

It is not on that both state and federal Liberal governments allow this to happen. I commend the Welfare Rights Centre for its invaluable work over the past 31 years; the wonderful staff they've had, the volunteers, for all their commitment and dedication in assisting and helping people. I'd urge the federal Attorney-General to ask his department to review immediately this terrible decision, and I hope that something can be done to reopen the doors of this crucial service that has assisted some of our most vulnerable people for many years through hard work, through volunteering, doing it all on a shoestring budget.

### Sport

**Mr TED O'BRIEN** (Fairfax) (19:45): This coalition government has spent over \$2.5 billion on sport and sporting activity since it came to office, an extraordinary feat—about \$950 million on sporting infrastructure for local and national organisations, \$113 million on the integrity of sport, \$710 million in direct funding for our current and future elite athletes, \$270 million for programs supporting Indigenous communities and their athletes, and \$10 million that I know we put towards the 2032 Olympic bid.

I could go on, but the question is: why? Why do we invest in sport? The answer is: because sport represents far more than just running around and kicking a footy or throwing a javelin. Sport is also about social inclusion. Sport is an opportunity for communities to bind together. Sporting organisations today play a far larger role in our civil society than they have in the past, and that's only becoming more the case as time goes on. We all love our sport and Australia is renowned for it. I think everybody in this chamber would remember that first time they threw on goggles and jumped in the pool or first threw a football or a netball, or whatever it is. We love our sport. We also recognise that sport keeps us healthy, not just physically but emotionally. It's been proven time and again that if we are active as a people our mental health is so much better. I don't know about you, Deputy Speaker, but I feel better if I do a bit of exercise in the morning. I just have a better attitude for the day. Sport is vitally important.

A vision of this government is to see Australia become the most active and healthy place in the world. That is very much encapsulated in our 2030 strategy for sport or, as we call it, *Sport 2030*. As part of that strategy we have a KPI, which is to reduce the inactivity of Australians by 15 per cent by the year 2030. We need to make sure, therefore, that this enormous funding we're putting towards sport hits the ground at the local level.

I was delighted only a few weeks ago to attend the launch of RideScore Active Schools on the Sunshine Coast. Full credit to We Ride Australia, who have championed this program. The federal government is tipping in about \$225,000. We're working in collaboration with the Sunshine Coast Regional Council, with the state government, with Stockland at their new development and a range of other partners but, in particular, We Ride Australia.

This program allows schoolchildren to ride to school—it encourages them. Up to about 70 per cent of kids get dropped off by car at school every day. You can imagine not just their health while they're young but the behaviours as their lives go on if they have the opportunity to get into the habit of getting on a scooter, getting on a bike or just walking to school. This particular RideScore Active Schools program will be rolled out at nine different schools on the Sunshine Coast, probably helping around 800 kids next year. The idea is that it overlays technology onto bicycles. So when children leave home and then clock in their bike at school it sends an automatic message to their parents, to mum and dad. It means, too, that there are safe routes mapped out for them so that they can go to school in a very safe way. In other words, it keeps kids active, it keeps kids safe and it gives mums, dads and carers peace of mind. This is yet another very simple but tangible way that we as a federal government are ensuring that our money spent on sport helps at the grassroots and keeps our kids in particular healthy and active. I'm delighted to be part of it.

### Loneliness

**Mr GILES** (Scullin) (19:50): What if there was a condition that was more deadly than obesity and more lethal than smoking 15 cigarettes a day? What if the same condition has a greater risk of death than alcohol consumption and lack of exercise? What if this isn't a terrible disease but a social condition? Loneliness. In politics we don't always speak about the things that really matter and we certainly don't pay enough attention to loneliness and its consequences. As the recent ABC Australia Talks survey stated:

Our ignorance about the health consequences of loneliness is a reflection of the fact that loneliness is not part of our everyday conversations around health.

We might think that older Australians are the ones most commonly affected by loneliness—and it is true that for the elderly the loss of social contact is incredibly damaging to health and wellbeing—but the ABC report found that loneliness is a particular challenge for young people. More than a quarter of young people aged 18 to 24 said they felt lonely 'frequently' or 'always'.

