormous sacrifices; so did their families. Some of those people are still making enormous sacrifices each and every day and are coming to terms with what that war meant to them.

I suppose the message for all of us in this House is: you can disagree with a war, you can feel that it is not a place that Australian troops should be, you can feel that maybe we would be better if we were not involved there, but each and every person of this parliament needs to stand up and support our service men and women when they are fighting for our country. Australia's history has been intertwined with the conflicts we have been involved in. It has been very formative on our nation. We need to learn from what happened in Vietnam. We need to support our Vietnam veterans. I commend the Prime Minister 's motion to the House.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (16:45): Last Sunday I had the honour of being invited by the Sydney chapter of the Vietnam Veterans Motorcycle Club to join their march through Menai to commemorate the Battle of Long Tan. At the service following the march, there was hardly a dry eye in the house as Macca spoke about the Battle of Long Tan and told the story of how, on 18 August 1966, the North Vietnamese were poised to deliver our most crushing military defeat of the war, where more than 2,500 Vietnamese troops had just 108 Australians and New Zealanders, most of them rural conscripts, pinned down in a rubber plantation that offered almost no natural protection. The odds of annihilation were overwhelming. But, instead, the Battle of Long Tan became one of Australia's most extraordinary military victories.

Macca then read out a passage written by Private Jim Richmond, who was injured at the start of the Battle of Long Tan, which I think is worth repeating here today:

I rolled over on my side hoping that the mud would dry out the wound and help to stop the bleeding. The artillery was still coming in and it was dark by now and I knew I'd get no help till morning at least. I kept hoping that the artillery wouldn't get me. I was worried about my mother, and I kept thinking if I died she would be up shit creek, so I prayed a lot and made a lot of promises, but I'm afraid I never really kept any of them after I got back home. It was the longest night I've ever known. The artillery was still coming in and I can remember thinking, 'This one's going over, and this one's falling short, and this one's for you Jim.' ... The other thing that was really worrying me was the thirst. I drank all my water and during the night I got painfully thirsty and reckoned if I could survive the Viet Cong troops and the artillery I'd probably finish up dying of thirst. I just lay there helpless and praying and trying to stay awake and wishing to hell it would get light soon.

Macca also read out a passage written by Private Terry Burstall, a survivor of Long Tan, who wrote of the aftermath of the battle:

We recovered the bodies of our friends who had been laughing living beings the day before. Nothing takes the supposed glory out of war more quickly than the sight of dead mutilated friends. Unfortunately it brings about a hardening of feeling toward your enemy that pushes normal human feelings of compassion to the back of the mind. It brings conflict down to a very personal level and gives you the licence to remain aloof from the suffering of others as long as your own little band is protected.

... ..

I personally do not care how many troops we faced at Long Tan or whether the body count is accurate or not. Jingoism is the last thing we need. I do not care who claims victory. The only fact I care about is that a lot of good men from both sides died that day and I will be forever saddened by that.

In the Battle of Long Tan we lost 18 young Australians. The eldest was just 22; the youngest only 19. Eleven of the 18 who were killed were national servicemen. Looking through their list of civilian jobs, of those who gave their lives at Long Tan, they included: a butcher, a farmhand, a storeman, an apprentice electrician, a student, a clerk, a labourer, a postman. This was a group typical of any group of 19- to 21-year-olds you would find in any town or suburb throughout Australia. Yet this group was called on to make the ultimate sacrifice. Those 18 who were killed at Long Tan were part of the 500 Australian lives that we lost in Vietnam.

It is to our nation's eternal shame that we did not give those who fought in Vietnam the due recognition

that they deserved when they returned home. This left a large number of veterans deeply traumatised and adrift from the society that they returned to. But with the hindsight of time it is now evident that those who served in Vietnam did in fact achieve many of the long-term strategic objectives that our nation set out to accomplish in Vietnam. Firstly, and it must never be forgotten, when Australia first became involved in Vietnam the world was in the midst of the Cold War. The ideological confrontation between communism and those that believed in democracy and free enterprise was at its height. Eastern Europe was one great concentration camp. The communists had taken control of the world's most populous nation—China. Soviet imperialism was on the march in Asia, Africa, South America and Western Europe. The Soviet Union had the intent of dominating the world by using subversion or military power to convert countries to communism. The Warsaw Pact forces had invaded Czechoslovakia. The domino theory was real.

These were dark days for the very future of freedom and democracy. In the 10 years of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War, when we fought alongside our American allies, this became a holding action for freedom and democracy. During these 10 years we halted the communist advance and this period allowed the Western democracies and other ASEAN nations to grow strong enough to outlast the enemy. It was during this period that history proved for all time that the entrepreneurial efficiencies that are generated by a free market combined with equality of opportunity and protected by strong anti-trust laws would deliver greater wealth and greater prosperity than the communist-socialist ideology of a nation's economy being controlled by giant industrial concerns and centralised planning. It was during the 10 years of Australia's involvement in Vietnam that countries that followed communist ideology of a centrally controlled economy run by a few elites saw their economies stagnate while in contrast during the same period those countries that followed the principles of democracy, freedom and equality of opportunity saw their economies grow and prosper.

It was also during this 10-year period that the contrast between the standard of living between West German and East Germany and North and South Korea became undeniable. So there was a domino effect, but not the one that we rightly worried about in the early 1960s. The domino effect that occurred after the Vietnam War was when countries saw how their neighbours that had rejected communist and socialist ideologies and instead followed the principles of free and open markets prospered and grew strong—and those countries followed. Today communist and socialist economic ideology has been rejected throughout South-East Asia and also the rest of the world, and

we see the Vietnamese economy prospering from free-market incentives through the encouragement of private businesses and foreign investment, which has lifted millions of Vietnamese out of poverty. For that we have our troops' service in Vietnam to thank. Their 10-year holding action, a period history will record as being truly the critical decade in the fight against communism, was a period that enabled the Western democracies and other ASEAN nations to grow strong and their economies to flourish and for democracy and freedom to win out. For that we have our Vietnam veterans to thank.

The second outstanding achievement for which our Vietnam vets can proudly take credit for has been the consolidation of our relationship with the USA. During the many trips that I have had the privilege of making to America, many Americans will often comment to me how they will never forget how Australia stood by America during the time of Vietnam. The special friendship that we enjoy with the USA underwrites our national security. It provides immeasurable economic and strategic benefits. For this we have the service and the sacrifice of our Vietnam vets to thank.

We also have our Vietnam vets to thank for standing up for their mates when the government let them down. After they returned from Vietnam many veterans experienced a degree of bitterness from their peers who did not share their experiences during the war. So it has been no surprise that the many Vietnam vets that were shunned by society upon their return in turn shunned society and turned inward to the only people who they could trust and rely upon—their brothers in arms, other Vietnam veterans. It was their mateship forged during the unique nature of military service, where they developed an absolute trust in one another at all times and a strong sense of doing the right thing by one's platoon, ship or aircraft crew that enabled Vietnam vets to be there to take care of their mates when the government failed them. So, to the members of the Sydney chapter of the Vietnam Veterans Motorcycle Club, I say: I am proud that you have elected to be based at Menai, in the electorate that I represent. And to all Vietnam vets, to Spike, and the Sydney chapter of the Vietnam Veterans Motorcycle Club, on behalf of my generation, that enjoys the benefits of your service and your sacrifice, I simply say: thank you, on a job well done. And to my constituents: if you see a member of the Vietnam Veterans Motorcycle Club wearing their club colours with the distinctive black leather jacket with the skull and slouch hat, go up to them and simply say thank you—say, 'Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your service, your sacrifice and your great achievements in helping win the Cold War and making the world a better place for future generations.'

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you for your contribution.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (16:55): It is a great honour to rise today to echo the words of the Prime Minister in honouring those men and women who served their country in the Vietnam War. I was very sad that I was not able to join the Governor-General, Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition at last week's commemoration due to my commitments in the chamber. I would very much have liked to be there to pay my respects to the dedication and sacrifice of those Australians who count themselves among Australian's Vietnam vets, my father-in-law included.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the great work that has been done in the Canberra community by the local RSLs, particularly the RSL in Tuggeranong, Woden Valley RSL and also the Hellenic RSL. I recently addressed the Woden Valley RSL at a special lunch seminar. It was a great honour and I really enjoyed that occasion. So they do great work around the community in supporting the vets from all wars by helping them through difficult times and just keeping them active in the community. They have also been a great help to my father-in-law since my mother-in-law died last year, dropping in to see how he is going and just making sure he is faring well and keeping his spirits up. So I would really like to take the opportunity to thank them very much for their work in the community.

The 18th of August is the day chosen as the date to recognise Vietnam vets because it is the day of the Battle of Long Tan. That battle has come to symbolise Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War in much the same way as the Kokoda Trail symbolises World War II. The story of Long Tan is a compelling one. It is a story that tells of how a handful of men from D Company, 6 Royal Australian Regiment, cut off from support, faced down an opposing force many times larger—perhaps even of regimental strength. They did so in monsoon rain, with withering machine-gun fire and wave after wave of enemy troops. They showed immense courage. It was an impressive feat. I am also impressed by the stories of the helicopter pilots who, on hearing that D Company was running low on ammunition, risked heavy fire to drop boxes of it and blankets for the wounded. I would like to recognise the courage of the relief force from 2 and 3 Troop of the first APC squadron who would not stop at anything, including heavy machine-gun and anti-tank fire to reach their mates and also the members of the 1st Field Regiment, Royal Australian Artillery, 161st Battery, Royal New Zealand Artillery and the US 2nd Battalion, 35th Artillery Regiment who provided excellent artillery fire to protect their mates. I understand that A Battery fired a shell every 15

seconds. They did so through the entire engagement, despite exhaustion, because they knew their mates needed help. But with the determination for which Australian soldiers are well renowned and with good training and tactics, they managed to take the day. Eighteen men did not return to base that day, and another 24 were wounded.

Over 500 Australians were killed in the Vietnam War and many, many more were wounded. But they were not just wounded by enemy fire. Many carried the emotional and mental scars that would not heal. It is a sad fact that we have not always recognised the sacrifice of those Australians who served in Vietnam and that their deeds were not given appropriate recognition. All too often individual stories of gallantry and heroism of Vietnam vets are forgotten because of the deep divisions in this country, and indeed the Western world, about the legitimacy of the conflict and Australia's involvement in it. Here it is about not just vets but the families of the vets, and I talk here as the wife of an Army brat. My father-in-law did two tours of Vietnam, leaving behind a family of five children, all under the age of 10, at Woodside Barracks in South Australia. This was the time of the antiwar moratoriums and protests, and my husband, his brothers and sisters and the other Defence kids were vilified at school, as were their mothers whenever they went out to the local shops. There was such antiwar sentiment that even the families copped it, which is really tragic. It seems grossly unfair, given that Mary and the other women were bringing up their families on their own while their husbands were at war.

I take this opportunity, too, to acknowledge the work of the families, mainly women, who are left behind when their loved ones are deployed to war. Yesterday I attended the launch of the Defence Community Organisation initiative FamilySMART with Minister Snowdon. It is a series of programs designed to help partners of ADF members identify strategies and support that will help build their resilience through the life cycle of military careers and beyond. As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, the women and men who are left behind with little children do it tough. I was talking to the wife of someone who has just come back from Afghanistan and she told me that, though it was difficult when her husband was away because of worrying about him and wondering whether he would be okay, the wives, husbands and children who are left behind get into a bit of a rhythm. She said it was actually the predeployment that was the most stressful period. There was a lot of tension and anxiety about him actually going, and that was the most difficult time for her. I found that most interesting.

