



**THE HON KATE ELLIS MP
MINISTER FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION,
CHILD CARE AND YOUTH**

TRANSCRIPT

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**MINISTER FOR YOUTH AND SPORT, KATE ELLIS, ADDRESSES THE
NATIONAL PRESS CLUB ABOUT INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY.
NATIONAL PRESS CLUB
12:30 PM WEDNESDAY
12 AUGUST 2009**

CONVENOR: Today at the National Press Club, the Minister for Early Childhood Education, Child Care, Youth and Sport, Kate Ellis. To mark the International Youth Day for 2009, the Minister will detail the Government's youth initiatives over the past 18 months, and argue that youth policy should not be developed in isolation from the rest of the Government's programmes.

Kate Ellis with today's National Press Club address.

KEN RANDALL: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the National Press Club and today's National Australia Bank address. It is, as you've just heard, the International Youth Day, and it's particularly appropriate occasion to welcome the Minister for Youth, Kate Ellis. And the portfolio's particularly appropriate for her too, because when she was first elected to Parliament, she was the youngest woman ever to enter the House of Representatives and now she also has responsibility for sport, early childhood education and child care, as you've just heard.

The United Nations chose, as its motivation theme for this year's International Youth Day, Sustainability: Our challenge, our future. And that fits quite well with Kate Ellis's commitment to providing a genuine voice for Australian youth and recognition of the role they play in Australian life generally.

Please welcome Kate Ellis.

[Applause]

KATE ELLIS: Well thank you very much for that introduction Ken.

Can I, of course, begin my remarks today by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Ngunnawal people, and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

I'd also like to acknowledge my parliamentary colleagues who join with me today; the Agriculture Minister, Tony Burke, the good Senator Don Farrell and I know the Member for Canberra, Annette Ellis and I believe the Member for Wakefield Nick Champion.

I'd like to welcome them, as well as acknowledging the Secretary of the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations, Lisa Paul. Meredith Turnbull, from the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition.

And I'd really particularly like to acknowledge the young people who join with us in the audience today. And can I say that there are some absolutely phenomenal young Australians in this room with us here today, some of whom I'm going to speak about shortly. And I'd like to particularly recognise the Steering Committee of the Australian Youth Forum who are here.

So, to all of you, a very happy International Youth Day.

In honesty, I recognise that International Youth Day may not stop the nation. It may not be an event that people have been counting down the sleeps until. But I think that it is a fitting time for us to reflect upon the state of attitudes towards young people in this country. The state of young Australians themselves, and the importance of this, I believe, often maligned area of policy debate.

So let's just be upfront about it. Let's just say that some people view the youth portfolio as a bit of fluff and as, at best, a bit of a pat on the back for some overachieving do-gooders, and at worst a waste of the parliament's time, when it should be debating so-called real issues.

And people do dismiss some of this stuff and, from the outset today, I'd like to address some of my comments around challenging some of the misconceptions and some of the stereotypes that exist around both young Australians and youth policy itself. And then I want to outline the reasons to you all why, even if one doesn't choose to acknowledge youth, out of the goodness of their own hearts, there are some really compelling economic and social reasons why we need to invest in young Australians and we need to make sure these that these investments are made now

And then finally, I want to outline how the young people of today face some serious challenges, some emerging trends and something that governments just cannot afford to continually ignore.

Some of you may recall that one of our election commitments, prior to the last election, was to compile a State of Australia's Young People report. And today I will be providing the first snapshot of the findings from this upcoming report. And I must say that it sets off some alarm bells, because there are some really serious health issues, state of mind issues amongst young Australians. It highlights issues such as the increasing rates of self-harm, negative body image, cyber-bullying, skyrocketing rates of violence in particular areas. All of these things which are of massive concern to our entire community.

So I will touch on these issues shortly. But I will also today release some of the key findings and statistics out of this upcoming report.

In short, overall today, the point I want to make to you is that you might be able to run a short-term political agenda, by excluding young people. But if you want to prepare a nation for the challenges of the future. If you want to govern in the interest of the long-term, not just the present. And, in fact, if you want to be a government for all Australians, then youth policy matters. And today is as a good day as any for us to recognise that.

Now whilst people might belatedly be starting to see that the politics around youth can be really powerful - I mean one classic example, of course, is the election of President Obama, where we know that if it wasn't for the impact that young people played in that, he wouldn't have been the Democratic nominee, let alone the current President of the United States - so whilst people are slowly starting to recognise the importance of the politics around young people, they've been very late to come to the cause of the policy around young people. And that's what I want to concentrate on today.

