

**May 2010**

*Contents*

- 1 National Broadband Network: roll out
- 2 It's time for disability reform
- 3 Nanotechnology
- 5 Population reform
- 6 Sustaining skilled migration

**Winning Government with Quality Candidates & Progressive Politics**

*Contact Us*

laborunityvic@gmail.com

mobile: 0457 298 770

www.laborunity.com

**National Broadband Network: Roll Out**  
*Senator Stephen Conroy*

The National Broadband Network is the largest nation-building project in Australia's history and will lift Australia to the top of world rankings in broadband access; it will drive major productivity and growth opportunities; and ensure our children get the best education in the world.

The NBN will deliver high speed broadband to all premises in Australia, no matter where they are located. Every home, business, school and hospital will be included and no one will miss out.

Under the NBN, 90% of premises will be connected with Fibre-to-the-Premises technology providing speeds of 100Mbps. The 10% of Australians who live outside the footprint will

receive faster and cheaper broadband from the next generation of satellite and wireless technology. These services will deliver on and exceed the Rudd Government's election commitment.

The NBN is not a quick fix for an election; it is a solution for the long term benefit of the country, including our rural and regional areas.

Since the Rudd Government announced the NBN on 7 April 2009 there has been much progress and work is now well underway.

The first services are due in Tasmania from July and on the mainland, the first building blocks are being put in place with 6,000 km's of optical fibre



backbone being laid in regional Australia. In March NBN Co also announced the first five sites to receive high speed broadband on mainland Australia, as part of the NBN.

The first release sites will be used to test network's design and construction methods and will provide crucial information to assist in the roll out of the NBN.

Construction in these sites will begin in the second half

*Continued on page 4*

**It's time for disability reform**  
*Bill Shorten MP*

It may not be the issue at the top of everyone's priority list for the upcoming Federal election, but make no mistake, disability policy is rapidly gaining importance to a point where it could shift votes.

South Australia's recent election saw the first



candidate in Australian history elected on a

disability platform, a sign of the growing movement for a better deal for people with disability.

Just going by the numbers, disability is an issue that should have become prominent long before now.

Around 15% of our population, or 2.6 million Australians, have a disability. That number has

*Continued on page 2*



*Bill Shorten is the Federal Member for Maribyrnong, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services and Convenor of Labor Unity.*

*"It's a matter of human rights; of treating people with the dignity they deserve; and a matter of equity."*

*- Bill Shorten*

*Continued from page 1*

doubled since 1981. The rate of growth for profound or severe disabilities has been even greater, and is expected to grow from the current 1.5 million to 2.3 million by 2030. This growth will see a commensurate increase in demand for services and for Government funding to cover them.

The Rudd Government, for its part, has recognised this, and has substantially increased Federal funding for disability. We have signed up to a new agreement with the states that involves a major injection of new funds: by 2012, the Federal Government contribution will reach \$1.2 billion, compared to \$620 million under Howard in 2007.

But it's not just a matter of growing costs. It's a matter of human rights; of treating people with the dignity they deserve; and a matter of equity.

The reality is that many people with a disability enjoy a much lower standard of living than the rest of the community. More than 30% survive on less than half the median income – despite having higher costs for daily necessities such as medical treatment, mobility aids and transport.

Disability support services are offered through an inefficient maze of programs – a maze that places the burden on people with a disability and their

families to navigate their way through and hunt out the support services they need. Often they complete the maze only to find they fall into one of the many cracks in the system and the support they need is simply not available. Often support services are rationed and only available in a crisis.

Remarkably, it is even possible to find people with the same condition but different levels of support, based on the manner in which they acquired their disability.

The reason for this bizarre inequity is that in every state there exists a number of statutory insurance or compensation schemes – WorkCover and TAC are a couple of well-known examples in Victoria.

These schemes, while not without their own flaws, do provide a superior level of support that can include lump-sum payments, a percentage of pre-injury wages, and long-term, case managed care based on the person's needs.

As a result, a child who severs his spinal cord in a car accident receives life-time care, while a child who suffers the same injury in a backyard trampoline mishap is left to navigate the maze of government safety-net services.

These schemes also offer nothing for the parent whose child is born with a condition such as autism or Down's Syndrome.

Clearly, if we are to have a system that truly delivers appropriate care

for people with a disability and is sustainable into the future, then what we really need to be talking about is reform.

One model for reform is a national disability insurance scheme.

The inequities and inefficiencies of the current system would be replaced with individualised, life-long care based on the needs of the person.

This is a big idea – as big as the original idea for Medicare – and it would turn our current system on its head.

It's a good idea, worthy of consideration, analysis and debate. And that's why we have now asked the Productivity Commission to look into the costs and benefits of a national long-term care and support scheme, including consideration of a social insurance model, and see whether such a scheme is appropriate for Australia.

The inquiry begins in April and will report back to the Government in June 2011.

The inquiry is in itself a great step forward: it means we are about to have the debate. Disability policy is about to become an issue, not just for people with a disability, their families and carers but for the community as a whole.

The time for disability reform is rapidly approaching.

