

THE QUEENSLAND *on*LINE

WITH SENATOR SUE BOYCE



November 15, 2009

IN CANBERRA

The Senate begins one of the most important debates in our history this week with the reintroduction of Labor's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) Bills.

A lot has happened since the Bills were rejected in August—the Coalition's in-principle agreement to a set of amendments to be negotiated; the Rudd Government's release, finally, of Treasury modelling on the likely real costs of a CPRS; and a lot more healthy debate on the proposed scheme.

My personal view is that Labor's CPRS is a clumsy way to seek to reduce national carbon emissions but, provided that amendments protecting job-creating businesses, including agribusiness, can be negotiated, the scheme is currently the only option available and should be passed.

It would have been preferable to have simply taxed carbon emissions and to have compensated vulnerable sectors of the community where necessary.

But whatever we do we must finally admit that it's time we got past the short-termism of underpricing the damage that our use of resources causes.

For decade after decade, we behaved as though the air could always clean itself—but increasing pollution and the hole in the ozone layer taught we were wrong.

Back then many industries claimed they could not survive the introduction of environmental protection legislation. Some didn't but I haven't noticed too many mid-range effects on the economy.

For decade after decade, we hid many of our primary and secondary industries behind tariff barriers resulting in lazy, sluggish productivity and yet, without globalisation and the resultant efficiency of our industry—apart from Minister Kim Carr's pets—we could not have boomed as we did in the Howard-Costello years or been as resilient during the global economic downturn.

For decade after decade, we behaved as though water was free—until we almost ran out.

In the national interest, and the global interest, we must acknowledge now that CO₂-equivalent emissions are underpriced and that Labor's clunky scheme is better than no scheme at all.

The overwhelming scientific consensus on Climate Change is that this time the damage we cause may well not be reversible if we simply wait and watch and warm.

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LOST INNOCENTS AND FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS

I welcome the announcement that the Prime Minister will apologise to Forgotten Australians and to Child Migrants next week. This outcome was a direct result of the Community Affairs Committee report into [Lost Innocents and Forgotten Australians](#), and I urge the government to implement the recommendations made in the report.

GOVERNMENT'S BLIND SPOT

The Coalition and minor parties in the Senate during the last sitting moved to block the Rudd Government's attempt to grab \$40 million each year by cutting Medicare rebates for cataract treatment.

As part of the Labor Government's Budget measures, patients receiving cataract treatment were to see their Medicare rebates halved for cataract operations.

After voting down the proposed changes, the Coalition and minor parties put up a private member's bill which would ensure that the \$620 rebate will remain. However, the Health Minister Nicola Roxon rejected the move and implemented a stop-gap rebate of \$340.76.

Cataract patients will immediately be out of pocket by an additional \$280 if they are currently seeking an operation.

The Coalition will work with the cross-bench parties during Parliament's next sitting to overturn the stop-gap rebate and reinstate the former \$620 rebate.

The cut in the rebate has been condemned by the medical profession. President of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Andrew Pesce, has said that the cuts will affect thousands of ill, elderly and vulnerable Australians and that the "cuts will place pressure on our already overburdened public hospital system".

The attack on cataract operations represent yet another assault by the government on Australia's health care system.

Health commentators point out that the increase in cataract patients is simply due to Australia's ageing population.

Rather than attacking patient rebates, the affordability of healthcare and pushing millions of Australians into the public system, the Government should be working out how health care systems will cope with an ageing population and record levels of public debt.

UN COMMEMORATION DAY

On October 24 I joined former and serving members of Australia's UN peacekeeping forces to recognise the enormous contribution Australia makes in ensuring the security and safety of those countries ravaged by war.



I spoke on [Commitment](#) and the selfless dedication of members of our armed forces.

The service at Canungra was organised by members of the [Military Brotherhood](#), a motorcycle club for soldiers and police involved in operations overseas.

PUTTING THE MUZZLE ON

Hansard, the official record of Parliament, is a cornerstone of our democracy and it can't be censored, right?

Well, yes it can.

On October 1, following an Audit Office report into the entitlements system for Senators and Members, new rules were introduced by the government covering the use of the Printing and Communications Allowance.

They were spelt out by Special Minister of State Joe Ludwig in a circular outlining the ban on electioneering in taxpayer-funded correspondence and described "electioneering" as anything that "seeks support for, denigrates or disparages" a party or person. Senator Ludwig even included the Macquarie Dictionary definitions of denigrate and disparage.

To enforce this new ruling, a high-powered committee of public servants from the Finance Department was set up to minutely examine every single word of every single document Senators and Members want to mail out using their postal allowance.

