

THE QUEENSLAND *on*LINE

WITH SENATOR SUE BOYCE



August 10, 2009

IN CANBERRA

By the time you read this the most important debate of this Parliament - on the design of an Emissions Trading Scheme for Australia - will be underway in the Senate.

As industry after industry - SMEs (small and medium businesses), the road freight industry and the recycling industry are just the latest - identifies costs that will be major AND uncompensated, the frightening lack of business experience in the Rudd Labor Government becomes more apparent. (see the [Queensland Resource Council's assessment](#) below)

Whilst the Rudd-Wong scheme compensates very large Emission-Intensive Trade-Exposed industries, there is an underlying assumption that business will simply pass the costs down the chain.

There is no recognition that many Australian manufacturers are not competing just with other local firms but with imports as well. They have very little capacity to increase prices so their only alternative is to decrease costs and one of the easiest ways to do this is to shut down manufacturing in Australia and import instead.

Of course, the outcome of this in the medium term will be higher emissions from offshore manufacture and freight, higher Australian unemployment, and an increase in net debt as imports increase and exports decrease.

Opposition Leader, Malcolm Turnbull, has just released economic modelling on an [alternative ETS scheme](#) which would see an unconditional 10 per cent reduction in CO2 emissions (compared to 5 per cent in the Government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme) and far lower cost increases in electricity.

This report has already been criticised for enabling big polluters to buy more carbon offset licences offshore - 70 per cent compared to the Government's 30 per cent. Apparently buying licences offshore is worse than simply sending the pollution (and the jobs) offshore.

The modelling, which the Government refused to ask Treasury to do, was commissioned by the Coalition and Independent senator Nick Xenophon and undertaken by Frontier Economics.

It should be a major embarrassment to Prime Minister Rudd and Climate Change Minister Penny Wong who have refused to negotiate with the Coalition.

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Once again, the Government seems keener to play politics than to get the best outcome for Australia.

The Coalition in the Senate will be voting against the Government's CPRS Bill unless it is amended. We have no objection to the Renewable Energy Targets Bill but, unless the Government agrees to separate the RET Bill, we will be forced to oppose this as well.

I continue to hold the view - as do 65 per cent or so of Australians - that global warming is real and can be ameliorated by human action now.

If Australia adopts the Coalition's plan, and I'm wrong, we will have significantly cleaned up the atmosphere, created new jobs, and pushed new technologies along at a minimal cost for no good reason.

But if those who want to do nothing because they're not sure if Climate Change exists are wrong, the entire world will suffer.

ON UTEGATE

The Coalition has indeed had finer hours than last week's analysis on Utegate but I'm mystified by media suggestions that only Opposition Leader Malcolm Turnbull and Senator Eric Abetz should have known that senior Treasury official Godwin Grech was "not well".

How come the people who put Mr Grech in charge of the new \$2 billion Government Ozcar program - Mr Rudd, Treasurer Swan, Minister Kim Carr, Treasury head Ken Henry - didn't notice that something was amiss with Mr Grech?

If it wasn't obvious to his employers who had daily contact at some stages with him, why should it have been obvious to Coalition MPs who spoke with him for a few hours?

For the record, Malcolm Turnbull continues to have my full support as Coalition leader.

PETER COSTELLO

In the last session of Parliament, Peter Costello announced that he would retire at the next election. He has spent more than half of his 19 year term in Parliament as Treasurer, a record unlikely to be equalled.

Amongst his achievements was the repayment of Labor's \$92 billion dollar debt and much of the regulatory underpinning that has ensured Australia escaped the worst excesses of the worldwide financial crisis.

Mr Costello has consistently urged the Liberals not to let Kevin Rudd & co rewrite the economic history of 1996 to 2007. The Coalition paid out Labor's debt and kept the country's economy strong despite the traumatic effects of September 11, 2001; the Asian financial meltdown; the SARS epidemic; and the Iraq, Afghanistan and East Timor conflicts.

I wish Peter Costello all the best in his future life.

