

COMMUNITY CABINET CANNINGVALE – 20 JANUARY 2008

Question 1: Some 5,000 self-funded seniors reside in Australia on subclass 410 (Retirement) Temporary visas and are unable to apply for citizenship. They are not accepted as residents nor are they eligible for seniors' concessions or government funded health care – yet they pay taxes. This situation creates considerable uncertainty for them in their old age.

Response: Minister for Immigration and Citizenship (Chris Evans) – appreciated the issue and had asked for specific briefing from Department. Noted in his view the general principle should be if residency is permitted then citizenship ought to be an option. If feasible the government would develop a proposal for consultation.

Question 2: Natural Resource Management funding arrangements in limbo while Government considers its priorities. Environment groups are seeking confirmation that Commonwealth will continue its commitment to and funding of community involvement in The National Heritage Trust Phase 3 (NHT3).

Response: Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts (Peter Garrett) – noted that WA community very active in such programs and commended their commitment. Government considering national funding options and currently engaged in consultation with those on the ground to determine appropriate priorities. Contribution to the process made by community groups will continue to be recognised, as the Government moves forward in establishing its policy directions.

Question 3: Cost of housing – both rental and purchase –eroding the dream of home ownership for many young people. Noted the shortage of qualified tradesmen but also the additional costs imposed on housing market by GST and state government charges (stamp duty). Proposed that there be some form of GST rebate and elimination of stamp duty for first home buyers.

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – Government acutely aware of the increasing cost of housing, especially in Perth. Noted that the National Summit on Housing Affordability bringing together the then Opposition and industry representatives last year canvassed a number of proposals. One under active consideration by Government is a 'first home saver account'. It could, for example, be given the same benefits as superannuation accounts, thereby allowing first home buyers to accumulate a deposit more quickly. Emphasised that the Government is also concerned that the cost of infrastructure development associated with new housing developments is being passed on to home buyers. Government looking at providing funds via partnership arrangements with local governments to bring down infrastructure costs and thereby lower new housing prices. Agreed that rental accommodation is a bigger challenge and outlined the Government's commitment to provide half a billion dollars to support the building of high-quality affordable rental housing stock via a premium scheme for private investors. Establishment of a Commonwealth Department of Housing with a Federal Housing Minister demonstrates importance government gives to the issue.

Question 4: Australian Government action in response to treatment of Falun Gong (Falun Dafa) practitioners in China.

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – stressed that the assumption that these issues are not raised with the Chinese directly is wrong. As Leader of the Opposition, he had raised the issue of human rights (including those of Falun Gong) directly with China. Emphasised that human rights will remain a central issue in Australia's relationship with China.

Question 5: What action will the Australian Government take in response to Japanese whaling in the Southern Ocean? What measures does it propose to mitigate against the invasion of cane toads into Western Australia.

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – Government committed to the permanent cessation of Japanese whaling. Government will never accept that Japanese whaling is for scientific purposes. Noted that Minister for Foreign Affairs (Stephen Smith) has been at forefront of negotiations to deal with current impasse between activists and whalers. Committed to use practical steps to gather evidence about Japanese whaling activity and pursue legal action against Japan.

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Stephen Smith) - outlined the measures which he and Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts (Peter Garrett) announced last year – increased diplomatic emphasis on the issue as part of bilateral engagement with Japan (intend to establish a Whaling Envoy in Japan to put Australia's views to Japanese); surveillance and monitoring of whaling activities to inform an international legal case (noting *Oceanic Viking* had been engaged on monitoring activities when it was called on to assist resolve dispute between activists and whalers); and pursue legal case in both the International Court of Justice and via International Law of the Sea.

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts (Peter Garrett) – reiterated that Government working hard in preparation for the International Whaling Commission in March, specifically on the loophole that allows Japan to continue whaling on scientific grounds. In relation to Cane Toads, aware that toads are about to enter WA. Noted the high level of community engagement in the Kimberley to deal with problem. Government had committed \$2 million to help stop the toads moving into the Kimberley and Kununurra areas and working with scientists on solutions.

Question 6: - When will counselling be recognised as a therapeutic option by the public health system (as an alternative to drug therapy), especially for victims of childhood sexual abuse. Noted the difficulties that victims faced (particularly women) in later life – violent relationships, accessing appropriate accommodation (emergency and public housing), accessing and participating in education.

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – emphasised that the Government acutely aware of the shortage of crisis accommodation – including for those subject to domestic violence, especially children.

Minister for Health and Ageing (Nicola Roxon) – agreed that access to counselling could be vital and advised that the Government was assessing possibility of continuing the reach of

Medicare to counselling in certain circumstances. It was certainly an area marked for significant development. Noted some existing programs which already make use of counselling as part of an early intervention strategy (eg post natal depression and “Headspace” for young people). Government also aware of the difficulties for those in regional and remote areas to access such services.

Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Jenny Macklin) – stressed that homelessness was a big agenda item for the Government. Prime Minister and Cabinet members had demonstrated commitment to understanding and addressing the issue during recent visits to homeless refuges. Aware that it was equally important to establish on-going housing options for those moving from crisis housing. Part of the challenge will be to reshape the way Commonwealth/state governments engage on the issue of housing (including crisis and public housing). But the Government also committed, when formulating its strategy, to listen to the experiences and views of those people who are in crisis.

Question 7: No new areas were added to the Heritage List under the previous government. Will the new Government allow people to nominate areas of significant environmental and/or heritage value?

Response: Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts (Peter Garrett) – Understood that many people want to participate in the listing process. Currently, looking at proposals from a number of organisations. Will be looking to improve the processes and will be consulting with community organisations on best approach.

Question 8: Increasing the Old Aged Pension in line with CPI alone does not provide sufficient funds for its recipients to live on.

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) - aware of the issue – noted that the issue was constantly raised by the public throughout the election campaign (e.g. especially during any walk through of a shopping centre). Those on fixed incomes have a tough struggle, especially given the recent increase in the cost of food. Will be looking hard at the index of items used to determine CPI and the weighting given to food items say in comparison to white goods (the cost of which have fallen over recent years).

Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Jenny Macklin) - government has increased utilities allowance for Aged Pensioners, Seniors and those on a Disability Pension. Have also provided an additional \$50m to enable state/territory governments to offer transport concessions across state/territory borders. Propose to increase the Telephone Allowance for pensioners to allow greater internet access and provide additional access via Senior Citizen clubs.

Question 9: Concerned about the powers vested in the Australian Building and Construction Commissioner by the previous government – Does the new Government plan to address excessive powers?

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – noted the importance of maintaining stability in the construction industry and that the government would consult the industry about employment. Referred issue to Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations

Deputy Prime Minister; Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations; Minister for Education; Minister for Social Inclusion (Julia Gillard) – Government committed to abolition of ‘Work Choices’ in its entirety. Legislation will be introduced in the 1st sitting of Parliament. Under these new arrangements the BBC will be retained until January 2010. This will allow the necessary time to consult on a new model, addressing concerns about the existing multiplicity of authorities, and develop a more streamlined one-stop-shop.

[14:58 – Prime Minister extended time for Q&As for another 15 mins]

Question 10: State schools are run down and are no longer competitive with private schools. What was the Government going to do about creating a more equitable choice for parents?

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – education is one of the key issues for the Government – committed to ensuring that Australia has the best state and private schools in world. Firmly held belief that it is not possible to over-invest in education. When travelling around the country, always incredibly impressed by passionate dedication of teachers and headmaster. Government about to consult with state/territory governments on major education proposal. Reiterated that this was a “gut level” commitment.

Deputy Prime Minister; Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations; Minister for Education; Minister for Social Inclusion (Julia Gillard) – drew attention to the billion dollar investment in IT, the focus on Trade Training Centres (\$2.5 b) (required to address skills shortages in the labour market), programs to encourage people to take up teaching (especially in areas such as Maths and Science and locations such as Western Australia). Government started conversation with state/territory education ministers before Christmas about funding arrangements for schools – including universal pre-school across Australia. The Government was preparing to make a lot of investment and the community could expect to see a lot of activity soon.

Question 11: Australia is grossly over taxed – GST, excise, etc. Need a simplified tax system. The Tax Act is overly complex. At the minimum tax thresholds need to be raised for those on low incomes and retirees.

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – It is always a difficult question of balance. How do we fund those things we regard as essential (schools, hospitals) without quashing incentive. Understand that the Tax Act is complex and regulatory complexity is strangling business. Lindsay Tanner (Minister for Finance and Deregulation) and Craig Emerson (Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy) are working on proposals to cut regulation and red tape.

Treasurer – (Wayne Swan) – Government has to get the balance right and will be looking to set taxes as low as possible consistent with quality public service. Clear that people deserve and require incentive and Government is committed to tax reform – noted the reform program

put forward during the election campaign with the objective of achieving a simple three rate structure. But this will take time. Agreed that business taxation is too complex – a problem for wealth creation. This too will be a focus of the major tax reform proposed by the Government.

Question 12: That there is no justice rather “just us”.

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – Consider that justice is better here than most countries but can always look for ways to improve system.

Question 13: Offer of support. Encouraged the use of a Zulu concept of well-being and “inter-connectiveness” as a model for problem solving.

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – thanked for offer of support.

