QUITTING SHADOW CABINET (1987)

In 1987 there were several main events. The first was my resignation from the front bench, which is covered in detail in the following account and which was taken from contemporary diaries but written later. When I resigned from the front bench of the Opposition, many women and women's groups were supportive; the political leadership of my party and of the National Party were the ones who did not understand what I had done and why it was the proper course to take because equal employment opportunity is so important. So I came out of it as a hero and the parties came out of it as fools. However, they decided not to oppose several identical Bills not long after—so they know how to limit their losses.

During the evening of 21 March 1987, the Leader of the Victorian Opposition, Jeff Kennett, was travelling by car from central Victoria back to Melbourne. His candidate [Marie] Tehan had just held the Upper House Seat of Central Highlands against Labor and the National Party, and Kennett was pleased with himself. Using a telephone in his car, he called Andrew Peacock in Melbourne to say some harsh things about Federal Liberal Leader John Howard in robust and basic barrack-room language.

Mobile radio telephones operate as do radio transmitters, and transmissions are not secure. This conversation was recorded and released to the media almost immediately—a strangely fortuitous event not properly explained during the furore that followed. The upshot was that, far from getting the benefit of a good election victory against the tide, the Liberal Party found itself on the defensive as the more lurid details of the conversation were discussed by the media. By the time I came to Parliament House on 23 March for Shadow Cabinet, there was no other topic of conversation, with particular attention being given to those parts of the conversation critical of John Howard.

Shadow Cabinet had been scheduled for 10 am, but was put off several times. We eventually gathered at midday for what was to be my last meeting as a member of the Shadow Cabinet. Howard told us that he had sacked Andrew Peacock from the Shadow Cabinet and ministry on the basis of the intercepted conversation. He then read us the press statement he would make within 10 minutes. The only comment from the front bench came from Peter Shack, who said the sacking was, in his view, unnecessary and an error of judgment. Howard then went to his press conference and we started the agenda under the chairmanship of Ian Sinclair.

To be present during these moments of great crisis is to be impressed often with how calmly everything happens, how calmly one thinks, and how one's judgment, sharpened and alert as it is, operates nevertheless with detached calm. Within just one hour I was to face my greatest personal crisis in this room and with these colleagues of long-standing. Having endured one enormous political crisis that day, I did not imagine that another crisis of even greater personal impact was upon me.

The issue that was to cause all the trouble was some way down the agenda. It concerned the position to be taken by the Opposition in relation to a government Bill to require the application of the principle of equal employment opportunity (EEO) principles to all but four statutory authorities of the Commonwealth. The Bill had been introduced by the minister for employment and industrial relations Ralph Willis, and was brought to Shadow Cabinet by his opposite number, Neil Brown. Brown, deputy leader of the party and something of a cynical schemer, had consulted me about the submission he would make to Shadow Cabinet. We had agreed that he would recommend that we not oppose the Bill.

Quite apart from the imperative need to support the Bill on its liberal merits, support was necessary in order to keep us consistent with a position I had put publicly eight months earlier, in the Parliament, on behalf of the Opposition. I had acted then with the authority of the Shadow Cabinet, and Brown and I both agreed that support for the latest Bill was necessary. Brown recommended accordingly to the Shadow Cabinet. Realising that I might need to take part in detailed analysis of the Bill, I had used some of the time before we gathered at midday to prepare the brief, to recall details of the EEO debate of 1986, and to check my own contributions to the debate in the Senate.

It was when we began to deal with the agenda that the first warning bells began to sound. Sinclair, the embattled leader of the National Party, was in the chair in Howard's absence at the press conference at which he justified the sacking of Peacock. Ian Sinclair had his own problems that week, problems which determined his sense of priority on issues before us. Ian Sinclair faced

the critical conference of his National Party at week's end, a conference which was likely to spell the end of the coalition arrangement between the Liberal and National parties. The erratic Premier of Queensland, driven by recklessness and ambition, was attacking Sinclair and his federal colleagues at every opportunity.

Sinclair believed he could deliver the numbers for several critical votes at week's end, but was desperate to avoid giving Premier Bjelke-Petersen any excuse for a 'free hit' in the few days remaining before the conference. As Sinclair saw it, the Shadow Cabinet agenda contained two difficult items, one of them the EEO Bill, and both requiring to be deferred until John Howard could be present. It was after lunch that discussion of the two difficult items commenced. Brown opened the discussion by speaking to his written analysis of the Bill and setting out his reasons for recommending that we should not oppose the Bill. He presented a good case honestly. Sinclair followed and indicated that the Bill presented a problem for his party.