THE ULTRA-PRINCIPLED 54

I received many emails decrying the irresponsibility of Kevin Rudd's \$900 bonus. Many said they didn't want the money even though they were entitled it because of the debt it would create. Some even said they'd said it straight back.

So I was interested to see how many made good on this. And I've recently received the reply from a question on notice during Senate Estimates.

54! That's the number of ultra-principled Australians who returned their payments to Centrelink.

SENATE COMMITTEES

The [Senate](#) is currently inquiring into the following

[Health Legislation Amendment \(Midwives and Nurse Practitioners\) Bill 2009 and two related Bills - inquiry and report by August 17, 2009.](#)

I'm not sure if this Inquiry has set a new record but we have had almost 2,000 submissions opposing aspects of this Bill which would make it technically illegal for midwives to attend homebirths. Opposition has come not just from families who have had homebirths but from many women's organisations who believe mothers should have the choice. ([see below](#)) The bills would also amend the Health Insurance Act 1973 and National Health Act 1953 to: enable nurse practitioners and appropriately qualified and experienced midwives to request some diagnostic imaging and pathology services for which Medicare benefits may be paid; and allow these health professionals to prescribe certain medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

[Fairer Private Health Insurance Incentives Bill and related Bills - inquiry and report by August 5, 2009.](#)

Despite Government denials, the overwhelming evidence to our Inquiry into these Bills suggest they will substantially decrease the numbers of people holding private health insurance and drive up premiums. The Coalition has lodged a report dissenting from the findings of the Government senators. These three bills cover three private health insurance tiers, the bill amends the Income Tax Assessment Act 1936, Income Tax Assessment Act 1997, Private Health Insurance Act 2007, Taxation Administration Act 1953 and Taxation (Interest on Overpayments and Early Payments) Act 1983 to reduce the amount of private health insurance rebate eligible taxpayers with complying private health insurance are entitled to when their income for surcharge purposes is above the relevant Medicare levy surcharge threshold.

OTHER COMMITTEES:

[Select Committee on Fuel and Energy - inquire and report by October 21, 2009](#)

The Senate Select Committee on Fuel and Energy is considering Australia's fuel and energy security challenge.

[Bank Funding Guarantees - inquire and report by September 15, 2009](#)

The committee is to inquire into the bank deposit guarantee and wholesale bank funding guarantee.

[National Consumer Credit Protection Bill 2009 and three related bills - inquire and report by August 7, 2009](#)

Inquiry into the COAG decision to replace state-based legislation with a national regime for consumer credit regulation and oversight including licensing and dispute resolution.

[Building and Construction Industry Improvement Amendment \(Transition to Fair Work\) Bill 2009 - inquire and report by September 10, 2009](#)

This Bill amends the BCII Act through implementing the key recommendations of the Wilcox Report.

[Telecommunications Legislation Amendment \(National Broadband Network Measures No. 1\) Bill 2009 - inquire and report by August 17, 2009](#)

This inquiry will consider the scope of requirements, power conferred and whether confidentiality provisions are adequate to ensure privacy protections.

[Australian Citizenship Amendment \(Citizenship Test Review and Other Measures\) Bill 2009 - inquire and report by September 7, 2009](#)

This Bill seeks to implement the recommendations of the Australian Citizenship Test Review Committee and to strengthen the eligibility requirements for citizenship for applicants under 18.

AEC RELEASES DRAFT BOUNDARIES

The proposed Queensland electoral boundaries were released by the Australian Electoral Commission on July 24, and are available on the AEC website at www.aec.gov.au.



Queensland gains an extra seat (from New South Wales) and the Committee has proposed the name "Wright" for the new electorate, in recognition of Judith Wright's service and contributions to Australia as a poet and social and environmental activist.

The area covered by the new seat includes Mt Tamborine, where Judith Wright spent the last 20 years of her life. It is only the fourth Queensland seat named after a woman, joining Longman, Moncrieff and Rankin.