Question 14: Indigenous Australians’ life expectancy still 15-20 years less than the general population. Indigenous community still experiencing high levels of preventable disease (WA communities have world’s 3rd highest level of diabetes), crime (17% of Australia’s jail population but only 3% of general population) and distress (high levels of youth suicide). Own mother was one of the stolen generation. Indigenous contribution to the nation, e.g. war service not recognised in the same way as others. When will people acknowledge what history has done to Indigenous communities?

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – Raise very important issue for Australia’s future. Must address the issues of the past. Government’s first principle is that there will be an apology. No question that this is the right thing to do – a bridge, built on respect. But also must concentrate on the future. Focus on closing the life expectancy gap, funding (\$250m) for literacy and numeracy – address those things we can measure and number. Objective is to ensure life opportunities as rich and diverse as other Australians.

[15:15 Prime Minister called for last question]

Question 15: Noted Chinese Government’s policy of removing organs from executed prisoners (many of whom are political prisoners) for sale to foreigners without donor consent (organ tourism). Will the Australian Government introduce safety measures to ensure that all transplant organs are from donors who have given consent.

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – Already addressed Chinese human rights issues today. With time so limited propose that Minister for Foreign Affairs (Stephen Smith) respond in writing.

Question 16: Concerned that Australian Government land is sold with no ongoing control over treatment or use. Perth Airport surrounds have been cleared of all vegetation. Government should ensure there are requirements imposed on future owners for the public good.

Response: Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government (Anthony Albanese) – Had been on a tour of Perth Airport that morning with relevant State Minister and the Jandakot Airport Corporation. These issues not properly thought through when the 99 year leases offered, as Commonwealth land not subject to state or local government planning approval processes. Local member Ms Sharon Jackson has ensured he is now acutely aware of the consequences of the brickworks development on the surrounding areas of Perth Airport. Has sought advice on how the current legislation can deal with non-airport activities on airport zoned land. Will be looking for ways to ensure that future development around the airport will be more appropriate. Proposing to consult with both operators and community to ensure better outcomes. Agreed that it was unfair that lease holders were taking the benefit of their locations without contributing to the supporting infrastructure. Much will, however, depend on legal advice, as there is limited scope under the legislation implemented by the previous government.

COMMUNITY CABINET NARANGBA – 2 MARCH 2008

Question 1: Reforms to family law by the previous government introduced 50:50 shared care custody of children. Concerned that this does nothing to address the issues of domestic violence. Women and children are exposed to domestic violence and their concerns are being ignored by Magistrates. Shared care is not suitable for children under the age of seven. Magistrates are going on hearsay and throwing women in jail.

Family law courts are also allowing drug affected parents custody of children, so how are children meant to survive?

Response: Attorney General (Robert McClelland) – Children who grow up in an environment with domestic violence face greater risk, for example, they may have learning difficulties, so this issue is a big challenge. The reality of 50:50 custody will kick in in the middle of the year (2008), the Government is looking at the situation closely and will monitor the impact of the legislation.

The effect of orders for domestic violence is important, also ties in to the issue of homelessness, and women in refuges are too common.

These are substantial issues, and the Government is constantly looking at them, particularly the changes to the legislation made by the previous government, and the role of Magistrates in this issue both locally and nationally.

Question 2: Lung cancer in need of more funding from the Government - lung cancer accounts for 15 per cent of cancer diagnoses in Australia, with 7 000 deaths a year, but only receives 5 per cent of funding. The Australian Lung Foundation receives no core funding from the Government. Lung cancer is changing; it is no longer smokers who are getting lung cancer. Drugs for lung cancer are not readily available, neither are speciality nurses for lung cancer patient support, treatment and care. Rural Australia is in desperate need.

More needs to be done. There is a misrepresentation of lung cancer - of 8 000 lung cancer patients, half have never smoked or have been non smokers for many years. Stage 4 patients generally die within eight months of diagnosis, so the question from patients and the

Australian Lung Cancer Foundation is what, if any, current initiatives does the Government have to address this appalling situation?

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) - cancer is a principal killer of Australians, and there are two key areas related to this: one is the preventative side, and the other is the response side dealing with patients and patient support. In relation to preventative measures, on the research front, the government has committed approximately a quarter of a billion dollars to advance cancer research. Every cancer category is important. Collaborative care centres where research and clinical care are combined are important. This has given rise to a cancer research centre funded through the University of New South Wales (UNSW).

Minister for Health and Ageing (Nicola Roxon) – It would be good to meet individually with the questioner and with the Australian Lung Foundation following the forum (staff will take details).

General comments- some cancer treatments are becoming very specialised, but there is a need to provide a breadth of care. The Government is talking with State Ministers to deliver cancer care to public hospitals. These issues are at the forefront of Minister Roxon's mind when negotiating new Health Care Agreements.

The Minister indicated she would like to speak personally to the questioner about this issue, and notes the challenge of getting new treatments of the PBS quickly.

Question 3: On March 4 2008 the inaugural meeting of the Elders Round Table will be held in Nambour. This group is working very hard with the community to address issues within the community themselves, for example, regional housing needs. Could a meeting be scheduled with the Prime Minister to discuss the provision of funding for elders to travel up and down the coast, in light of the expense involved with petrol costs?

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – the questioner should sit down with Jenny (Macklin, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) and discuss the matter following the question and answer forum, noting this was a specific local issue.

Question 4: Regional Arts development policy – Arts, Culture and Heritage issues have been absent from the national agenda for some years, so what commitment of support for the arts, our artists and places of expression can this Government provide?

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – The Australia 2020 summit has an entire Working Group based on building a creative Australia - about art and design and how we take creative potential and give it greater expression. The questioner should consider making a submission to the Australia 2020 summit. Also, Peter Garrett (Minister for Environment, Heritage and the Arts) has been in active dialogue with the Australian film industry. The creative arts are a core part of the vision for the future, and the 2020 Summit is a great place to start.

Question 5 Request for development of a regional cultural centre in Caboolture - Caboolture Council has listened and taken analysis and design of a regional centre which includes a

space for performing arts, a library and an art gallery. This will also service the Moreton Bay region. An application for partnership funding has been submitted to the Federal Government, and awaiting reply. The State Government has offered funding. This project presents great opportunities for the community. Asking for the Federal Government to give the application full consideration and asking to arrange a meeting to give the relevant Minister an overview of the facility.

Response: Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government (Anthony Albanese) – the Regional Partnerships Program (under which the application was made) is a former government initiative and the Department is currently reviewing the program. With regards to the specific application, questioner should see Minister (Albanese) afterwards so they can organise to discuss and to obtain information for Minister and for Minister for Environment, Heritage and the Arts (Peter Garrett).

Question 6: Firstly, appreciated the recent apology to the Stolen Generations. Questioner is the manager of Caboolture Family Haven, dealing with families- who are not actually working families - who are in financial crisis and facing unaffordable housing. Many people seeking service during financial crisis, so what policies apply to them?

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – Homelessness is an acute challenge, as 100 000 Australians are designated as homeless, plus 10 000 sleeping rough every night. Government has begun the first White Paper on homelessness, together with the community, the Choir of Hard Knocks, the Minister for Housing, and a reference panel which is due to report by the end of 2008.

There is no one size fits all approach to fix this issue, you cannot deal with homelessness in isolation from things such as drug abuse and basic public dental programs (linked to employment).

A successful centre in Sydney run by Mission Australia deals with the broad spectrum of needs of homeless people – for example, providing skills as well as accommodation, preventing the recurring theme of giving a person accommodation and then having them returning some time later with the same problems..

We have commissioned a group of people passionate about this issue to work on the White Paper.

Question 7: Questioner is a land developer whose primary focus is to create and develop affordable, good quality land and would like to know the government's strategy for improving the approach to land release.

The questioner has cleared 1000 lots of land since 2003 not far from Narangba yet it is sitting unreleased due to bureaucratic red tape. The questioner asks how can it be released for first home buyers

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – housing is important because there is a crisis affecting families and young people. On average, 38 per cent of median income is used for payment of mortgages across the country.

Big challenge on our hands – at a time when the pressure is on working families (you will see today announcements on a Teen Dental Program which links to taking off some of those pressures).

At our Housing Affordability Summit last year when in opposition, we looked at how to help people save for a deposit, and at land supply. Regarding deposit: the Treasury has developed a policy to create First Home Saver Accounts which act like superannuation accounts and allow people to save for a deposit. Regarding supply – there are policies from before the election which deal with how to negotiate a reduction on charging on infrastructure for land. There are problems with council bureaucracy and the development assessment process - getting bogged down in it. Government is working with State Governments (establishing national Housing Supply Council) and will put \$500 000 million over the next five years in the Housing Affordability Fund in infrastructure – linked to housing developments to reduce the cost of new homes. Looking at how to get new arrangements to partner with local authorities to provide more funding for lower infrastructure charges. Will have an expeditious approach to land release.

Question 8: (Congratulated the Prime Minister on his visit to East Timor). Question relates to increasing aid to 0.5 per cent of GNI (Gross National Income). The Millennium Development Goals say that it should be 0.7 per cent by 2015.

A White Paper in 2006 said that aid had increased, but aid money included things like the Pacific Solution, wildlife and counter terrorism measures. Two issues – will there be greater transparency in relation to aid, and, will Australia give more aid?

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – commitment to raise ODA (overseas development assistance) from 0.3 to 0.5 per cent because of Millennium Development goals – to assist 1.6 billion people living in poverty. The previous government committed to raise aid to 0.34 per cent by 2015. We are increasing to 0.5 per cent by 2015, while this falls short of the Millennium Goals it is a strong step in the right direction. Also there is mutual responsibility with aid – Australian aid helps to build countries' economic infrastructure but Australia needs to make sure that the work is done on the ground, for example, in areas of education, health, and transport.

