

Sue Boyce

Liberal Senator for Queensland





The Queensland *on*Line

30 April 2009

SENATOR SUE BOYCE

I celebrated my second anniversary as a Queensland senator on April 19 - the date I was formally 'elected' by the Queensland Parliament to fill the casual Senate vacancy.



I was then re-elected by Queensland voters seven months later at the November 2007 Federal election.

In my maiden, or first, speech in the Senate I outlined my three particular areas of interest: business development, regulation and governance, especially for SMEs and family businesses; disability and meaningful inclusion of people with a disability; and reform of parliamentary procedures, especially to make politics a more woman-friendly career.

On the first two, I feel I have made some progress. I have advocated tirelessly for the needs of business and I fully support the Coalition's Small Business Action Plan released recently (outlined below).

During the long debate on the Rudd Government's so-called Fair Work Australia laws, I argued against many of the impractical proposals of the Government. I was stunned at how little many Government Ministers knew about the realities of running a business. During the debate on the unfair dismissal provisions, Queensland Senator Joe Ludwig suggested that small business owners would prefer to use a head count to know how many staff they had!

As a member of the Parliamentary Committee on Corporations and Financial Services, I was involved in inquiries that recommended a more equitable system for franchisees and franchisors and oversaw the work of ASIC. This committee will shortly begin an inquiry into the collapse of Storm Financial and of Opes Prime.

I've also set up the [ShopSmart](#) website to assist in promoting financial literacy.

In the disability area, my Community Affairs Senate committee has made wide recommendations to encourage the development of Special Disability Trusts, a method of allowing families to use their funds to provide for a family member with a long-term disability. It seems bizarre that Australia has a system that offers tax breaks and other assistance to individuals to provide their own superannuation as an alternative to government pensions, but nothing similar for people with a disability.

I have also held a very successful public forum in Brisbane to highlight the basic requirements needed to make inclusive education of students with a disability work (see below for link).

In the third area - more women in politics - I haven't been so successful. The time and travel demands of being a Federal politician still mean that the majority of women between 25 and 45, the women with children, would not even consider such a career. We don't travel by boat and train any more, but not much else has changed since Federation about the way Parliament meets.

On the non-Labor side of politics, the Shadow Minister for Ageing, Margaret May (McPherson), and I remain the only women from Queensland.

In the past two years, I've travelled widely throughout Queensland and in remote areas of Australia.

Rural and regional Queensland, including the Torres Strait, has a legitimate gripe about being left out of much policy making and decision making. Yet it's always fascinating to learn about the myriad of plans that different communities have to maintain their vitality.

And I will keep working - on all fronts - over the next four years.

BUDGET EDITION OF QUEENSLAND ONLINE

Federal Parliament next sits on May 12 for the Budget session.

My office has already started work on bringing you a comprehensive overview of the Budget and the Coalition's Reply in the next Queensland onLine.

The Government's headline actions will be well covered by the mainstream media, so we'll be particularly trying to get behind the ideological spin of the Rudd Labor Government to examine any unintended consequences of their actions, especially attacks on the so-called "rich" and where Labor decides to set that very elastic benchmark this time.

Self-funded retirees, most of who would not fit any reasonable definition of "rich", are already victims of the unintended consequences of the Labor Government's unlimited guarantee on deposits to the banks.

We certainly don't need to see more Australians fall into Labor's "oops" category.

DATE CLAIMER

Malcolm Turnbull will be speaking at the Queensland Media Club on May 18, and if you or a friend would like to attend the invitation is [here](#). Wayne Swan will be speaking the following day, and it's an indication of the important role Queensland will play in the next Federal election.



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COALITION SMALL BUSINESS ACTION PLAN

I've been advocating for some time for better recognition of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and family businesses and for genuine assistance. I'm delighted to welcome the [Coalition's Plan for the sector released by the Opposition Leader, Malcolm Turnbull](#), recently.

The SME sector is the largest employer in Australia with 3.9 million people working for 1.2 million enterprises. In contrast big business employs 3.7 million and the public sector only 1.6 million.

If the Rudd Labor Government is serious about protecting jobs, the SMEs are the crucial sector to assist and it's worth remembering that every big business was a small business once.