Now I don't want to dwell on this, as you can imagine. But unfortunately, there is one very positive thing that I can say about the Opposition, the previous government, when it comes to youth policy, and that was that they were consistent. Sadly, they were consistently bad.

They were a government who, in fact, abolished the Ministry for Youth. They defunded the National Youth Peak. To them, youth engagement went no further than the 44 hand-picked members of their National Youth Roundtable.

They were a government who attacked young people time and time again. Went too far with their VSU legislation, enforced HECS hike, upon HECS hike on our students. Slugged young workers with WorkChoices and, of course, legislated to close the electoral roll, leaving 100,000 young people left without a vote in 2007.

They were a government who was driven by short-term politics. They were a government who failed to act on the issues facing young people, instead preferring to embrace the stereotypes and perpetuate those damaging myths.

So I think it's important that we begin by tackling the stereotype head on. And this is not going to be a lecture about giving young people a fair go. It's not about pitting the alphabet of generations against each other. But I do think it's important to acknowledge upfront that stereotyping of young people exists, and it has existed for a long time, across a whole range of generational divides.

What do we see if we look back on the baby boomers, through the lenses of their parents? We know that they were seen as a rebellious mob of long haired louts, whose music was completely obscene. What if we look at Generation X? We know that it was allegedly all about sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. And how do we ourselves sometimes stereotype Generation Y? The never-had-it-so good generation. The celebrity obsessed generation. The not-great-with money, the apathetic generation. The party-boy-Corey generation, or chk-chk boom, just to name a few of the things which are so regularly referred to.

So the reality is that perceptions of young people are often laden with clichés; clichés no matter what their generation.

The good news for baby boomers and for Generation Xs, is that the long-standing legacy of each generation is ultimately defined by them, themselves, when they eventually get to be in charge.

The good news for the current generation is that if you don't believe - I don't believe that you should need to sit back and wait to correct the record about what it is that your generation's about. To dismantle these incorrect labels of being self-obsessive. And you shouldn't have to. Which is why it is - why is it that so often generations choose to play the big bully brother or sister to the generations that follow them? And let's just have a think about what impact that has on these emerging generations.

An American writer and futurist, Alvin Toffler, doesn't pull any punches when he talks about this. He says; the secret message communicated to most young people today, by the society around them, is that they are not needed. That the society will run itself quite nicely until they, at some point in the distant future, will take over the reins.

Yet the fact is that society is not running itself nicely because the rest of us need all the energy, the brains, the imagination and talent that young people can bring to bear on our current difficulties.

Well, I agree with Alvin, and I believe that it's critical that governments invest in young people, engage them in decision-making, and harness their talents and energies because it's got - it's in the nation's best interests, both now and in the long-term.

In 20 years' time it will be the current generation of young Australians - while we're busy kidding ourselves that 60 is the new 40 - they will be emerging as the main decision-makers and leaders in our community.

So it might be worthwhile just fast forwarding 20 or 30 years when we will all be living in a world faced with enormous challenges, challenges that will be determined by the will of Generation Y and with their hands at the steering wheel.

So let's just picture this world.

It's interesting to note that the sum of human knowledge is currently doubling every three years. It's estimated that 70 per cent of the jobs that will exist in the year 2020 do not currently exist. By 2030, Australians could face around one degree Celsius warming of temperatures and up to 20 per cent more drought months. There will be an increase in storm surges and severe weather events. Declining oil

production will bring major challenges and changes to our heavily oil dependent lifestyles.

In 2033 health and residential aged care expenditure is projected to increase by 189 per cent, from \$85 billion today to \$246 billion then.

As well as paying the health and welfare costs associated with the ageing population, this generation of young people will also take on the caring responsibility, and they'll be doing so at a time when many of them will be caring for their own children as well.

Now, I don't know about you, but I think that when we imagine this world, when we look at the challenges to come, it makes sense to start investing in young people right now and preparing them for these challenges. It's a pretty sound investment when there is just so much change to grapple with.

And so that's what we, as a Government, have been doing. We've been investing in young people and, importantly, moving youth policy from the periphery of government to at the very centre of government business.

And there's no action that demonstrates this more than the steps we took to cushion the impact of the global recession on young Australians.

We know that the global recession threatened to derail the current generation and, in doing so, threatened the future of our economy. History tells us that young people are often the first to feel the impacts of economic downturn and they're the last to benefit when the economy recovers. We've seen this. Between June 2008 and 2009 the number of unemployed 15 to 24 year olds has increased from 60,000 to 255,000.