It is so important that organisations like the Defence Community Organisation and Defence Families

Australia are there to help those who are behind as well as the troops who come back. They provide a fantastic support network of friendship, assistance and community, because quite often these families are isolated in barracks that are away from capital cities. I applaud the FamilySMART initiative and the work of the Defence Community Organisation and Defence Families Australia.

Going back to Long Tan Day, I know that feelings at the time of the Vietnam War were exceptionally strong, but now we must put aside our opinions on the virtues or otherwise of the Vietnam War to honour those Australians who did serve the nation overseas, regardless of how we feel about the validity of their mission. They were not responsible for the decision to go; they were just the ones tasked with carrying it out. They did so with honour and courage and they risked much. I add my voice to those honouring their service today. Lest we forget.

Mr SIMPKINS (Cowan) (17:03): Vietnam Veterans Day is commemorated on the anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan, it being arguably our finest moment in the Vietnam War. It was on that day, 18 August 1966, that D Company and supporting troops took on a vastly superior enemy force in the Long Tan rubber plantation. In that desperate fight, against such terrible odds, victory was achieved. I pay tribute to the courage and bravery of the members of D Company and those who shared the fight with them that night.

Some people in this country talk of the Vietnam War as a defeat. It is not correct to say that we were defeated. When the last of our troops left Vietnam in 1973, the war had not been lost. Our soldiers had not been defeated and we and our allies had not been driven into the sea. At the start of 1973 the Paris Peace Accords had resulted in a cessation of the fighting, so when we left Vietnam the north had been stopped. Our soldiers had fought with distinction and overall success in Vietnam from the days of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam, 'the Team', all the way through the war until the withdrawal. Thousands of our soldiers have the right to be proud of their achievements but, as we know, they were treated terribly upon their return. That constituted what I think we all acknowledge is a national disgrace. Although subsequent events have at least partially redressed that terrible wrong, the pain is something that will always live with our veterans. It is most definitely the case that when you look back upon the Vietnam War and compare it to the Korean War or even the Second World War there is a big difference between a war where you could walk out of the jungle one day and be back on the streets of Sydney the next day, and a war where you could be on a boat for one or two months coming back from Europe and have the time to wind down and hang out with your mates

under less arduous circumstances. So when you see those sorts of comparisons it makes the treatment of our Vietnam veterans at the time even worse because they were repatriated back to Australia and almost thrown directly out on the streets into circumstances of great adversity. People did not have a great regard for them at all and that was, as I said, a national disgrace.

Australia was not the only country, particularly in the late 1960s and early 1970s, where there was a lot of opposition to the war. It seems that many civilians took on the side of the North Vietnamese communist government; that was the case in the United States as well. Big protest marches took the simplistic line of how evil we were in prosecuting the war and how our opponents were, in some ways, the epitome of goodness. I think the only real comparison that can be drawn between the Vietnam War and the current war in Afghanistan is the way left-wing opponents of the war always see those who we are fighting as legitimate freedom fighters or some other romanticised view of such people.

The first point that is always overlooked is that our involvement has never been about colonialism or permanent occupation. With Vietnam, it was not like the French in Indochina or the Dutch in Indonesia; instead, it is about being in these places—Vietnam or Afghanistan—to achieve stability. The other major point that is always overlooked by the political opponents of these sorts of wars is that our enemies in these wars do not represent what the local people want. The people of the south of Vietnam wanted their democracy to succeed; they did not want a communist government. It is the same in Afghanistan: they do not want the Taliban and their allies from other Arab Islamic countries to control their country; they want control of their own destinies. That is the mission that we continue to support.

In returning to the issue of Vietnam, I still consider it a great tragedy that we and the United States did not remain in Vietnam to ensure the communists complied with their obligations under the Paris Peace Accords. The people of South Vietnam wanted a democratic future—that has not been a reality. When Saigon fell to the communists on 30 April 1975 the communists were not pleasant or nice people. They treated their opponents brutally. An example is that, despite their wounds or injuries, the soldiers of the South Vietnamese army who were in hospitals were thrown out of those hospitals and told to go back to their families. They still suffer to this day with the disabilities and injuries they were suffering from when they had to leave the hospitals. I also pay tribute to the Vietnamese veterans of the Vietnam War who now live in Cowan in Western Australia and elsewhere around this country because they still undertake significant

fundraising for their comrades who still survive in Vietnam. They raise money and send those funds back to Vietnam to alleviate the suffering of those treated so inhumanely by the communists.

On around 30 April each year I attend the Black April commemoration service in Kings Park in Perth with the veterans and the leaders of the Vietnamese community. On those days we remember the high hopes that were held for democracy in Vietnam and how very distant the reality has become. We remember the examples of the brutality and the inhumanity with which the communists treated their adversaries. We talk of how the hardworking people of Vietnam, the families and friends of Vietnamese Australians, continue to be held back by the communist government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. It is a government that serves itself and its elites before it serves its people.

It is in that context and in the light of the history of the Vietnam War that I pay tribute to our soldiers, our airmen and our sailors who served in the Vietnam War. Theirs was a noble cause, a cause where the weak needed to be defended and they were defended while we were participating in that war. We should be proud of the achievements of our troops in the Vietnam War. They fought with great honour and great distinction. They achieved their tasks. They protected South Vietnam and the people of South Vietnam. They fought to defend a democratic dream, and that was the right thing to do. The Vietnam War had been halted by a ceasefire on 27 January 1973, four days after President Nixon had declared that peace with honour had been achieved. The reality was that treachery and betrayal would follow in 1975, and it was only then that defeat came and not at all during the Australian involvement. So once again I pay tribute to every Australian serviceman and servicewoman who served our country, our national interests and the great cause of democracy in the Vietnam War. As I said, theirs was an honourable effort; theirs was a distinguished effort. We should always remember and do whatever we can to look after them in the future.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (17:10): I too rise in acknowledgement of Vietnam Veterans Day and in thanks on behalf of a grateful nation to all who partook of the conflict in the Vietnam War. 18 August is a day on which the Battle of Long Tan has long been remembered and is now the day on which we remember and pay tribute to the sacrifices of all Australians who participated in the Vietnam War. This conflict may have been the first modern war where the community back home saw the horrors of war on their television sets. This horror was felt by everyone—not only the public through the many protests and the things that we saw here back home but, more realistically, by the veterans themselves who witnessed the horrors

firsthand and who were actually there. The veterans have always suffered throughout their lives as a result of their service in times of war. The lack of adequate support on their return to their homeland increased the suffering tremendously, and we have all heard and seen stories of Vietnam vets and heard about the non-existent services when they first returned and the horrendous things that they went through, even on their return here to their homeland.

This year it was a great honour for me on Anzac Day, when I was actually in Vietnam and I attended the wreath-laying ceremony at Long Tan this Anzac Day, in the year of the 45th anniversary of the battle. It was attended by government officials, by the Ambassador to Vietnam and by the consul-general in the area, and we were joined by many Australian veterans who paid their respects at this place and at the time to the service of members of the Australian Defence Force throughout that conflict and to the recognition of the suffering that has continued since. It was a very eerie feeling turning up at dawn that morning in this rubber plantation. The current rubber trees that are there would all have been new growth from when the battle took place. As I said, it was very eerie to think that these young kids, really—19 or 20—were in this forest of rubber trees and then were pounced on by the enemy. But they did us proud. We heard stories that morning from many veterans who were there recounting what took place in that horrible, horrible battlefield. They did us proud and we are here to acknowledge their heroic efforts. It will be one of the battles that will go down in history as one that was so significant to Australia. As I said, it was a really eerie feeling being there at dawn watching the sun come up and conducting the ceremony for Anzac Day. I thought: imagine how those young lads felt being in that rubber plantation and being fired upon as they were on patrol.

I would also like to take this opportunity to give thanks to all those who aid and assist veterans through their civilian lives here in the Australian community. All of us have RSLs within our electorates and have connections to those RSLs. As I go round my electorate and visit the numerous RSLs, such as the Henley and Grange RSL, the Plympton Glenelg RSL and the Hilton RSL, I see first-hand the services they offer to a lot of the Vietnam vets. A lot of those RSLs today are run by Vietnam veterans; the presidents, the secretaries and the welfare officers are all Vietnam vets. Local RSLs play a wonderful role in the lives of those veterans and the Vietnam veterans in particular.

I would also like to give a special mention to the Vietnam Veterans Association in South Australia, who deserve special recognition. The amount of voluntary work that they do in South Australia, giving 24/7 service by phone or in person, is truly remarkable. It

is absolutely tremendous assistance in the alleviation of the ongoing suffering that many of our veterans still endure today. Nobody knows the thoughts and feelings of a veteran better than another veteran, and the fact that there are veterans out there who are willing and able to serve their fellow veterans in itself deserves recognition, thanks and support from all of us. A group of members of the South Australian branch of the Vietnam Veterans Association go back regularly to Vietnam, where there is a particular orphanage, the Baria orphanage in South Vietnam, that they sponsor and support. You can see a lot of this sort of good work going on today in Vietnam, as many Vietnam vets go back to visit the places where they were and want to contribute something to those communities. This year, I was with some of them, and they were welcomed with open arms by the local community.

I would like to conclude simply by conveying my deep and profound respect to all Vietnam veterans—those who lost their lives and those who had their lives irrevocably changed by their service to this nation. Let us not forget.

Mr COULTON (Parkes—The Nationals Chief Whip) (17 : 16): I too feel very privileged to speak in this chamber about Vietnam Veterans Day. Originally, 18 August was a day that commemorated the Battle of Long Tan, which was in 1966, but it has now been adopted by all veterans. I wish to make a short contribution to these statements to acknowledge the Vietnam veterans in the electorate of Parkes and recognise the significance of the Battle of Long Tan. Some years ago, I read an account of the Battle of Long Tan in book form and I was very moved by the contribution that those few soldiers made, and the level of courage and resourcefulness that they showed in such overwhelming circumstances.

I would also like to acknowledge the atmosphere in the Australian community to which the Vietnam vets returned. I was a teenager at the time—I missed out on being in the ballot by a few years—but I was aware that they were treated differently and thought of differently by the wider public. I remember seeing on television some of the marches and some of the animosity towards the Vietnam vets. On one of the darkest days in Australia's history, Vietnam vets were flown into Mascot airport in the middle of the night, under cover. So I would like to mention today the hardships that they have faced and the fact that many of the Vietnam vets that I know personally have been profoundly affected. Some of the vets have managed to lead very resourceful lives but many have been affected by late-onset traumatic stress and have battled mental illness in their fifties and sixties.

I would also like to acknowledge, following on from the member for Hindmarsh's comments, the great role that the vets are doing now in looking after the veteran community. As the World War II and Korean War veterans are getting on in years, the returned services community in my electorate is run by Vietnam veterans. Apart from running the club, the vets do great work looking after war widows and looking out for each other, so I wanted to recognise the role that they play. Today I would also like to make special mention of the Dubbo Vietnam Veterans Association, of which I am the patron. It is one of the positions that I am most proud of. I hold it in such high regard that those members have asked me to be their patron. I hope that I can do justice to the great honour they have given me. In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge all Vietnam veterans around Australia on Vietnam Veterans Day, but particularly the veterans in the seat of Parkes.