Since then, the Committee has set to its appointed task with a real zeal.

A brochure from Shadow Minister Michael Ronaldson had a reference to "Labor's reckless spending" chopped, NSW Senator Marise Payne had her newsletter slashed because it made the point that the government's stimulus spending was a dreadful waste and their schools funding program was inept management and Victorian MP Jason Wood was banned from sending out a newsletter that described as "disgraceful" a government decision to remove some funding from a weed eradication program.

There has been any number of other similar examples.

"Reckless", "dreadful", "inept" and "disgraceful" are not permitted. Oddly enough, in other contexts, "failed", "damning" and "deplorable" have managed to sneak through the committee.

Outrageously, Hansard cannot be sent out using the Printing and Communications Allowance unless it is vetted to remove any strong criticism of the government and its policies. So much for the record of our parliamentary democracy.

While all Senators and Members must bow to the new rules, obviously they impact most on those in Opposition, which includes the Greens and Independents. After all, how many Labor Senators and Members will be criticising government policy?

The rules also require that all printed material include the statement: "This material has been produced at Australian government expense by (insert name of member of senator)" on every page and the rules even state the size and type of font to use.

The Orwellian absurdity of this new regime is illustrated by the awful uncertainty of what Christmas cards are, or might be.

Are Christmas cards a single page or does the declaration need to be printed on the front, centre and back?

The chair of the censorship committee actually told a Senate committee that they were seeking legal advice. "It is not clear until we get certain legal advice whether, if the Christmas card is printed under the printing entitlement, the statement that it has been printed at Australian government expense needs to go on each of the readable surfaces," he said.



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Isn't that in the festive spirit?

Queensland onLine wouldn't survive if it were printed instead of emailed.

The Opposition made it clear with the release of the Audit Office report that we supported necessary reform – but this regime is beyond any reasonableness.

We will be taking action in the Senate to remove these rules – our negotiations with the government to get some sense into them have failed to achieve anything meaningful.

SENATE COMMITTEES

UPCOMING SENATE INQUIRIES



[I'm a member of the Senate Community Affairs Committee, deputy Chair of the Joint Parliamentary Committee of the Australian Crime Commission, and a member of the Joint Committee for Corporations & Financial Services and the Joint Committee on Migration.]

The *Community Affairs Committee* has announced inquiries into the following:

[Gene Patents in Australia](#) - to report by the end of November, 2009.

This inquiry is examining the impact of granting of patents in Australia over human and microbial genes, with particular reference to the Patents Act.

[Hearing Health In Australia](#) - to report by the end of February, 2010.

This inquiry will look at the current state of hearing health in Australia, and the effect poor hearing has on our community.

[Suicide In Australia](#) - to report by the end of April, 2010.

This inquiry will examine the costs of suicide in Australia, particularly the disproportionate effect on young, indigenous and rural Australians. We'll also be looking at the effectiveness of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, and ways improvements can be made.

The *Corporations and Financial Services Committee* is currently inquiring into:

[Financial Products and Services In Australia](#) - report back by November 23, 2009.

This inquiry is currently investigating financial advisers and associated legislation, with particular reference to the collapse of Storm and OPES. The Committee has received 407 submissions, and we'll be releasing the final report very shortly.

The *Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission* has announced a new inquiry into the following:

[Adequacy of Aviation and Maritime Security Measures to Combat Serious and Organised Crime](#) - submissions should be received by November 6, 2009.

This inquiry will look at the the methods used by serious and organised criminal groups to infiltrate Australia's airports and ports, and the extent of infiltration. This includes illegal imports of drugs, firearms, money laundering and people smuggling.

The *Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Migration* has announced a new inquiry into the following:

[Inquiry into the Migration Treatment of Disability](#) - submissions should be received by October 28, 2009

The Committee will investigate the assessment of the health and community costs associated with a disability as part of visa processing in Australia. While the formal submission period has closed, the Committee will continue to accept submissions and encourages people with a disability, employers, business organisations, disability and community services providers, and any other interested individuals or organisations to make comment.

OTHER INQUIRIES

[The possible impacts and consequences for public health, trade and agriculture of the Government's decision to relax import restrictions on beef](#) - submissions should be received by November 12, 2009 to report by November 30, 2009.

The Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee is inquiring into the possible impacts and consequences for public health, trade and agriculture of the Government's decision to relax import restrictions on beef, especially relating to the import of beef from countries previously affected by bovine spongiform encephalopathy, otherwise known as mad cow disease.