The Prime Minister has made it clear that we won't stand by and watch while thousands of young Australians have their hopes and aspirations dashed by a recession that was not of their making.

It's also important that we remember that young Australians are not just passengers in our economy. They're active contributors to our nation's productivity, to our wealth and prosperity.

According to the ABS, almost half of all 15 to 19 year olds, and over two-thirds of all 20 to 24 year olds were working in 2006. In 2007 Australians aged between 15 and 24 had a total gross income of approximately \$50 billion dollars.

So letting these workers and letting these consumers fall through the cracks is against everyone's best interests, no matter what your current age.

Evidence shows us that young individuals who face prolonged periods of unemployment can face a phenomena known as the scarring effect, where a young person's long-term employability is permanently damaged by the onset of early unemployment. And, indeed, the OECD has identified that long-term unemployment for young persons can not only be costly for the individual but it comes with a massive price tag for the whole nation and the whole economy.

So what this all boils down on is that it is incumbent upon government to ensure that young Australians remain productively engaged during this time of economic downturn, and that they're not left to languish on the unemployment queue.

So that's what we've done.

We established the \$277 million youth Compact with young Australians, guaranteeing all young people aged under 25 with an education or a training place.

Underpinning this contract - this Compact is the \$623 million National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions which I am currently working on with each of the state and territories governments. This national partnership will overhaul our youth programs. It will make sure that they're targeted to improve educational outcomes and to transition to support so that more young people can complete school, can go on to further study, and can enter training and indeed the workforce.

We know that many young people face additional barriers in doing this; participating in education and training. Issues such as homelessness, drug and alcohol issues, family dysfunction, juvenile justice issues and mental health problems. And we also know that young people in regional and in Indigenous communities have unique challenges when it comes to accessing employment and education.

So it's important that we do this work. It's important that we make sure that the safety net is right.

And it might not sound like the sexiest area of policy, but it will better align the support services and the needs of young people because we can't just keep doing what we've always done in the past.

Of course I'm not going to run through the shopping list of other actions that we have taken. You're all aware of the \$42 billion nation building Economic Stimulus Plan; the \$650 million Jobs Fund; the \$33.7 million for an additional 5500 pre-vocational training and support places; as well as the incredible investment being made through the Deputy Prime Minister into education as the best building block for young people.

As I said, I'm not going to run through these in great detail today.

But I will say that as well as economic development, education and training, the health of young people is another core area of government business. And we're making sure that youth are at the top of the priority list.

We've made really clear, particularly in recent weeks, that we recognise that any responsible government will take note of some of the health statistics that I mentioned earlier; the forward projections and the future challenges on our health system, and respond accordingly.

We've made clear that this is exactly what we intend to do because if you're going to be serious about tackling the significant health challenges of the future, you have to be serious about reform and you have to be serious about prevention.

And, whilst I might be being 'Captain Obvious' here, when it comes to investing in prevention, the earlier you get in, the more effective it is. So that means working with young people and working with their health, not just for the benefit of the individual or for the family but indeed ultimately for the benefit of our nation's health bill.

The benefits of preventative health and early intervention are clear. But take mental health, for example: 64 per cent of mental illness shows signs before the age of 21. This is backed up by the stat that shows us that 40 per cent of young people aged

16 to 24 have experienced a mental health disorder at some point in their lives. This alarming rate of mental illness among young Australians is an example of one of the serious challenges facing young people that has risen to a level of severity which has not been faced by any generation before them.

So, in recognition of this, we've taken action in the area, and nearly doubled our investment in youth specific mental health programs over the next four years.

And it would not be - it would be remiss of me not to, when talking about preventative health, also briefly put one of my other hats on and talk about the importance of physical activity and sport. And it's for this reason that we have made such significant investments in grassroots sporting infrastructure, and why we've introduced programs such as the local Sporting Champions program so that we can keep young people healthy and active as opposed to treating their illness later.

So, whether it's jobs, whether it's education, training or health, to name a few...homelessness... I note Tony Burke's presence today and know just how much work he's been doing in terms of engaging with regional young Australians in particular.

We are engaging with young people as part of our core business. We know - but we also know and recognise that there are a set of unique and serious challenges which directly affect today's generation of young Australians and we see it as the responsibility of the entire government to address them.

I am pleased today to be able to offer a snapshot of these issues as identified in the upcoming State of Australia's Young People report. And while the report identifies that overall Australia's young people are doing very well, looking around the room, we can see many an example of inspiring, empowered and impressive young Australians.

Yet, there are also some alarm bells which this report sets off, in relation to some key areas.