At this stage, Howard emphasised what he called the 'absolute priority' of acting to maintain the Coalition and the need to act in furtherance of this strategic approach. It was only as events unfolded that I realised that his statement of 'absolute priority' was one that he really meant. Absolute—even if the alternative was the political survival of a Shadow Cabinet colleague. Sinclair then followed up by indicating that his colleagues could not support the Bill. So there we were, after having sacked Andrew Peacock four hours earlier, setting up the conditions for my resignation.

It was at this stage that I joined the discussion. In what the press later in the week, on the basis of leaked reports, called a 'passionate discussion', I pointed out the impossibility for me of any position that did not support the position I presented in 1986 on behalf of the Coalition. I warned my colleagues that this was an issue that could force my resignation if pushed too far, and that it was double jeopardy for me as I had to face my preselectors for re-endorsement at the weekend. My contribution was angry and forceful.

The Shadow Cabinet then considered (very briefly) the option of the parties voting separately on the issue, but Howard found this unacceptable. As far as Sinclair was concerned the only recommendation that met his political needs that week was total opposition to the Bill. As I realised just how serious this was for me personally, I intervened several more times. I reminded them that I had been acting on their behalf in August 1986 when I demanded that the Government extend EEO cover to statutory authorities, that they were placing me in an impossible situation in which I would have to consider resignation. Howard objected to this, saying that I could not ask Shadow Cabinet to consider

the matter under threat from me; he also repeated several times his view that the overwhelming strategic consideration had to be the maintenance of the Coalition.

My friend Ian Macphee, himself to be sacked from the Shadow Cabinet within three weeks, passed several notes to me during the discussion to see what could be done. When a vote on Brown's recommendation to support the Bill was eventually taken, there were only four votes of the Shadow Cabinet in favour of the recommendation together with perhaps one of the outer shadow ministry. The four were: Brown, [Fred] Chaney, Macphee and me. The rest, including Peter Durack, Jim Carlton, Tony Messner and John Howard, deserted me and sealed my resignation—some not understanding, some understanding but not caring.

Now that the decision was made to oppose the Bill, we broke about 4.30 pm so that Brown could marshal some arguments to oppose what he had recommended we support. We reassembled as a Shadow Cabinet only at 8 pm where Brown presented a thin, miserable, incredible package. In essence, we were to demand certain amendments and, if these were unsuccessful, would oppose the Bill. We had proposed more than 30 amendments to the EEO Bill in 1986, but when these failed, had managed to support the Bill and the principle it embodied. To be told now that we would be expected to oppose the companion Bill, which I had called for, would expose me to ridicule and to criticism which I would merit.

The Shadow Cabinet settled Brown's amendment. I reserved my position, which in Liberal Party code meant that I would consider my position in relation to my place in the Shadow Cabinet and front bench. My reservation was acknowledged.

In view of the crisis, the likelihood that the Bill would be debated in the House of Representatives that week, and my preselection at the weekend, I sought out two close friends, Robert Hill and Chris Puplick, and apprised them of the problem. Their advice was that I could vote honourably for the amendment, and that there would be time to take the matter back to the Shadow Cabinet, twice if necessary, before it came before the Senate for debate.

At this stage too I let Jenny know that I had a real problem. My policy adviser Joan-Mary Hinds presented a different problem. Normally in Canberra on sitting weeks, she was in Sydney this week and would not know of the details of the developing crisis for the office. Her job would be forfeit if I resigned from the Shadow Cabinet but, as I did not trust her judgment on this matter, I did not brief her as I did not brief the other members of my Sydney office. Briefing of other people, including staff, family and friends, was on a strict 'need to know' basis. On this basis, the decision not to advise Joan-Mary was a correct one.