Objections to the draft boundaries close on August 21, 2009, and the final determination will be made on December 15, 2009.

BILL OF RIGHTS : A SOLUTION IN SEARCH OF A PROBLEM

Do we need a Bill - or Charter - of Rights and can we identify an instance when it was needed?

In many ways these questions are central to the current debate. A Bill of Rights introduced "because the US and other countries have one" runs the risk of reducing our rights, not increasing them.

It's important to recognise that the passage of a law does not guarantee freedom and can have serious unintended consequences.

With this in mind, it is interesting to watch the Rudd Government's National Human Rights Consultation Committee acceptance of submissions on whether Australia needs a Bill of Rights.

Whilst we do not know which rights would be included in such a Bill, I believe that human rights in Australia are sufficiently protected by a combination of the common law, the Constitution, and the responsible action of Parliament.

For instance, the common law already protects "rights" such as freedom of speech and the right to have a fair trial. The constitution protects the religious freedoms of Australians; and the separation of judicial, legislative and executive branches of government prevents the abuse of power by any member or group of government.

These protections have been performing well to protect most human rights in Australia over the past 100 years and others have been improved with new law as circumstances have required, for example, Disability Discrimination legislation.

International organisations such as Freedom House give Australia the highest possible ranking for the political and economic freedoms enjoyed by its citizens.

From a practical perspective there is nothing a Bill of Rights would offer Australia. The most that could happen is that the Rudd Government would introduce yet more hollow symbolism.

At its worst, a Bill of Rights would cede decisive control over legislation to unelected judges. At regular intervals, Members of Parliament are called to account for the decisions they have made.

An unelected, unaccountable judiciary does not offer the same safeguards.

The [Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry](#) (ACCI) has also pointed out that the imposition of a Bill of Rights would potentially increase the scope of frivolous and vexatious actions.

The imposition of a Bill of Rights would introduce uncertainty into everyday life, as the "letter of the law" would become whatever a judge determines it should be. Australia has, over the past century, developed a system that not only works but also maintains a belief in a "fair go". While there are times when the law may be seen to falter, there is the ability for Parliament to transparently adapt the law to changing circumstances, and for that law to be tested in the courts.

Giving complete authority over rights in Australia to unelected judges is a danger to a democracy that has served us well so far. The Coalition is likely to oppose the Rudd Government's imposition of a Bill of Rights in Australia.

QUEENSLAND BRAIN INSTITUTE

I recently visited the [Queensland Brain Institute](#) to discuss the important work the Institute is doing to unlock the human brain.

Professor Perry Bartlett, director of the QBI, outlined the plans for a national Centre for Ageing Dementia Research working collaboratively on treatment and prevention of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.



Brain disease is a more common ailment than cancer with the financial cost to Australia estimated to rise to 3.3 per cent of Australia's GDP by 2050.

For such a major health problem, the \$3.5 million a year for five years sought by the QBI from the Federal Government appears to be a relatively small investment.

MIDWIVES AND HOMEBIRTHS CAUGHT IN CROSSFIRE

Proposed legislation introduced by the Rudd Government to extend Medicare coverage to midwives looks like having the opposite effect. Effectively these changes will make it illegal for midwives or nurse practitioners to assist in home births.

Legislation currently before Parliament will establish a National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for all Health Professionals by July 2010. This body will require evidence of medical or professional indemnity insurance to secure registration.

The Howard Government subsidised the cost of Medical Practitioners indemnity premiums and the subsidy continued under Kevin Rudd. The Government have made it clear that they do not intend to provide indemnity insurance to private practice homebirth midwives.

The problem is that private practice midwives are unable to purchase private practice indemnity insurance, a problem that has existed in Australia since 2001 due to the small number of midwives and the potential for major insurance payouts.

This presents a very serious threat to women who want to have a midwife assist at a homebirth. As a result these midwives will be unable to register, making it illegal for them to attend homebirths.