Key areas like the fact that one in four young Australians, aged 16 to 24 have a mental health disorder, especially we now see girls highlighting self-harm as a huge and emerging issue as well as unhealthy body image.

We also, in this report, see that more than one quarter of year eight Australian students report that they know someone who's been cyber-bullied. It also shows that young people are more likely to be affected by particular crimes and particularly violence and it shows that teenagers aged 15 to 19 had the highest hospitalisation rates for acute intoxication from alcohol amongst all age groups.

So when we look at new and emerging issues, when we look at rates of self-harm, cyber-bullying, growing incidences of negative body image and alarming levels of violence, it's clear that these issues threaten to impact on the health and wellbeing of the current generation, like they never have before.

As I look around the room, I recognise that I, despite sometimes considering myself somewhat young-ish as I do, and fancying myself as being as in touch as I can be, I didn't face anything like these issues which the current generation of young Australians are now grappling with on a daily basis. And it's clear to me that my parliamentary colleagues didn't either. They experience vastly different upbringings to those, that today, fall in the 15 to 24 age bracket and I venture that the same can probably be said of the Press Gallery.

So as a collective group, I am pretty sure that when we look at the Parliament, I am on safe ground in saying that some of the issues which are affecting young people today are new to us. Others which are not new are being faced at a rate, and to an extent, that we've never before seen in Australia.

The State of Australia's Young People report features the following feedback from a young woman on an issue which is emerging as an alarming trend amongst young people, that being, self-harm.

She says, I know a couple of girls in my class who have cut themselves, it was depression. Now I have to say, it's difficult for any of us to imagine the psychological distress that must accompany this behaviour.

And I for one am the first to acknowledge that it's a complex and delicate area to address. But this is what we do know; we know that 25,000 Australians are admitted to hospital each year for self-harm. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has also found that hospitalisation rates for intentional self-harm among young people increased by 43 per cent between 1996 and 2006. The increase was much greater for young woman - for young women, a 51 per cent increase and for young men a 27 per cent increase.

This is our young Australia; so lost, so isolated so frustrated that they take to slashing their own flesh or other means of self-harm or mutilation as a release.

If these stats aren't a call to arms, if these stats aren't a cry-out that governments need to take these issues seriously, then I don't know what is.

The manifestation of mental illness in physical form is also playing out in our classrooms and across the country in the form of negative body image. The report also features feedback on this issue; one young person wrote, *at my school in every single year level, there was someone who was anorexic, that's pretty bad odds.*

Well, she's right, it is. We know that negative body image is reaching epidemic proportions amongst young Australians, especially young girls but increasingly young men as well. These people are bombarded with fanciful and manipulated imagery in magazines and on TV and young girls are quite literally, starving themselves as they aspire to replicate these images. We know of alarming stories of girls aged as young as six dieting because they think they're overweight. So what these figures tell us is that negative body image is not just a passing fad, it's a serious issues which is affecting the health, the confidence and the self esteem of young Australian women in particular.

And it's a really complex issue, it's an issue which previously has been brought up and it's either been dismissed or instead people turn to pointing the finger.

Some pointing to the modelling industry and blaming skinny models, others then pointing to the advertisers saying that they're the only people they'll employ, the advertisers then talking about the media or the consumer and how that's actually what they're responding well to and that's what they're buying.

Well the reality is that it's time to stop pointing the finger and it's time to come together and talk about solutions. Let's talk about how we're going to leave young Australians, in particular, with positive self-esteem and images of themselves.

So this has been a core priority of the work that the Government's been doing and you may have seen we established a national advisory group on body image who are currently working as a priority on coming up with an industry code of conduct which will provide guidance for the responsible portrayal of body image in the media, in advertising and in the fashion industries, as well as advising on steps in a

national approach, whether that be in media literacy, whether that be in empowering young people to feel okay about these challenges. We've also invested half a million dollars to establish a new national eating disorders collaboration.

We've done this because this is an issue which is predominantly affecting young people; it's an issue which has been dismissed in the past. In fact, the first time I raised it in the Parliament was dismissed by someone opposite interjecting that this is nothing new, it's something that we've all felt when we were growing up, and we've all wanted to be thinner than we are.

Well, we're not going to dismiss this because we think it's serious and because we think that the issues which young people are telling us are their priorities need to be government priorities too.

Which, I guess, brings me to cyber-bullying and we all saw the heartbreaking case last month of a 14 year old Victorian student who took her own life just hours after somebody threatened to reveal her secrets over the internet.