The Pacific Solution has been abolished – it can't be claimed as aid.

Question 9: (Thank you for 'the apology' and for ratifying Kyoto). Question relates to housing – questioner's rent was raised by 20 per cent in January with one month's notice which makes his rent 30 per cent of income. Family did not shift house as worried about homelessness. Can't afford to buy even though have \$100 000 in deposit. If interest rates rise to 10 per cent rent will be 50 per cent of their household income.

There are massive incentives for investors rather than owner/occupiers and there is a huge under supply of housing. Superannuation changes and negative gearing are part of the problem. Does the Prime Minister support an entrenchment of a two tier society of owners versus an underclass of renters? If not, government should remove the incentives for investors to purchase homes; how will you address this?

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – under the previous government there was no Minister for Housing and no Department of Housing. Housing is fundamental for helping working families to make ends meet, and it is an important issue to the Government.

The question goes to the ability of first home owners to buy. The First Home Savers Account is dedicated to accumulating a deposit for a house. The part of the question related to undersupply goes to land release and the availability of a skilled workforce in the housing industry. We do not intend to breach our election commitment on negative gearing. We can also help increase the supply of housing – this is not a perfect solution but it is better than before

Question 10: The skills crisis affects everyone on the front bench (Cabinet Members). The reason for the skills crisis is that training is not being handled properly – this is a key issue. On behalf of the company Steel Spears, we have written to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, and has a gift for the people of Australia.

Steel Spears provides training, and 25 per cent of the profits go to Indigenous aged care housing, 25 per cent to non Indigenous housing, 20 per cent into a fund for workers when there is a downturn, 20 per cent to community projects and 10 per cent to trainee wages.

Response: The Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Minister for Social Inclusion (Julia Gillard) – There is Government interest in the model so far. We will follow up with a direct discussion today. We're interested in pursuing the model and to have a conversation about the next stage. There has been email contact with my Chief of Staff about this issue.

Question 11: Is the Government prepared to be in partnership with the Lions Club to improve eye health (ophthalmology) in East Timor?

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – regarding aid, the Secretary for Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade will discuss this with you afterwards.

Minister for Health and Ageing (Nicola Roxon) – The Government federally fund lots of programs to deliver eye health services.

Discuss with Departmental colleagues after the session to see how this would fit into existing plans and election commitments we flagged. For example, whether Vision 2020 fit in there or do we need another solution.

Question 12: (Thank you for 'the apology') Chairman, Aboriginal Health Service Brisbane. Need to focus on practical measures for Indigenous people e.g. closing the gap in health services and also to focus on all Indigenous people, not just those in remote regional communities. How is the Government helping with that?

Response: Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Jenny Macklin) – The Government works for all Indigenous Australians. Most Indigenous people live in urban and regional Australia. Together with colleagues, we are making sure

Indigenous children get the best health services, whether they are in a city, regional town or remote Australia. We won't be able to close the gap unless focus on everyone.

Question 13: Regarding insulin pumps for kids with Type 1 diabetes - they cost \$8000 each – can the Government help us buy them?

Response: Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – (began talking about initiatives for those with Type 2 diabetes, interrupted by attendee who raised the difference between Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes – Prime Minister stated he understood the difference between the conditions and that both types were significant issues

Minister for Health and Ageing (Nicola Roxon) – noted that there is a submission under active consideration by the government – insulin pumps are not funded yet, meeting with some representatives from JDRF (Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation) in appointments – they are an effective Lobby group. Diabetes is a difficult condition and the submission regarding insulin pumps will be considered during the budget process. Health Minister and Treasurer to meet with advocates.

Question 14: Asking about community transport (considers that Queensland Transport does not take this issue seriously). Call for coordinated approach to community public transport. Public transport is not for everyone, for example the elderly and people with disabilities often do not get on buses. However, there are lots government funded vehicles in communities, which could be used for transport for these people. The volume of government funded vehicles in the community means that it is necessary to have a centralised information/co-ordination point for people to use the vehicles.

Response: Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government (Anthony Albanese) - it is very difficult and inappropriate to co-ordinate community transport development from Canberra, it requires local coordination. An example is the Minister's electorate in Sydney where there is a car share plan (Council plus State funding). This has benefits for the environment and costs savings. The Council of Australian Local Government will be discussing details soon. Need to use assets which are sometimes idle but public transport can also be more efficient. There are constant meetings with State Governments on this issue. Happy to raise issues at these meetings.

Question 15: (Responsible Parents in Sport) – major issues with families struggling to bring kids to sporting clubs because of the enormous registration fees (and the timing of fee payment in February which coincides with school fees). Obesity issue links with sporting activities. A particular problem for single families – possible to have rebates for families who are struggling with these registration fees? A tax deduction will not work

Response: Minister for Health and Ageing (Nicola Roxon) – We have had a lot of representations regarding this issue and are considering it closely. Obesity, alcohol, preventative health, are all of key focus. We are working on this issue on several different fronts. The government has initiatives regarding e.g. active after school care. Families are under pressure and the collective minds of the Cabinet are turned to this, but cannot give an answer for the particular strategy raised.

Prime Minister (Kevin Rudd) – we will be having conversations with State Premiers regarding sports in schools.

Question 16: On Friday (29 Feb) the Attorney General addressed a group about providing resources for Native Title. Asking that these resources are held back until the *Native Title Act* is revised

Response: Attorney General (Robert McClelland) – Your point is very valid. We need to focus on outcomes – long term productive outcomes. The *Native Title Act* is horrendously complex – need to take stock and get back to the philosophy behind the introduction of Native Title. This is what we are looking at now.

COMMUNITY CABINET PENRITH – TUESDAY 15 APRIL 2008

Question 1: What is the government doing to look after seniors and self funded retirees given the rising cost of living?

Response: Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs – Jenny Macklin: that is a question that is heard in many parts of Australia, as pensioners and self funded retirees are feeling the pain of the cost of living. One of the commitments has been to increase the utilities allowance from approx. \$107 to \$500 per annum, which will be paid quarterly (this was the result of one of the first pieces of legislation passed by the government). The first payment was made from 20 March 2008, and pensioners should have received a letter informing them of this. The government is also increasing the telephone allowance by 50 per cent for those connected to the internet, and soon, seniors will be able to use their transport concessions across State boundaries – government has allocated \$50m for this

Question 2: Grow Australia (started 51 years ago) – need to help people with mental health issues. Previous government promised money through COAG – Grow Australia has not received any of this money and is too small an organisation to lobby for funds – what are we going to do to have fresh thinking in relation to mental health?

Response: Prime Minister – Kevin Rudd: personally heard about Grow Australia 25 years ago. The challenge with regard to mental health is huge.

Minister for Health and Ageing – Nicola Roxon: (staff will get details of attendee) a large amount of money has been allocated to mental health through COAG though there was no investigation under the previous government to see if this funding scheme was working). Most recent report released soon re: State government funding which is patchy – meeting with Health Ministers on Friday and extra \$20m into Allied Health Services available soon. A range of health initiatives worth over \$6m are already in place in Lindsay (from previous government). Government supports these but wants to know if there are better ways of doing things. The Government is interested in speaking to community groups to identify gaps in government programs.

Question 3: Is the government going to investigate the Department (FAHCSIA) regarding the loss of a child care centre (at Mt Druitt)?

Response: Prime Minister – Kevin Rudd: not aware of the details behind the question (although the attendee is welcome to make an appointment with a Minister) but early childhood education is important to the government. Some initiatives include that the government has promised a significant investment of funds so that every four (4) year old has fifteen (15) hours per week of quality childcare, fifty (50) weeks per year of access to learning of numeracy and literature, that there will be support for an extra 260 centres across country to assist with the double drop off problem so that childcare centres will be located near schools, and an increase in the childcare tax rebate

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Minister for Social Inclusion – Julia Gillard: with reference to the Mt Druitt childcare centre, there were problems with the management and with financial liquidity. The government is working with the local member for Chifley to canvass alternatives as to what can be rebuilt (attendee to see staff/Minister)

Question 4: Attendee has been on workers compensation for two and a half years, and there is no superannuation for people on workers comp – can the government change the legislation?

Response: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Minister for Social Inclusion – Julia Gillard: the government is working to change Occupational Health and Safety laws to ensure less people are injured in the first place.

Workers Compensation is a State based arrangement – the government will be looking in long term to harmonise the laws but it is a very long term discussion (will bear in mind that those on compensation are losing super)

Question 5: The previous government changed the Welfare to Work legislation so that disability pensions are available to people to who can't work more than fifteen (15) hours per week. The previous amount was thirty (30) hours per week, which means that people who could work up to thirty (30) hours won't for fear that they will lose their pension entitlements. This is a disincentive for people with disabilities to work, and it limits the amount people with disabilities can supplement their pension with income from part time work.

Response: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Minister for Social Inclusion – Julia Gillard: MPs - particularly Brendan O'Connor and Bill Shorten – are working on a disability employment strategy. The government wants to hear ideas for the strategy and get over the artificial barriers that get in people's way (Minister's staff to collect attendee's details)

Question 6: Part A – Western Sydney has a population of 1.8m people, and there is only one university in this area. South Australia has three universities and Western Australia has five

for a similar number of people. Can Western Sydney get an additional university or alternatively additional university places for people from Western Sydney?