## Nanotechnology: The biggest little thing going

*Richard Marles MP*

The biggest thing in science right now is smaller than you can imagine. Nanotechnology is a brave new world containing the likes of carbon nanotubes and buckyballs which promises an array of technological advances every bit the equal of the information revolution: better medical treatments; lighter, more efficient building materials; tougher sporting equipment.

An example of nanotechnology are carbon nanotubes: a carbon tube just a few nanometres in diameter yet relatively speaking very long. The ratio of the tube's length to diameter can be up to 132,000,000:1 which vastly exceeds anything that can be achieved in the making of tubes on a scale visible to the human eye.

Carbon nanotubes are very strong without being dense and so the builders of cars, planes and trains will look to the possibilities of carbon nanotubes for building lightweight structures that are more fuel efficient.

Nanotechnology is the result of a scientific convergence on the ultra-small. Everything

from the study of DNA to the desire to make computers more compact has seen scientists squinting their eyes and focussing on the tiny. The collaboration of these different scientific endeavours has seen the blossoming of nanotechnology: the ability to manipulate particles on a near atomic scale.

A nanometre is 10<sup>-9</sup> of a meter. The relationship between a nanometre and a metre is the equivalent of the relationship between a marble and the planet earth. But the most important thing about nanotechnology is that at the nanoscale the properties of materials can change.

Recently I launched the Australian Academy of Science report on nanotechnology. The report was encouraging in its findings that both research and publications around nanotechnology are on the increase. So too are the number of collaborations between Australian and international researchers. It paints a picture of a technology that the



Australian scientific community is well and truly embracing.

While recommending a robust framework for a co-ordinated collaborative national effort to develop nanotechnology, the report also urges government to work on "the development of science-based regulation and direct community engagement on nanotechnology issues".

It is a message the Rudd Government hears loud and clear.

Because we do not want to repeat the mistakes of the past – and because nanotechnology has such tremendous potential – both the scientific community and the Rudd Government are dealing with nanotech in a very different way to maximise the potential of

*Continued on Page 4*

*"Nanotechnology has such tremendous potential ... Climbing the technological ladder is at the heart of the future success of Australian manufacturing and industry."*

*- Richard Marles*

## National Broadband Network: Roll Out

*Continued from page 1*

of this year, with services to be delivered early next year.

NBN Co chose the first release sites based on a range of criteria such as demographics, climate, existing infrastructure and terrain, to ensure the physical roll out of the NBN is as smooth as possible.

The first release sites are:

- A part of the suburb of Brunswick in Melbourne
- An area of Townsville covering parts of the suburbs of Aitkenvale and Mundingburra
- The coastal

communities of Minnamurra and Kiama Downs south of Wollongong

on broadband penetration, speeds and pricing – not to mention the deterioration of consumer service levels across the telecommunications sector.

- An area of west Armidale, NSW, including the University of New England
- The rural town of Willunga in South Australia.

Labor members everywhere should be proud that the Rudd Government has done more to improve broadband and telecommunications services in this country in two years, than the opposition managed in 11 ½ wasted years.

On the opposition's watch, Australia languished behind the rest of the world

Thanks to the Rudd Government, all Australians will stand to benefit from world-class high-speed broadband and be able to unleash the enormous potential of a truly digital economy.

*Senator Stephen Conroy is the Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate and Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy.*

*“Labor members everywhere should be proud that the Rudd Government has done more to improve broadband and telecommunications services in two years than the opposition managed in 11 1/2 wasted years.”*

*- Senator Stephen Conroy*

## Nanotechnology: The biggest little thing going

*Continued from page 3*

nanotechnology while minimising any risks.

On the same day as the launch of the Academy's report, the Innovation Minister, Senator Kim Carr, launched the Government's National Emerging Technologies Strategy.

This strategy is underpinned by a \$38.2 million commitment over four years to provide a platform for the uptake of new technologies, not the least of which is nanotechnology.

This will include: industry. There are many steps along the way which will need to be large, but there is one giant step that will only be viewed through the most powerful of microscopes.

That step is nanotechnology, and the Rudd Government is determined to ensure that Australia takes it.

This strategy is fundamental and will ensure that as the nanotechnology train leaves the station the entire Australian community is on board.

Climbing the technological ladder is at the heart of the future success of Australian manufacturing and

*Richard Marles is the Federal Member for Corio, and Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation and Industry.*

## It's better for us to sustain skilled migration

*Michael Danby MP*

Since 1945, Australia has welcomed 6.9 million migrants and their descendants have benefited this country economically and culturally. Maintaining our balanced, non-discriminatory but highly skilled immigration program will continue to pay dividends to an Australia challenged by demographic change.

Australia's highly selective skilled immigration has a net benefit of \$830 million in the first year (based on the 2008-09 migration intake). Twenty years hence, taxpayers would enjoy a positive impact of \$1760m in the 20th year. From one year of principally skilled migration during a 20-year period, Australia would gain more than \$20 billion net tax. This from just one year's worth of immigration at the present mix.

Certainly we have serious environmental and infrastructure problems. It is easy to blame population increase and therefore migration for these problems. I don't accept this view.

Our problems are due mainly to poor management in the past of our land and water resources, and, particularly in Sydney, neglect of our urban infrastructure, especially public transport.