It highlights the gravity of this situation and I know that the story touched thousands of people right across the country and brought the issue of cyber-bullying to the fore of many people's minds probably for the first time. But for young people dealing with it, night after night, alone in their rooms, then the reality is all too harsh, and one that we as a government, can't ignore.

The insidious nature of cyber-bullying means that the sanctity of the family home is no longer a guaranteed safe place for young people to flee to once they escape the school bully, because, of course, students can now be reached 24 hours a day whether that be through text messages or whether it be over the internet.

For this reason, we recently announced a \$3 million national pilot project, which is aimed at addressing the issue of cyber-bullying in our schools. And at least 150 schools around the country will be taking part in this pilot program, so that we can start addressing ways and acting on this serious issue.

One last issue which I might highlight, which is in the State of Australia's Young People report, is the serious impact that violence is having on young people's health and on their well-being. And I don't think that anybody in this room would be surprised by this. All you really need to do is read our daily newspapers, to see the

senseless street violence, which is shattering the lives of not only our young people, but also their families and their friends.

The issue is though, we often portray young people as the perpetrators of violence. What we don't often do is recognise that they're also predominantly the victims of this violence.

Incidents of assault have almost doubled since 1995, with young males and females between the ages of 15 and 24 having the highest rate of being victims of this assault.

Now I recognise that violence is not new. It's not something that hasn't previously taken place within our community. But the ferociousness and the frequency of street attacks, often fuelled by excessive alcohol consumption, is on the rise. And I think the fact that we have a term for picking up a glass and smashing it over somebody's face, illustrates that we have a problem, let alone the fact the incidents of glassings have increased by more than 25 per cent in New South Wales, between the years of 2003 and 2008. This says even more.

There's no quick, easy, solution to this problem. But I do know that if we are going to tackle this problem effectively, then we're not going to tackle it from our Parliament alone. We're going to tackle it in partnership with young Australians themselves.

Some of you, and our AYF Steering Committee members, are well aware that at the Government's inaugural YouThink event earlier this year, we had a satellite link-up of over 600 young Australians right around the country, telling us their views on the violence that was taking place in the community, and what they thought could be done to address it.

I'm really pleased that the experiences that was brought up through this process have now been presented to Annette Ellis, who is the chair of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth, which is set to report on the impact of youth violence later this year. And I know that they're making a particular effort to ensure that young Australians play a key role in informing their deliberations.

Annette's here today with two other remarkable young role models in Jono Chase and Nina Funnell - who I haven't mentioned that I'm going to speak about, so I

hope they'll forgive me, but they've heard me do it before - but I want to illustrate the importance and the power of working in collaboration with young Australians on these issues, and I think that they're both a great example of that.

Now on the day following the revelation that yet another one of our sports stars is facing serious allegations of violence, it's a timely reminder for us to, on the need for positive role models in both sport and the broader community, and on the need for us all to take a strong stance against violence, because in any circumstance it's not acceptable. And I've had a rant on *The Punch* today about attempts to absolve role models of their responsibility in this space and how it's just not on. And how defending violent behaviour should never be condoned and should never be tolerated.

But I think that those that seek to do this could learn a lot from Jono and from Nina, who know what it's like to either be the victim of violence, or to lose one of your mates to it.

So I just want to briefly share with you the impact that their stories has had on me, and I know has had on a lot of young people around the country.

Jono - and I apologise for doing this [laughs] to you - Jono is the cofounder of Step Back, Think, a group based in Melbourne. The group began - and I'll use their words to describe this - *after the brutal bashing of our friend James, in the city, in 2006. James is now confined to bed, or a wheelchair, imprisoned in a body that doesn't work, because of the damage caused in a split second of senseless violence. He can't walk, talk or eat and he exists in a twilight zone, where he's neither dead nor alive.*

Now Jono and his friends at Step Back and Think, have been going out and talking directly to their peers, because people might not always listen to government, listen to their parents, when we're talking about the impacts this is having. But we know how powerful the stories of their peers can be.

Nina's story is equally as powerful and inspiring. She was sexually assaulted in 2007, and has had the strength and the courage to speak openly about this to other young people.

Her attacker was a suspected serial rapist and she's now claimed the power back, by going public with what happened to her. She was previously a journalism

student and now spends her time raising awareness of sexual assault and advocating women's rights and self-defence. And she's helped countless youths to deal with their assaults, through her public forums and various articles, which have been published in a number of mediums.

Now I'm grateful for both of these two, because I've had the opportunity to work with them at some of our AYF events, both YouTHink and Outreach events. And so I'd just like to acknowledge that we're serious working in partnership with young people, because we recognise it doesn't just bring benefits to young people, but it brings benefits to government in getting our message out there.