Part B – Western Sydney has a high car dependency and there is a lack of public transport initiatives

Response: Prime Minister – Kevin Rudd:

Part A – government policy is for an ‘Education Revolution’. The government is particularly investing in:

- Early childhood education – pre literacy and pre numeracy - \$500m to get that program
- Computers provided for Yr9-12 students and trades training centres established – committing \$1b
- Vocational education training and uni – commitment to training centres,
- increasing the number of undergraduate and postgraduate scholarships

The government’s vision is for the best educated and skilled workforce in the world

The University of Western Sydney is in the sights of the government because of its capacity to bring people to uni who would not normally attend. The education reforms will take a while to roll out– the first steps are in the upcoming budget but there is a long term plan

Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government – Anthony Albanese:

Part B - A few things have been done in line with election commitments, because the government takes infrastructure seriously. Infrastructure Australia has been established, which has a co operative framework with representatives from Local Government, State, Federal Government and the private sector. It is necessary to have engagement with urban transport issues of rail as well as road – and there needs to be strategies to address issues here (W Sydney). Minister has met with the NSW Premier to discuss what the State government has in mind. It is a national tragedy that people spend so long commuting and not with their kids. A long term strategy is needed but this is a starting point. Need to look at all transport options to solve the issue

Prime Minister – Kevin Rudd: this is the first time that a national government has accepted that it has responsibility for infrastructure

Question 7: [Attendee thanked the Prime Minister for making a speech in Mandarin on his recent trip as it reinforced the need for Australians to speak Asian languages].

Question is in relation to child protection and is concerned with the borders that break up the country. The attendee asks that consideration be given to the government taking the lead in child protection so that there is an overarching policy for States to use.

Response: Prime Minister – Kevin Rudd: It is the first responsibility of Government to protect society’s most vulnerable.

Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs – Jenny Macklin: there is a need for national leadership on this issue. The government has made a commitment to develop a national child protection framework – any child should expect the

same level of protection (no matter where they live) in any State. Minister has had a round table discussion with Non government agencies, and a discussion with State colleagues, and a discussion paper will be released shortly. (Someone from FAHCSIA would take questioner's details).

Question 8: Attendee has written to Minister Macklin and the Prime Minister in the past and has made a submission to a Senate enquiry under the previous government – she lives in the Blue Mountains and cares for a 24 year old disabled son. Concerned that if unable to care for her son, community resources were inadequate to take over. She mentioned a facility in Leura with 38 beds that had closed, and was replaced with group homes, so the total number of beds were reduced.

Response: Prime Minister – Kevin Rudd: the attendee has eloquently expressed the deep, often silent challenge/problem in community (tribute to questioner). This is a hard area going to the fundamental decency of our society– it comes up often in the country and needs to be the centre of attention. The government's first responsibility is to the most vulnerable. Agreed with the attendee that carers save the Government "buckets of money"

Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs – Jenny Macklin: the Minister hears this message every week, i.e. that parents are anxious about what will happen to their children if something happens to them (the parents).

This is a challenge to the State/Territory/Commonwealth disability agreement – the governments knows that housing etc has to be a priority and that there has to be additional support for respite. The message from carers is that people want to be recognised for what they do and the contribution they are making to society – the government intends to do that

Question 9: Could politicians drive 'little' cars - hybrid or electric – in order to help save the country? Also, if a person buys a little car, they should get a reduction on their registration or insurance

Response: Minister for Environment, Heritage and the Arts – Peter Garrett: some motor vehicles are more efficient than others – the government has committed to work with the motor industry to develop green cars and to have them manufactured in Australia. The government is looking at a Commonwealth procurement policy to encourage procurement of fuel efficient Commonwealth cars. It is necessary to have access to vehicles that are fuel efficient and the government is providing support, policy and money to do that.

Question 10: What is the government's policy with regard to the National School Chaplaincy Program introduced by the previous government?

Response: Prime Minister – Kevin Rudd: there has been enormous value from chaplaincy program (seen in Queensland schools, where between 200 and 400 schools have chaplains)

Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Minister for Social Inclusion – Julia Gillard: two rounds of funding have been allocated as it is a popular program – the money is allocated over three years and the

government will guarantee that chaplains will enjoy support for that time - \$160m over the budget period

Prime Minister – Kevin Rudd: it is also necessary to look at school counsellors in general as chaplaincy is not for everyone

Question 11: The cost of living and owning a house is very difficult (e.g. had to cancel cricket club membership of son) – what can be done? Temporary tariffs could be introduced as a means to slow down the economy without hurting the bottom end of the economy

Response: Prime Minister – Kevin Rudd: the community is under a lot of financial pressure. The government is introducing practical measures – there are two or three sets of housing policies across time e.g. 50 000 affordable rental housing units to be followed by 50,000 more if the policy works. Previously there was no Minister for Housing, Department of Housing or a housing policy. These programs will be rolled out in the medium term.

Currently,

- Will introduce tax cuts on July 1 (which are for lower to middle income earners)
- Will increase the childcare rebate from 30% to 50% - up to \$7500
- Will introduce a 50% education tax refund for e.g. textbooks, internet connection

The government is committed to tax cuts although many economic commentators disagree with the policy.

Treasurer – Wayne Swan: recognise that eight interest rate rises in the last 3 years, 4 of which have been in the last six months, have put families under pressure. The tax cuts from 1 July are directed at low and middle income earners for the first time – backed up by initiatives in childcare and education

Question 12: *John Harding* - congratulations on the release of the issues paper for aviation. Badgerys Creek airport is not on the agenda according to the issues paper – what process is there to take it off the issues board, and what does the government plan to do with the site?

Response: Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government – Anthony Albanese: the issues paper was released last Thursday, it will lead to a Green paper in September and then a national Aviation Strategy next year. The strategy is partly to deal with the lack of capacity at airports. There is a problem in Sydney and a second airport is needed, but the paper says clearly that Badgerys Creek is not an option.

The paper also notes the challenges of aviation security, and is dealing with issues on a national level. It deals with the needs of aviation over the next twenty years because you cannot have an ad hoc approach re: planning airports

Question 13: Unemployment is at 4.1% - does this figure encompass casual employment? It is hard for those with lower socio economic status to get work that is not casual employment – is there any current or future policy to encourage an increase in permanent positions, and would this have any effect on skills, productivity or inflation?

Response: Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Minister for Social Inclusion – Julia Gillard: economic trends are to casual or part time work. Permanence cannot be mandated, but the government can make sure that workplace relations laws are fair and that there is a fair valuing of casual workers- need a safety net and there is now a fair safety net in place. The workplace relations system needs a fair-valuing of the problems of casual employment from the point of view of the employee – a safety net that ensures conditions and under WorkChoices there was no safety net.

Prime Minister – Kevin Rudd: a number of stories have been heard regarding the impact of ability of people to make ends meet. A significant achievement in first four months of government is that workplace relations laws have been introduced.

COMMUNITY CABINET MACKAY – SUNDAY 29 JUNE 2008

Question 1: Public education in Queensland has been in crisis for years. Since the introduction of benchmarking in 2002, literacy and numeracy standards indicate that the Queensland public education system is getting worse, particularly in comparison to the ACT. In 2008, a Mackay high school was given additional funding as one third of Year 8 students could not achieve benchmarks.

Teacher quality is also a key issue - Julia Gillard has stated there is nothing more important than teachers in the education system. In 2005, I resigned as a teacher, having witnessed fraudulent activity, including fraudulent signing of documents and use of funding.

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: This government has been in government for 6 months. Tackling education has been a priority. Prior to being Prime Minister, I read up on the foundations of literacy and numeracy and the importance of investment in early childhood education (for 3-6 year olds, including play based education).

Australia does not invest enough in early childhood education, running last amongst OECD nations. Literacy and numeracy in early childhood education has been the recipient of half a billion dollars worth of funding, including the establishment of a program of 15 hours a week, for 40 weeks a year, of pre-school education.

On the issue of quality, it is important to evaluate the outcomes of investments. The Government has put in place a structure to develop a national curriculum – the National Curriculum Board has already been established, focusing initially on English, history, maths and science, before moving to foreign languages. A national curriculum will help overcome problems that occur when people transfer between state jurisdictions.

Education remains a key challenge. It takes a long time to turn this area around.

Additional Response: One on one meeting with the head of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (Mr Terry Moran).

Question 2: What has or will be done to fast-track the listing of complementary medicines on the PBS?

Minister Responding: Nicola Roxon – Minister for Health and Ageing

Response: There are two different stages in Australia that medicines go through to be listed on the PBS. Medicines are first approved on the basis of their quality or safety, before they can go on sale in Australia. Secondly, medicines are assessed for cost/effectiveness, and thus a determination is made whether the medicine should be subsidised by the government.

Complementary medicines only undergo the first of these processes – the safety and quality testing, and thus are not listed under the PBS.

There are likely to be some complementary medicines for which clinical evidence of their success is now available. Where clinical evidence exists, the Government is looking over the longer term to engage in the debate as to whether such complementary medicines should be included in the PBS.

The debate as to whether these medicines should be covered by the PBS is occurring, but is not a top priority at the moment.