If the Monday had been bad, the Tuesday was worse—for that matter each day that week up to Friday became progressively worse. Tuesday, 24 March was the day of our last joint meeting as a Coalition. Neil Brown, the complete legal advocate, argued for the Shadow Cabinet position (and against his own recommendation), emphasising the 'grave deficiencies' of the Bill, the 'pseudo-quotas' it allegedly contained, the 'burdens for business' and so on. Earlier I had heard him tell the backbench committee on industrial relations just what a horrendous piece of legislation this was—the effort of a real 'hired gun'. To be fair to Brown, the ability to argue passionately in public for a collegial position in which one did not believe is regarded as a virtue in political circles in Australia, and in the Liberal Party in particular. It is regarded as an essential part of the armament of any barrister, member of a cabinet or shadow cabinet.

I had never been able to do this easily. Mostly I had been spared the need to speak to some of the dreadful positions we adopted as parties. But recently I had found some of those positions morally offensive. For example, I had failed to vote on a couple of motions by conservative Tasmanian Brian Harradine designed to withhold certain benefits from people in de facto relationships and I had abstained too on a motion by Democrat David Vigor regarding the limiting of tobacco promotion.

My problem now was that the Equal Employment Opportunity (Commonwealth Authorities) Bill was considered an employment matter, not a matter affecting the status of women. So, Brown had its carriage in the House and his counterpart would deal with it in the Senate. I had no role to play, and furthermore, was required to keep silent during party room consideration of the Bill. I managed to disobey the rules and signal some of my distress to the meeting by interjecting angrily on one of the more Neanderthal of the National Party members, Michael Cobb of Parkes, when he made a more than usually outrageous statement about the legislation. Steele Hall said he would vote with the Government, Chris Puplick reserved his position. The quality of National Party concern was encapsulated by the contribution of Gary Nehl, whose total speech to the party room consisted of: 'This is another piece of socialist crap. Let's throw it out.'

The party room, inadequately briefed, and ignoring the policy imperatives implicit in the principle of EEO, endorsed the recommendation of the Shadow Cabinet. At lunch, I passed the table at which Peacock and Steele Hall were eating. Andrew asked me: 'Are you all right, mate?' Hall just looked thoughtful. I said very little but it was an interesting contact in light of what followed. My position was now extremely tenuous—but was to become impossible within a day.

That afternoon in Question Time, as I contemplated a series of awful personal alternatives, Fred Chaney came and chatted. He told me I looked awful—was I unwell? Margaret Reid then asked the same thing—it was sweet of her. During the morning of Wednesday, 25 March I visited the Law and Government Group of the Parliamentary Library Research Service and spoke to Kathryn Cole, wife of Laurie Oakes, the television commentator. He had appeared on television grossly overweight and I chatted to her about relatively painless dietary management of obesity. Quite coincidentally, about 15 minutes later, I received a phone call from Oakes himself. He wanted to ask me some questions. I agreed to hear the questions but guaranteed him no answers. The question when it came was a blockbuster. 'Did you threaten to resign at the Shadow Cabinet on Monday?' When I refused to comment, he asked no more questions.

Realising what this could mean, I went immediately to Howard and advised him of the question. Graham Morris was there. We agreed to wait and see what transpired; [it was said that] 'Martin Riordan would sniff around'. Fearing the worst, I began work on a resignation letter in the private access volume of my computer. At 4.50 pm I was summoned urgently from the Senate to Howard's office to be advised that Oakes was likely to run his story on the 6 pm news, 'in which case we would have a problem'. I understand that the leadership group met between 5 and 6 pm. I took advice from Keith Kessell in Chaney's office; we agreed that Oakes would not hold off the story and that it was not worth approaching him. I phoned Jenny to warn her to watch, and gathered Chris Crawford from my office together with Chris Wallace and Kessell from Chaney's office to watch the television.

Oakes led with the story that I had threatened to resign from Shadow Cabinet during 'an angry meeting' on 23 March 1987. We took a video of the segment. I saw Howard immediately, and from then on, at various times during the evening. In contrast to his obsessive concern with the welfare of the doomed Coalition at the Shadow Cabinet two days earlier, Howard now displayed decisive intelligence, a clear grasp of the issues, friendly and genuine concern, and distress at the course of action he now, finally, understood I would take. His office was now under siege from media heavies—the questions which could not be avoided were:

1. Will Baume resign or stay?
2. Will he or will he not support the Shadow Cabinet position on the EEO (CW Authorities) Bill?

Leaving Howard at 6.20 pm, I returned to my office and briefed Chris Crawford. The 'need to know' criterion now included him. Crawford advised resignation. I then called my wife, Jenny, again; she had a discussion group meeting at another house at 8 pm, but promised to talk to our mothers, to Sarah and to Ian.