Mr HUSIC (Chifley—Government Whip) (17:20): I would like to associate myself with the comments made last week by the Prime Minister on Vietnam Veterans Day. Although we were all here on that day, I did take the opportunity last Friday back in the electorate to commemorate this important day by hosting an afternoon tea and recognising the service of three veterans. It was a privilege to present these ex-servicemen with Saluting Their Service certificates, the first I have had the pleasure to present. In their own way, these men made a significant contribution to Australia's wartime efforts—two in Vietnam and the other in Japan. I would like to recognise in this place the service of Michael Anthony Gillett of Rooty Hill for his service in the Vietnam War; Roy Tootell of Blacktown for his service in the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan, and Allen Peter Williams of Hebersham for his service in the Vietnam War. Michael Gillett served with the 7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment in Vietnam. Roy Tootell served in the British Commonwealth Occupation Force workshop in Kure, Japan and told some really great stories about his time there in 1946 and walking through Tokyo at that time. Allen Williams served seven months as an infantry rifleman before serving with Army aviation for the next year and a half in Vietnam, and again he recounted some of the things that he had to do—in particular marking targets and having to be placed in a position of great risk evading fire to do the work that he had to do and did so proudly. All three men were delighted to receive their certificates, but so too were their families—and in particular Jenny, who is Roy Tootell's daughter—who came with them for their presentation.

It is well documented that veterans of the Vietnam war suffered terribly after their return to Australia, particularly from the lack of recognition and appreciation by the broader community, divided as it

was at that time in the political debate surrounding that conflict. There were also people in the community at that time who had lost interest and confidence in the war. But those people who had served had done so responding to a call by their nation and should never have been placed in the position that they were on their return as a result of their services and their respecting that call. Veterans themselves suffered innumerable health complaints such as post-traumatic stress disorder and the effects of the chemicals they used in jungle warfare. More than in any war before, Vietnam veterans suffered lasting psychological damage as a result of what they saw in battle and what they were required to do. The war itself was one of the longest major conflicts in which Australians had been involved, lasting 10 years from 1962 to 1972 and involving some 60,000 personnel. A limited initial commitment of just 30 military advisers grew to include a battalion in 1965 and finally in 1966 a task force. Each of the three services was involved, with the dominant role being played by the Army.

Vietnam Veterans Day, originally a day to commemorate the Battle of Long Tan in 1966, has now been adopted by all veterans. Last Saturday I had the pleasure of attending the Long Tan memorial dinner at Rooty Hill RSL, a dinner hosted by the Rooty Hill naval subsection of the Naval Association of Australia. The subsection themselves were celebrating their 35th birthday on the night and had Commodore Bruce Kafer, Commandant of the Australian Defence Force Academy, there to cut their birthday cake. For me one of the highlights of the dinner was an address given by Mr Vin Cosgrove from the St Mary's Vietnam Veterans Outpost where he recounted key events in the Battle of Long Tan. He certainly captured everyone's attention through the events that he recounted on the night, and it was an important part of the evening to recognise what had gone on and the odds that were faced by our servicemen in that particular battle as part of the broader conflict. It was Australia's most significant contact with the Viet Cong in the 10 years of the conflict itself. In May and June 1966 soldiers of the 6th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment, or 6RAR as they are known, arrived in South Vietnam. By August 1966 the Australian task force base at Nui Dat was only three months old. Concerned at the establishment of such a strong presence in their midst, the Viet Cong determined to inflict an early defeat on the Australians. In the days before the battle itself radio signals indicated the presence of a strong Viet Cong force within five kilometres of the base, but patrols found nothing. On the night of 16-17 August Nui Dat came under fire from mortars and rifles. While the Australians believed an assault would follow, none came.

Patrols continued the following day, 18 August, and Delta Company 6RAR left the base at 11.15 that morning bound for Long Tan rubber plantation. They entered the plantation at 3.15 that afternoon and less than an hour later the Viet Cong attacked in force, putting the Australians under mortar, machine-gun and small-arms fire. Only the quick response of a New Zealand artillery battery to desperate calls for support saved Delta Company from annihilation. Captured documents and information from prisoners suggested that Delta force had faced some 2,500 Viet Cong. On returning to the plantation the following day, the Australians counted 245 enemy dead with evidence that others had already been removed from the battlefield. Eighteen Australians unfortunately lost their lives in that battle and 24 were wounded. All but one of the dead were from Delta Company.

It is understandable, given the toll our soldiers paid in the Vietnam War, that so many were left alienated by their treatment after returning home. The war itself was an important theatre of war for Australia strategically and politically and deserves to be recognised as such. I hope that students in Australian schools are being taught about the war, in particular this battle, the Battle of Long Tan. It is an important part of our history. I am grateful to hear of Vin Cosgrove's account. Finally, I would like to thank Mr Peter Hamrol, President of the Rooty Hill Sub Section of the Naval Association, for their invitation to attend the dinner and I congratulate them on their 35th birthday. I indicate my personal thanks, a debt of gratitude and the gratitude that many feel for the services that have been carried out by these people who operated under extreme circumstances.

Mr EWEN JONES (Herbert) (17:27): It was only a short time ago that I was walked from a morning tea down to the parade ground to farewell 2RAR as 800 men and women were in the process of being deployed to Afghanistan. I was walked down and back by the same warrant officer. On the way back we talked. He was near retirement. I asked, 'Did you serve in Vietnam?' He said, 'Well, as a matter of fact I did. I was very young then.' I said, 'Did you get a send-off like this?' He said, 'We got nothing, mate. We got nothing on the way out and we got nothing on the way back.' What a great change we have seen and it is for the people who served in Vietnam that we see this change. The people who served in Vietnam and went through what they had to go through in this most unpopular war have seen the way Australians have changed and now re-embrace the members of the Australian Defence Force.

Townsville is very lucky to be Australia's garrison city. We are very proud of that. But it has not always been the case. Up until the Somalia conflict in 1990 it was them and us. There were whole suburbs of

people segregated. You would not go anywhere near the AJs. You fought with them in the pubs; you fought with them on the streets. When they came back from Somalia it was the *Townsville Bulletin* that started calling them 'our boys'. From there, the city and the ADF have made a concerted two-way effort to change the relationship between the men and women of the ADF and the city. I want to say how proud I am to be associated with the men and women of the 3rd Brigade of the 5th Aviation Regiment at the RAAF base and the Navy contingent in Townsville. We are truly lucky to have them in our city. We are very proud of them. They live amongst us; they go to our schools.

Everyone has focused on Vietnam, today being the anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan. We should never shy away from that being a truly remarkable achievement. Whether it be the big battles of Long Tan, Coral-Balmoral or Binh Ba, we should not take away from the skirmishes that went on all over the place and it should not just be about the people who were there in conflict. I have a good friend who was a captain in the Army at that time—he is now a retired brigadier—who called artillery onto his own position to defeat the enemy. That was a very brave thing to do. I have mates who had to sleep next to artillery for the first three nights they were there. They did not sleep at all but now they can sleep through anything. If you can sleep through an artillery barrage going on outside your tent you can sleep anywhere. I have friends who came back from Vietnam as shattered men. I have friends who came back from Vietnam saying it was the greatest time of their lives. I have friends who served in the jungle and friends who drove armoured personnel carriers. I am part of that lucky generation from the end of the baby boomers to the beginning of the generation Xers who has not had to serve in a war. We missed conscription. It was terrible to watch people being conscripted, with some trying to get out of it, along with the rage in the streets that went with it.

To everyone who had anything to do with it, including the people who continue to have something to do with it, such as the Vietnam Veterans' Counselling Service, the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the Department of Defence and the wider community, I say: let us make sure that we recognise our Vietnam veterans. They are now becoming almost the elder statesmen of Anzac Day. Let us turn Anzac Day into a celebration of what these men and women did for their country. A lot of them did it without volunteering.

I cannot let this opportunity go without referring to the people who lost a brother, a son, a husband or a father. There are lots of people floating around who have had people killed in that conflict and they will always carry those scars with them. No-one wants to go to war, but soldiers train for it. They train hard. You should go

to the 3rd Brigade and watch those guys from 1RAR and 2RAR and the rest of the guys go through their exercises. It becomes muscle memory. They are battle-ready. They are ready to go and they want to go.

I also must use this opportunity to reinforce the fact that these people went to Vietnam and we had a government that changed the way that their pensions were indexed. We have an opportunity to right a terrible wrong for Vietnam veterans, and for other people who have served at least 20 years in the Defence Force, by correctly indexing the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefit scheme. It has broad based approval from both sides of the House; we just cannot get it across the line. Let us not lose this opportunity to right this terrible wrong.

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina) (17:32): Vietnam Veterans Day, commemorated in Australia on 18 August each year, remembers those Australians and New Zealanders who served during the Vietnam War and also commemorates the Battle of Long Tan. It gives us an opportunity to stand as one and remember those who did not come home. One of the most well-known Australian engagements in the Vietnam War was the Battle of Long Tan from 17 August to 20 August 1966. The battle saw the action of 108 Anzacs against a Viet Cong force of many thousands. The battle was one of the heaviest conflicts of the Vietnam War as well as one of the few battles in the recorded history of the world to be won against such overwhelming odds.

The Vietnam War was the longest war Australia has ever been involved in. Australian involvement in the Vietnam War was marked by controversy, significant levels of public opposition to conscription and a concern about casualties. For this reason the Vietnam War was sadly a taboo subject for many years. Our men and women risked their lives for their country only to be shunned when they returned home. It took many years for these soldiers to gain the recognition they deserved. Now, 45 years since the Battle of Long Tan, we know these men and women can hold their heads high, as they should be able to, and be shown the respect they rightly earned.

On Thursday and on the weekend, ex-service men and women from around the country conducted ceremonies to mark the anniversary of the famous Battle of Long Tan. The biggest ceremony in my electorate was held in Wagga Wagga, the home of the soldier. In the Vietnam War 139 servicemen and women who listed their city of birth as Wagga Wagga fought in Vietnam. In Griffith, the other city in my electorate, 103 people who had listed their place of birth as Griffith went to Vietnam. All up, about 250 men and women from Wagga Wagga saw active service

in Vietnam. With two major military facilities in the locality at the time, Kapooka Army Base and the RAAF Base Forest Hill, it was predictable that a majority of these people would be enlisted service personnel from other localities who had been posted to either Kapooka or the Royal Australian Air Force training base at Forest Hill. However, some 70 service men and women were locals and they are commemorated in the city's Victory Memorial Gardens.

Various organisations for Vietnam veterans have been established in the Riverina. The Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia is the main voice for veterans. Its mission is simply summarised in its motto: 'Honour the dead and fight like hell for the living'. Australia's service personnel, past and present, have given so much to their nation, and they deserve to live out their lives in the knowledge that they have financial security.

Australians are rightly very proud of our past and present service men and women. We recognise the dangers they have faced and continue to face, and we admire their professionalism, skill and capability. Let us continue to show them the respect they rightly deserve and, after they have given so much, not take away from them by way of financial security. Thousands of men and women have been lost in conflict. In the Vietnam War, 60,000 Australians served our country. Five hundred and twenty-one died and more than 3,000 were wounded in that war.

