



**DAVID  
FAWCETT**  
SENATOR FOR  
SOUTH AUSTRALIA



# THE FAWCETT FLYER

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2024

Never Again is Now Rally, Adelaide



It has been a busy two months. In February, senators spent three weeks in Canberra—including two for Parliament sitting and another of additional Budget Estimates. You can find an update on my Estimates work, as well as other committee responsibilities, on pages 2 and 3.

On 27 February, the Parliament farewelled former prime minister, Scott Morrison. I thank Mr Morrison for his service as Australia's 30th prime minister, especially during the challenging years of the pandemic. We also welcomed Dave Sharma back to the Parliament. Senator Sharma was previously the Member for Wentworth in the House of Representatives and Chair of the Foreign Affairs and Aid Sub-committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, which I chaired at the time. I look forward to working with Senator Sharma in his new role as a senator.

In early March, I hosted Shadow Home Affairs and Cyber Security Minister James Paterson in Adelaide for a community forum and several stakeholder engagement events with both industry and academia. It was a good opportunity to discuss priorities for a future Dutton Coalition Government on matters related to Senator Paterson's portfolio.

On 16 March, the South Australian Liberal Party voted to determine its Senate team for the next federal election—preselecting Alex Antic, Anne Ruston, myself and Leah Blyth. I thank the Liberal Party for its ongoing endorsement and look forward to working with the Senate team in the lead up to the next federal election. Immediately following preselection, I hit the ground running—presenting prizes at a defence and veterans' event that afternoon (the HMAS Hobart Cup yacht race—see picture on page 9), followed by another fortnight in Canberra before the Easter long weekend.

On page 5 of this edition of the Fawcett Flyer, I have included a special report on the MRH-90 Taipan debacle, including my engagement in various contexts—including in the media, Estimates and parliament—during February.

More recently, we have seen concerning developments on the religious freedom front, with the release of the Australian Law Reform Commission's report into faith-based schools and discrimination. I outline some of these concerns, with links to further detail, on pages 6 and 7.

As always, please contact me if you have any questions or would like further information on any aspect of my work.

Kind regards,



**SENATOR THE HON  
DAVID FAWCETT**





Besides the usual departmental briefings, meetings and hearings associated with my committee responsibilities, in mid-February senators flew to Canberra for an additional round of Budget Estimates.

I took the opportunity to question the Departments of Defence and Foreign Affairs and Trade, as well as the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) and the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). You can find many of these exchanges online.



In late February, I travelled to Kingston SE with colleagues to take evidence as a part of the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport's inquiry into Bank Closures in Regional Australia. There is often a disconnect between the perspective of executives in east-coast board rooms and the reality on the ground for people living in regional Australia. The conflicting evidence on the day from community, business and local government versus the bank executives clearly reinforced this.

The Joint Standing Committee on Treaties held several hearings between February and March, including on amending the *Agreement Establishing the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area*, and other international instruments.

Besides the public Treaties hearings, there were also several new inquiries announced to scrutinise agreements between Australia and several foreign governments and other international agreements.

Of particular note were the inquiry into the agreement between Australia and Fiji on cooperation in the field of Defence and the status of visiting forces, and the agreement between Australia and the United States concerning technology safeguards associated with US participation in space launches from Australia.

Other new Treaties inquiries included:

- “Nairobi International Convention on the Removal of Wrecks”
- Amendments to Appendices I, II and III of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
- Australia-Tuvalu Falepili Union

On 20 March, the Treaties committee tabled reports from its inquiries into “Acts of the Universal Postal Union adopted by the 2nd Extraordinary Congress” and “Acts of the Universal Postal Union adopted by the 27th Universal Postal Congress”, both of which can be found on the Australian Parliament House website.

I also participated in committee hearings associated with both the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (JSCFADT), and the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade (SSCFADT).

Additionally, on 27 March, the Senate ended up supporting my motion for the SSCFADT committee to assess the efficacy of Australia’s support for Ukraine. The inquiry is currently accepting submissions and is due to report on 4 August 2024.

Finally, the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade released its report from its inquiry into the *Defence Trade Controls Amendment Bill 2023 [Provisions]*.

You can read the committee report, along with the additional comments from Coalition Senators, by scanning the code:



As the Deputy Chair of the JSCFADT, during February and March, I had diplomatic meetings and related events with representatives and delegates from a range of nations, including Israel, South Korea, Japan, Fiji, the United States, Taiwan, Lithuania, France, Ukraine and several African nations.

In late March, I spoke in the Senate to rebut the presumptions underpinning a matter of public importance moved by the Greens concerning Australia's AUKUS partnership with the United Kingdom and the United States. In particular, the Greens' motion raised concerns about Australia's future acquisition of nuclear-powered, conventionally-armed submarines.



In my speech, I made several points in response to their concerns about the AUKUS agreement.

I pointed out that the cooperation as a part of the AUKUS deal is not a threat to Australia's sovereignty, as is sometimes asserted. In fact, Australia already partners with likeminded countries like the United States and the United Kingdom for the maintenance and ongoing operation of a range of existing platforms. This is not a threat to sovereignty.