[Matters Relating To The Torres Strait Region](#) - submissions should be received by October 30, 2009 to report by February 26, 2010.

This inquiry will examine the Torres Strait region, including fisheries, trade, sustainability, border security, immigration, government cooperation and transport.

THE OTHER BORDER SECURITY CRISIS

With public anger and concern about the government's inept handling of the asylum seeker crisis mounting, I revealed an equally disturbing problem on Australia's (and Queensland's) border with Papua New Guinea. The story received national media prominence.

It is a problem that has been allowed to fester because of deliberate inaction by the Federal and State governments.

As a participating member of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee Inquiry into matters relating to the Torres Strait, I received a distressing report by the Torres Strait Island Regional Council.

[Mayor Fred Gela](#) stated "We are requesting a full review of the Torres Strait Treaty as our local islanders have a different concept of the treaty, than what is carried out today".

I wrote to the Prime Minister: "This report is simply appalling and describes a community in crisis, abandoned and neglected by both the Australian and Queensland governments.

"At a time when your government is spending vast sums of money in attempts to deter the entry of foreign nationals from Sri Lanka and elsewhere, this report makes it distressingly clear that foreign nationals from Papua New Guinea enter Australia with impunity.

"I specifically refer you to the Mayor's statement under the heading, Need for Law and order: 'It is easy for women in particular to be abducted from our communities and taken to PNG, kept prisoner (this is a fact)...' and 'It is not uncommon for large groups of PNG nationals to be walking the streets of our communities brandishing weapons (machetes, knives)' and 'Major Theft occurs with Boats, tools, equipment taken on a regular basis'."

Every page of this submission tells of a community that is living in third world conditions and prey to large numbers of foreign nationals without the slightest protection of the Australian and Queensland governments.

Imagine the outcry and the reaction if drunken bands of foreign nationals wielding knives and machetes invaded any other Australian coastal community to terrorise people, abduct and rape women, pillage, potentially spread disease, strip natural resources, freely bring sly grog and drugs and appropriate government services provided for Australian citizens.

This, according to the Torres Strait Island Regional Council, is happening there now.

There would be a massive and immediate response by the military, customs officials, State police and other agencies if, for example, such an invasion was attempted in Cairns.

It begs the question: Why shouldn't it be the reaction to the reality happening now somewhat further north in our Torres Strait community?

There is an urgent need for immediate intervention by federal and state agencies. Ignoring these Australians and leaving them to their fate is not an option and, in fact, it would be an international disgrace if no action was taken to secure their safety and protection.

The second part of Cr Gela's submission deals with problems caused by bad laws, woefully inadequate and expensive transport, primitive communications and lack of facilities considered fundamental elsewhere in Australia.

Last year I called for an investigation of costs in the Torres Strait and the consideration of a freight subsidy scheme similar to Tasmania's.

However, the urgent priority now is to ensure the safety of these Australians and the protection of our northern border. Our fellow Australians are being betrayed by inaction.

Mayor Fred Gela detailed the problems facing the Torres Strait in his [submission](#). You would be forgiven for forgetting that this is Australia and not some poor third world nation.

I am proud to be their champion and will not stand idly by while they are ignored and neglected.

THE TRAVESTON DAM - IS THE SAGA FINALLY OVER?

The decision by Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett to refuse the Bligh government's Traveston Crossing Dam is to be welcomed.

The decision is a triumph for common sense and a campaign by a united and determined local Mary Valley community aided by the federal and state oppositions.

This monumental blunder, announced by then Premier Peter Beattie in April 2006 and strongly endorsed subsequently by Premier Bligh, has had an incalculably devastating impact on local people even though their relief is now obvious. The community endured three and a half years of hell.

That the Bligh government persisted with this hated project in the teeth of unanimous local opposition and overwhelming scientific evidence and wasted hundreds of millions of dollars on preparatory works

and buying now unwanted properties speaks volumes for its arrogance.

The Bligh government now has a responsibility to the local community to help it rebuild as well as rethinking its south-east Queensland water strategy as a matter of urgency.

The 494 properties the State Government acquired will now be offered for sale back to the original owners. For further details, contact 1800 225 384.

QUEENSLAND HOSPITAL REPORT CARD

In the lead-up to the 2007 election Kevin Rudd declared that "the buck would stop with him" and he would takeover the state hospital system if it wasn't working by July 2009.

The Australian Medical Association has released its annual [Hospital Report Card](#) - and once again Queensland hospitals are at the bottom of the list.

The report found Queensland public hospital bed numbers had increased by only 76 beds since July last year, failing to keep up with the corresponding rise in population.