For far too long Australians and young Australians and the issues that they face have been undervalued and underestimated. And I think that we all should be sorry for that. Ours is a Government that wants to not make this same error. We recognise that we need young people to be part of the solutions, part of the solutions not just for today, but also for tomorrow. We recognise that dismissing young people and dismissing them and telling them to just sit back and wait their turn, it lacks foresight and it doesn't work.

We recognise that young Australians have a valuable contribution to make and that harnessing this contribution is smart. And we back this in with action, in re-establishing the Ministry of Youth, in establishing the Office for Youth, to bring a focus on young people and young issues right across government. In engaging with young people in innovative new ways. Over 1.2 million on our new website, or through the Australian News Forum, in meeting with people on their own turf. We're literally speaking with thousands of Australians, right across the nation, about their issues.

And, of course, it's not all doom and gloom. We have a remarkable generation of young people who are truly inspired and truly inspiring and I point to just one in the room today, in Hugh Evans, who's almost single-handedly saving the planet I believe, with his global poverty project, as well as a number of other issues.

But the issues that I touch on today and the point that I'm trying to make is that there are issues which need to be addressed by governments, which are unique to young people. There are issues that have been ignored for far too long and they're issues that we commit to working with you to address, because we know that in order to ensure the self-esteem, the confidence and the empowerment of this important group of the Australian community, we need to act. And we'll do this because we also get that if you want to govern in the long-term interests, you have

to act as a government for all Australians and harness the productivity and the innovation of the entire nation. You can't continue to exclude 20 per cent of the population.

So all of these reasons are why youth matters. And I point them out to you, so that we can highlight them, not just today on International Youth Day, but every day going forward.

Thank you very much.

[Applause]

KEN RANDALL: Thank you, Minister. We have our usual period of questions starting today with Alex Symonds.

QUESTION: Minister, Alex Symonds from The Fin Review. In your speech you talked about the Howard Government going too far with its introduction of VSU. You've got a VSU fix on the table in the student amenities fee. The Coalition has opposed this from the start and continues to.

Why is it that you think you haven't been able to get this bill through sooner given you announced it last September? And is the Government still committed to this new fee?

KATE ELLIS: Thank you for your very timely question. The legislation to which you refer is currently listed for debate before the Senate in this sitting period. I understand they've got a little bit else going on up there at the moment, but we are very much committed to this legislation.

We recognise that whilst their legislation went way too far, that we're not returning to the arrangements of the past, that we're setting a new way forward. We believe it's a balanced and fair way forward, and we believe that it's really important that we act to make sure that our universities are world-class institutions who are capable of attracting and supporting overseas students, but also who provide our domestic students with a well-rounded educational experience.

So I look forward as much as many others to it hopefully passing the Senate in the very near future, and we will continue to work towards this.

KEN RANDALL: Thank you. The next question's from Bonny Symons-Brown.

QUESTION: Hi, Minister. As I'm sure you know, there has been a long-running dispute between media outlets and sporting organisations over access to games. Earlier this year there was a Senate committee inquiry into the matter which found that legitimate journalists should be granted access to these events. Since then little has changed however.

Was that enquiry a complete waste of time, or should communications Minister Stephen Conroy step in and enforce a trade practices code, which was recommended as a last resort by the inquiry?

KATE ELLIS: Thank you for your question, and I think it's a really important issue - it's an important issue for the media. But it's also an important issue for sport and to make sure we get it right.

Basically the findings of the inquiry were that, yes, whilst they came up with some last resorts, as a first, and second and perhaps as a third resort, we would really like to see the media and the sporting industry sit down together and come up with some sensible compromises and I think that there is definitely a capacity for that to occur.

If anything, I think the role of Government should be limited at this point to trying to facilitate and make sure that happens, and I think it's in the interests of both media and sport that it takes place, and I'm confident that it will.

KEN RANDALL: Mark Kenny.

QUESTION: Mark Kenny from the Adelaide Advertiser, Minister. I just want to ask you a broader philosophical question, I guess, about - in your capacity as a minister of the Government but also representing the youth constituency.

Looking at an issue like climate change, it seems surveys of young people show that they, among all groups in the population, need no more convincing that climate change is real and that action is needed. But we see from our established politics, you know, a bit of a macho standoff between the political parties - there's a lot of game playing, there is no real progress and that's the take out young people seem to have from politics.

I wonder, is politics broken in that sense, is our politics broken and what can be done to engage young people in the political process?