I will finish with the words of Lieutenant Colonel Harry Smith MC Rtd, who now lives in Hervey Bay, Queensland, which is in the electorate of Hinkler. Earlier, the member for Hinkler spoke very eloquently on this motion about Harry Smith's involvement, dedication and bravery and how members of his company had not been properly recognised. Whilst I am not an advocate for retrospective awards, I feel as though the member for Hinkler's words should be heeded to by the authorities. I will finish with the words of Harry Smith, who said:

I am very proud to have commanded Delta Company, 6RAR who gave their all on that fateful day, above and beyond what would have been expected of them. That is why my company, which bore the brunt of the battle and lost 17 killed and 21 wounded, was awarded the US Presidential Unit Citation, and was offered the South Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry Unit Citation. I am also proud and thankful to those who supported us—all the artillery, the RAAF, the USAF, the APCs, our A Company and the B Company platoon, and others.

Although nowhere near the same scale, Long Tan will be remembered alongside Kapyong, Tobruk, and Gallipoli. I am saddened by the loss of life, and the tragic loss to all the loved ones, on both sides. Like the

errors of Gallipoli, a proper assessment of intelligence reports would have averted my company being sent out to face a VC regiment. But we saved the Task Force Base from what would have been a disastrous attack by the 5,000-strong VC 5th Division, and their influence in the province was reduced thereafter. That is why Long Tan has become so significant and is feted as the icon of the war for all Vietnam veterans to commemorate those lost or maimed between 1962 and 1972.

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (17:3 8): There are a few days in the national conscience when we stop to remember and reflect on battles and wars fought and won. We remember the soldiers, sailors and air men and women who served. We think of Anzac Day on 25 April, and we think of Remembrance Day. I personally reflect on Kapyong Day, 24 April. In the Korean War, the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment stayed the Chinese offensive at Kapyong. Of course, 18 August marks a special day, Vietnam Veterans Day. This is a special day in our national conscience when we stop and remember Vietnam—the longest war Australia has been engaged in. This war began on 31 July 1962, when Colonel Ted Serong alighted from a civilian airliner onto the tarmac at Tan Son Nhut Airport, Saigon. Three days later his unit arrived. This was a small group of 29 officers, warrant officers and engineers—mostly infantry and some elements of engineering and signals. They were specifically chosen for their tasks. More than half had served in Malaya and had been trained in the art of counter guerrilla warfare. Indeed, the early days of the war saw the arrival of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam, which included my old school sergeant, Warrant Officer Class 2 Jim Geedrick. He had fought in World War II, in the Malayan emergency, in the confrontation in Vietnam and then with my old unit, the 3rd Battalion, in Korea. Vietnam would end on 8 December 1972, and the Australian Army training team in Vietnam received orders to return to Australia 10 days later, thus completing the commitment to Vietnam.

Fifty-nine thousand Australians served in Vietnam. It turned out to be a very costly war. 2,122,244 is the official number for those killed during the war. Over 3.65 million were wounded. There were 58,169 Americans killed and 11,465 of them were teenagers. There were 304,000 wounded. More than 74,000 French had been killed before the first Americans arrived in 1956. Australia lost 511 of its finest, and seven civilians were killed. Six more were missing in action, their bodies have now all been recovered. I give credit to the Labor government for ensuring that was finalised and occurred. There were 2,069 wounded.

The average age of the combat soldier from Australia in Vietnam was 20 years old. The average Australian

combat soldier saw 314 days of combat in a period of one year. That is a long time with a weapon in your hand. By comparison, the average Second World War soldier in the Pacific was 26 years old and saw, whilst it varied, about 40 days of combat in a period of a number of years. There were 444,000 North Vietnamese, over 220,000 South Vietnamese military personnel and over half a million civilians killed. 2,590,000 Americans, and over 59,000 Australians served in Vietnam and 6,700,000 tonnes of bombs were dropped compared with 2,700,000 tonnes dropped on Germany during the Second World War. Vietnam truly was a destructive period of combat.

It has left its mark on our nation. I think it is seared into the souls of Australians that war indeed is hell. There will come a time when we will beat our weapons into ploughshares, and that time will be welcomed. But that time is not now. An effective diplomatic policy must be backed up by an effective force of arms. The nation must retain an effective deterrent in the form of combat of arms. We all pray that the articles of war are not used, that the machines of war are not rolled out, and that the men and women who fight those combat operations are not used. But alas, we find ourselves in this debate in the middle of combat operations in Afghanistan. But this year, this year we stopped, paused, reflected and remembered. We considered the Australian Vietnam veteran community, as together we marked the 45th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan and of course the awarding by her Excellency the Governor General of the citation for those who served with D Company.

All Australians owe a great deal to the men and women who fought in Vietnam, as we do for all those who fought for freedom. Freedom is not free, someone pays the price. The price of eternal vigilance, of course, is what we pay for peace. We owe a great deal to those who fought in Vietnam, and to their families who stayed behind and have borne some of the pain, the sorrow, the joys, the happiness, the tears from those who have returned from their service. As we mark this 45th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan, it is appropriate to make special mention of the 108 men of D Company 6RAR who fought off as many as 2,500 determined Vietcong soldiers in the rubber plantations of Long Tan and Phuoc Tuy Province of South Vietnam, on 18 August 1966.

Eighteen Australians lost their lives in that battle and a further 24 were wounded. More than 245 enemies were killed in action, their bodies found on the battleground when fighting ceased. Hundreds and hundreds of more blood trails indicated the damage that Australia's combat fighters from D Company 6RAR had inflicted. It is fitting that the efforts of the men of D Company, 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, will be

honoured and have been honoured when they received Australia's military's highest honour, the unit citation for gallantry from the Governor General.

This award, many years later I acknowledge, is an important recognition of the decisive efforts of that battle. Never underestimate the horror of combat operations at the best of times, let alone in the teeming rain in a rubber plantation, when you are outnumbered 20 to one. You are vastly outnumbered with monsoonal rains driving mercilessly across you as you move forward, radio communications almost non-existent, to fend off a combatant that is determined and aggressive. I think this country has dealt with the shame of those 15 years post Vietnam when there was no recognition of their service. It is a stain on our nation's history. I believe the nation has dealt with it; I believe the nation has addressed it. I think the nation has resolved in its conscience that never again do we bear upon those men and women who have fought in our name, in our uniform with our flag emblazoned across their shoulders, and not recognise their service and their sacrifice.

I pay tribute here this evening to the families of the Vietnam veterans: you have endured so much; you have shouldered a burden many of us can never understand. Thank you for caring for those men and women who returned, in many cases broken and questioning why the nation had not embraced them as its sons and daughters. We will not forget the service and sacrifice of our Vietnam veterans, nor of their families. We resolve once again as a parliament of people representative of our nation that the sacrifice of any Australian who serves in any theatre of combat, sent by its democratically elected government, will be recognised, remembered and embraced. We have learnt the lessons of our past.

We acknowledge today the bravery and the Anzac spirit which prevailed and which continues to prevail, even under the sometimes difficult circumstances of those who come back wounded and those who have been killed in action. Their bravery and the spirit in which they fought is forever forged in our memories. We have come a long way since 1972, when it all ended. I was two years old then. We have had several welcome home parades. We have unveiled and rededicated, quite rightly, a magnificent Vietnam veterans memorial in Canberra. We have issued the Australian Service Medal. We have seen the RSL and other organisations become safe havens for many Vietnam veterans who took on the office-bearer roles when our World War II diggers passed the mantle.

Australians are incredibly proud of you veterans. It is great pleasure to recognise you for the incredible service you have rendered. That is the great joy of

Vietnam Veterans Day on 18 August: it gives us all as a nation an opportunity to honour the service and sacrifice you have made. I remember a tombstone in Gallipoli of a very young soldier who gave his life on the first day there, on 25 April, 1915. It said simply, 'When you return, tell them of us and say: for your tomorrow we gave our today.' The same can be said for those who served in Vietnam: many gave their tomorrow for our today. We will not forget that freedom is not free. We will remember them.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (17:47): I am pleased that the government has called for speakers to commemorate Vietnam Veterans Day. In particular, I want to speak about the 45th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan. I was honoured to speak on the adjournment last Thursday, 18 August, on this very topic. I am speaking again today as I feel very strongly that our service men and women should receive the recognition that they deserve, as occurred last Thursday at the Gallipoli Barracks at Enoggera, in my electorate of Ryan. I was disappointed to miss that significant event due to the House sitting. The ceremony involved the presentation of the prestigious unit of citation for gallantry for members of Delta Company, a subunit of 6RAR, as well as a medal of gallantry for retired Lieutenant David Sabben. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the unit's commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Harry Smith, whose tireless efforts have finally seen this belated recognition achieved.

The date of 18 August is a very special day for our nation, Vietnam Veterans Day, and commemorates the Battle of Long Tan. Regardless of whether you supported the Vietnam War, or whether you support or object to war at all, our veterans deserve recognition for the sacrifices they have made, particularly when that sacrifice was made through national service. At the time, the Vietnam War was the longest war in which Australia had been involved. As we all know, it was also one of the most controversial. It was the first war broadcast live on television, witnessed from the comfort of our homes. It was a tragic time, a confusing time, with public opposition to conscription and to the war itself often overshadowing what members of our Defence Force went through. I commend the men and women who ensured that the Vietnam veterans were finally acknowledged as they should be with a welcome home parade in 1987 and the adoption of the anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan as Vietnam Veterans Day. Vietnam Veterans Day is commemorated on 18 August each year, the anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan. This year this day was particularly important as it marked the 45th anniversary of the battle.

There is no doubt that these servicemen deserve recognition for their gallantry. On 18 August 1966, 108 Anzacs unknowingly found themselves pitted against a main force of North Vietnamese army troops as well as Vietcong estimated to be between 1,800 to 2,500 in number. The battle is one of the best known and heaviest conflicts of the war and one of very few battles in recorded history to be won against such odds. We lost 18 Australians in the Battle of Long Tan, with 24 wounded. The opposition losses are unknown but 245 bodies were left on the battlefield.

The conditions were terrifying. Servicemen recalling the battle tell stories of chest-height mist, torrential rain and shots that came out of nowhere. Six men were lost immediately upon first contact, and back-up companies were delayed for over an hour. The low forest meant that there was little air support, although 9 Squadron, standing by their mates in true Anzac fashion, flew their helicopters over the battlefield, well outside operational restrictions at the time. Despite this conditions, our troops kept a numerically superior force at bay, showing unquestionable bravery under circumstances most of us cannot fathom.

I am proud that the men of Delta Company were recognised last week. It is unacceptable that many of the men who were on the ground at Long Tan putting their lives on the line in terrifying conditions had their gallantry awards downgraded. I commend former Prime Minister John Howard for being the first Australian Prime Minister to visit Long Tan and acknowledge the poor treatment Vietnam veterans had received. Thankfully, in 2006, we as a nation went some way to acknowledging our Vietnam veterans, with many of the awards that had originally been downgraded then being upgraded to properly reflect what these brave men deserved. Last week the final piece of the Battle for Long Tan was put in place at the ceremony at Gallipoli Barracks in Enoggera.

I feel privileged to have the opportunity to publicly commend our service men and women, past and present, from the Boer War to those serving around the world today. I hope our defence forces never again face a conflict like the Battle of Long Tan. But if they do, their gallantry, their sacrifice and their trauma must be recognised.

Mrs MARKUS (Macquarie) (17:53): I rise today to commemorate particularly Vietnam Veterans Day but also to honour those men and women who have served through our history and continue to serve as I speak here in the chamber. The 18th of August is a significant day on the Australian calendar. It is the opportunity for all Australians to remember those who served during the Vietnam conflict and to acknowledge the price paid not just by them and their mates but also by their

families. In total, approximately 60,000 Australians served in the Vietnam War between July 1962 and June 1973, and 521 Australians were killed in action and over 3,000 were wounded. Like all men and women who have paid the ultimate sacrifice in the fight for freedom, we honour their lives and acknowledge the deep loss of those who loved them.

