

ADJOURNMENT

Economy

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (11.51 a.m.)—Another day, another tranche of job losses under Mr Rudd's rudderless economy. Another Gold Coast boat builder has fallen victim to the slowing Australian economy, with Coomera based Telwater yesterday revealing it has sacked 100 staff in my electorate of Fadden. This, in combination with the losses out of Riviera Marine, takes the total boat-building losses to well over 357 in one of the biggest industries in Fadden and an important export industry for the nation. The management company of Telwater, which is the parent company of well-known brands that include Quintrex and Stacer, lays the blame squarely at the feet of the struggling economy and high fuel and food costs. It goes to show that food and fuel do not just hurt at the checkout and the bowser; they hurt all the way down the economic line, right throughout the purchasing chain.

Despite Mr Rudd's rhetoric during the election campaign, we are yet to see any real, tangible initiatives to solve these problems. A couple of websites—costing millions and millions of dollars each—have never had a major impact on the economy, and I do not see any change with the farcical Fuelwatch or GROCERYchoice websites. On average, petrol has gone up more than 30c per litre since Mr Rudd was elected. Many times during the election campaign he and his politicians indicated to the Australian people that they would bring petrol and grocery costs down. Petrol prices have not come down and it is impacting on the marine industry. The high Australian dollar, which has now dropped by up to 20 per cent, has almost offset any reductions in petrol that may have been received by the Australian people because of the drop in the price of oil.

Grocery prices continue to rise, putting further strain on family budgets. Labor's own budget forecasts that by mid next year 134,000 Australians will be out of work, will have lost their jobs. Treasury indicates perhaps another 100 per cent more. The Bankers Association indicates that unemployment will reach five per cent by mid next year and it will be approaching six per cent by next Christmas. That is almost one million Australians, taking into consideration mum and dad and the kids, who will be impacted by job losses—all of them, each and every one of them, on Mr Rudd's watch. In Mr Rudd's own words:

We have done as much as we physically can to provide additional help to the family budget ...

I contend that this is not good enough. These job losses demonstrate that fuel and food is not just about the family budget.

I asked the Deputy Prime Minister last week in question time how many job losses we would see in the wake of the losses at Riviera; are 134,000 not bad enough? Boats are a discretionary purchase item, and historically the discretionary market segments are the first to suffer in times of a slowing economy. Whilst this week's interest rate reduction by the RBA is welcome news for mortgagees, it is an indicator that the RBA believes the economy needs a kick-start, although inflation is still high and heading towards five per cent. In the national accounts released yesterday it is not hard to see why. Growth for the last quarter was 0.3 per cent, compared to 0.7 per cent the previous quarter. Growth in New South Wales was minus 0.1 per cent. New South Wales is at the start of a recession—a recession technically being two quarters of negative growth. It has just experienced its first quarter of negative growth, and my home state of Queensland is not far behind it.

The great question for the people of Fadden is this: is the marine industry the canary down the mine shaft? Is it the flickering candle down where oxygen is thin? Are these job losses in the marine industry an indicator of more to come on the Gold Coast, where

one of the most important industries is the tourism industry? Holidays are another discretionary item that is likely to be hit hard as the economy continues to worsen. The more our household essentials continue to rise in price, the less we have in the wallet for the things we do not really need but would otherwise purchase or experience. Luxuries or discretionary items may not seem that important, but they are when you consider where they come from. I firmly believe in protecting jobs. I believe in employment. I believe in the great virtue and dignity that jobs bring and I know we need to fight to continue to see that jobs remain in the electorate of Fadden.