There are differing opinions over the value of homebirth, but the proposed legislation denies the freedom to choose. The alternatives will be a hospital or birthing centre with support or a homebirth with no support at all.

A [day of protest](#) will be held in Canberra outside Parliament House on September 7 at 11:30 am.

RED TAPE STRANGLES BUSINESSES

The Coalition is on the hunt for Australia's worst piece of government red tape.

Following our successful [Jobs for Australia](#) forums held across Australia, the overwhelming message from participants has been that government needs to get out of the way.



We are asking small businesses to send in forms and filings they think should be axed, and Malcolm Turnbull and Shadow Minister for Small Business Steven Ciobo will visit the small business operator judged to have nominated Australia's worst piece of red tape.

MINIMUM WAGE DECISION PROTECTS JOBS

I was pleased by the recent decision of the Australian Fair Pay Commission to maintain minimum wages at current levels, despite strong pressure from the Labor Party and unions for a \$21 a week increase.

Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard condemned the decision to maintain minimum wage levels, calling the decision disappointing. It was another reminder of how little experience Labor Members and Senators have had in the real world.

In the current economic climate, Australia's priorities must be about protecting Australian jobs. When the costs of doing business rise, employers can no longer afford to retain staff and unemployment increases.

The Labor Government's own submission to the Fair Pay Commission called for a wage increase, but also recognised the negative relationship between wage increases and employment. If this government really cared about jobs, it should support the freeze on minimum wages.

The trade union movement and the Labor Party do not understand that business must remain viable and profitable if jobs are to be protected. A \$21 increase would have crippled the ability of many businesses to pay wages. As a result, employers would have been forced to lay off workers if the increase was approved. Low skilled, low-paid workers would be the first hit.

In the economic downturn, the most important thing the Government can support is jobs. Research by the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey shows that unemployment has a effects on a worker's self esteem and confidence, where as a low-paid job has the opposite effect.

When employment opportunities are scarce across the country, the low-skilled are the most vulnerable towards slipping into unemployment, and the government should be doing all it can to protect their jobs.

The Fair Pay Commission made a responsible decision that will protect many low skilled, low-paid workers from joining the unemployment lines.

50,000 NEW GREEN JOBS - NOT NEW, NOT GREEN, NOT JOBS

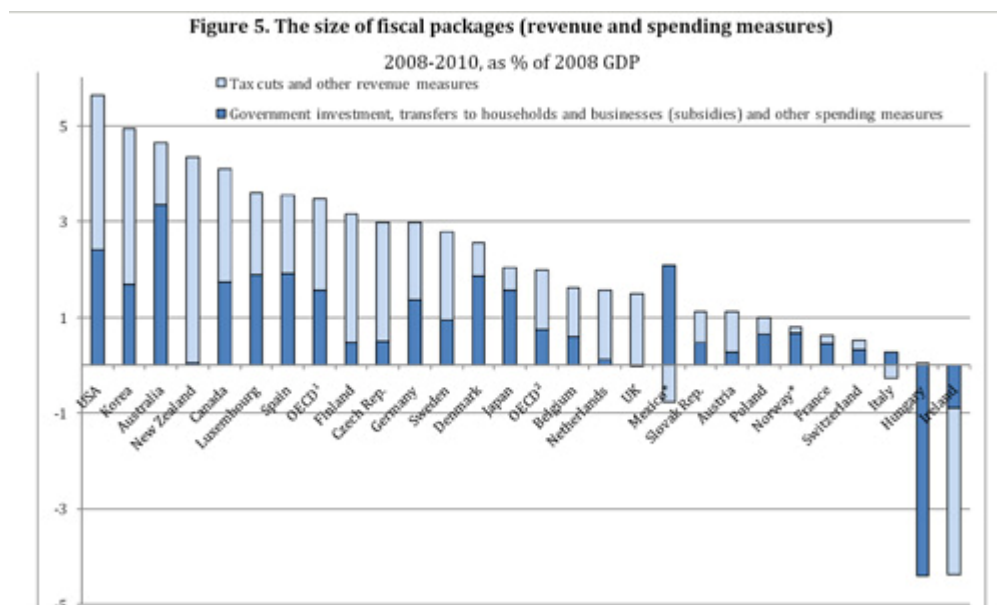
The Rudd Government's 'spin over substance' approach took another battering when it was revealed that the "50,000 new green jobs" promised at the ALP's National Conference were not new, not green and certainly not jobs. And despite the Government's best attempts at double-counting, they didn't come to anywhere near 50,000.