Crawford undertook to keep the press at bay and did this magnificently during the remainder of the crisis. Puplick and Hill arrived and stayed most of the night with me. Chaney came briefly; he was late for a dinner but would return later. Robert Hill wanted me to stay but did not see how I could do so with any credibility or honour. Chris Puplick gave me two lots of advice: mindful of the weekend preselection, Senator Puplick advised me to stay, while my friend Chris Puplick advised me to resign.

I spoke again to Jenny just before she left for her discussion group. I advised her I would probably resign and would like her to be with me; she agreed to come down the next morning on the first available seat, which meant the mid-morning plane.

I saw John Howard again in his office. He begged me to stay. He pointed out, accurately, that I had been used as a pawn in an exercise directed against him. He wanted me on his front bench as a reasoned and articulate liberal voice. He indicated that a different portfolio could be arranged, that the timing of the whole thing was terrible, that it was a 'body blow', etc.

But the bottom line was always that I would be required, while I was a member of the Shadow Cabinet, to support the decision on the EEO Bill. I agreed with this appreciation, but pointed out that the requirement to support the decision was the main reason that resignation was my likely course. We agreed that a decision could not be delayed past the morning.

Back in my office at 8.30 pm, I phoned Ted Pickering to advise him of the disastrous effect in relation to preselection. He was calm and began damage control immediately. I then phoned Betty Grant, who wanted me to avoid resignation. Chris Crawford ordered some food to be sent down—I cannot remember what it was. Fred Chaney returned from his dinner and we argued on in the office, Chaney and Puplick using my whiteboard to construct decision paths, etc.

Robert Hill phoned [his wife,] Diana; she advised against resignation, as did George Brandis and Tom Harley, each of whom phoned in. Interestingly, all those who advised against resignation this night from outside the Parliament agreed later that it was the only proper course I could have taken. At some stage in the course of events, my brother Stephen phoned to see if I was all right. When I explained the problem and asked for his advice, he replied: 'It depends on how much you want the job.' That really settled it for me.

At about 10.30 pm, I found Jenny at the discussion group. She had the support of my family for anything I did. She asked did I have to support the decision of Shadow Cabinet as part of any package; if so, how could I possibly stay with any honour. I told her I was determined to go and she promised to be down as soon as possible.

At 11.15 pm, John Howard phoned again from the Commonwealth Club. When I advised him that my decision at that stage was to resign he said, 'Oh no! This is a body blow! Please sleep on it.' We then agreed to meet for breakfast at 7.15 am.

Back at my Woden Gardens unit, I found my friend and tenant Stewart McArthur busy preparing his speech for the Bill the next day in the House. I told him then what I had not been permitted to tell the party room: that his arguments were wrong and would be seen as wrong and weak by the press and public. Nevertheless, he should prepare a good and strong speech. I warned him further that I would resign from the Shadow Cabinet over the Bill in the morning. The news seemed to startle him.

I got to bed at 11.45 pm. Strangely, I had no doubt about the course I was about to take, nor about its correctness. Perhaps because of this, sleep came easily.

Arriving at Parliament House by 7.15 am, I beat the press who set up their cameras a little later. Chris Crawford was already there, hard at work; Chris Puplick arrived almost immediately. Then John Howard arranged to meet me for breakfast at 7.25 am. Arriving in the dining room, Russ Gorman, the Labor Member for Greenway, congratulated me warmly on my position, but then begged me not to resign.

Interestingly, I learned later from a Sydney Jewish journalist that he had occasion to speak to Graham Richardson during the 16 or so hours before my resignation became final. The journalist asked him what would happen. Richardson is reported to have said that there was no doubt at all that I would resign. He was right.

Breakfast was unsatisfactory as some uncomprehending MP came and sat with us. So Howard and I went to the Senate Rose Garden and walked and talked there. He repeated his offer, but with the same proviso. We continued walking to the back of Parliament House but were there confronted by television cameras, which accompanied us all the way back to the Reps side door.

Leaving John at his office, I returned to my office and settled my resignation letter. Jenny phoned Chris Crawford to check on certain press reports that I had been talked out of resignation. Unable to talk freely because of a journalist camped in with him, Chris was still able to assure Jenny that I was resigning.