Question 3: The breakdown of the two airline system in Australia has led to favourable results for consumers. Can we break the monopoly currently held by Coles and Woolworths in the supermarket industry? Can the government encourage foreign investment in this industry though players such as Walmart and Tesco to break this monopoly?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: The ACCC is currently investigating the structure of the supermarket industry in Australia, from the farm gate through to the retail point of sale. This is a long term issue that requires comprehensive examination before any changes can be made. Increasing price pressures on families is an issue that needs to be addressed, and we intend to get to the bottom of it. The ACCC will reach its conclusions shortly.

Question 4: When I asked what the Government's policy on family law was before the election, the response was that there wasn't one. Now the Government is in office, what is your policy on family law?

Minister Responding: Robert McClelland - Attorney General

Response: The government has no plans to change the current law. We are currently undertaking a review which has involved submissions from many organisations including the national Lone Fathers Association.

Going to the Family Court will always leave you with less – less assets, less time with your kids. It is a difficult and emotional area, and these issues always come up at the electoral office level. The review is being conducted through the Family Law Council, and will look

at presumptions regarding parenting (especially the presumption of shared care), and family support. The review is a work in progress.

Additional Response: The questioner already had a meeting with the Attorney-General, but was promised an additional meeting with Joe Ludwig, the Minister for Human Services.

Question 5: Does the ACCC have power to deal with Coles and Woolworths and their ability to sell petrol at lower prices than independent retailers as a result of subsidies from the sale of groceries?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: There is a link between petrol prices and grocery prices. As with the earlier question, the Government is waiting on the report from the ACCC. We will use whatever powers the Commonwealth has to empower consumers. The Assistant Treasurer is not here today unfortunately, however we understand the issues of market power and concentration.

Additional Response: Anthony Byrne will get the Assistant Treasurer on the phone and respond to the query within two days.

Question 6: I am an indigenous person who has lived in Mackay for 60 years. I commend you for your comments on Sorry Day – the apology had a lot of meaning and went a long way towards national reconciliation.

I heard Jenny Macklin speaking on radio who said that if the Northern Territory Emergency Response was successful, it would be rolled out across the country. Is this true?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: There have been successes in the NTER. Notable achievements include: 50 additional police to remote communities many of whom previously had no police officer present; Many more people are now under income management. Consumption patterns have changes in many communities, which has led to some modest improvements in nutrition. Thousands of health checks have been undertaken. A number of medical and surgical procedures are being performed (correcting complaints such as ear infections) We have identified around 2,000 kids are not registered to go to school.

The 12 month review into the NTER is currently underway.

Additional Response: Jenny Macklin – Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Thank you for comments regarding the apology – it has had a big impact on bringing Australians together. I also note that in the audience are some people who came to Canberra for the apology.

The primary purpose of the review is to look at what is working. Short term examples of what is working - putting in extra police has seen a reduction in alcohol fuelled violence; alcohol controls have also seen a reduction in alcohol fuelled violence; income management has seen an increase in food consumption and a reduction in cigarette use; we have seen an increase in kids going to school, and in schools with nutrition programs where kids were previously experienced malnutrition, they are now putting on weight.

The Government will take policy advice depending on the measures which work.

Question 7: The Government has announced a range of measures to help the environment, including signing Kyoto, acting on whaling, supporting hybrid cars through Toyota and on plastic bags. However there are new mines opening in this area. How do big-ticket environmental concerns interact with local mining?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: Tackling climate change is a really hard. We can ignore the issues or we can be responsible and look to the future. The previous (Government's) response was to put your head in the sand. However, we need to look to the future.

We also need to look at what will happen to the economy if the environment is not protected, in addition to the damage caused to the environment itself - its impacts on tourism as it affects the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu and snowfields. Unless acted on, tropical disease may move southwards and spread. We have already seen the damage caused by drought. These are the challenges we face. We ratified Kyoto to get involved in the global dialogue.

There is a tension between carbon based fuels and the future of coal. As the largest coal exporter in the world, we have a responsibility to act on clean coal. We're one of the 4 top countries carrying out R&D in this area. We are acting on the development of clean coal technologies and have established a clean coal fund – we are at the point of working with industry to make a commercial-scale project a reality. We must get this right. We are also working on delivery energy efficient technologies and a carbon trading scheme. These are global issues and we must negotiate globally.

Question 8: Queensland disability services are inadequate – can the Queensland Commonwealth-State Disability Agreement (CSDA) be looked at?

Minister Responding: Jenny Macklin – Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Response: We are currently negotiating a new CSDA and should have agreement by December. However the Government is not just waiting for this Agreement to be finalised before making change. I have met with my State and Territory colleagues and have already allocated \$1.9 billion of extra funding to increase supported accommodation, respite and in-home care. The Commonwealth is contributing extra cash, and is requiring the States put in extra cash. 24,000 items of care and accommodation services will be achieved with this increased funding.

Additional Response: Prime Minister - The different performances of states in disability services makes this a complicated issue.

Question 9: The automotive industry is the third largest user of fossil fuels, the housing industry is the second largest user, and then food production is the largest user. The increasing price of petrol will drive up grocery prices, and climate change is one of the largest issues we face. How important is peak oil in all of this?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: Setting the scene – there is a global oil crisis being driven by supply issues and increases in consumption fuelled from the development of India's and China's economies and population. Over 50% of the global oil demand increase is from these countries. How do we help them to reduce their demand?

We need to develop long term use strategies; greater fuel efficiency in cars, being done through the recent deal with Toyota; greater investment in public transport. Many solutions are needed. Internationally, all governments need to work through these issues. The Treasurer is just back from Europe.

Question 10: Thank you for the Apology – this allowed for healing process for the stolen generation to move forward. I am a Murri Court elder – we are underfunded and under resourced. The Court sees high rates of juvenile suicide. We ran a program to visit inmates, but have lost funding for this program. We had a seven seater bus and it was taken away because of funding cuts. We need a ten seater but only have a four seater. Currently we have no building and need to provide an ongoing community service.

Minister Responding: Jenny Macklin – Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Response: Minister Macklin will meet with you after this forum privately to discuss.

Question 11: I'm from England and have been living in Australia, but I cannot get Australian residency. What is the Government's future immigration policy?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: The Immigration Minister is not with us today. We are currently reshaping our immigration legislation which will unfold over time. You need to discuss your personal situation with Joe (Ludwig), who has good knowledge of these matters.

Additional Response: Arranged for a meeting with Joe Ludwig, the Minister for Human Services.

Question 12: The sugar industry has spent the last 40 years at the cross roads. Something has to change – we have stuck with raw sugar for too long. We need to diversify the

industry, for example, into ethanol and co-generational. We are told that this is 5-10 years away but the industry can't wait 5-10 years. I am also upset at seeing 50-60 year old women cutting cane. They should not be doing so, but are being used as free labour to save money on labour. Sugar is currently selling at \$28/tonne but I can tell you that the cost of producing it is \$26-28/tonne.

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: I know what it is like to grow up in a sugar town. I remember when Morton Mill closed down. I don't support doomsayers. Sugar can survive. We need to be positive about the future of industry, and we need to be able to adjust to issues such as diversification of land use and global markets.

Additional Response: Tony Burke – Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

I think we are talking later today. I recently visited and heard from members of the Mackay Cane Growing Community. Development and diversity of the sector is important. Numerous pressures currently exist – we need the expansion of bio fuels, and ensure our mills have a critical mass. The pressures are real. We need to see if there is an opportunity and what can be done. There is a loss of land to other purposes.

The ethanol debate has become simplified. Ethanol debate is not just the issue of fuel Vs secondary generation (food). The government is committed to research and is looking at the use of celluloids for bio fuels. Be wary of narrowing timeline arguments regarding the economic viability of these fuels, especially given the increasing price of oil. \$15m has been invested into the use of cellulose for fuel. The best way to move forward is through R&D. We need the R&D to catch up. I am working with Martin Ferguson to enable this to occur.

Question 13: I was in Canberra for the election. In the budget, I was disappointed that there was not anything for pensioners – particularly single women pensioners. I know two elderly women who recently had to leave Mackay as they could no longer afford to live here because of higher rents.

Minister Responding: Jenny Macklin – Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Response: There have also been affordable housing measures contained in the budget. There has been the delivery of \$500 bonuses to pensioners (higher for carers). Significant increases in the utilities allowance from \$107.20 a year to \$500 a year (first payment due this week). This is an ongoing increase.

The Treasury review looking at taxation will include a review of the base rate and adequacy of the pension. We understand that it is very hard to live on the pension, in particular the single base rate of pension.

Additional measures to assist pensioners include the Commonwealth dental program and work being done with Tanya Plibersek on affordable housing such as the building of 50,000 new affordable housing units in conjunction with the private sector.

Additional Response: Wayne Swan - Treasurer

We are aware of the problems for single aged pensioners. We can't undo all the previous faults in the system in just one budget. We are looking into it. We believe in doing the right thing and will deal with the pension adequacy through the Henry Review. We believe in a sustainable future and will look after lower income earners.

Question 14: Leading up the last election, the Government was asked – if elected, would you reduce the cost of fuel? The answer was 'No'. The Government was asked if it would reduce the cost of grocery prices, the answer was 'No'. During question time, you have repeatedly avoided answering the question of what your position is on lowering petrol prices. Since the election, the media keeps referring to a 'promise' that you would keep these prices down. Is it possible to rectify the lies spread by the media that this promise was made?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: Prior to election we stated that we wanted to do whatever was possible to increase consumer power re petrol/grocery purchases. We even got attacked by the then Treasurer that we wouldn't promise to keep prices down. That's life. All we promised was to do what is possible – to improve consumer power by enhancing knowledge.