What they actually amounted to were:

- 6,000 previously announced positions;
- a further 10,000 places available in a new national Greens Jobs Corps for six months, during which time eligible unemployed people under 25 will have a training allowance added to their Youth Allowance or Newstart payment;
- 30,000 existing apprenticeships will have 'green' skills added to them; and
- up to 4,000 places installing household insulation if there is sufficient demand.

AUSTRALIAN TAXPAYERS MISS OUT

The [Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development \(OECD\)](#) recently released a report comparing the reaction of member countries to the Global Financial Crisis. It's interesting to note that Australia spent more on direct assistance than any other country - and less on tax cuts as a percentage of GDP.



New Zealand, despite almost matching Australia's fiscal package as a percentage of GDP, took the opportunity to reduce taxes instead of providing handouts.

If you'd like to find out what your taxes are being spent on, try www.taxcheck.com.au. It will tell you exactly how much of your tax last year went to various government services.

RESOURCES SECTOR UNDER THREAT FROM CPRS

In the recently released [State of the Sector Report](#) published by the [Queensland Resources Council](#) (QRC), 79 Queensland resources companies responded that domestic climate change policies are the second major business concern, just behind concerns over global market uncertainty.

The Rudd Labor Government's flawed Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) will require companies emitting 25,000 tonnes of carbon each year to acquire a permit for every tonne that they emit.

The QRC points out that a small Queensland coal mine, employing 200 people, would emit 300,000 tonnes each year and the proposed scheme would be particularly damaging to the resources industry.

The Coalition argues that the Government should not proceed with its plan until a global approach to climate change has been agreed. This will allow the Government to correctly assess how an ETS will impact upon Australian business.

Prime Minister Rudd and Environment Minister Penny Wong are stubbornly sticking to their flawed ETS policy to convince voters that the Government is serious about climate change.

Under the ETS, the price of Australian goods will go up as companies attempt to absorb the cost of permits. Business groups believe that Australian production and jobs will be lost overseas to companies that can emit carbon without needing to buy permits.

The more trade-exposed the company, the more vulnerable it will be to the ETS.

The US recognised the position of trade-exposed industries in the design of its ETS which currently before the US Senate. The US will mandate controls that mean that permits may not be sold for more than 18 per cent above the original price. The Australian Government will allow sales up to 175 per cent of the original price.

The Australian resources sector will not benefit from the transitional assistance offered to other industries, despite being one of the most trade-exposed industries.

The transitional provisions would have allowed the industry to access 66 per cent (or 94.5 per cent if emissions are over 2,000 tonnes per \$million of revenue) of its permits free of charge in the first year, reducing every year by 1.3 per cent until it matched global competitors.