The Coalition's action plan includes:

- An offset of up to \$100,000 over two years for businesses who suffer losses in 2009 or 2010 against taxes paid over the preceding three years. This will enable businesses to get a refund up to the limit of the taxes they paid.
- Partial reimbursement of the Superannuation Guarantee Contribution for two years for firms with 20 or fewer staff, amounting to 3 per cent in the first year and 1.5 per cent in the second year. This will make it easier to keep employees on the payroll.
- Reducing red tape and time spent filling in forms by reducing Australia's overall regulatory burden to match and surpass OECD best practice.
- Provide a one-stop-shop portal for online access to all forms and filings, irrespective of the level of government they came from. The Coalition will create an agency for small businesses that will deliver integrated online access.
- Increased support for family businesses through support and advice on succession planning and increased professionalism.
- Making the Department responsible for small business part of Cabinet, ensuring they have a seat at the table in Canberra that matches their importance to the national economy.

The small and medium business sector is a major employer and a major contributor to Australia's bottom line. I believe that the best way to build big business is to give small business room to grow.

VIOLENCE RETURNS TO THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

In 2005 the Howard government set up the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) to enforce workplace laws in the building and construction industry. This followed many years of fraud, intimidation and corrupt behaviour on Australian building sites.

The ABCC has the powers of a standing royal commission, including the power to compel witnesses to testify.

Now that the Rudd government is preparing to remove the ABCC in favour of a specialist division in Fair Work Australia, thuggish elements in the building unions are already cock-a-hoop.

In Victoria, the Westgate project and the Royal Children's Hospital development are among several major projects that have seen a "marked increase in coercion, intimidation, threats and violence" in recent months.

Australian Building and Construction Commission head John Lloyd said: "The range of activities brought before the court include extreme verbal abuse; property damage, including to a vehicle; coercion and intimidation; and threats of violence."

Details also emerged last week about five building workers who were arrested and charged after allegedly pursuing two employees for more than 30km through Melbourne's suburbs.

It is believed the two men were targeted because they had been seen speaking to ABCC inspectors, investigating incidents at the Westgate Bridge strengthening project.

The two men told police they were too scared to pull over during the 30 minute pursuit through busy Melbourne traffic. Police intercepted a motorcycle and car with five men who have been charged with a range of offences including assault and conduct endangering a person, a serious indictable offence.

Late last month a building inspector was taken to hospital after a union official allegedly head-butted him at a building site in suburban Melbourne.

CFMEU Victorian secretary Bill Oliver and Electrical Trades Union Victorian secretary Dean Mighell have claimed that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd gave a commitment to abolish the ABCC in a meeting before the election.

Mr Mighell claims Mr Rudd said words to the effect "(building) taskforce inspectors will be made redundant as soon as I'm elected". The unionists then gave cheques to ALP National Secretary Gartrell, he said.

Other unions, including the Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union (CEPU) claim they gave \$500,000 in cheques to Labor on April 12, 2007 only after Mr Rudd, then opposition leader, pledged to remove the ABCC. Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) officials claim they were given the same commitment and were told by Mr Rudd to "trust me" on the issue, [The Age](#) newspaper said.

NATIONAL FARMERS FEDERATION WINS AWARD FIGHT

The [National Farmers' Federation](#) (NFF) has recorded an historic victory in the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC), where they challenged the Federal Government's Award changes to the Pastoral Industry Award (PIA).

The AIRC's redraft of the Award would have seen minimum wage hikes of 10 per cent, riding up to 100 per cent for the dairy industry, as well as the introduction of working conditions more suited to elements of the public service.

Agriculture is not a 9 to 5 industry, and the old Award provided a 'flexible hours-of-work' clause. This flexible approach to working conditions was restored, but other changes, such as the introduction of a 38 hour week for shearers and new classifications for farm workers, are now part of the new Award. The new Pastoral Award, which also replaces current equivalent state Awards, will now come into effect from January 1, 2010.

Because of the wide-ranging scope of these significant changes to the Award, the NFF is urging the Government to ensure that major education campaigns be undertaken across the country, including industry-based education. This will help overcome any confusion for both employers and employees about these new changes.

INQUIRIES AND COMMITTEES

FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION INQUIRY INTO THE COST OF RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE

The Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration has finalised an extensive inquiry into residential and community aged care in Australia. The Committee held hearings across Australia, and received more than 160 submissions and reports on the aged care sector. The Committee is a bi-partisan one, and I was fortunate to have attended most of the public hearings and heard some of the distressing news from the aged care industry.

