



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**SOCIAL SECURITY AMENDMENT  
(NATIONAL GREEN JOBS  
CORPS SUPPLEMENT) BILL 2009**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 18 November 2009**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

---

## SPEECH

<p><b>Date</b> Wednesday, 18 November 2009</p> <p><b>Page</b> 48</p> <p><b>Questioner</b></p> <p><b>Speaker</b> Sidebottom, Sid, MP</p>	<p><b>Source</b> House</p> <p><b>Proof</b> Yes</p> <p><b>Responder</b></p> <p><b>Question No.</b></p>
---	---

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM** (Braddon) (1.50 pm)—I am very happy to support the government's amendment here and I note that my friend and travel colleague the member for Boothby has listed for consideration other amendments whilst not refusing to give assent to this bill.

I notice, as part and parcel of what you would regard as predictable comments by those opposite, that this government allegedly stands condemned for rising youth unemployment. What I did not notice in the preamble to the shadow minister's statement was that in fact we have gone through and are still experiencing a worldwide recession. Australia in comparative and relative terms has done much better than comparable economies throughout the world, but that does not deny the fact that we have had rising unemployment and unfortunately, as part and parcel of that reality, that sad fact, young people are those that suffer most. It is not just those that are unskilled or not highly trained. We also know that it is affecting those that are well trained and, indeed, university trained as well. That is the reality. But to claim that this government somehow or other is the cause of this is ridiculous and I am sure that those in the gallery today would be tired of these types of arguments that have been going on in this parliament since cocky was an egg and decades since. We know the realities. The question is: what do we do about increasing employment opportunities and in the meantime in training and skilling up our young people as well as those already in the workforce? We need to carry out constructive proposals to assist them.

The Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009 is designed to assist young people, most notably vulnerable young people, first and foremost to skill themselves and, secondly, to do that by gaining confidence not just in what they are doing but in themselves while, at the same time, adding to our environmental capital and stock by involving themselves in green corps activities. We regard this as an important contribution both to educating themselves, gaining confidence skills and life skills, and at the same time, as I mentioned, adding to our capital stock for the environment.

To comment again on the amendment moved by the member for Boothby, I remind all members in this place, and indeed the public generally, that this

government has sought—along with its jobs compact with Australia through the COAG agreements, or with our Commonwealth partners—to introduce more incentives for people to take on young employees in particular. Indeed, 'Christmas bonus for apprentice takers' is heading my Christmas edition of *The Bottom Line*, which is my newsletter. What we have done, for the record, is triple the bonus for employers who put on an apprentice essentially this summer. Under the Apprentice Kickstart program—that is a good name for it—employers who put on a new first-year apprentice in a traditional trade will receive \$4,850 which consists of a \$2,350 commencement bonus—up from \$1,500—plus another \$2,500 at nine months.

It is not the be-all-and-end-all, it is not the bee's knees, but it is a significant contribution to employers as an incentive to take on young people, particularly at this difficult time in the economy. We are still recovering; we have a long way to go. Having travelled recently, I can tell you that the US economy, which drives so much of China's exports, is still in the doldrums. We have to remember this. I believe we have two years of cautious optimism to look forward to. The important thing is that we offer incentives to employers. And what better time to do it than now? We have got kids coming out of schools; we are encouraging them to be better educated—what better time for employers to take on these young people? But they have got to be quick because there are only 21,000 places at this stage up for grabs nationwide. It is first in, best dressed to take up these incentives. The bonus comes just in time for the end of the school year, as I mentioned, enticing employers to consider hiring an apprentice. For the record, Kickstart is open from 1 December 2009 until the 21,000 positions nationwide are taken up. It will be available to employers who take on a traditional trade apprentice aged between 15 and 19 years. I encourage anyone who is interested in this to check out our website at [www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au](http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au). I think this is a great incentive to try to assist employers to take on young apprentices, particularly at this time of the year.