The Australian commitment consisted predominantly of Army personnel; however, a significant number of Air Force and Navy personnel as well as some civilians served during this period. Australia's involvement began with the Australian Army Training Team arriving in South Vietnam in July 1962. This consisted of 30 military advisers who were known as 'the Team'. The Royal Australian Air Force also sent a flight of Caribou transports to the port of Vung Tau in 1964. At the beginning of 1965 it became evident that South Vietnam could not keep at bay the Vietcong and their North Vietnamese comrades for more than a few months. This led to a major escalation by the US military, who requested that Australia and other nations join the effort. The Australian government dispatched the 1st Battalion Royal Australian Regiment in June 1965 to serve alongside the US 173rd Airborne Brigade in Bien Hoa province.

There were many significant battles with Australians involved. Australia's heaviest actions of the war occurred in August 1966 in what would later become known as the Battle of Long Tan. This year, as has already been mentioned, we mark the 45th anniversary of the battle. The battle involved a company of the 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, 6RAR, and took place in a rubber plantation near Long Tan. The 108 soldiers of D Company held off an enemy force estimated to be over 2,000 for four hours in the middle of a tropical downpour. They were greatly assisted by a timely ammunition resupply by RAAF helicopters, close fire support from Australian artillery and the arrival of reinforcements in APCs as night fell. The armoured vehicles had been delayed, having had to 'swim' across a flooded creek and fight through groups of enemy along the way. When the Vietcong withdrew at nightfall they left behind 245 dead but carried away many more casualties. Seventeen Australians were killed in action and 25 were wounded, with one losing his battle for life several days later.

The 18th of August has become the day that veterans from the Battle of Long Tan observe a day of commemoration. This day has, since the 1980s, come to be recognised also as Vietnam Veterans Day. It is a day when everyday Australians acknowledge all who served in that conflict and their families.

Macquarie is home to two Royal Australian Air Force bases, Glenbrook and Richmond, and has a very strong

ex-service community. I was privileged to attend the Vietnam Veterans and Associated Forces Memorial Day activities which were held in Springwood on 14 August. I acknowledge and congratulate all those who organised the day. An event like that takes many months—in fact, probably from one year to the next—to organise. It is attended not just by residents of the Blue Mountains but by many ex-service organisations, members of the ex-service community and current serving personnel from across our region. It was particularly heartening to see the people from different generations—young children from local schools and many from volunteer organisations—who came to acknowledge the service of our men and women. We also had present with us on that day the Governor of New South Wales, Marie Bashir, who is indeed well loved by those in the service and ex-service communities and in the seat of Macquarie.

Another group I particularly acknowledge is the Children and Grandchildren of Vietnam Veterans Network. I was honoured to be invited to the inaugural conference of the network during my time as shadow minister for veterans' affairs. The network is committed to supporting generations of not only families of Vietnam veterans but all military families by understanding and providing meaning through their shared experiences of living with parents affected by their time in the Vietnam conflict. Families are often forgotten. They indeed pay a price as well. The Vietnam Veterans' Family Study, due to be completed in 2012, hopefully will provide insights and solutions for how we assist those impacted by military service.

There are many vibrant service and ex-service organisations in Macquarie—the RSL, Legacy, the Vietnam Veterans Association and the War Widows Guild, to name a few. I acknowledge their daily and weekly service to both current and ex-service personnel and their ongoing practical support for all our veterans and their families. I would like for a moment to focus on the BEST program, the Building Excellence in Support and Training program, which offers grants to ex-service organisations, pensioners, welfare practitioners and advocates who provide advice and assistance to the veteran and defence communities. This has been an invaluable program. In my time as shadow minister I was honoured to be able to fight on behalf of veterans to ensure that the amount of funding for this program increased year by year. It is very disappointing that the 2011-12 budget has significantly reduced the amount of BEST program grants. The 2010-11 financial year saw around \$6.7 million in payments. However, the Labor government has slashed this valued service significantly with less than \$3.7 million available in the current budget. This will severely impact the capacity

of ex-service organisations to respond to the needs of the community.

Sadly, it is through not only the reduced funding of the BEST program that this Labor government is letting our veterans down. The voting down of the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Amendment (Fair Indexation) Bill 2010 by Labor clearly demonstrated where their priorities lie. It is a shameful betrayal of the men and women who serve and have served our nation in the Australian Defence Force. The decision by Labor to vote this down means that many in the veteran community will see their superannuation continue to lose purchasing power. This is at a time when further increases in the cost of living are impacting their quality of life. The coalition has been very clear on this issue; we believe that military service is unique in its nature and Australian service personnel both past and present, after giving so much for their nation, deserve to live out their lives with the knowledge that they have financial security. Labor made a commitment at the 2007 election to fix military superannuation. We are familiar with these false promises. Unlike Labor, the coalition has consulted widely and has listened carefully to the views put forward by veterans, the ex-service people, ex-service organisations and current ADF personnel. It is time that this Labor government did the same thing. I urge the Prime Minister to offer veterans the support they need and deserve by restoring adequate BEST funding and by supporting a reconsideration of the defence force retirement and death benefits bill. This would be a very practical way that the government could acknowledge that we remember and acknowledge the service of all our veterans.

Mr HARTSUYKER (Cowper) (18:03): I am grateful for the opportunity to recognise the 45th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan and to note the contribution of Australian troops in the Vietnam War. It is a testament to the sacrifice and courage of Australian troops down through the years that we are here today representing our constituents in a democratically elected parliament. Outside the parliament this week we witnessed peaceful demonstrations against the government, and inside the parliament we have argued our different points of view using debate, not weapons. Australia is one of the world's oldest democracies and we must thank our veterans for their contribution to protecting our way of life.

Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War was the longest duration of any war in Australia's history. The Australian soldiers arrived in 1962 and the final Australian soldiers left in June 1973. Almost 60,000 Australians served in Vietnam and, sadly, 521 men died and 3,000 were wounded during that conflict. Australian soldiers in Vietnam reinforced the Anzac

tradition of courage, mateship and bravery, and there is no finer example of that Anzac spirit than the men of D Company 6RAR in the Battle of Long Tan. I will not repeat the details of the battle, as I am sure it has been adequately chronicled here by previous speakers. However, I must pay tribute to the courage of D Company, who faced overwhelming odds and held their ground for three hours under withering fire; 17 men of D Company died on that day and more were wounded. Of course these were not the only casualties suffered in the Vietnam War. Long Tan was the first costly battle for Australians in that conflict. It is remarkable and a tribute to the skill, determination and bravery of those troops that despite being outnumbered some 15 to one, they held out and we can count Long Tan as a victory. I am pleased that the men of 6RAR have finally been recognised as a unit for their extraordinary bravery on 18 August 1966. This unit citation has been a long time coming, but it is fitting for the men of D Company to be honoured in this way. Long Tan was not the only battle in which Australians fought and the men of D Company were not the only casualties but 18 August has become the day on which we acknowledge the service of all our Vietnam veterans.

I wish to commend my ex-services community for their tireless efforts to ensure that the courage and sacrifice of our service men and women are always remembered. It is through their efforts that we see so many people, most of whom have not experienced the horror of war, attending commemorations around this country not only on Anzac Day but on a host of other days that are significant on the military calendar. I particularly note the various RSL sub-branches and associations in my electorate that ensure their fallen mates will not be forgotten. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend memorial services in Coffs Harbour, Nambucca Heads and Woolgoolga this year due the parliamentary sitting schedule. However, I want to place on record my thanks to the many veterans in the Cowper electorate who served our country so valiantly in Vietnam. As we reflect on the Battle of Long Tan, we must never forget the sacrifices made on that day and work towards a future where such sacrifices will not be required again.

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (18:06): I rise to speak in recognition of our Vietnam veterans and the contributions that returned service men and women have made to our community, and to specifically speak about Vietnam Veterans Day, which is celebrated on 18 August each year and commemorates the Battle of Long Tan and the Australians who served in the Vietnam War. The 45th Vietnam Veterans Day was recently honoured at the Kirra Sports Club within my electorate of McPherson. More than 200 Vietnam veterans from across the Gold Coast attended the

service to mark the anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan.

McPherson does have a very large veteran community and the Vietnam veterans certainly form a significant proportion of that community. Our Vietnam veterans should never have had to wait 15 years after the end of the war to get the recognition they deserve. This has been a huge disappointment for the veteran community as a whole. The sacrifices that these men and women made for our community should have never been forgotten.

The Battle of Long Tan was one of the most incredible and bold encounters by Australian troops. During the attack, 108 diggers and six Royal Australian Regiment members successfully held off 2½ thousand Vietcong in a rubber plantation in South Vietnam. Eighteen Australians were killed in this battle and 24 were wounded. Once the fighting had ceased, more than 245 bodies from the enemy were found on the battle ground. I am deeply sorry for the families of the 18 men who did not return after the Battle of Long Tan. These men should never be forgotten and Australia should continue to pay its respects to the fallen.

Two of my uncles were part of the Vietnam War story. One uncle served as a cook with the RAAF. I recall him telling me of his arrival by helicopter in Vietnam and being shot at as they were coming in to land. As a cook, I know that he would have got to know many of the men and women who served in Vietnam, some of whom were wounded and some who never came home. My other uncle was caught up in the national service birthday ballot. Under the national service scheme operating at the time, 20-year-old men were required to register for national service. As there were more eligible men than required, the men were subject to a ballot. If their birth date was drawn out then it was possible that they would be required to serve two years continuous service in the regular Army following by three years part-time service in the Army Reserve. I remember my mother being so concerned that her younger brother might be sent to active service in Vietnam, and whilst that did not happen to him, the memory of my mother's tears remain with me today. I can understand the concerns of the families of our service men and women as they wave farewell to their loved ones, never quite knowing if they will return. As I have mentioned many times before in this place, I have the privilege of representing an electorate with a large veteran community on the southern Gold Coast. It is not only the returned servicemen that deserve recognition; I would also like to extend my gratitude for the support given to these veterans by their mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, partners and children when these veterans returned home.

I would also like to mention that these veterans also believed that one of the greatest achievements to come from the Vietnam War was returning home to raise their families. After all that they endured during the battles in Vietnam, these men and women continued to push past many mental and physical barriers to live positive lives with their loved ones. This in itself is a great achievement and one which the veteran community to this day are most proud of.

I urge all members of the community to share the story of the Battle of Long Tan so that the great sacrifices and achievements of these men and women will continue to be remembered in the generations to come. Lest we forget.

Mr SLIPPER (Fisher—Deputy Speaker) (18:09): Last week on 18 August marked the 45th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan in 1966 during the Vietnam War. This battle is iconic in Australian military history in that it demonstrated the heart and skill of Australian soldiers who did not give up, who stood determined against an opponent that was 20 times larger in number and much better equipped, and who was able to record an inspirational victory in shocking conditions. Sadly, as has been recounted by others, it was with the loss of 18 heroic lives, with 24 wounded.

It is a battle that is often referred to to showcase the skills of Australian soldiers, but it should also be an inspiration to anyone who faces a difficult task against seemingly impossible odds. The anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan on 18 August has become the day that Australians pause to remember the Vietnam War and all its battles and all who served, and the 528 Australians killed during the conflict. The Battle of Long Tan has become entrenched in the Australian psyche as a touchstone for inspiration, motivation and determination. If there was anyone who had a right to fail it was these soldiers, but they did not give up and as a result they were able to record an amazing victory, one that we commemorate and discuss today 45 years later here in the Australian parliament and many thousands of miles removed from that horrible battlefield.