Question 15: Six months ago, my daughter (Claudia) was upset because she couldn't vote. She has drawn and coloured a picture of a whale and would like to give it to you.

Minister Responding: Prime Minister.

Response: That's lovely, thank-you – you are very good at colouring in. Peter Garrett is in Chile for a whaling meeting trying to work internationally for a diplomatic solution. I spoke with the Prime Minister of Japan while I was there about this issue. This is tough but we are giving diplomacy a go to try to get the outcome desired.

Question 16: Given the high rate of mortgage foreclosures and the impact of the global financial crisis, does the Government have a plan to offset the collapse of banks, and what will they do about protecting and relocating people who lose their homes?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: Housing affordability is a big challenge – there have been 12 interest rate rises in a row – 10 before we took office. This has a huge impact on families. The Government aims to take as much pressure as possible off inflation and has done this through the budget surplus. This is acting responsibly to address housing affordability.

The previous Government had no housing minister, department or policy. In recognition of the importance of housing, the Government has a Minister for Housing and given it a place within a department.

The Government has announced \$1.5 billion worth of programs to help home buyers, including the first home buyers savings accounts. Tanya Plibersek is also working with local councils to help reduce the passing-on of red tape costs to new home buyers. There is also a new program aiming at increasing affordable rental accommodation through the construction of quality accommodation places to be leased at 20% below the market rate.

Additional Response: Arranged a meeting with Wayne Swan to discuss the banks issue.

COMMUNITY CABINET YIRKALA – WEDNESDAY 23 JULY 2008

Question 1: The National Apology talked about the stolen generation, which didn't happen here. Would you like to redo that apology now?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: The key to a meaningful Apology is 'closing the gap'. The national apology was a great symbol. 'Closing the Gap' is the practical on-the-ground work that now needs to occur.

Question 2: There is a need for a compromise (in strengthening the economic development potential of indigenous community homelands). The Northern Territory Government has failed to support (this) – to keep our historical asset (culture and communities on the homelands). Can the Commonwealth do so?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: I don't know your circumstances. But there are 400+ homeland communities. 'Closing the Gap' for each of these means setting national objectives then bringing out the strengths of each community through partnerships – different programs for different communities – which require mutual respect and mutual responsibility between communities, government and the private sector. I want to hear what practical things you propose.

Question 3: What practically (on indigenous homelands) is the Government going to do to 'close the gap'?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: Closing the Gap is about giving (indigenous) communities the same possibilities as other Australians, such as life expectancy. We want something that fits individual communities everywhere, not one size fits all. There is a lot of work to be done, but this (can be) worked out together – governments and communities and (where possible) corporations as well. We need to be flexible about how we get there, but the goals are the same – 'closing the gap'.

Additional Response: Jenny Macklin – Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs: Thank you for that question. We are acutely aware of the

issues, such as education. I have visited the homelands and am also aware of your concerns about the closing of CDEP. We are aware of our responsibility to work closely with you.

Question 4: Income management - Yirrkala has just been 'switched on'. There is (a high chance that) if people will miss one day without a certificate, (then they lose payments for 8 weeks). (What can the Government do about this unfair process)?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: The Northern Territory Intervention is under a formal review. These matters should be raised (in that review). There needs to be mutual respect and responsibility (in all aspects of the program).

Additional Response: Jenny Macklin – Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

We are aware of the issue – (however it) isn't income management. Brendan O'Connor [Minister for Employment Participation] is working on the issue (at the moment).

Question 5: Education is the key for the future of our homeland communities. Can we advertise for the teachers or are we just a holiday school system?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: We have specific targets for halving the (literacy and numeracy) gap, funding extra teachers in the Northern Territory and providing three secondary level boarding schools. We understand that access to teachers in remote outstations and homelands is critical and we are trying in different ways (to support this): bridging support from income management; remote area rules have been lifted and the same rules will apply as to all Australians for those who don't attend Centrelink; and Brendan O'Connor is working (on the issue).

Additional Response: Jenny Macklin – Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Thank you for that question - we are aware of the issue.

Question 6: We need the support of all the mala leaders (on the) hard issue of alcohol and drugs. We need the support of your Cabinet to help this work. More health workers and more funding for health services. This is the way to close the gap. We need Yolngu (needs) to be driven by Yolngu (and to) build bridges between two worlds – work with us!

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: (with extensive issues such as these) I favour a local community development model for the future (which addresses these issues) from the ground up – education, health and housing.

Question 7: PM, you speak Mandarin. How are you and your Government (at speaking the) Yolngu language? How committed are you to (bilingual services)?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: English is important. The problems (are where) primary school kids don't end up with effective English. Primary schools need to deliver effective levels of English.

Additional Response: Jenny Macklin – Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

We understand how critical language is to preservation of culture and success in one's livelihood. The evidence is that kids who are fluent in their own language are likely to learn English fluently. We want to work with you.

Question 8: I want to thank you for your support for the institution of marriage and encourage Government input by Christian organisations to uphold family values.

Minister Responding: Nil

Question 9: Learning Partnerships – how can we make this a pathway to a better life (for our homeland communities)?

Minister Responding: Jenny Macklin – Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Response: I remember well my visit to your homeland schools. We are providing 200 extra teachers to come to the Northern Territory. We are also working on 3 boarding facilities for homeland secondary education – East Arnhem is on the short list for one of these.

Question 10: How are we going to encourage more teachers into the area when they can't find anywhere to live?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: We hear this message. We can't turn it around in 7 months. We will work with partnerships (between the community, government and private enterprise). We have committed funds not just to teacher numbers but housing. (Towards an) integrated development model – micro finance, health, education housing.

Additional Response: Jenny Macklin – Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

We know we need to provide staff housing. Also, there are the terrible levels of overcrowding in residential areas. We know people need healthy places to live in and the

importance of ensuring (families and children) get a good night's sleep. We are committing \$700 million to provide 750 new houses and upgrade 2,5000 dwellings. We want local involvement in construction.

COMMUNITY CABINET HALLET COVE – 14 AUGUST 2008

Question 1: Given changes to the law, will there be system changes between relevant Commonwealth agencies to identify people who should be paying child support but do not lodge a tax return as the basis for assessing the required support payments?

Minister Responding: Jenny Macklin, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Response: We are trying to introduce a fairer system and we want both parents involved in the child's ongoing care. The final stage of this major change has just happened which includes more money for the Child Support Agency (CSA) to ensure that each parent does the right thing.

The Minister directed her staff to take the questioner's details for individual follow up.

Question 2: *Workchoices* - I am a bus driver. Since the industry was privatised I have experienced a fall in my pay conditions. How will the new workplace relations laws help me? *Disability Support* – My wife's disability support dates don't match the pay cycle. I have tried to get this changed but I am getting nowhere.

Minister Responding: Julia Gillard, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations; Minister for Education; Minister for Social Inclusion

Response: The Government has abolished Australian Workplace Agreements as they stripped away the safety net. We have modernised the awards system with 10 national employment standards. We are also committed to a fair bargaining system – if the majority of employees want to bargain, bargaining must commence.

Additional Response: Jenny Macklin, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

(In relation to the Disability Support) This is a complicated issue. The head of my department is here and we will try to get you a definitive answer.

Question 3: Can we get the state governments to open the locks and keep them open to let the flood waters from Southern Queensland/Northern New South Wales flow down the system to flush the lower lakes? The salt content is getting higher.

Minister Responding: Penny Wong, Minister for Climate Change and Water

Response: We are facing a historical situation of over-allocation plus historic low levels of inflow. The two years to November 2007 had the lowest inflow on record and we understand how hard things are in lower lakes. There is no easy answer to a problem which has been 100 years in the making. There has been more water allocated in the past than can be sustainably used. We can't solve the problem overnight. We recognise that rivers run across state borders and have created a single Murray Darling Basin Commission with agreement by the states to a single water plan and allocation cap. In the short term, we need to do more with less by: investing in irrigation infrastructure to prepare for a future of low rainfall; and increasing water purchasing, which no federal government has done in the past.

Question 4: Aboriginal people in this country are struggling to translate old into new. Our places for rituals are decimated and the inability to practise our religious ceremonies hurts us. We would like to recover the last of what's left over – the dreaming of our religious sites – and renew our religious practices.

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: The Government is committed to freedom of religious expression. That principle should apply to indigenous communities as well. This is difficult because of the pattern of settlement in the past two centuries, but it is important that sites are preserved.

Additional Response: Jenny Macklin, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

I have just been in the AYP homelands of South Australia and was very affected by seeing two cultures coming together. People are trying to protect significant cultural sites. The Government has a deep respect for one of the oldest living cultures in the world. The vast majority of Australians want to come with you on this very special journey.

Question 5: I work with members of the stolen generation. I came here to say thank you.

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: To the Indigenous community and the stolen generation, thanks for your patience.

Question 6: Desalination plants are energy intensive. Are there any plans to build more power plants? Or go nuclear?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: We are committed to a desalination plant in South Australia and to increasing green and efficient energy use. Our energy policy, including the Carbon Emission Reduction Scheme, aims to lower the amount of carbon produced by the economy and we will act on a range of energy efficiency measures. The cost of inaction in this area is greater than the cost of action. We are acting now on the basis of inaction over the last decade.

Question 7: \$500 once-off pensioner bonuses – I have sent letters to Jenny Macklin and the local member on 22 July and have not received a response. As an ex-serviceman and pensioner, I have been discriminated against and have not received the bonus due to my birthday falling on the wrong day and I have missed out. I am feeling really ignored and let down.