I also refuted the concerns around the potential for destabilising our region, noting that one of the key reasons you have a strong defence force is for deterrence in order to keep the peace. Far from destabilising our region, AUKUS will actually enhance its stability through deterrence.

I also addressed the cost of the submarines. While the billions of dollars invested in the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines sounds like a lot of money, it will be spread out over a period of thirty years. I highlighted that this is about 0.15% of GDP, compared with the 10% of GDP that the Australian Government spends on its welfare budget.

Far from being a waste of money, the AUKUS arrangement is a sensible investment in the stability of our region.

It is also an investment in our sovereign capability, in partnership with likeminded nations, to preserve Australia's national interests and the interests of the Australian people.

You can view the entire speech on YouTube:



# MRH-90 TAIPANS & SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE



Since before October last year, I have engaged a number of stakeholders to encourage the Australian Government to donate our retired fleet of MRH-90 Taipans to the Ukrainian war effort, as was requested by the Ukrainian Government.

Since the Government's appalling refusal to do so in December last year, I have pursued the matter in a number of contexts, including in Estimates, Senate Question Time as well as the media, urging Defence Minister Richard Marles to reverse his decision.

You can listen to my interview on the subject with 2GB's Michael McLaren here:



The response to my public speeches and exchanges on this matter—including in the media, the Senate and Estimates—has sparked a significant response, demonstrating the widespread public support in Australia for Ukraine's defence against Russia's brutal invasion.

As was highlighted by Ambassador Myroshnychenko during his speech to the National Press Club, Ukrainian men and women are "giving up their tomorrows" to defend the same values that Australian service personnel have given their lives to preserve—namely, democracy, freedom and the rules-based international order.





The Albanese Government in late March tabled the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) report into Religious Educational Institutions and Anti-Discrimination Laws in Parliament.

This final ALRC report appears to be a worse outcome for religious freedom than the ALRC Consultation Paper released last year. Of equal concern is the fact that the Albanese Government is refusing to be transparent about the legislation they have prepared in response.

It has become apparent that the few faith leaders who have been consulted by the Government have been gagged by way of having to sign a non-disclosure agreement. This prevents them speaking about the elements of the legislation that they may have insight into with others, including other faith leaders or their own denominational members.

Even the Shadow Attorney General has only been provided a copy of the legislation on the condition that she cannot share it with others.

This lack of transparency flies in the face of the usual practice of making draft legislation available for scrutiny by a Senate committee via an inquiry—giving experts, affected organisations and the general public the opportunity to have their say.

A large number of senior denominational and educational religious leaders have signed an open letter questioning the Government's approach and its willingness to do a deal with the Greens to pass this legislation without scrutiny.

They also highlight that the report's recommendations would undermine religious freedom and severely limit the ability of faith based schools to operate and teach according to their faith values.



You can read the open letter from faith leaders by scanning the code.

I and my Coalition colleagues continue to call on Prime Minister Albanese to release his draft legislation for scrutiny by the Opposition, stakeholders and the public.

As always, I will continue to work to ensure that due process is followed and that religious freedom is protected.

You can read an op-ed I wrote last year on the right of faith-based schools to retain their distinctive character—published by the Menzies Research Centre.



27 March 2024

The Hon. Anthony Albanese, MP  
Prime Minister of Australia  
CC: The Hon. Mark Dreyfus, MP  
Attorney General  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Prime Minister,

**OPEN LETTER FROM FAITH LEADERS IN RESPONSE TO REPORTS THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL CONSIDER WORKING WITH THE GREENS TO IMPLEMENT THE AUSTRALIAN LAW REFORM COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

We write to express our deep concerns at media reports that suggest you are now considering negotiating with The Greens in order to implement the recommendations of the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) and pass a religious discrimination bill.

While the Government has had access to the ALRC report since last year, it has only just been made available to those most affected by its recommendations, particularly religious schools.

Only a select few have seen the two draft pieces of legislation, meaning there has been no opportunity for people of faith to offer detailed feedback to the Government or the Opposition.

We consider the reluctance of the Opposition to offer support to a legislative proposal for religious freedom which is – at this point – unseen and untested by faith communities to be reasonable and prudent, rather than an indication that a bipartisan approach endorsed by the faith communities is unachievable.

Further, we do not consider that any negotiation with The Greens will yield a result that provides any meaningful protections for religious freedom.

The policies of the Australian Greens include:

- Removing exemptions for all religious organisations in anti-discrimination law, not only those related to religious schools contained in section 38 of the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*;
- Replacing school chaplaincy programs with the contentious Safe Schools program; and
- Making federal funding to hospitals – including those operated by religious organisations – contingent on the provision of abortion.



South Australians have been feeling the pain for eighteen months now, but data released this week officially confirmed that Labor has broken its promise of a \$275 reduction in energy prices.

In South Australia, the draft Default Market Offer shows that Labor has fallen short by \$971 of its promised price reduction for everyday households.

This is equivalent to a 33.5% increase since Prime Minister Anthony Albanese came to power.