The figures for this battle are outstanding: 108 Australians fought against an estimated 2,500 Vietcong soldiers in a rubber plantation in a driving monsoonal downpour and without radio communications. But through their resilience and courage the soldiers of D Company 6RAR were able to record victory. More than 245 enemy soldiers were killed in the conflict.

I do pay tribute today to not just the soldiers who fought in Vietnam but soldiers who fought in all spheres of conflict during our nation's existence. They have risked everything and in some cases lost all to make sure

that, as Australians, we are able to enjoy the freedom, stability and way of life that we have as a nation, which indeed makes us truly the envy of people throughout the world.

On the Sunshine Coast, including in my electorate of Fisher, we have a great number of veterans from various conflicts, including Vietnam. I pay tribute to them all for their efforts in what is the most challenging of vocations, the defence of our country for their families, their relatives, friends and neighbours—and also the defence and protection of complete strangers—in the theatre of war.

Before I conclude I just want to say how pleased I am that collectively as a nation we have moved on in the treatment of our war veterans. I think that it is appalling that people who opposed the Vietnam War found it necessary to take out that opposition on people who in some cases were conscripted and who were sent abroad to serve their nation and to serve the policy of the government of the day. Happily, we have moved on. No-one in our Australian community has sought to ill-treat, or mistreat or blame those brave soldiers who served in Iraq—and that was a war that some segments of the Australian community did not support. Those men and women fought in Iraq for the policy of the government of the day. Collectively as a nation we can take great pride in the fact that we have moved on. We have to recognise that people in our military do whatever the government of the day tells them to do. If there is a deployment to a certain country, whether or not individuals might support that deployment or support the objects of that deployment, as loyal military personnel they go and carry out their duty. I think that it was appalling that Vietnam veterans were treated with contempt—in some cases even spat on—by people who took out their opposition to the war on these veterans who had served the country.

As I said, that is now not the case and I think that, collectively as Australians, whatever our view is on any sphere of conflict, we have now come to a national community consensus that anyone who serves in our military is worthy of respect and that anyone who carries out his or her duty is worthy of admiration. So many of these people have risked everything and lost all. I am very happy to support the motion now before the House but I just wanted to emphasise how pleased I am and how proud I am that collectively we have moved on to a situation where now we respect everyone who has served our nation with great distinction.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa—Second Deputy Speaker) (18:16): I rise today to support the motion moved by the Prime Minister to commemorate Vietnam Veterans Day and the 45th anniversary of

the Battle of Long Tan. Whilst it is the anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan, 18 August is also the day when Vietnam veterans gather with their friends and family, with great support from around the nation, to remember their service and the sacrifices of so many of their mates in the Vietnam War. I had 5½ years as the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and it was a great privilege to serve in that portfolio. I also got to know so well, from a generation similar to mine, those who had served in Vietnam—many of them of course having been conscripts.

Australia's military involvement in the Vietnam War was the longest in duration of any war in Australia's history. From the time of the arrival in Vietnam of the first members of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam in 1962, almost 60,000 Australians, including ground troops and Air Force and Navy personnel, served in Vietnam. Sadly, 521 died as a result of the war and over 3,000 were wounded. Many of those 3,000 had to carry those wounds and injuries for the rest of their life.

On 18 August 1966, 108 men of D Company, 6RAR, fought off as many as 2,500 Viet Cong soldiers at a rubber plantation in Long Tan in Phuoc Tuy Province of South Vietnam. Vastly outnumbered, the Australians endured driving monsoonal rains, which decimated radio communications, to fend off an enemy more than 10 times the size of the Australian company. Tragically, 18 Australians were killed in action in the battle and 24 were wounded. More than 245 of the enemy were found dead on the battleground when fighting ceased.

In 1996, I had the privilege of leading the first official pilgrimage of Vietnam veterans back to Vietnam, marking the 30th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan. There were many veterans who found it difficult to travel as part of an official delegation, but who, on the way home were able to tell me that each day of the pilgrimage had been another day of healing. To return to the battlefield for so many of them, to return to parts of Vietnam which harboured so many terrible memories—memories which had troubled many of them since the war—was part of a healing process. They crossed a bridge which many of them had felt might never be crossed. I was privileged to lead them back to Vietnam.

Only 10 days ago I was in Brisbane, at the Brisbane Exhibition strangely enough, and a lady came up to me and said, 'You are Bruce Scott, aren't you?' and I said, 'Yes.' She said: 'I am the wife of so-and-so'—I will not mention his name—who was representing the Navy in the group you took back to commemorate the Battle of Long Tan, the 30th anniversary official pilgrimage. It has made a great deal of difference to

our relationship.' To get, 15 years later, that mention from the wife of a veteran is a measure, from my point of view, of how those pilgrimages are so valuable in helping veterans to heal and so valuable for us as a nation in acknowledging the great sacrifices that were made not only in the Vietnam War but in other theatres of war.

I want to acknowledge the families of all our veterans—the wives, the girlfriends, the sisters, the brothers, the mothers, the fathers—who took care of our veterans when so many other Australians turned their backs on them. As a nation we must always err on the side of generosity when it comes to our military. After all, they serve as a result of a resolution of the parliament. They serve with the support of the parliament. They serve and do as the government asks of them. It is up to us as members on both sides of the parliament to make sure we always err on the side of generosity when it comes to compensation and looking after those who serve and, sadly, those who are left behind. I will never stop fighting to make sure that we as a nation, whenever money is available, extend entitlements to all those who have served, to their families and to those who have been left behind.

I know time is short, but in conclusion I want to say that in the year 2015 we will be celebrating—although I would like to call it commemorating—in many ways 100 years since we landed at Gallipoli, when our nation, a nation of less than five million people, lost its innocence. In the year 2015, 100 years on, we must look across all wars and conflicts that Australia has been involved in, not just at Gallipoli. I know a former CDF is going to chair a committee. He will bring great knowledge to that committee and he will do an excellent job of leadership. But it is important that we look not just at Gallipoli in that year. It is important to look at Vietnam and our involvement in the Second World War, the Korean War, the Malayan Emergency, the Indonesian Confrontation, East Timor, Afghanistan, Iraq—the list goes on. And of course so many of our peacekeeping forces have been in theatres that so often do not have a profile—for example, the Sinai and the Sudan. We must make sure that across the board, wherever our Australian men and women in the Australian Defence Force serve as a result of a resolution of the parliament at the wish of the government, we commemorate and remember all of those who have served throughout more than 100 years of service to our nation.

Dr STONE (Murray) (18:22): I join others in supporting this motion. As a patron of the Goulburn Valley Vietnam Veterans Association and also as the proud mother of an Australian Army officer, I can say that I have some sense of what it must have been like for the mothers, the wives and the sisters of the

Vietnam veterans as they returned from that service some 40 or 45 years ago and were treated with such dishonour and disrespect by the Australian public. I can understand the scars that are still felt by my Vietnam veterans. Even though long ago our Vietnam veterans had their special recognitions and their welcomes back to the country, literally decades after they should have taken place, I can still understand their grief and their deep sense of hurt as a consequence of the way we treated them.

I have to say that a lot of it was the fault of the media of the day. The Vietnam War was the first to be telecast almost every evening into the lounge rooms of ordinary Australian families. I do not think the media took the responsibility that technology gave them seriously or undertook their responsibilities properly. They were driven by the American media behaviour and, with very poor understanding of what was really involved, the edited highlights were often the worst possible way to demonstrate to the Australian people just what efforts were being made—the humanitarian efforts in particular—and how our Australian servicemen and servicewomen not only were following in the footsteps of the glorious Anzacs of the First World War, the Second World War, the Malayan emergency and all of the other conflicts we have been involved with but were in fact building on the reputation of the courageous and honourable behaviour and performance of Australian servicemen and servicewomen. Today, in particular, we recall the Battle of Long Tan. It was August 1966. A company of the 6RAR was engaged in one of Australia's heaviest actions of the war in a rubber plantation near Long Tan. On the nights of 16 and 17 August 1966—almost exactly 45 years ago—mortar and rifle fire was directed at 1 ATF base from the east. A Company of 6RAR was required to search for the firing positions to the north-east of the base and B Company 6RAR was dispatched to search the area to the east towards Nui Dat 2. On 18 August, A company returned to the base and D Company 6RAR relieved the B Company. After an exchange of information and a lot of intelligence, obviously, they followed up a possible enemy trail into the Long Tan rubber plantation. The 108 soldiers of D Company then held off an enemy force estimated at over 2,000 for four hours in the middle of a tropical downpour. An extraordinary thing. The survival of the company and their victory can be attributed to the extraordinary courage and discipline of its members and to the decisive command at each level as well as the devastating effects of the artillery that came in to support them—and this was in very close proximity to each of their positions. Then there was the helpful location of the final company position on a shallow reverse slope that provided some protection from the direct fire. There was also a timely and heroic helicopter ammunition resupply and finally

the disruption of enemy plans for further attacks on D Company by the movement, combat action and arrival of the APC-mounted relief force. A number of Australian components were involved in the Long Tan battle, without for a minute taking away from D Company, who were central to the victory in which they were outnumbered.

When the Vietcong withdrew that night, they left behind 245 dead but carried away many more casualties—we will never know how many. Seventeen Australians were killed and 25 wounded, and one of our serving men died of wounds several days later. Many of our service personnel went into Vietnam with jungle warfare experience they had learned from our glorious Anzacs, who fought off the Japanese invasion in PNG during the Second World War. Australians understood the perils of jungle warfare but never before had there been such use of explosive devices and civilian populations—the Vietcong were able to literally disappear into the jungle and come back and fight another day. Australian soldiers, sailors and airmen involved in the whole of the Vietnam conflict were magnificent.

It is ironic that the Australian RSL did not always welcome the Vietnam veterans when they returned to Australia. That is another shameful chapter of the RSL's history. But today, especially in my electorate of Murray, the RSLs are led by Vietnam veterans, who are taking over from the now very elderly Second World War veterans and Korean War veterans. The Second World War men are typically in their mid- to late-80s, but it is the Vietnam War veterans who stand up proudly now and honour all of the previous service men and women in Australia's war histories, and put aside their own insults and grief as a result of what they experienced when they returned. I have a great deal of respect for the way they do that.

The veterans had to wait 40 years to be officially and publicly acknowledged for their extraordinary efforts. They were, after all, trying to stop the advance of communism at a time when communism was a great threat to the globe. Today, we laugh a bit about the reds under the bed notion, but in the 1960s and 1970s this was a very real threat to those countries in the immediate path of communist intentions but also ultimately to Australia. Prime Minister Menzies, the Prime Minister of the day, knowing that Army Reserve numbers were low, introduced national conscription, which of course had been first introduced for the Korean War episodes of 1951. National service, or the Nashos, became part of the mixed understanding and public concern at the time and we had people hiding from the draft or burning their draft cards and talking about harassment and non-democratic processes. I can very well remember my fiance at the time, the night

that his marble went into the barrel. It was based on your birth date. His marble did not come out of the barrel and so he was not conscripted, but if he had been I am sure he would have honourably served, like his son has and is now, having served in Iraq and East Timor. That period of national service also tended to be forgotten for a very long time and I want to commend our coalition government under John Howard who minted the first medal to recognise national service in Australia. I still give out those medals to national servicemen who have never before been officially understood and recognised, even when their service was in the 1950s for several months. The point is that they were prepared to serve anywhere that their country asked them to, under any conditions. These national servicemen should never be forgotten. Some, of course, lost their lives in the Vietnam conflict. They fought beside the regular Army, Navy and Air Force to the very best of their ability.