In other words, our problems are political, not demographic, in origin. Australia is a sparsely populated country by world standards, even if we consider only the more closely settled areas.

If we manage our land and water better, and if we invest in necessary urban infrastructure, we can sustain our present migration rate and rate of population growth and harness the positive economic impact of migration to maintain our generous treatment of seniors as the baby boomers move beyond their working years.

Concern about climate change is forcing us to manage our land and water resources better. Australia is not in fact short of water: we just waste most of it, including through inefficient irrigation. Now commonwealth and state governments are making huge investments in efficient irrigation, urban water conservation projects and desalination.

Our cities are suffering not because they are too big - even with seven million people, Sydney will hardly be a big city by world standards - but because we have neglected transport infrastructure and forced too many people to use private transport to get to work.

By 2036 Melbourne may have a population approaching seven million. Regional Victoria will grow up to 500,000. Victoria has an integrated plan to redevelop its transport system to adjust to this increase in population. A new rail tunnel between west and east will increase the capacity of Melbourne's rail network by about 12,000 passengers an hour. A new regional rail link serving an important growth corridor will be the

biggest expansion of the rail network since the Melbourne City loop, creating a 40km twin-track rail link from West Werribee to Southern Cross Station via Tarneit and Sunshine.

We must also consider what the cost to Australia would be if we were to cut our migration numbers. Like most Western countries, we have an ageing population, and this will impose enormous costs on the next generation as the ratio of working-age to retired people declines. As the recent Intergenerational Report notes, our young migrants offset this trend. Cutting migration risks following Russia and Japan into rapid ageing and consequent economic stagnation. This is also why we need to keep our focus on skilled migration, because it contributes most to our demographic, economic and cultural vitality.

Migration contributes enormously to our economic growth. A recent study conducted by Econtech estimates that continuation of the migration program, compared with no program, would deliver an increase in living standards of \$852 a person (at 2000 prices) by 2021-22. Other studies show similar benefits. Contrary to anti-immigration mythology, migrants create more jobs than they occupy, and a skilled migration program improves our skills base and represents a brain gain for Australia.

Migration has been of great benefit to Australia in the past, and if we are smart it will go on benefiting us in the future.



*Michael Danby is the Federal Member for Melbourne Ports and Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration.*

*"If we manage our land and water better, and if we invest in necessary urban infrastructure, we can sustain our present migration rate and rate of population growth and harness the positive economic impact of migration."*

*- Michael Danby*



*Kelvin Thomson is the Federal Member for Wills and Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties.*

*“Recent projections indicate that Australia’s population will reach 35 million by 2050. If this is allowed to happen it will mean Melbourne will almost double and reach 7 million people.”*

*- Kelvin Thomson*

## **It’s time for population reform**

*Kelvin Thomson MP*

Sick of being stuck in traffic? Worried about how your kids are going to ever afford their own home? Concerned about street violence in Melbourne? About home-grown terrorism? About the rising cost of food, water, petrol, electricity? About employers taking advantage of cheap overseas labour to put downward pressure on wages and conditions? One cause: runaway population growth. One solution: population reform.

Recent projections indicate that Australia’s population will reach 35 million by 2050. If this is allowed to happen it will mean Melbourne will almost double and reach 7 million people, Sydney will become a city of 7 million people and Brisbane will double to four million.

The impact of a 60% increase in Australia’s population on our native wildlife will be catastrophic. Already over 200 species of Australia’s birds are under threat - 30% of our 760 species.

And what about carbon emissions? The Government has promised to cut carbon emissions by 60% over the next 40 years, and all the science is saying we need to cut them by 80% to tackle global warming. How are we

supposed to do that if our population is going up by 60% at the same time? It’s pretty hard to reduce your carbon footprint when you keep adding more feet.

And there’s the impact on our major cities - Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane. Declining housing affordability, traffic congestion, overcrowded concrete jungles. I don’t want Melbourne to become like Mexico City, or Karachi or Shanghai.

Another 14 million people will not give us a richer country; it will spread our mineral wealth more thinly and give us a poorer one. It will make a mockery of our obligation to pass on to our children a world in as good a condition as the one our grandparents gave us.

Rather than sleepwalk into an environmental and social disaster, I have put forward a 14 Point Population Reform Paper that sets out how we can stabilise our population at 26 million by 2050.

My Population Reform Paper recommends:

- reducing our net annual migration intake to 70,000 per annum,
- reducing our skilled migration intake to 25,000

- per year,
- abolishing the baby bonus,
- restricting the Family Tax Benefit for third and subsequent children to those already receiving it,
- using the money saved from revising these payments to increase University and TAFE places for young Australians,
- restricting subclass 457 temporary entry permits,
- requiring overseas students to return to their country of origin for at least two years before applying for permanent residence,
- increasing our foreign aid budget to 0.7% of GDP, and
- increasing our refugee intake from 13,500 to 20,000.

I have been greatly encouraged by the fact that over 95% of the responses I have received have supported my proposals.

If you would like a copy of my paper, please visit my website at [kelvinthomson.com.au](http://kelvinthomson.com.au).