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: We have commissioned the Henry review, which will report on retirement income in February 2009, to look at the benefits issues comprehensively. This is an issue that hasn't been looked at for a very long time.

Additional Response: Jenny Macklin, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

I am sorry I haven't written back to you yet but I will. Cut off dates are always a difficult issue as some people miss out. As the Prime Minister indicated, this whole area of the adequacy of the pension needs to be looked at and whether it is best to increase benefits by once-off payments or regular payments. We would welcome your views.

Question 8 : If the report [of the Henry review referred to in the previous answer] isn't due until February, we won't see a change in the pension until July 2009. This is a long time to wait when the cost of living is increasing. Couldn't a change to the pension be made now?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: The total outlays involved in any change in the pension means that a very serious analysis is needed. We have done something immediate with an increase in the utilities allowance, which is a permanent increase. The Government is receiving the message clearly about the enormous cost of living pressures on pensioners. It's a major Government priority to address this.

Question 9: Doesn't government funding for private schools take money away from public schools?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: We intend to get the best results for everyone. We are investing in all schools through the computer fund which provides students access to the digital economy. 258 computers have already been provided for Hallett Cove School and there has been an allocation for Morphett Vale Catholic School.

Additional Response: Julia Gillard, Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations; Minister for Education; Minister for Social Inclusion

We want to invest in all schools through the \$1.2 billion fund [over 5 years] for the Digital Education Revolution and \$2.5 billion [over 10 years] for the Trades Training Centres in Secondary Schools. We also are providing funds for schools near each other to share support services. \$258,000 has been provided for this school [Hallett Cove School] for computers in Round 1 and funds are being provided for disadvantage needs and teacher quality across the board.

Question10: Further to the issue of sustainability of our use of the Murray River, I am concerned about the issue of peak oil and that our energy infrastructure is inadequate to address the looming crisis. What is the Government's plan to tackle energy supply constraints?

Minister Responding: Martin Ferguson, Minister for Resources and Energy; Minister for Tourism.

Response: This is the biggest question in the world. We are active in an integrated energy market in the context of climate change. We are committed to increasing the use of renewable energy sources – and South Australia is leading the way in geothermal. We are releasing guidelines [on the Geothermal Drilling Program] in the next few weeks. In the long-term there is the National Energy Security Assessment to look at alternative fuels as Australia is gas and coal rich but oil poor. We are looking at this in the context of the white paper on our Energy Future for the next 10 to 20 years. This is a priority for the Government.

Question 11: When I drive home in the car and see businesses that have lights on and nobody is there, I wonder, why can't more buildings turn off their lights at night?

Minister Responding: Prime Minister

Response: Energy efficiency is one of our big challenges. It's impacted by what we do at home, at work and in our biggest industrial enterprises. We need to use our electricity effectively by boosting renewables and decreasing demand.

Additional Response: Peter Garrett, Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts

This goes to the heart of how we address climate change as individuals. These are big challenges and what happens in homes and businesses is critical. We need to accelerate the phase-out of inefficient lighting and expand energy efficiency ratings on appliances to give consumers more information. Measures to help houses and schools to reduce energy use are being introduced, including the Solar Schools Plan and low interest loans to do the same thing in homes.

COMMUNITY CABINET HALLET COVE – 29 SEPTEMBER 2008

Question 1: This question relates to the proposed changes to the Medicare Levy Surcharge thresholds. I agree with the Opposition that this policy will force people to drop their private health insurance and put greater strain on the public health system. In addition I believe that

people who choose to remain with private insurers will experience higher premiums. There are other avenues for delivering tax cuts if this was the Government's intention. What is the real reason for these changes?

Minister Responding: Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister

Response: When the Medicare Levy was brought in 1997, \$50,000 was considered a high income. This threshold has not changed in 12 years. We are working to introduce a fairer system as we are not of the view that a person on \$50,000 can adequately support a family.

Additional Response: Nicola Roxon, Minister for Health

About 330,000 people will benefit from the proposed changes to the Medicare levy. Initially we wanted to help 460,000 people, but the Senate has restricted it to 330,000. These people will receive between \$1,200 - \$1,500 back, which will make a difference. These are not new people putting pressure on the system, they are people who are paying the tax but do not have private health insurance. People also should have the choice to use their money as they like. We are committed to a fairer system and to providing rebates to people who chose to have private health insurance.

Question 2: How can we move from an adversarial system of Government to a system where Parliament can be seen to work together?

Minister Responding: Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister

Response: The impression I get from the Australian public is that they have had a gutful of negative politics. There are so many huge problems that society faces we should just get on and do something about it, rather than tearing each other down. Our Government is trying very hard to do this, but it's not easy - many things are out of our control, for example the global economic situation. Another thing I've noticed is that people are sick tired of one level of government blaming the other, like a very bad Gilbert and Sullivan play. The mood of the country seems to me to be "just get on and fix it". Despite our long history of an adversarial system of government there is goodwill on all sides of politics, you just have to be able to find it. Australia expects a new way of governance from us, and we have and will continue to get on with the practical business of doing it.

Question 3: I believe our standards of education are far behind some other countries standards. I would like to help. I have a child in Year 2. What is the Government doing to ensure my child has prospects?

Minister Responding: Julia Gillard, Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; Minister for Social Inclusion

Response: We do have tests that compare education in Australia with other countries, and we have been doing pretty well, but recently we have slipping a bit. We aren't doing enough for the most able students and we have a long tail of disadvantage. Other nations have education systems that can offer those students more. We are hoping to change these circumstances in Australia through a new era of transparency, a quality national curriculum,

new investments in the most disadvantaged schools, and improving the quality of teaching. We want to make sure that every child in Australia gets a great quality education regardless of whether that's here in Newcastle, remote areas or capital cities, or if they attend a state school or an independent school. We are always happy to look at ideas from people who want to help.

The Minister directed her staff to take the questioner's details for individual follow up.

Question 4: I disagree with your clean coal comments, coal exports are still rapidly expanding and it's our biggest contribution to climate change. Should we not impose a moratorium on coal mining and burning until we've worked out how to do it without emissions?

Minister Responding: Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister

Response: We have to move forward on climate change on multiple fronts. One front is the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, second through promoting growth in renewable energies, third is encouraging energy efficiency in households and industry, and fourth is making existing processes like coal cleaner through carbon capture and storage technologies. Australia, although high per capita, only emits about 1.5% of the world's greenhouse gases. India and China by 2050 are expected to account for about 40% of the world's emissions alone. We can actively promote carbon capture and storage technologies and share this with other nations. This is why we launched the Global Capture and Storage Institute.

Additional Response: Penny Wong, Minister for Climate Change and Water

I'll begin in the national context – coal still accounts for the majority of our base load power. If we are genuinely going to reduce emissions overtime we have to look at how to minimise carbon pollution from coal. We don't have the capacity at the moment to switch from coal fired power to other sources even if we wanted to. I say that to give you an idea of the challenges we face in this area. In the global context, anything that Australia does, for the foreseeable future, will not matter. Many developing and developed countries will still burn coal to fulfil their energy needs. So regardless if Australia decided to go down a different path, it will not matter due to the atmospheric nature of the problem. The world needs a global solution on coal if we going to tackle climate change. On your question of a moratorium – I think that relates to transition – how are you going to get from a high carbon based economy to a low carbon based economy? Our approach has been to implement the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme, where for the first time there will be a price on carbon emissions. We are doing that because we recognise the environmental cost of pollution in economic transactions. We have also committed to a 20% renewable energy target by 2020 and established the \$500 million Renewable Energy Fund.

Question 5: The United Nations (UN) has been labelled as inefficient in recent years. The Security Council was constrained by Russia's veto power to act in the recent conflict in Georgia and Slobodan Milosevic has been on trial without conviction for too long. What are your thoughts on the UN?

Minister Responding: Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister

Response: Australia's foreign policy is based on three pillars: one, maintaining the USA alliance; two, our active membership of the UN; and three, comprehensive engagement with the Asia-Pacific region. A lot of people criticise the UN, and sometimes that is valid. But what is the alternative? Churchill said that democracy is the worst form of government in the world, except for all the others. Similarly, the UN is the worst form of international governance in the world, except for all the others. The UN is very good at delivering urgent humanitarian assistance on the ground. I look at the work of UNICEF, the World Food Program and the Food and Agricultural Organisation delivering practical assistance in some of the worst places of the world on behalf of the international community. Is it perfect? No, but it is a thousand times better than the alternative. Part of our engagement with the UN in the next few years will be to reform the Security Council – expanding its membership, and adjusting the rules of how it operates. I am focussed on getting on with reforming the UN to make it a continuing force of positive good in the world.

Question 6: What is the Government doing to promote and invest in tourism for our natural assets, such as wetlands?

Minister Responding: Martin Ferguson, Minister for Resources and Energy, Minister for Tourism

Response: I am pleased to say that I met with the new NSW Minister for Tourism here in Newcastle today about working cooperatively with states to increase tourism funding and revenues. We particularly focussed on accrediting tourism products to ensure quality in the industry, attracting high-yield international tourism, and how to best utilise our outstanding landscapes in National Parks and other areas, a process that Mr Garrett has also been involved in. Next Monday I will be launching the Northern Rivers landscapes initiative with the members for Paige and Patterson. There is a great sense of co-operation and understanding between the NSW Government and the Federal Government to promote that kind of tourism.