I want to commend the Vietnam veterans, particularly those who were involved in the Battle of Long Tan, but also to reinforce that we are living in different times. I am sure this is a bipartisan thing, that all parties and Independents in this House and in the Senate regret the behaviours of the public of Australia back in the seventies and eighties, until the nineties when we fully understood where we had been very wrong. I want to particularly commend the Vietnam veterans in my electorate who now are shouldering the responsibility of looking after the welfare of one another. They are very concerned that this government has cut back on the funding for welfare support services for the volunteers who have trained to do that counselling. That is a serious problem because most of my Vietnam veterans do not have the spare cash to pay for the transport, the fuel and the time that they spend trying to support one another and to advocate for their fellow Vietnam veterans when they often need to. So I do ask this government to rethink their slashing of the funding for the counselling services, particularly for the Vietnam veterans.

I also want to commend my own special groups that I have called boards of trustees—I have one for each shire in my electorate—and what they do. They are clusters of Vietnam and Second World War veterans and community people who go around to all of the tiny towns or places where my towns have disappeared and they look at the cenotaphs, the honour boards, the old tree avenues of honour and they consider the condition of all of those memorials. Where they are destroyed or degraded or just simply weathered away, those boards of trustees and I come back together and say: 'Where do we apply for funding? How do we cut the grass, trim the trees, replant the trees, put back the fences, and rescue the honour boards?' Indeed, we have rescued some from tips. 'How do we make sure that not one

name of a serving man and woman, from the Boer War through, is ever forgotten?' I have to say that one of the things we have been doing very actively is adding the names of Vietnam veterans to those honour boards and rolls and cenotaphs which typically were not added in the seventies and eighties. Now they are there, and I am proud that they are.

This is an important motion. I support it as the local patron. I also say that we abhor war in any guise, but Australians have always fought above their weight in helping to defend our own country and support the freedom of others who have not the power or the means to defend themselves. Long may that always be so.

Ms O'DWYER (Higgins) (18:33): Before I make my contribution in this place on this motion on Vietnam Veterans Day, I would like to associate myself with the remarks of my colleague Sharman Stone. She very fittingly, very eloquently, made a very moving contribution to this motion and I would really like to commend her for that contribution. I think it is fitting that Vietnam remembrance day is the day on which Australian soldiers fought the Battle of Long Tan. This battle is synonymous with the Anzac spirit of endurance, mateship, perseverance through adversity, valour and enterprise; the spirit that was born on the international stage during World War One at Gallipoli and one whose thread can be traced through all of the wars and campaigns that Australia has fought. In this motion we honour those that have sacrificed their lives for us during the Vietnam War and we commemorate in particular the 45th anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan. Our commitment in Vietnam started in July 1962 with the arrival of the Australian Army Training Team Vietnam in South Vietnam. It was a campaign of just under 11 years. It is a matter of great national shame that the 60,000 Australians who served our country in Vietnam, in the Army, Air Force and Navy, did not receive the thanks of a grateful nation for that service on their return. The 3,000 men who came back wounded, both physically and mentally, were not given the care and consideration that was their due. Instead, their nation abandoned them in their time of need and left it to their families to fight for them and care for them. The 521 families whose loved ones made the ultimate sacrifice had to deal with both the grief of losing their loved one and public opinion that at the time did not value the enormity of their sacrifice. As my colleague Sharman Stone mentioned before, this disrespect of our serving Australian military, the ingratitude for that service, will be a stain on our history. It is quite wrong that we would confuse the policy of a government with the people who serve in our military. As I said, it is a great source of national shame. It is fitting that, though all too late, these brave soldiers have joined their brothers in the pantheon of Australian heroes to whom we will be forever grateful.

Australians are famous for their resilience and resourcefulness in battle. This was tested on 18 August 1966 during the Battle of Long Tan. D Company 6RAR, which consisted of 105 Australians and three New Zealanders, was sent to resist the Vietcong forces, numbering up to 2,500 troops, that had earlier attacked the Australian operations base in Nui Dat, Phuoc Tuy province. Eighteen Australian lives were lost; 21 Australians were wounded. By contrast, 265 Vietcong were killed. The efforts of D Company 6RAR were honoured last Thursday when they received the Australian military's highest honour, the Unit Citation for Gallantry, in recognition of their efforts in battle.

There were other significant battles. One of the worst days for Australian forces during the Vietnam War was the afternoon of 17 February 1967, during Operation Bribie. There were also the protracted, 25-day battles of Coral and Balmoral in May and June of 1968, which involved Australian, New Zealand and United States forces. These battles, and so many more, form the enduring history of Australia's distinguished military service overseas. We thank those who served us in Vietnam. We thank their families as well for the sacrifice and service they have provided to our country.

In conclusion, I place on record the thanks we also extend to current soldiers and their families for the service that they give us today. I record particular thanks to those 3,280 Australian Defence Force personnel who are on active service in Afghanistan, East Timor, Egypt, Iraq, the Middle East, Solomon Islands and Sudan. For those who served us and those who continue to serve us: we will never forget.

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

ABC Helicopter Crash

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (18:38): Paul Lockyer, just 11 days before the horrific crash, visited the township of Grantham, where he was doing a follow-up story. Eleven days beforehand was the last interview that I did with him and I feel sure, though I would need to check the records, that that was the last interview Paul did—the follow-up story on the Grantham disaster. In the short amount of time that I had to know the man, I could tell he was a kind bloke. He showed empathy and compassion, not only with the Grantham incident but also by being the first person on the ground when the floods hit. With his surname being Lockyer, he boasted jovially that he belonged to that valley and that he owned it. He had an ability to make people feel comfortable around him. As a new member I can only suggest that, in the presence of journalists, one is always on edge and cautious about what one says, however Lockie had an ability to make you feel at home and comfortable.

Lockie was born on a farm near Corrigin, about 300 kilometres away from Perth. His award-winning career spanned more than 40 years. Lockie had done everything from working in foreign affairs and as a political correspondent to covering the Sydney Olympics. He first joined the ABC Perth office on a four-year cadetship in 1969 and he quickly rose up the chain, moving to Sydney and then to Canberra in 1976. Three years later, Lockie was made ABC's South-East Asia correspondent. He was one of the first to uncover the full extent of the Khmer Rouge atrocities in Cambodia. After a stint in Washington Lockie returned to Australia to join the Nine Network in 1988. He reported on droughts in eastern Australia in 1994 and *A Current Affair* was given credit for the inspiring Farmhand Appeal. He returned to the ABC for a decade where his coverage of the Sydney Olympics earned him a Logie award for the most outstanding TV news reporter. In 2005 Lockie was the presenter for the ABC news in Western Australia.

Recently in this House a member made a fitting comment about another journalist who had passed away. He said:

I have been in this place for almost 21½ years and in that time I have interacted with many journalists, past and present. I can honestly say that you could number on my left hand the number of journalists that I would be prepared to speak about in a condolence motion. Rob Chalmers is one of them. I found him to be a good person. I found him to be a decent person. I found him to be a very ethical person. And I liked him.

They were the words of Daryl Melham, the member for Banks. Well, I liked Paul Lockyer and my condolences go to his family. I did not know the other gentlemen, pilot Gary Ticehurst and cameraman John Bean, and my sympathy and condolences go to their families and to the loved ones they leave behind. Having lost a father earlier in the year, I know losing a loved one is a tough gig. To the workforce they have left behind in the ABC family, my thoughts go to them and I know they will find strength and comfort in each other's company. Again, my total condolences go to those loved ones that Lockie left behind.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (18:43): Last Thursday night, my husband Chris and I were sitting at home when he got a phone call at about 10.30 from the executive producer of 7.30. It was to advise him of the sad loss of three of the ABC's most dedicated, professional and longest serving servants of the news. It is a significant loss for the ABC. I have witnessed much over the last week, and I will outline some of that tonight. I cannot believe how these three men touched nearly everyone in the ABC—if not everyone in the ABC—and made a very lasting impression on them

which was all decent and good. These were three very good and decent men and it is a great loss, not just to the ABC but to journalism and Australia.

The deaths of journalist Paul Lockyer, cameraman John Bean and pilot Gary Ticehurst has hit the ABC and its staff very hard. The managing director of the ABC, Mark Scott, referred to 'a team of three of our finest. It's going to be one of our saddest days ever.' Tributes for these three veterans of the news have come thick and fast.

Journalist Paul Lockyer had a career in journalism spanning four decades. As a result of the depth and breadth of that career at the local, national and international level he touched nearly everyone—if not everyone—at the ABC. He served in a variety of roles and in many locations around the world. In the footage that we have seen in the last few days you see him in all sorts of exotic and less exotic locations.

Paul has often been described as a journo's journo. His peers looked up to him, he was admired and he was respected. Well-known names of ABC news have also heaped praise on the professionalism of Paul. I was interested to read the tribute by Kerry O'Brien, who declared that he so admired Paul that he wanted to be him. He said:

I remember Paul in the early 80s in Bangkok and I remember thinking, 'Gee, I would like to be like to be like him' ...

I am sure there are lots of ABC reporters who have thought and felt the same.

ABC news director Kate Torney said:

Paul Lockyer was a journalist's journalist. He had done it all—war correspondent, Olympics, floods—and he never burnt a source.

I think Paul will be remembered for his recent reporting of the tragic floods in Queensland, where he not only reported on the hard facts of the developing tragedy, particularly at Grantham, but also managed to capture the real human tragedy of that disaster.

One of the lasting impressions I will have is of the series Paul did on Lake Eyre which were majestic—that is the only word you can use to describe them. They were just extraordinary tributes to our beautiful country and our beautiful landscape from someone who was so in love with it and had such an attachment to it. Obviously the cameraman and the pilot had that great love too. It is just obvious from those beautiful works of art that they produced. In Paul's reporting you also get a great sense of the people behind the story. That is no small skill, and it will be significantly missed.

Paul is survived by his wife, Maria, and their two sons. I understand his memorial service is at Riverview this Friday. There are going to be a lot of tears shed that day too. The who's who of the ABC and of journalism will all be there, and I do not think there is going to be a dry eye in the place. I imagine it will be oozing out at the edges with the numbers of people who want to turn up for the event. I understand he is a Riverview boy, so there will be old boys there as well. It is going to be, I hope, a celebration of his life and a tribute to him, but it is also going to be a very sad day.

While Paul may have been the face of the story, we should not forget the incredible work of those men and women behind the camera. John Bean was every bit to cameraman what Paul Lockyer was to journalism. John had an incredible eye for photography and could capture in pictures what many journalists could not capture in words. As Mark Scott said, he was a cameraman that the reporters always clamoured to work with, a beautiful craftsman. You can see that with those fantastic works from Lake Eyre. He was wonderful behind the lens. In the tribute show that was on last Friday night on 7.30., Leigh Sales was saying that John—'Beanie' I think they called him or 'Beano'; I cannot recall his nickname—was always the man that journalists really wanted to work with, and you can see why.