The office phones ran hot but Chris Crawford was able to give effect to our policy of offering no public comment at all. I finalised my resignation letter and delivered it to Howard at about 9.30 am. John showed me his response and both were released about half an hour later. My resignation letter read as follows:

> 26th March 1987.
>
> It is with deep personal regret that I tender you my resignation from the Shadow Cabinet.
>
> I have very much appreciated your support and understanding in the discussions we have held about this matter. You know from our discussions that I cannot, consistent with my principles, vote for the Shadow Cabinet and Party room decisions to oppose the Equal Employment Opportunity (Commonwealth Authorities) Bill 1987.
>
> You will be aware that this decision is directly counter to views which I put and to amendments I proposed seven months ago on behalf of, and with the authority of, the Shadow Cabinet and the Opposition Parties.
>
> You must be able to command full support from your Front Bench for every decision and so it is proper that I resign as a Shadow Cabinet Minister.
>
> Thank you for your support and concern during the numerous discussions we have had in the past twenty-four hours. My object remains to ensure that the Coalition defeats Labor and to see the restoration of hope and good government under your Leadership.
>
> I will pursue this goal and contribute towards it with vigour and determination from the backbench. You have my continuing personal support and good wishes in your great task and in the goals you pursue on behalf of all of us in the Liberal Party.
>
> Yours Sincerely
> Peter Baume

John Howard's reply was:

> 26th March 1987.
>
> Senator the Hon Peter Baume
> Senator for New South Wales
> Parliament House
> Canberra ACT 2600
>
> I refer to your letter of today's date in which you have tended your resignation from the Shadow Cabinet. I accept your resignation with enormous regret. You are aware of the high personal regard in which I hold you. I have always appreciated your contributions to the Shadow Cabinet. They have been based on integrity.

Your deeply held views on equal opportunity are understood. However Shadow Cabinet took the view that there were differences between the Bill now before the Parliament and the amendments put seven months ago.

In the final analysis there is an absolute requirement that all Shadow Ministers fully support decisions of the Shadow Cabinet. You have quite properly acknowledged this in your letter.

With kind regards,
Yours Sincerely
John Howard

He issued an accompanying press statement as follows:

Senator the Hon. Peter Baume, L46/87

Senator the Hon Peter Baume has today resigned from the Shadow Cabinet. I attach his letter of resignation together with my response. I have appointed Senator the Hon Peter Durack QC as acting spokesman for the Opposition on Community Services and Status of Women.

Senator Baume's resignation is due to the absolute requirement that all Shadow Ministers fully support decisions of the Shadow Cabinet once taken. The Opposition is against the Equal Employment Opportunity (Commonwealth Authorities) Bill 1987 for the following reasons. First, the Government has not subjected the Bill to the examination that the Government on 9 January 1987 undertook that it would subject all new proposals for business regulation. Secondly, the Bill in effect imposes pseudo quotas on the employment of women and other groups covered by the legislation. Thirdly, the Bill applies to independent contractors in addition to employees which we regard as unacceptable.

If the Government accepts these objections and acts accordingly by amendment or otherwise, the Opposition would be willing to support the measure. As Mr Brown said last night: 'Indeed, we would have voted without any quibble for a Bill which was a genuine equal opportunity Bill based on merit and one that had been tested against the Government's own business regulation procedures and which had passed them'.

Some media reports have suggested that the Opposition's stance on this Bill is due entirely to the views of National Party members of the Coalition. Such reports are nonsense. There are widespread objections to the Bill in its present form within the Parliamentary Liberal Party as well as in the National Party. These objections have been articulated in the Shadow Cabinet, in the Joint Party Committee and in the Joint Parties Room.

The Shadow Cabinet recommendation was supported by a clear majority of those who participated in the Party room debate. The arguments in the press release were those that had been developed by Neil Brown after his original recommendation to support the Bill had been lost in Shadow Cabinet. They were

> either minor matters requiring amendment, or they were wrong, or they were contrived. I answered the merits of the arguments when I spoke to the Bill in the Senate a month later.

Friends continued to phone frantically urging me to stay. They missed the point that to stay would be to lose all credibility and potency—to become just another compromising time server. George Brandis phoned again to say that he had now reversed his opinion and believed 'this is the most noble resignation in Australian political history'. Maybe. Maybe not.