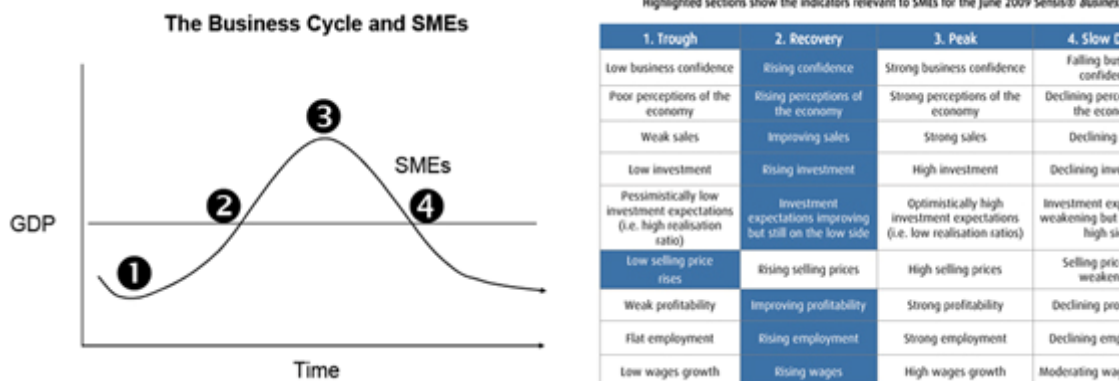
Under these guidelines, QRC estimates that the Australian coal industry is being undercompensated by \$9 billion over the first 10 years of the new emissions regime - leading to estimates of job losses totaling 28,000 by 2020.

SMALL AND MEDIUM BUSINESS CONFIDENCE RISES

I've always admired the resilience of Australia's small and medium businesses, who can bounce back from fire, flood, global financial crises and even Labor governments.

The Latest [Sensis Business Index](#) provides some indication that Australia is recovering, although there are still wild variations between the States.

The Northern Territory and Western Australia were the most confident regions with Queensland and New South Wales at the bottom of the ladder. One of the potentially troublesome prospects for Queensland is that we have the highest expectation for wage increases in the next year but the lowest expectation for sales and employment.



MASTER PLUMBERS ASSOCIATION OF QUEENSLAND

Given my background, I've always had a high regard for plumbers - "the guardians of the backflow". It's great to see the Master Plumbers' Association of Queensland revitalised and moved into new State Headquarters at Acacia Ridge.

A recent article by Geoff Bilau in the [Queensland Master Plumber](#) emphasises the point that "a great deal of the work performed by plumbers actually prevents the very maladies that are treated by doctors and nurses. Plumbers have long battled against simple stereotypes while performing vital work that is frequently taken for granted.

"The World Health Organisation has acknowledged that the SARS virus that caused havoc in the Asian countries a few years back, causing hundreds of deaths and billions of dollars in expenditure, was spread through inadequate plumbing."

Australia's strong regulatory system makes it easy to become complacent about water safety but constant vigilance is needed.

INVESTING BETWEEN THE FLAGS

As a long-term advocate for financial education, I welcome ASIC's current campaign on "Investing between the flags".

ASIC's deputy chairman, Jeremy Cooper, suggested that investments could be divided into two categories. The first includes bank deposits, superannuation, basic managed funds and blue-chip shares. This would equate to "swimming between the flags".



The second category, investments that swim "outside the flags", would involve more difficult financial products. This includes products with any degree of complexity, any geared investments, debentures, mortgage trusts, tax-driven schemes, investments with a lack of diversification, and a grab bag of hot tips, fads, products reliant on forecasting and all the way through to outright scams.

While this is a good guide, it is by no means exhaustive.

Solid companies, such as Pyramid Building Society and ABC Learning, looked great investments until the day they collapsed.

Some companies that have started on very wobbly feet have grown to become solid investments.

What is important is that investors take a moment to consider all of their financial options before jumping in to what can be very deep water.

AGED CARE BEDS

I've recently visited a number of Aged Care centres and spoken to a variety of providers. It has become clear that while there is a definite need to cater for our ageing population, the Rudd government is making it increasingly difficult to provide much needed places.

Despite a commitment in October last year by the Minister for Ageing, Justine Elliot, to provide 7,600 beds in the latest approval round, only 5,748 places were funded.

When I visited Gladstone a few months ago it was obvious that a shortage of aged care places was having a dramatic effect on local communities. Without suitable local places, many residents were relocating to Hervey Bay, taking their friends and family with them.

This is a scene repeated throughout Australia, as distortions in Aged Care funding ripple through the local communities.

In Queensland the numbers are even worse, with 813 fewer residential places provided in the 2009 Aged Care Approvals Round (ACAR), after Minister Elliot promised 2,416 places in January 2009.