As the population ages, there will be increasing stress and strain on current facilities unless new developments are undertaken. Due to the marginal return on investment, many aged care providers are reluctant to offer more services. If this trend continues we will soon reach a point where we will simply run out of places.

This is already evident where applications for bed funding dropped substantially in the last round of aged care placements. For many in the industry this is a time for consolidation, not expansion.

The [final recommendations](#) from the Committee were tabled on Wednesday this week, and I hope that the Rudd Government takes on board many of the recommendations that have been put forward.

OTHER SENATE INQUIRIES THAT MAY BE OF INTEREST

- [Community Affairs Implementation of the Recommendations of the Lost Innocents and Forgotten Australians Reports](#)
- [Joint Committee On Corporations and Financial Services Inquiry into Financial Products and Services in Australia](#)
- [Community Affairs Gene Patents](#)
- [Community Affairs National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for Doctors and Other Health Workers](#)
- [Economics Australian Business Investment Partnership Bill](#)
- [Finance and Public Administration Inquiry into the National Greenhouse and Energy Amendment Bill 2009](#)
- [Community Affairs Compliance Audits on Medicare Benefits](#)
- [Finance and Public Administration Plebiscite on the Republic](#)
- [Community Affairs Support for Carers](#)

RUDDNET

Big, well-designed infrastructure proposals are exactly what the Australian economy needs right now - Ruddnet is not one of these.

Prime Minister Rudd's throwaway line about building a high speed internet connection appears to run on nothing but hot air, is notoriously short of detail and long on hope.

For starters, the government will kick in 10 per cent of the estimated \$43 billion cost, a total apparently pulled out of the ether.

According to the hapless Stephen Conroy, the Minister for Communications, "our business case, our business structure and our business model will depend on ...negotiations". If it was a commercial operation pitching this proposal as credible and seeking investors, ASIC would surely have hauled them over the coals by now.

What we do know is the Government is expecting most of the money to come from private investment, but hasn't detailed how. Prime Minister Rudd and Treasurer Swan are even spruiking it as an ideal investment for Mums and Dads – presumably just like BrisConnections was - just with a lot less detail!

Will Ruddnet deliver? Perhaps, as long as you're in an area with more than 1,000 people. In Queensland that excludes 207 towns.

If you're in a capital city and prepared to pay for a fast connection, you can get internet at whatever speed you can afford. Those Australians living in rural and regional areas don't have that option, and unfortunately the areas of greatest need will be least likely to see a benefit.

It's also interesting that at the same time our internet is speeding up, the Government will also be placing greater restrictions on what we can see through internet filtering. While I'm still waiting for the final outcome of the current ISP trials, I note that the existing Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) censorship regime lacks both transparency and some important safeguards. Sites can be blocked on one complaint, without notification and without a process for challenging the blacklisting by the ACMA.

Ruddnet will provide an ever diminishing web to access - but it will do it at incredible speeds (and cost).

The irony is that if Senator Conroy hadn't abandoned the very sensible Coalition upgrade of internet services we would already see part of the high-speed network operating.

CHILDCARE VISIT WITH SOPHIE MIRABELLA

I had the opportunity recently of visiting a number of Childcare centre on Brisbane's north with our Shadow Minister for Childcare, Sophie Mirabella. As part of her listening tour, Ms Mirabella has been speaking to operators and staff about the current state of facilities, access and funding.



I was interested to hear from childcare operators, many of whom started as employees before becoming employers, on their view of the Rudd Government's changes to awards and

unfair dismissals. There was a genuine concern that the increasing amount of paperwork was impacting on their ability to deliver quality childcare, and a concern that changes to staff ratios would make many centres uneconomic.

There are practical limitations on the amount they can charge, but increasing costs and spiralling red tape have an impact on their ability to provide quality care. I was astounded at the amount of paperwork many operators have to contend with, and in many cases the paperwork has nothing to do with the business, but appears to be designed to gather information at the whim of the Department.

THE BROLGA PROJECT

The Brolga Project is a new program designed to give university students access to work experience in rural and regional towns.

Currently 10 universities and about 200 metropolitan students have listed their interest. It means that's students in, say, pharmacy can be matched to pharmacies in rural Queensland for their next rounds of work experience.

I hope the Brolga Project is a great success. If students experience country life, it may well spark an interest in returning as graduates. For more information on the Brolga Project or to register an interest, please click [here](#).