I phoned and advised everyone in the Sydney office. Joan-Mary was shocked as she lost her job with the decision. She was appalled that I had not asked her to come to Canberra to share the crisis and the decision making, but the strategy of leaving her in Sydney was correct in view of her personality and persona. I talked to all the heavies in Sydney again and offered Frank Hooke the chance to take the hotel room at preselection alone without me. Jenny arrived before midday and it was good to be together.

Once it was all over I felt right: the Shadow Cabinet had turned its back on me when it should have given loyalty to the position I had taken on its behalf. My leader had placed his Coalition priorities ahead of those of a Liberal colleague and the primacy of that Howard priority made my resignation inevitable. I felt clean. And I felt free. Above all, I had not failed myself or those I love. When the crunch came I had been able to resign my position and seniority, built up over 13 years, and had been able to do so with calm detachment and no regrets for myself. My regrets had been for my colleagues and party, and for Frank Hooke, whose chances of beating the dreaded Bronwyn Bishop for a Senate nomination in New South Wales were now reduced.

Later in the morning I was called to Hill's office where, with Puplick, we talked Ian Macphee out of resigning with me. Little did we know he would be sacked within a few weeks. He was genuinely ill with an abscessed tooth so we sent him back to Melbourne, still in the Shadow Cabinet, for urgent dental care.

Now for the future! For the Liberal Forum; for publishing, writing, lecturing, thinking, and for saying what I thought necessary for Australia. After more than nine years as an office holder, minister, or shadow minister, the back bench would offer some real opportunities and possibilities. Just how many I did not know then.

Epilogue to my Resignation from Shadow Cabinet

The Federal Coalition ended after the Parliamentary National Party repudiated one of the elements of an agreement between Howard and Sinclair. This occurred on 28 April. On the next day, I asked the party—the Liberal Party alone now—to reconsider its handling of the EEO (Commonwealth Authorities) Bill. I pointed out to the party that our task was to find a way to handle the matter with least damage, that we were now no longer subject to National Party veto or pressure, that to adhere to our position would inevitably lead to mass defections in the Senate, and that in all the circumstances the best course might be to allow a free vote in the Senate. This would have involved least direct challenge to John Howard.

The party was not interested. The conservatives led by [Shirley] Walters, by Carrick et al., argued that there was no need to alter our position. John Watson made an interesting contribution to the debate. He mentioned that he had been unable to demonstrate to his daughter the gross defects allegedly present in the Bill. He offered the view that the party room had been misled in March and that we deserved better. The decision nevertheless was to stand with the March decision.

On 30 April the Bill was debated at the second reading in the Senate, and early the following week a division was called in the Senate to oppose the third reading of the Bill. Seven senators crossed the floor: Puplick, Hill, [Baden] Teague, [Mike] Townley, [Reg] Withers, [David] Macgibbon, as well as me. [Don] Jessop did not cross the floor but abstained. [David] Hamer, in craven style, said nothing and had himself paired. He sat in the gallery and some may have concluded, incorrectly, that he too was abstaining.

The effect was damaging for Howard and for the party. The damage could have been avoided either by taking up Neil Brown's original recommendation to Shadow Cabinet or by granting senators a free vote. The leadership, through arrogance or foolishness, adopted neither course. The party was so shaken by the size of the defection (25 per cent of the Liberal Party voted for the Bill and one other abstained) that in the very next week, when the same EEO provisions appeared in another Bill (The Wool Industry Bill) the party decided to support the Bill, and the provisions, rather than face another mass defection. So we won on the issue. But at enormous cost.

When the Parliament was dissolved and a double-dissolution election called just one month later, each of us suffered in the preselection that followed. Robert Hill was demoted from first to third, and Baden Teague was placed fifth

in South Australia. Don Jessop was dropped entirely. Mike Townley withdrew from preselection when it was made clear that he would not be re-endorsed. Reg Withers retired. I was relegated to second on the New South Wales ticket and Chris Puplick went down to fourth. The only saving grace was that the dreaded Bronwyn Bishop failed in an attempt to have us demoted further in her favour.

My speech in the Senate on the Equal Employment Opportunities (Commonwealth Authorities) Bill was the best and most important speech I have ever given. It is reproduced in this book, together with the remarks made about it by Senator Peter Cook of the Australian Labor Party.

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