More than 180,000 Queenslanders – one in 20 people – are languishing on the so-called waiting list to get on a waiting list, which was exposed during the 2005 health crisis with a total of about 110,000 people waiting.

Queensland Health Minister Paul Lucas has admitted there is no control over soaring hospital waiting lists - and yet Kevin Rudd's sole solution has been to commission a review of the original report.

WASTE WATCH

The Rudd government has blown \$2.85 billion – or about \$130 for every Australian – since its election on waste, mismanagement, fiascos and fumbles.

Spending on expensive consultants is rapidly nearing \$1 billion despite Labor's pre-election promise to cut \$395 million from outsourcing public sector work.



The list of budget blowouts mounts almost daily – the schools stimulus program has a staggering \$1.7 billion blowout, the cost of laptops in schools is \$800 million higher than expected, private sector lawyers have reaped \$555 million, nearly \$50 million in tax bonus payments went to dead people and Australians living overseas, the pink batts insulation scheme has cost \$200 million more than expected, the bungled Grocery Watch scheme was dumped after costing \$10 million, \$20 million was squandered on a broadband tender that failed to deliver and advertising for the stimulus package alone was \$50 million.

The list could go on and on. The Coalition has produced an [annual report](#) for 2008/09 detailing examples of the waste generated by this government.

Another example? Almost unbelievably, \$45 million has been spent on a program to build houses for Northern Territory indigenous people yet not one house has been actually built!

While this recklessly irresponsible spending goes on unchecked and public debt mounts. The risk of higher and higher interest rates looms. Every dollar wasted is one less dollar for essential services such as health and education.

Without a doubt, the next Coalition government will inherit a mountain of debt – a repeat of the Hawke/Keating "legacy" to Australia in 1996.

EQUAL PAY - THE NEED FOR FURTHER ACTION

I'm pleased to see that the Australian Services Union will undertake the first federal test case on pay equity under the new Fair Work system.

Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Ms Broderick said the caring and community industries were traditionally low paid and highly feminised and around 200,000 women who work in homeless and domestic violence shelters, aged care and other community services could win a 30 per cent pay rise.

Latest evidence suggests an entrenched gender pay gap of at least 17 per cent between fulltime male and female employees across the board.

It is intolerable that people, irrespective of gender, should suffer simply because they chose to work in providing care – it is doubly intolerable that women in this field earn less than their male colleagues.

Much remains to further the cause of women in the workforce.

Currently, women hold only 2 per cent of chief executive positions and only 8.3 per cent of board positions.

A World Economic Forum report in October ranked Australia 20th in the world on gender pay equity but found we were actually tracking backwards on key measures including female labour force participation. In that, we ranked an abysmal 60th out of 134 survey countries.

UNITED NATIONS DISABILITIES COMMITTEE CHAIR

I would like to congratulate Professor Ron McCallum AO on his election as the 2010 Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Professor McCallum was elected as a representative to the Disabilities Committee in November last year, and is the only Australian currently on a United Nations treaty body.



He was a witness to the Immigration and Disability Inquiry of which I'm a member.

The Howard Government signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on July 30, 2007, becoming one of the very first Western countries to show its support. We also signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention, enabling the Committee to receive and investigate complaints once domestic processes have been exhausted.

SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT LINE

A Small Business Support Line has been established to provide information, assistance or referral on issues including business planning, registration and licences, ebusiness and online assistance, marketing and promotion, government grants and assistance, employing staff, importing and exporting, government regulation and many other small business related matters.

The service promises to have calls answered by highly experienced operators with a background in small business. For further information please call 1800 77 7275.

NATIONAL DROWNING REPORT

The recent drowning tragedies emphasise how important pool safety is in Queensland.

Last year 302 people across Australia drowned - 32 of those were children under five. Royal Life Saving has produced a free checklist for pool safety that you can download at www.homepoolsafety.com.au. As a Keep Watch Ambassador, I am horrified how easily these accidents can happen.

Printed copies of the Royal Life Saving newsletter, SuperVision, are available in my office or you can download it [here](#).

SHOPSMART

The latest OECD figures showing that Australia's food prices have vastly outstripped price rises in Canada and Britain should remind us all of the pre-election ALP promise which effectively created the impression that the creation of the so-called Grocery Choice website would act to keep prices down.

In recent years, according to the OECD, our grocery prices have risen by 41.3% compared with only 33% in Canada and Britain.

The infamous Rudd Government Grocery Watch website proposal was a dud even before some futile attempts were made to outsource it to the consumer watchdog Choice. It was dumped in June only five days before its scheduled introduction.