THE BOYCE DEBATES ONLINE

I'm proud to have hosted the first of the "Boyce Debates", celebrating Queensland 150th anniversary, at the Powerhouse recently. Our topic *"Making inclusive education work - is it the will, the skill or what's in the till?"* needs much more discussion in the community.



It was certainly an informative evening, creating a substantial amount of debate and further questions. I would like to thank our speakers Dr Bob Jackson, Professor Suzanne Carrington and Dr Rhonda Faragher. They were both professional and passionate about the topic of inclusion.

I would also like to thank the Powerhouse at New Farm for their support. Videos from the Boyce Debates are now online at [YouTube](#) or www.sueboyce.com.au/The_Boyce_Debates.

The next debate will be "Love, Hate ... Politicians", - details will be announced shortly.

THE AUSTRALIAN CRIME COMMISSION

I've been asked about the work of the Parliamentary Joint Committee of the Australian Crime Commission (PJCACC) following my recent appointment as deputy chair of the committee.

Our Committee oversees the [Australian Crime Commission](#) (ACC), a Commonwealth body that works with the federal, state and territory police to counter serious and organised crime. The ACC undertakes criminal intelligence, collection and analysis, as well as investigating serious and organised crime at the Federal level.

In 2008, organised crime was estimated to cost the Australian economy at least \$10 billion. This figure includes a loss of legitimate business revenue, loss of taxation revenue, expenditure on law enforcement, and managing 'social harms' caused by criminal activity such as the health, safety and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Financial crime also hurts Australia. For instance, the Australian Institute of Criminology reports that money laundering in and through Australia amounted to an estimated \$4.5 billion in 2007. This money allows criminals, including potential terrorists, to finance their operations in Australia and internationally, as well as illegally avoiding Australian taxes.

The ACC established the Money Laundering and Tax Fraud Determination (otherwise known as MIDAS) in 2003, and has pioneered methods of collecting data during investigations. The approach has much in common with an economic analysis, tracking movements and risk in money investments to determine unusual events.

The ACC is also leading the Financial Intelligence Assessment Team (FIAT), which recently seized \$1.6 million from a money laundering syndicate and \$4.5 million from two other laundering offenders. Finally, the ACC is involved with Project Wickenby, which targets offshore tax evasion. In February, 12 people were charged with offences relating to a \$10 million scheme.

I'll be watching with interest as Queensland prepares legislation designed to stop Outlaw Motor Cycle Gangs (OMCGs) from 'cherry picking' the State with the softest legislation as their operations base.

JACOB ZUMA

For the sake of South Africa and her wonderful people, I hope Jacob Zuma confounds his past and his critics to be an ethical and successful President.

Mr Zuma has been a political activist for the last 50 years, first joining the ANC in 1959. He was arrested in 1963 for conspiring to overthrow the government, and served ten years on Robben Island with Nelson Mandela and others. He was Deputy President of South Africa between 1999-2005.

Mr Zuma's more recent background includes corruption charges and a dismissed rape case.

Mr Zuma has also married at least four times, and has paid a "bride price" for another three women, acceptable within Zulu culture.

I can't think of a modern culture that accepts polygamy AND treats women equally. I hope this is not a backward step for the women of South Africa and for the nation generally.

ASSISTANCE ANIMALS

What has happened to laws for Assistance Dogs in Queensland?

As someone with a long interest in disabilities, I have kept an eye on the status of laws relating to assistance dogs in Queensland. Assistance dogs, as distinct from guide dogs, are dogs which are trained to assist people with their disabilities and to give them a greater level of independence.

Dogs assist their owners with tasks such as: Opening and shutting doors; Turning on lights; helping make beds; Picking items up from the floor; Pressing buttons at pedestrian crossings; and getting help in an emergency situation.

I was particularly interested to learn of the work performed by [AWARE Dogs Australia](#), which provide assistance dogs for Australians with mental health impairments. These dogs are trained to assist people with major depression, Bipolar disorder, Schizophrenia, and Panic and Anxiety Disorders. The dogs are trained to remind their owner to take medication, warm their owner's body during a panic attack, and interrupt checking and other repetitive behaviours.

Unfortunately, assistance dogs have still not been granted the same access rights as guide dogs to places such as supermarkets, restaurants, and public transport. Following lengthy community consultation last year, a Bill giving equal rights to guide and assistance dogs was introduced into the Queensland Parliament in October. Under the proposed law, assistance dogs would be certified by a trainer, but the Bill is yet to be passed.