In the little bit of time I have available to me before I am rudely interrupted by question time, I would like to enlighten colleagues on more of the content of this very important bill before us. What is the purpose of the bill? The purpose of the bill is to amend the Social

Security Act 1991 to enable the temporary payment of a \$41.60 supplement per fortnight to participants in the National Green Jobs Corps program who are in receipt of youth allowance, Newstart allowance or a parenting payment. The supplement is to be payable to those people who participate in the National Green Jobs Corps between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011. The National Green Jobs Corps complements the government's compact—as I mentioned earlier—with young Australians. It guarantees a training place for those under the age of 25 who are not employed, to ensure that they have the skills needed for the economic recovery. The majority of the participants, when they complete the program, will have attained at least a certificate level II qualification. This is also consistent with the compact with young Australians in which job seekers aged under 20, without year 12 education, are encouraged to attain a year 12 equivalent qualification.

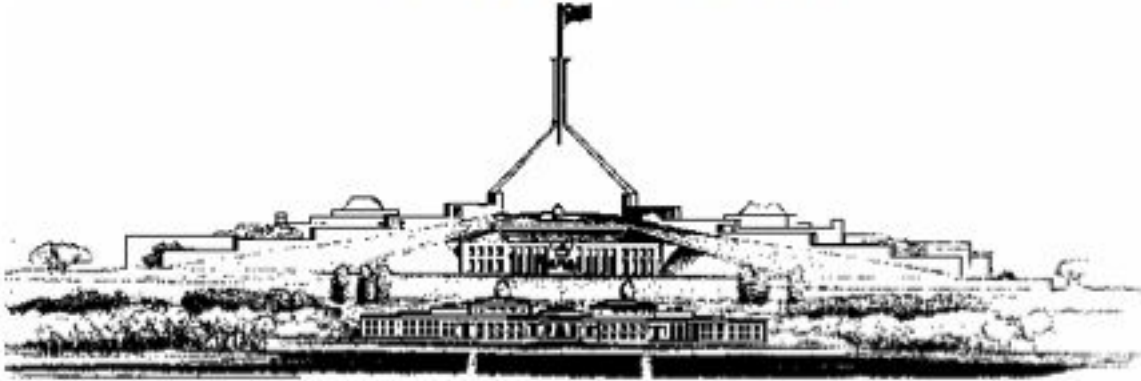
The package is intended to serve two main purposes. Firstly, as I mentioned earlier, it is to help combat youth unemployment at a time of economic downturn in which young people—unemployed people in particular—are typically the worst hit. Secondly, it is to assist in tackling environmental problems and the impacts of climate change. So it has a double purpose: to assist those people most vulnerable, particularly unemployed young people, and give them training and skills, including confidence skills and life skills, at a most difficult time—we have gone through one of the worst economic recessions the world has seen, but of course that is rarely recognised by those opposite; and, secondly, to tackle the important area of green jobs and support the environment by combating what many on the opposite side claim does not exist at all—climate change and the negative impacts of that.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! It being 2 pm the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 97. The debate may be resumed at a later hour and the member for Braddon will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed.



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**SOCIAL SECURITY AMENDMENT  
(NATIONAL GREEN JOBS  
CORPS SUPPLEMENT) BILL 2009**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 18 November 2009**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

---

## SPEECH

<p><b>Date</b> Wednesday, 18 November 2009</p> <p><b>Page</b> 77</p> <p><b>Questioner</b></p> <p><b>Speaker</b> Sidebottom, Sid, MP</p>	<p><b>Source</b> House</p> <p><b>Proof</b> Yes</p> <p><b>Responder</b></p> <p><b>Question No.</b></p>
---	---

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM** (Braddon) (4.53 pm)—In continuation: I was trying to give an overall definition of the National Green Jobs Corps program, which is a 26-week environmental work experience and training program that is targeted at low-skilled 17- to 24-year-olds who have been unemployed for more than 12 months, especially those who have not completed year 12. The participants are to undertake work experience and skills development on environmental and heritage projects for something like 130 hours of training, leading to a nationally recognised qualification such as a certificate I or certificate II qualification in horticulture, conservation or land management. Participation in the program will also enable young unemployed people to meet their participation obligations for receipt of youth allowance, Newstart allowance or parenting payment income support.

We have been reminded by several speakers that the program is not new. Indeed, a Green Corps program has been operating continuously in Australia from 1997 to 30 June 2009. What is new, however, is that the participants in the updated and renamed program are to be provided, at least temporarily, with a supplement to their income support payments. This is as an incentive both to participate in the program and to assist in this participation. This amounts to an extension of the existing training supplement paid to eligible Newstart allowance and parenting payment (single) recipients who commence approved courses between 1 July of this year and 30 June 2011 to National Green Jobs Corps program participants.