Before the election the ALP from Kevin Rudd down trumpeted that Grocery Watch and Fuel Watch would dampen down prices. They were nothing more than an elaborate attempt to con the Australian people.

Remarkably the soaring grocery prices in Australia, compared with other similar economies, have come at a time of low inflation. We now hold the record of having the fastest-rising food prices in the developed world.

Graeme Samuel from the competition watchdog ACCC, has defended Australia's two retail giants Coles and Woolworths which together control almost half of the fresh food market and almost 80% of the dry packaged foods market.

"It's all too easy to say it's the big operators in the town that are the cause of the problem. We can make all sorts of wild claims about the rip-off that might be occurring," Mr Samuel said.

However competition and consumer law expert Professor Frank Zumbo from the University of New South Wales squarely blamed the big two grocery chains, saying that Australia had the "most concentrated" supermarket duopoly in the OECD.

The latest ShopSmart information is available at www.shopsmart.sueboyce.com.au.

SILVER CORD SERVICE

Silver Cord Service is a telephone reassurance project coordinated by St John Ambulance (Qld). It provides social support to those who are elderly and/or frail, or people with a disability and their carers, who are in danger of becoming socially isolated. This support is provided through regular security calls, or weekly "friendship" calls.



Phone calls offer peace of mind for those being supported and their families who may not live nearby and are comforted to know someone is taking care of their loved one.

The Silver Cord Service needs more volunteer caring callers throughout Queensland. Silver Cord volunteers call from their own homes, and can claim reimbursement for calls made. The work does not take a great deal of time, but makes a difference to people. To volunteer, call (07) 4151 0419 or fill out the contact form [here](#).

WHITE RIBBON DAY 25 NOVEMBER 2009

White Ribbon Day encourages men to become involved in the campaign to end violence against women and to show that violence against women is unacceptable.



White Ribbon Day began in 1991 on the second anniversary of one man's massacre of 14 women in Montreal.

In 1999, the United Nations General Assembly declared November 25 the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (IDEVAW) and the White Ribbon has become the symbol for the day.

Today hundreds of thousands of white ribbons are worn by men and women across Australia. Today there are more than 230 white ribbon Ambassadors Australia wide. You can find out more at <http://www.whiteribbonday.org.au>

SOCIAL INCLUSION WEEK 23-29 NOVEMBER 2009

Social Inclusion Week has been launched by Jonathon Welsh AM, Australian of the Year 2008 and founding Musical Director of the Choir of Hard Knocks and the Choir of Hope and Inspiration.

This week is designed to build community connections and promote a healthier, more inclusive community. The www.socialinclusionweek.com.au website has some suggestions for you to promote in your community.

Please encourage organisations, businesses, schools, service clubs and others to join in this great community building initiative.

SENATOR BOYCE BURSARY

I'm please to announce that The National Council of Women of Queensland Inc (NCWQ) will be awarding a \$1000 bursary on my behalf to support a woman with a disability further her education in 2010.

Applications will open on March 1 2010 and close on June 4 2010.

If you know of a suitable candidate, please complete the form here or contact the National Council of Women on (07) 3846 4418.

YEAR OF THE GIRL GUIDE 2010

2010 has been declared the "Year of the Guides".

For 100 years the Guiding movement has supported the development of Australian girls into inspiring young women. A commemorative "Centenary of Guiding" coin will be produced by the Royal Australian Mint, and a set of stamps will also be issued by Australia Post.



Girl Guides Australia has an impressive and challenging program of activities planned in all States and Territories. For further information go to www.girlguides.org.au.

YOUR FEEDBACK

Thank you Senator Sue for your email advice and YES it is terrible what Kevin and Co have done with Peter Costello's wonderful handling of the economy 1996-2007. I hope the Australian people wake up before the next election. – BC

Your newsletter is a great initiative. It is great to know what is going on in regard to legislation and government spending that directly or indirectly has an impact on our lives. – BF

It's always a pleasure to receive and read Queensland Online...just one question for now...Is there anything else that can be done to Save The Mary River from the Bligh government dam??? - PA

Thanks Sue. Keep sticking it to KRudd and his mates. What a farce. Review after review whilst he is off furthering his ambitions to lead the UN one day. – JK

I read your Sept news with great interest, congratulations. – SL

Hi Sue – your newsletters are always so excellent! Thank you..... - MC

Many thanks Senator Sue, our very best wishes go with you and our team as you all work together to prevent Rudd & Co from totally wrecking Australia and our way of life. – MS

If you know someone who'd like to receive Queensland onLine, please email the office at online@sueboyce.com.au

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