If you would like more information about Assistance Dogs, the following organisations are happy to provide information:

A.W.A.R.E Dogs Australia

Phone: (07) 4093 8152

Mobile: 0402 861 186

Email: admin@awaredogs.org.au

Website: <http://www.awaredogs.org.au>

Assistance Dogs Australia

Phone: 1800 688 364

Email: info@assistancedogs.org.au

Website: <http://www.assistancedogs.org.au>

APRIL SHOPSMART

The latest ShopSmart figures for April are on the website at www.shopsmart.sueboyce.com.au.

The average basket of goods across the State has had the biggest jump since ShopSmart started in July last year, with prices increasing by more than four per cent.

This sharp increase has hit the Torres Strait the most, with their grocery basket hitting \$100 for the first time since ShopSmart started.

The increase in the Torres Strait prices was more than eight per cent, double the State average.

Woolworths at Woodridge again led the survey with the cheapest basket of goods at \$64.67. Coles in the CBD came in at \$74.66, which is \$10 more than last month's prices.

And for anyone feeling 'globally financially pinched', I'd really recommend the ASIC financial education website [FIDO](http://www.fido.gov.au). This month's issue has good articles on getting the most out of Term Deposits and the questions to ask before refinancing. There's also some important information for Westpac customers.



HAVE YOU SEEN THIS PLANT?

The [Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries](http://www.dpi.qld.gov.au) is on the trail of 68 rogue plants that could be devastating to our farming industry.

[Mexican feather grass](#) (*Nassella tenuissima*) was mislabelled and sold through Queensland nursery, garden and landscape outlets as *Stipa capriccio* from January to November 2008.



There were 288 plants imported from Victoria and sold in outlets from Mackay to Longreach and Surat and south to Goondiwindi. Most of the plants that were sold have been traced and eradicated, however 68 are unaccounted for.

Areas where they were sold include Mackay, Emerald, Longreach, Biloela, Kingaroy, Gympie, Mount Samson, Aspley, Rochedale, Kenmore, Blacksoil and Goondiwindi. It is important all plants are accounted for whether dead or alive.

Mexican feather grass has the potential to cause severe environmental damage to native grasslands. It is a low protein, fibrous grass that has no grazing value and would make pasture lands virtually worthless.

It's a densely tufted perennial grass that grows up to 70 cm high, with smooth stems and tightly rolled, rough leaves that appear round when rolled between the fingers. It flowers from October to November and the flower head is feathery with numerous small pale-coloured seeds. Each seed has a bristle-like tail of 45 to 90 mm long and may stick to clothing or animal fur.

If you suspect you've bought or seen a Mexican feather grass plant, don't dig it up or otherwise disturb it, just report it immediately to DPI&F on 13 25 23. And please let me know as well at online@sueboyce.com.au because I'm intrigued by this search. It would be great to succeed in this race against time.

SCHIZOPHRENIA AWARENESS WEEK

[Schizophrenia Awareness Week](#) runs from May 17 to May 23, with the aim of informing and educating the community about the real nature of schizophrenia and other mental illnesses.

Although it's estimated that one in 100 Australia have schizophrenia, the nature of the illness means that there are no hard and fast figures. Men are more likely to have schizophrenia than women, with the first signs for males coming between 18 and 25 years and for females between 25 years and mid-30s.

Schizophrenia is a medical condition that requires medical treatment. People don't "snap out of it" - they need long term, ongoing medical care. People experiencing schizophrenia may not even realise they have it, and may need time and patience to come to terms with it.

Community organisations can help - both in providing support and helping those affected come to some insight regarding their illness.

This [fact sheet](#) is a good starting point for information. Interacting with a person with schizophrenia can be quite stressful for those around them, so it's useful to develop good coping strategies.

It's estimated that Schizophrenia costs the Australian community over \$2 billion per annum in both direct health costs and loss of productivity.

As part of this week Schizophrenia Australia are also encouraging Australians to join the [SwearStop](#) campaign to raise money for research into schizophrenia. People who have schizophrenia often report hearing strange or offensive language. You can show your support by reducing your contribution to the voices they hear.

If you can give up swearing for a week, then why not nominate yourself - or a friend - to take part in the campaign from May 18 to 24. I'll be sponsoring several friends. You can also nominate Australia's most famous swearer by emailing contact@schizophreniaresearch.org.au.



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