It is interesting to look at the history of a good idea, because that is what this is. Irrespective of how many times we rebadge, rename, restate, redo—whatever you like—in politics a good idea tends to continue. This one can be at least searched back to 1992 and the LEAP program under the Keating government. Then it was dealing with 15-year-olds to 20-year-olds who were looking at a 26-week course. They were involved in issues such as land care, cultural issues, heritage and conservation and they were paid a taxable training allowance based on differential ages. So it has been there in the past—more recently with the last government—and it is continuing with this government. I applaud this government and the

policymakers for continuing what is essentially a pretty good idea.

I would like to highlight some of the practical results of the Green Corps program, results which I share with just about everyone in this place—and I know it has been pretty important in your electorate too, Mr Deputy Speaker Secker. One example is the Tasmanian Arboretum, which is located in Melrose, or more specifically Eugenana, where I live. This is a botanical tree park, established in 1984, and is now made up of about 66 hectares of magnificent arboretum. The Green Corps program, through Central Victorian Group Training, has been involved in a number of projects at the arboretum.

When you look at the aims of the program, which are reiterated in our bill, you can look at the development aims for the young people involved, such as leadership and teamwork skills, which I alluded to earlier; skills to liaise with stakeholders; interpersonal skills; confidence in gathering information and presenting outcomes to a variety of audiences; knowledge about the projects and confidence to share that knowledge; self-esteem and self-confidence; and, importantly, the promotion and development of a positive work ethic. They are all very positive characteristics and important skills to develop. The community aims—because these are of a collective nature—are to improve the appearance of the natural areas and open spaces in our community, to reduce invading weed species and to educate the community in aspects of the appreciation and preservation of natural and cultural heritage features. These features in actual fact have been replicated since 1992 all the way through to the present and will continue to be replicated under the excellent program outlined in our legislation.

Looking at some of the outputs of this arboretum project, we see 100 grams of seed were collected, 1,900 trees were planted, 2,000 seedlings were propagated, 200 metres of walking track were constructed and 20 metres of boardwalk, 1,450 metres of fencing were constructed and 6.5 hectares of weeds were removed. That is a pretty good outcome for a small project team, and a lot of hard work and a lot of skills were developed with it as well. Something you would be more familiar with, Mr Deputy Speaker Secker: three self-closing gates were established.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr PD Secker)**—I would rather they self-opened!

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—It was not written here, anyway. They knocked together a brochure explaining what they have done, they put together an information box, they set up distance markers and they designed and made 10 interpretive signs. Again, all good skills and of course they enhanced the magnificent atmosphere and aesthetics of the arboretum.

What other things did they manage to achieve in their Certificate I in Conservation and Land Management, with additional units from Certificate II in Conservation and Land Management? They had to go through an accredited training plan and that meant they had to be prepared for work. Those that passed the certificate I and certificate II were indeed prepared for work. They were able to carry out basic first aid; they were able to follow occupational health and safety procedures; they were able to support the nursery work that was required at the arboretum; they were able to apply chemicals under supervision; they were able to support the natural area conservation; they could operate basic machinery and equipment; they could recognise plants; they could install maintain and repair fencing, and given the distances of the fencing construction, nearly 1,500 metres, that is a fairly good experience I would say; they could plant trees and shrubs; they followed basic chemical safety rules; they undertook propagation activities; they were able to treat the weeds as well as recognise them and isolate them; and they were able to maintain their workplace. They are very positive outcomes in what was a pretty important program for the arboretum.

There were other programs involved with the Green Corps projects in Latrobe, particularly the magnificent Platypus Park, and also in Devonport on the Victoria Parade-Mersey River foreshore.

So, all in all, very good skills and incentives are introduced in this legislation for people to take up training and skills development, with a supplement in addition to act as an incentive. And not only are they developing skills in the area of conservation management and in the environment, but they are also developing very important personal skills and characteristics which will stand them in good stead for the future and allow them to develop not just an individual stock of skills for our community, but collectively they will be very important for this country. I commend the government on this legislation and I am glad that it is getting the full support of this whole parliament.