KATE ELLIS: The short answer is no, I don't think politics is broken, but I certainly understand that young people in particular can be incredibly frustrated and at times become incredibly cynical about issues which they recognise are important and which they want to see action on.

And I know not just as a Minister for Youth but as the local member for Adelaide, when I was out doorknocking at the last election, I will tell you that one of the main reasons why people were - and young people were keen to see a change of government, is because they were sick and tired of inaction on climate change, which is exactly the reason why we've acted.

It's exactly the reason why we've pushed the legislation to the Senate, and it's exactly the reason why we're committed to making sure that we do put in place this solution and see that Australia is at the forefront of action.

I guess to in some ways turn your question around, I think that it's our responsibility to make sure that we prove to young Australians that the system isn't broken, and that we're going to deliver on our promises, and our promise was to put in place serious action on climate change in the form of the CPRS.

KEN RANDALL: Peter Phillips.

QUESTION: Minister, Peter Phillips, one of the directors to the National Press Club. My question goes also specifically to the youth component of your portfolio and to its relevance to another controversial, but I think very important area of broader government policy, specifically in relation to alcopops.

It's become very popular in recent times for the Opposition and for other opponents to attack the Government for having been involved in the presentation of the Budget in 2008, in what was essentially a tax grab.

But it was my recollection at the time that the issue was originally presented very much in its context as a vitally important social policy measure, and a measure aimed very much at combating or attacking youth or underage recruitment to the

drinking of alcohol. And I understand that the issue was subsequently been legislatively, and therefore in revenue terms, broadly speaking, resolved.

But does it remain the youth - combating youth recruitment to alcohol, does that remain an important part of the Government's social policy, or was it just a revenue mission?

KATE ELLIS: Absolutely, and I think that's a fantastic question in that. I really like to articulate, particularly to young people, that when we are talking about our binge drinking strategies and when we are talking about the alcopops initiative, this isn't about being the fun police.

It's - what this is about is about recognising when you have a look at - we talked about violence and rates of assault - when you look at your chances of being a victim of sexual assault, when you look at the probabilities of being involved in a drink driving accident, when you look at the statistics on your likelihood to suffer a whole range of horrendous circumstances, they massively increase when you're drinking at risk levels.

And the point about alcopops is that when you have a look at teenagers in particular who are drinking it at risk levels, the overwhelming majority of them say that alcopops, premix drinks, are their drink of choice. Which is the reason why it's a concern when you have a ready-made drink which tastes like cordial, and the ability of that drink to both appeal particularly to young people, and to be the drink of choice of at-risk youngsters is something that we should address, which is why we acted on that particular piece of legislation.

But your question about whether or not it was a revenue measure alone, I think is answered by the fact that that wasn't a stand-alone initiative. It's actually part of a \$53 million binge drinking strategy.

And that's the strategy where we are engaging in working with young people themselves, working with community groups, working through their local sporting clubs and working in a whole range of different areas to start changing a culture which supports binge drinking.

Now this isn't an easy thing to do. It's not something that one measure alone is going to address, and we readily admit that, but it's something that is worth acting

upon and it's something that we have now put in place as strategy, which is a multifaceted strategy, to make sure that we turn these statics around.

KEN RANDALL: Minister, can I take you back a couple of questions to university services.

KATE ELLIS: Certainly.

KEN RANDALL: Without yet having your legislation passed, do you have an idea of just what the impact of the previous Government's changes has done - many universities have reacted differently to the situation they now face, particularly after the - so many of them have lost revenue from their investments. Just how bad is the situation?

KATE ELLIS: Thank you very much for the question. We do have an idea of the impact of the previous Government's VSU legislation.

Upon coming to government, I committed to doing a national visit of consultations and going out and speaking directly to universities, both metropolitan and regional universities about the impact. And what we found did differ from campus to campus, but overall we found that the legislation was stripping \$170 million down at the sector. And that has impacts, and it's felt in a number of ways.

We know that there were a huge number of services where the prices either massively increased, and there are examples of parking permits increasing by over \$200 a year. There are examples of sporting club membership by increasing massively to the point where it was unattainable for many people at a student level.

But there is also examples of services disappearing altogether. We saw child care centres which closed, or child care centres which increased their fees at such a rate that universities actually wasn't a viable option for some of these young parents any more.

And interestingly, some people have put to me, well I don't use any of the student services on campus, so why should I have to pay a fee? And the answer to this was we actually found that the impacts were being felt indirectly as well as directly.