John also served in many places around the country and around the world. He brought his great talent to a variety of sources. My heart goes out to his wife, Pip, and his family and friends. From all accounts, they had a very close relationship. Someone said it was not the model marriage but one of those marriages where there was absolute respect and warmth and genuine love and depth. I understand Pip is doing it very hard. My husband Chris's producer at 7.30, Michelle Ainsworth, and her husband, Ben, were very, very close to John; he was actually the best man at their wedding and Ben's best mate. So they are doing it really tough at the moment. They flew up to join Pip on the weekend to basically console her and support her during this incredibly difficult time. Speaking to Michelle on the weekend was pretty tough going; she was absolutely devastated.

Chris and I have been through this before in terms of having a dear friend killed—not in a helicopter accident but in a plane accident. My dear friend Liz O'Neill was killed in the Garuda flight when it ran off the runway in 2007. The irony of it was that just this weekend her husband, Wayne, and our goddaughter, Lucinda, were staying with us for the weekend, so all this was playing out while Wayne was there, and I was thinking, 'Gosh, I wonder what's going through his mind—whether it's bringing back all that drama and those horrible days when we first found out and we

were waiting to find out about the body and waiting for the identification of the body.' It is pretty rugged. Chris and I at that stage, as soon as we found out that Liz had died in the flight, flew up to Jakarta to be with Wayne. So hearing what Michelle was doing with Ben for Pip Courtney was very reminiscent of those days. So it is tough, and my heart really goes out to Pip, Michelle and Ben at the moment. I think it also takes me back to that flight and the fact that there were journalists who died on that flight in the line of duty as well. Morgan Mellish from the *Australian Financial Review* died, and Cynthia Banham, whom many of you know from the *SMH*, was badly injured. Cynthia is a constituent of mine; actually, she lives just down the road from us. She has just moved into a beautiful new house there with her husband, Michael Harvey, who is also a journalist. It makes you reflect not just on the journalists who die in the line of duty but also on the public servants like my dear friend Liz and also Allison Sudrajat, the councillor for AusAID at the Jakarta embassy, and the AFP agents Brice Steele and Mark Scott. So what has been happening in the last few days has brought all that back to us, and I really felt for Wayne at that time. Also, I am sure that Cynthia would have been reliving some of what she went through as well.

Gary Ticehurst was a helicopter pilot who had clocked up more than 16,000 flight hours in his four decades of work as a pilot. He was a former serviceman and then moved into work with the ABC. Like Paul and John, he will be remembered for his strong commitment and his dedication to his career both as a pilot and as a newsman. In fact, journalist Tim Palmer, who is part of that ABC family and was in Jakarta when everything happened with Liz, Cynthia and Morgan, remarked:

Wherever we landed, Gary would always be "in" with the police or mates with the firefighters ... or just charm one of the locals until he found out what was happening, one-upping the reporter as often as possible

— which I am sure would have generated great joy for him, because it is always good to one-up a journalist. I know, because I am married to one. So he sounds like quite a character. He was more than just a newsman; he also had a strong and committed heart. This is perhaps best remembered for his efforts during the 1998 Sydney to Hobart race, where he set aside his news role and participated in the search and rescue operation for those stricken boats—another tragedy. Gary will be sorely missed by his wife, Therese.

In closing, I think that what has really struck me about the last week is that there is a great feeling amongst the people of Canberra about this loss, but it is the ABC family that has really suffered a significant

blow from this. I know that some people may think it was indulgent of the ABC to do the tributes, but obviously these men had such a significant effect on other people. They were so well loved by other people that those people almost do not care that it is construed as indulgent, because they really want to pay their respects and honour these wonderful individuals. I know that Ross Solly, the local ABC 666 presenter, did a tribute to him on Friday. He was at pains to say, 'I am sorry if this is indulgent but I really do want to pay tribute to these wonderful men.' So I do hope there are no repercussions for the ABC and that people do not write and complain about the fact that it is indulgent. As you know, 7.30 did a special on them and there have been lots and lots of reports. I noticed Barrie Cassidy also paid tribute to him on *Insiders* on the weekend. I understand that Barry and Heather Hewitt were very, very close to Paul and the rest of the crew. It really has reverberated throughout the ABC. It is a loss for all of the ABC and they are really feeling it. There has been this sort of pall over everyone over the last week—speaking to Chris and speaking to other friends in the ABC, it has deeply, deeply cut into their hearts. It is a significant tragedy.

To lose any one of these men would have been a very, very deep blow for the ABC, but to lose all three is a grief that is really unimaginable. My condolences and those of the people of Canberra, because we are great ABC fans, go out to their families and their friends and to their family at the ABC.

Mr WYATT (Hasluck) (18:56): I want to say thank you to the member for Canberra for sharing those insights from a personal perspective with us. I offer my condolences on behalf of the electorate of Hasluck to the families of the three ABC staff killed in a helicopter crash last week, 150 kilometres north-west of Marree in the Lake Eyre region. I watched that 7.30 report the member for Canberra referred to and what I got a really good sense of was the individualism of the three—the spirit and the essence of who they were and their work. You looked through the eyes of the cameraman at the scene he was shooting and what you saw was an incredible encapsulation of the absolute richness and beauty of the Australian landscape. I suppose in one sense the three epitomise what the ABC has always strived to do, and that is to provide within Australia innovative and comprehensive broadcasting services of a high standard. You do not achieve that unless you have quality staff—like these three were—to broadcast programs that contribute to a sense of a national identity and inform and entertain and reflect the cultural diversity of Australia community. I see that regularly through ABC programs.

The stories of Paul Lockyer, who came from my hometown of Corrigin, really went to the heart of

a community or the heart of a group of people and reflected their feelings and the way in which they saw the world from their patch within Australia. The combination of the three was an incredible combination. They were, if I can use this term, like 'Three Amigos' because they were very rarely apart when they were working together and because of the interpersonal relationship that seemed to prevail. The very powerful still images of the three of them standing there with a helicopter in the background in a sense captured the relationship that the three had in the context of their work.

I had the incredible privilege of being the chair of the ABC advisory committee for two years and I got to know many of the ABC people. I got to know the professionalism but more importantly what I got to appreciate and have a real sense of was the family element that was so strong within the ABC.

The ABC is important and the people who do the work on the ground, who deliver the programs and services we take for granted, provide Australian society with a communication network that reaches into the remotest regions of this nation. The work that they pull together is of a high standard and high quality and they often do it with meagre resources. But the resources have never been a constraint to the quality of what they have produced and delivered for all Australians in their work. The passion that was certainly evident in—

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 19:00 to 19:27

Mr WYATT: The loss of these three in particular would have been a significant blow within the ABC, given the closeness of the people who work together. The member for Canberra described the staff at the ABC as one large family, and this has certainly been exemplified many times in my interactions with the ABC. Journalist Paul Lockyer, pilot Gary Ticehurst and cameraman John Bean were tragically taken away from their families, their friends, their colleagues and the nation. Their deaths are a tragic blow to journalism in this country.

Without risk there is no reward, and these men took their pursuit of balanced and informative news to the highest level. Over the past few days there has been a raft of wonderful and touching stories that have come out of the ABC and the wider news community from friends and colleagues of the three men which recount their experiences together. What touched me in Canberra were comments many people had put in the condolence book in the ABC offices within Parliament House.

Paul Lockyer had spent over 40 years as a journalist and covered some of the most important and historical moments in our time, both in Australia and abroad. I think the sentiments that were expressed by their families at the end of the report on 7.30 superbly encapsulated the degree of emotion, respect and deep love that family members had for the three. From overseas postings in Asia through to leading the coverage of the Queensland floods, Paul was a beacon of everything good and honest about Australian journalism.

The ABC have produced many great staff, superb journalists and brilliant cameramen who have put together over 40 years some of the incredible stories that we take for granted on a nightly basis. Their growth has been epitomised through their 24-hour dedicated news channel. They capture the essence of who we are. They produce quality stories that reflect the Australian way of life.

In closing, I would just like to add my condolences to the families of the three who we have lost.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT (Maranoa—Second Deputy Speaker) (19:29): I rise tonight to pay tribute to three wonderful ABC employees who lost their lives in a helicopter crash in the remote part of the Lake Eyre basin, just over the border from the western areas of my electorate of Maranoa. I was absolutely shocked and gutted when I first heard the news. The news came through to me on text first from my son, because he is married to an ABC journalist who got the news very late at night. I knew from the text and then from the voicemail that he left on my phone just how gutted they were. For the rest of the day and I think it will go on for some time, I felt empty. I spoke to a number of ABC reporters in western Queensland. People just felt lost. Certainly, I was lost for words, but we felt lost because we had lost three wonderful members of the ABC family.

We lost Paul Lockyer with his 40 years of experience. I will never forget the work that he, together with Gary Ticehurst, the pilot, and John Bean, the cameraman, put together when nature showed its wonderful beauty in the outback two years ago. That DVD is now available commercially—I am told actually it is probably one of the biggest sellers of any memorabilia of Lake Eyre for travellers into the outback and in my part of the world into places like Birdsville and Bedourie. What skill the cameraman John Bean had; what skill the pilot Gary Ticehurst had—with Paul Lockyer's dedication to putting the story together and telling it just as it was.

One of the other things I would like to say about them is that they were prepared to go out into rural and remote parts of Australia. They went into the most remote

parts of this nation to report back and bring vision to us—not only to those of us with great interest but all across Australia and I think some of their vision went around the world. I also mention the wife of John Bean, Pip Courtney. I know Pip quite well; she lives in Queensland but she does a lot of work on *Landline*—one of those wonderful programs. It is a must-see if you have a rural seat. She, I know, like all of us was just gutted to think that a wonderful man like John Bean could lose his life in such tragic circumstances. I know Pip will go on and continue her work as a member of the ABC family and I certainly say to Pip: I know you will keep the work up—the wonderful work that John would have wanted you to do, albeit I know this period is very, very tough for you.

Could I also say that the team also not only recorded the wonderful beauty of the outback when nature delivers but they also recorded nature's fury in this summer of natural disasters just passed. They were in my electorate of Maranoa; they were in Toowoomba; they followed the flood waters down the Murray-Darling Basin system. They were first into Grantham. Importantly, they told the story as it was and showed us the vision. They were professionals. There was no spin, no sense of sensationalism. It was just a straight play. I think that is why they had been so successful in their careers.

I extend my condolences to the families, the next of kin and to the whole of the ABC family. The three men will always be remembered. They died in a beautiful part of Australia. It is a part that I love to go and visit because I know how beautiful and serene it can be and how quiet. There is another beauty in the outback; there is another beauty in the Simpson Desert, that city folk often do not get an opportunity to witness. The work that they have done out there is now available on DVD. I commend it anyone out there who wants to see some of the wonderful work that they have done. It is available in ABC shops and in tourist outlets. The first is called Lake Eyre and I think the other one is The Deluge. I commend it to you if people are listening tonight, if we are on broadcast.

Tragically we no longer have them but they died doing what they loved doing and what they did so well. My condolences go to the whole of the ABC family and of course more importantly to the families, the next of kin and the closest friends of the three, Paul Lockyer, Gary Ticehurst and John Bean.

Main Committee adjourned at 19:36

QUESTIONS IN WRITING

Superclinics

(Question No. 366)

Dr Southcott asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 23 May 2011:

In respect of the Health and Ageing Portfolio Budget Statement 2011-12 (page 216), what timeframes have been agreed to by her department and each funded organisation, within which each of the 64 GP Super Clinics will become operational.

Ms Roxon: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

Generally, the timetable for completing a GP Super Clinic is heavily dependent on the size and complexity of the construction, and external factors including local council planning and approval processes, availability of construction workforce and materials, and weather conditions.

(Scullin) (NaN.NaN pm)