Question 7: Despite having a national healing program, Mayumarri's pleas for funding have fallen on deaf ears in Canberra, principally because the two appropriate portfolios, now under Ministers Macklin and Roxon, have been hand-balling our applications from one department to the other. What is the correct process to get Mayumarri's voice heard in Canberra?

Minister Responding: Nicola Roxon, Minister for Health and Ageing

Response: Thank you for coming and raising these issues with us, it's very brave. You are right that these issues overlap both my health department and with Jenny Macklin's family and community services divisions, as well Tanya Plibersek as the Minister for Women. We are aware that there is a lot more we can do, particularly in the area of mental health support for victims of child abuse. We have committed \$69 million to target youth mental health, the age group of 12 to 25. Maitland has one of our new mental health 'Headspace' centres which is due to open in a couple of weeks time. It is a local hub for young people where they can get all the support they require in one integrated spot. Jenny Macklin has also been doing a lot of work to put the Child Protection Framework in place. At the moment we do not have

the appropriate support mechanisms in place, but we have been prepared to take national leadership on this issue.

The Minister directed her staff to take the questioner's details for individual follow up.

Question 8: As a mum I am concerned that 10 million children die before their fifth birthday every year. Is Australia committed to contributing 70 cents for every \$100 to the Millennium Development Goals by 2015?

Minister Responding: Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister

Response: Going back to question before about Parliament working together, I'm pleased to say that both sides of politics are committed to 50 cents per \$100 by 2015. That's a standard that many countries have not reached yet. Our main focus is to provide funding to help our immediate neighbours in the Asia-Pacific, in particular investing in education and health opportunities in the Southwest Pacific. If we fail to help our Pacific neighbours, who are doing quite badly against development indicators, then that is a real problem for Australia long term as those countries become unstable and a source of refugees. Both sides of politics, as I understand it, have committed to a long term goal of 70 cents, but for now we have a concrete timeline for 50 cents.

Question9: Public school funding declined from 43% to 35% under the Howard Government. A report by Dr Jim McMorrow predicts that funding will fall to 33.8% under your Government. What is the Government doing to address this inequity for public schools?

Minister Responding: Julia Gillard, Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; Minister for Social Inclusion

Response: I've had a good look at Jim McMorrow's report and unfortunately it's not analysing the right funding and the most up to date funding. This Government has committed \$42 billion into schools over the next four years under the Base Schools Agreement. These are not the figures McMorrow analysed. Beyond this we are working on national partnerships with the states on areas of disadvantage, teacher quality, literacy and numeracy results, computers in schools and trades in schools. This is good news for all schools but particularly state schools.

Additional Response: Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister

I would like to add that most of the Cabinet attended state high schools including Wayne Swan, Julia Gillard and myself. The Government is committed to making all schools good.

Question10: I am concerned that the trend towards carbon capture and sequestration is unfounded and unproven [on a large scale]. Newcastle has two big coal fired power stations that provide electricity for everybody. How viable is carbon capture and storage and how can it be adapted to these two massive plants?

Minister Responding: Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister

Response: We have launched the Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute to face this challenge. There are literally dozens of small scale demonstration projects across the world. There is one at-scale project currently planned for construction in the United States that I'm aware of, and in July the biggest economies in the world agreed to build 20 at-scale projects by 2020. Why we have brought about this vision of ours, the Global Capture and Storage Institute, is to demonstrate that this technology can work, to fill the gap between small and large scale projects, and work out the cost differences and bring that cost down over time, building on our commitments to climate change as outlined by Penny Wong previously tonight. We are having a go, we have smart people - I met some of them today at the CSIRO Energy Centre here in Newcastle.

Question 11: Following on from the previous question, what about looking at solar energy? In particular solar-coal combined and solar-thermal energy? Will you take my letter?

Minister Responding: Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister

Response: Yes, I will take the letter and respond to it. As to the first part of the question, we had a longish discussion today out at the Energy Centre about doing solar thermal, not just solar photovoltaic, at scale around the world. Currently Nevada in the United States and Spain are looking at large scale projects producing up to 50 megawatts. We are alert to this technology. Our job is to move forward on multiple fronts at the same time – evidenced by our initiatives on carbon capture and storage, renewable energy, energy efficiency and the overall Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme.

The Prime Minister directed his staff to take the questioner's details and letter for individual follow up.

Question 12: I am concerned that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds are being disadvantaged at university by not being able to afford technology and resources required for study. Have you ever considered implementing a university technology rebate scheme or other financial measures to assist students in this area?

Minister Responding: Julia Gillard, Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; Minister for Social Inclusion

Response: Students face a lot of financial pressures related to study and the cost of living. We have done some things such as doubling the Australian Scholarship Program and we acknowledge that there is more to do to help students with course costs and living arrangements. Australian Universities are doing well compared to the rest of the world, but I think that has been despite Government, not because of Government. We have acted to take a little bit of the pressure off universities with a half billion dollar investment earlier in the year, and instigated the phasing out full fee paying places for Australian students at universities as we believe that Australian kids should get into university on the basis of merit not their ability to pay. There is currently a Higher Education review underway led by Denise Bradley and we are going to chart a vision of Higher Education for the next 10 years and beyond, which should be presented to Parliament by the end of the year.

Question 13: How is the National Curriculum going to work? Does this involve nationalising the education system?

Minister Responding: Julia Gillard, Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; Minister for Social Inclusion

Response: No, it is a standardisation of the curriculum, not nationalisation of the education system. It has involved establishing a board led by [Professor] Barry McGaw and representatives from all states and the catholic and independent school systems. They are tasked with delivering a national quality curriculum on core subjects first. It is important for the 80,000 kids who move interstate each year. This plan is designed to help those students keep on track with their studies while they are busy dealing with the other aspects of moving school.

Additional Response: Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister

I would like to add that as a father of a 14 year old son who recently moved from Queensland to the ACT, adjusting to changes caused by a move is enough in itself let alone having to re-do or miss things taught at school.

Question14: More children die from injury than all illnesses put together, therefore there is a real need for public education about preventable injuries.

Minister Responding: Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister

Response: Child safety is very important. I have a distinct memory of my daughter when she was about two years old going for an electricity socket with a fork.

Additional Response: Nicola Roxon, Minister for Health and Ageing

I am happy to look at your proposal. We are interested in maintaining the effort built up by organisations such as Kidsafe and are open to conversation with state and local governments to progress this cause. We have a strong focus on prevention but more on preventable diseases such as childhood obesity, diabetes, by lifestyle changes. Preventable injuries are still very important particularly with kids and the elderly, and they place a huge strain on the health system. So we are interested in maintaining effort, and traditionally the states have played a large role in that. For example, my three year old the other day went to a traffic training course organised by the local council. In addition, we have announced specific initiatives focused on indigenous children who still face high degrees of disadvantage in areas like infant mortality and morality under 5 years.

The Minister directed her staff to take the questioner's details for individual follow up.

Question15: What is our exit strategy from the war in Afghanistan?

Minister Responding: Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister

Response: We are in Afghanistan because following the September 11, 2001 attacks, we the world, decided through the UN Security Council to go to into Afghanistan and get rid of the regime that allowed al Qaeda to commit this atrocity, and then to stabilise the country. As a member of the UN, Australia has contributed its share. The troops are doing a fantastic job and it is still dangerous, as I have experienced myself many times now. I don't want Australian troops there a day longer than is necessary, we are making progress but there is currently more work to be done. I put to the community of nations in Afghanistan last year that we need to submit to a performance review against the mission statement, which comes up in March 2009. We are committed for the long haul in Afghanistan because of our commitments to the UN, but these commitments will be reviewed annually.

Question 16: It has been an interesting week with the United States debating whether to spend \$700 Billion to bail out some dodgy banks. Will our close economic relationship with China "save our bacon" in the developing global financial crisis brought on by the US economic slowdown?

Minister Responding: Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister

Response: Unfortunately there are a number of factors contributing to this situation regarding lending and borrowing. Basically there was not adequate supervision and a whole lot of greed at work. Part of the solution is how to reform the financial sector to regulate its activities in the future. It's about making sure that proper corporate governance is adopted. Australia is well regulated and well positioned to weather the predicted global downturn, but we want to be a part of the global solution to this global problem. My recent visit to New York highlighted the need for effective long term, universal and transparent regulations for financial institutions. Yes, Australia shares economic ties with China, but the Chinese will invest in many different countries and Chinese foreign investment in Australia follows the same rules as anyone else.

Question 17: Can you guarantee that Australia's emissions targets to avoid dangerous climate change will be based on science?

Minister Responding: Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister

Response: Yes – science has said that in the absence of policy changes climate change will hurt us both economically and environmentally. The cornerstone to addressing climate change is setting a reduction target and we have committed to a 60% emissions reduction by 2050 and will implement the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme by 2010. The next step will be working out the pace at which we get there, taking into account our economic responsibilities and what is environmentally sustainable. We are still crunching the numbers on that.

Question 18: I'd like to raise "Broadband over the Powerline". I have written to you before and did not appreciate your response.

Minister Responding: Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister

Response: I apologise for the inadequacy of the letter in response to your query. The Government is committed to rolling out a high speed broadband system across the country. There is debate about the best way to achieve that, but our intention is that every school and household has access to high speed internet in order to participate in the economy of tomorrow.

The Prime Minister directed a representative from the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy to take the questioner's details for individual follow up.