A number of the universities said to us that as a result of the income they were losing through the student services fee, they were forced to redirect funds out of their teaching and learning budgets. So what this meant was that money that previously would have been directed into research, could have been directed into keeping down class sizes, having smaller tutorials, having more resources available, library books available, was then being spent on student services which were previously provided under the system. So it was actually affecting all students, regardless of the services in particular that they were accessing.

And one of the final points which we found really disturbing was vice-chancellor saying to us this is impacting on our ability to attract overseas students as well. We attract overseas students because we give them a well-rounded service, because we provide support for them on campus, activities, ways for them to meet other people, but also avenues and information services for them to turn to if something goes wrong. Now I think that anyone who looks at the contribution that overseas students make to the Australian higher education system should be really alarmed at these consequences as well.

So this wasn't - this isn't as sometimes the Opposition would have us believe, about us wanting to continue on playing student politics. I can absolutely assure you that there is no desire whatsoever to do that. This is about the fact that it's having devastating impacts on our higher education sector and that this is a really important sector, both to our economy and our productivity, but also of course to our Education Revolution.

KEN RANDALL: Minister, time for some genuinely young people questions, we often get - it can be tricky. We often get visiting school groups here, and we've got two of them today and they've each nominated somebody to ask you a question. The first one is Madison Cashen(*) from the Alexandra Hills State High School.

QUESTION: Hi my name is Madison Cashen. I'm here from Alexander Hills State High School in Queensland. My question today is in The Courier-Mail on the weekend the state wide comparative test results were released. Unfortunately public schools, including my own, did not rate on the scale compared to wealthier private schools. It is clear that financial resources affect outcomes. I don't think this disadvantage is fair. What can be done to ensure that all students have equal access to quality education?

KATE ELLIS: Thank you, Madison. I think that's a wonderful question. It's a question which we've asked ourselves, and that we're now acting in terms of an answer to it.

We recognise that in terms of social inclusion, in terms of the opportunities which are available to people, to go on and reach their aspirations and succeed in their future ventures, relies upon quality education. We get that right from early childhood education to your schools, onto your training, and higher education if you choose to go that way.

Which is exactly the reason why, one, as part of the Education Revolution we've announced a whole range of additional funding measures for education, but two, and I think this is important in regards to your question, it's why the Deputy Prime Minister in Julia Gillard has been so passionate about the need for us to be able to see where the problems are.

We actually need to see where it is that people aren't getting the opportunity to achieve the greatest educational experience, so that we can target those areas, put additional resources in those areas and lift up the standards so that everybody does.

That's something that there has been some deal of debate about in recent times. But it's something that we're very passionate about, because we recognise that you should have the opportunity to have just as important an educational experience, and to get those learning opportunities no matter what post code you happen to live in, or what school you're enrolled in.

KEN RANDALL: Minister, the second question from a Queensland high school today is from Shannon Wigby(*) from the Wellington Point State High School.

QUESTION: Hi Minister, I'm Shannon Wigby and I'm from Wellington Point State High School in Queensland. My question is in my hometown, in the Redlands, Brisbane, there are very limited activities for the young people that are free. Part-time work and year 12 combined together are very stressful. Would it be possible for the Government to fund any social activities for young adults?

KATE ELLIS: Thank you for your question. It's a great question, because one of the things that keeps coming out in our youth consultations when we were talking about violence, one of the things that kept coming forward, was we want safe

places to go. We want activities to keep us occupied. When we were talking about binge drinking, people were saying we don't want to get bored and resort to binge drinking, and I guess this is one of the reasons why there are a number of different activities that can be offered.

One of them is around - and here I'm being biased again, but one of them is around physical activity and sport. And what we've done is recognised if you don't have access to the infrastructure that you need to go on and participate in that, then that can be a real barrier to you getting involved and being active.

It's one of the reasons why we invested over \$300 million in the biggest ever single investment in community sporting infrastructure, but also as part of the stimulus package, what we have been doing is working with local government, and my colleague in Anthony Albanese has been talking to local governments about their priorities.

Now lots of local governments have talked about youth facilities, have talked about engaging them and they've had a wish list for a long time, because they recognise it's in everybody's best interests that we keep young people engaged and active but they haven't had the funding to do.

So we're really grateful that as a result of the funding that we've put forward, there are more of those resources being built. But it's something we will continue to work with our state and territory colleagues on, on recognising that there is a need in a lot of communities for more activities for young people.

KEN RANDALL: Thank you very much.

[Applause]

Minister, thank you very much. All our speakers become members of the club, so I hope we get to see you at this lectern again in the not too distant future. Thank you very much and good luck.

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