Here in Australia, like in the rest of the developed world, the way we live, work and form and sustain relationships is being changed by technology. It's a strange irony that technology has made it easier for people to interact and connect at the same time as loneliness and social isolation are on the rise. However, the most

concerning predictor of loneliness is poverty—21 per cent of people who earn less than \$600 a week feel lonely frequently or always. By contrast, among people who earn more than \$3,000 a week, less than half that say they feel lonely frequently or always, reflecting the fact that around the world poverty is one of the biggest predictors of poor health, especially depression and other mental illnesses.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the adequacy of Newstart in this debate. The current rate of Newstart is unacceptably low. Newstart should be increased. Living in poverty is stressful and it is socially isolating, too. There is no policy lever more readily available to policymakers to address poverty in Australia than increasing Newstart.

As Labor's shadow minister for cities and multicultural affairs, I have been thinking about how loneliness is connected to this portfolio. How our cities are shaped drives how people interact, of course, but we haven't paid nearly enough attention to how this can isolate people. Getting around town isn't just about the depth of our labour markets; it is fundamentally a driver of the quality of our relationships and connections, too.

Loneliness is also a problem for many new migrants settling in Australia. Many make the move without family or support networks. Some struggle to make new social connections. We need to know more about this. In the UK the issue of addressing loneliness was one that was being championed by the late Jo Cox, and it is now championed in her name. The UK Conservative government has built on this by appointing a minister for loneliness. The UK approach recognises that loneliness is an inevitable part of the human experience—for instance, after the death of a loved one or a relationship breakdown—and its focus is on reducing the number of people who say they feel lonely frequently, starting with the Let's Talk Loneliness campaign, which is aimed at reducing stigma. Importantly, loneliness has been entrenched as a consideration across government policy, recognising the wide range of factors that can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and to support people's social wellbeing and resilience. Of course in the UK the link between loneliness, austerity, poverty and a lack of social mobility have made some question the sincerity of the UK government's approach. There is a political dimension to loneliness. Political choices matter, whether it's through cuts, how we talk about people in relation to one another as well as how and whether we regard this as a policy area worthy of political attention.

Last month in *The New York Times*, Nicholas Kristof called for a war to be waged on loneliness. He's right. I've spoken previously about the prevalence of loneliness in Australia and the important work of academics like Dr Michelle Lim and civil society organisations like the Red Cross in highlighting this and which have called for a national response from our national government. I'm pleased that Labor's national platform put loneliness directly on the map as something demanding the attention of Australia's government. But, under the Morrison government, nothing seems to be happening and this is just not good enough.

### **Forestry Industry**

### **Dairy Industry**

**Mr PASIN** (Barker) (19:54): When I first came to this place in 2013, I was shocked at how few conversations were had on the positives of our national forestry industry. Since that time, we have had over six years of a coalition government, and it's a very different conversation. Forestry is truly a sunrise industry. It's in a really great position to grow and create jobs, and in Canberra I feel we have a bipartisan approach to this. I've always had an innate sense of the importance of forestry because I grew up in a timber town. Like my great state of South Australia, our friends across the border in Victoria have a thriving timber and forestry industry providing thousands of jobs, particularly in regional areas. Whilst most of the conversations I'm engaged in focus on softwood forestry plantations, I appreciate that our native forests play an important part in the overall industry and the economic contribution it provides to Australia's regions.

Timber harvesting of our native forests is highly regulated, highly restricted and carefully managed to take into account the environmental, social, cultural and economic values of the forest. And the products that flow from the industry are underpinned by some of the best practices in the world. Timber, of course, is the ultimate renewable, recyclable and sustainable resource. In Victoria, just four—I'll say it again, just four—out of every 10,000 trees are harvested from state forests each year. It beggars belief on that basis that the state government would take the decision to halt all logging in native forests by 2030.

Victoria has the most environmentally sustainable native timber harvesting industry in the world, with value-adding occurring in our timber manufacturing facilities. This is an economically reckless decision which has nothing to do with the environment or environmental science and everything to do with politics or political science. It's made clear for me that if you vote Labor in Victoria you get the Greens. It seems that Premier Andrews has done the numbers and decided that he values Greens preferences more than he does blue-collar jobs. By banning the felling of four trees in every 10,000, we will now see more imported paper and hardwood products from countries with lower environmental standards, worsening our current status as a net importer of wood and