This situation has been exacerbated by providers handing back licenses allocated in previous years as it is no longer economic to build facilities.

NO LEAVE, NO LIFE

The tourism industry is a significant contributor to Australia's economic prosperity, employing 497,800 Australians and \$41 billion (3.6 per cent) of our Gross Domestic Product.



As the number of international visitors drops, Tourism Australia is reaching out to those Australians who currently have 123 million days of annual leave stockpiled.

As part of the [No Leave, No Life](#) campaign Tourism Australia has listed the reasons why it's time to take a break.

There's a whole country out there

There are so many great experiences to be had, make sure you take the opportunity to visit some more of Australia. Take a break from the routine and discover something new and gain some lasting memories as well as some great stories to share with others.

The people around you will appreciate it

Take the time to rediscover your friends, your family, and most importantly yourself. Isn't it time you got your kids out of the house and let them see the rest of their country? Even your work colleagues will appreciate a more relaxed and chirpier you.

The world will keep going even if you aren't there

Around 40% of surveyed employees don't take leave because they're worried about their workload while they're on holidays. But with a little bit of planning and some help from your employer, this problem can be easily avoided.

Being away from the office improves your productivity when you return

Well-rested employees are more likely to work better and have fewer accidents - both inside the office and out. Plus, healthy, well-rested people are likely to be more efficient or not suffer from Mondayitis. Finally, a cure!

Recharge your batteries

More frequent leave will see you gain more pleasure from taking a break, rather than merely recovering from fatigue. A holiday lets you recover and come back as a new person.

Enjoy some job satisfaction

Avoid the stress related to exhaustion and burn out, and achieve greater job satisfaction and enjoyment as you approach your role in a refreshed state.

Get well soon

Achieving that work-life balance comes with improved physical and mental well-being. No one likes feeling run down and tired, so make sure you set aside time to re-charge.

Seize the moment

After all, life's too short and at the end of it all you can't take your annual leave with you.

To find out more, go to www.noleavenolife.com

JULY SHOPSMART

Bargains are getting harder to come by, according to the July "ShopSmart" survey.

ShopSmart compares a standard basket of items across Queensland supermarkets once a month to give Queensland consumers information on price trends.

Brisbane supermarkets had both the top and bottom-priced baskets of goods in the latest ShopSmart survey. Coles at Upper Mount Gravatt had the least expensive basket of goods at \$64.49 and Coles in the Myer Centre was the most expensive at \$67.29.

But the difference between the highest and lowest priced baskets at only \$2.80 was the smallest margin since ShopSmart started a year ago.

The average basket price for July was \$65.40 with the prices of all baskets much closer together.

ShopSmart is available at www.shopsmart.sueboyce.com.au

The Rudd Government's GroceryWatch website was abandoned at the end of last month.



2010 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR NOMINATION

Is there someone in your community you think should be recognised?

Nominations are now open for the 2010 Australian of the Year Awards, and you can complete a nomination form online at www.australianoftheyear.org.au

Nominations can be made for:

Australian of the Year - Since 1960 our nation has celebrated the achievement and contribution of eminent citizens through the Australian of the Year Awards. The awards profile leading Australians who are role models for us all.

Senior Australian of the Year (60 years and over) - The Senior Australian of the Year Award recognises those Australians aged 60 and over who continue to achieve and contribute.

Young Australian of the Year (16 to 30 years) - The Young Australian of the Year Award recognises those aged 16 to 30 who are outstanding and exceptional young Australians.

Australia's Local Hero - The Local Hero Award was introduced into the Australian of the Year Awards in 2003. It acknowledges extraordinary contributions made by Australians in their local community.

ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

The Family Action Centre and Inspiring Communities are presenting a series of two day workshops aimed at building more inclusive communities. It will provide an in-depth understanding of the philosophy and practice of Asset Based Community Development, and ways to build local community responses.

To find out more go to
www.newcastle.edu.au/centre/fac/training/abcd.html

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