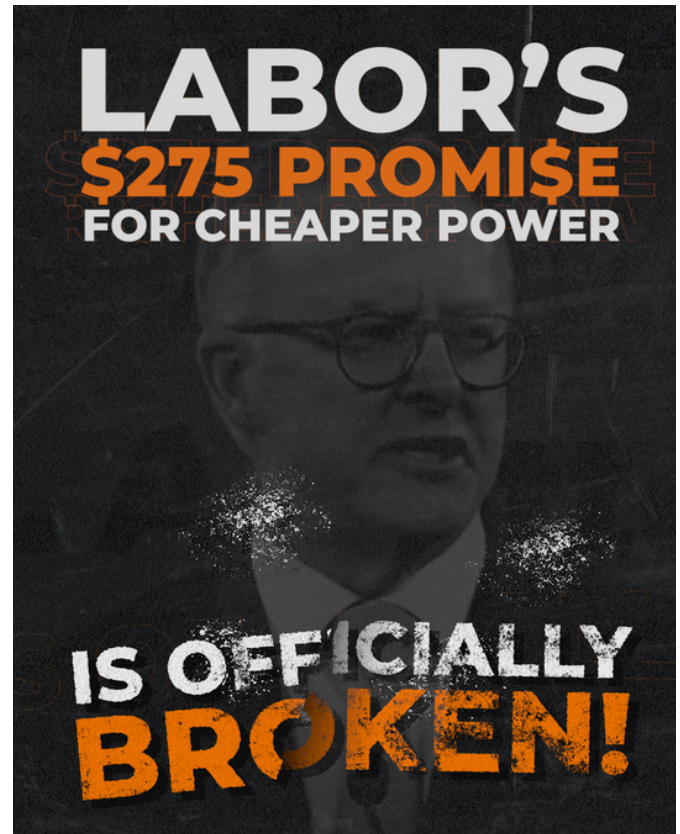
Small businesses in SA have also been hit hard by the Government's spiralling energy crisis with bills soaring by \$1,288 since Labor made its fatal promise.

Minister Bowen's assertion that higher levels of wind and solar will put downward pressure on the cost of electricity simply doesn't make sense.

As reported by *Sky News* recently, power prices in South Australia are currently *the most expensive in the world*, despite the fact that 75% of our energy generation comes from renewables like wind and solar.

As a sign of the suffering faced by everyday households, new numbers from the AER have also revealed that 25,144 South Australians have been placed into hardship due to their skyrocketing energy bills and 192,459 people nation-wide are now in energy debt.

South Australia is now paying up to 57 cents per kilowatt hour for electricity, whereas the Government's Fuel Efficiency modelling on energy prices said that SA would be paying just 27c kw/h.

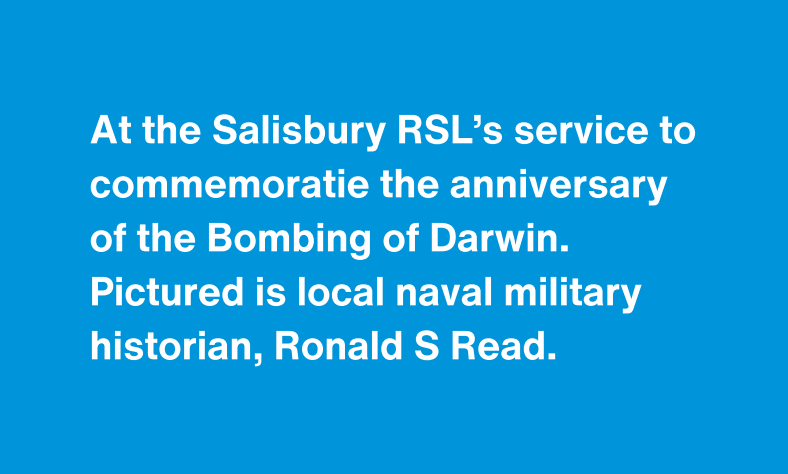


Watch my speech on electricity costs and nuclear energy in the Senate:





At the official opening of the Flinders University City Campus with State Opposition Leader the Hon David Spiers and Andrew Mannix, Executive General Manager of Mission Solutions at Nova Systems.



At the Salisbury RSL's service to commemorate the anniversary of the Bombing of Darwin. Pictured is local naval military historian, Ronald S Read.



National Press Club addresses by Ukrainian Ambassador H.E. Vasyi Myroshnychenko and Kateryna Argyrou, co-chair of the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations.



Australian Council for International Development delegation.



HMAS Hobart Cup race. Pictured is the victorious Air Force team.



Left: Speaking at the Defence Industry luncheon at the Naval, Military and Air Force Club.

Right: With Party members Irene Filsell and Phoebe Parker at the Mount Barker Show in March.



Community Forum on Keeping Australia and Our Community Safe with Shadow Minister for Home Affairs and Cyber Security, Senator James Paterson.



At the Pathway Community Centre Opening with Mayor of the City of Tea Tree Gully, Marijka Ryan, Director of Pathway Community Centre, Noel Wallis, and Hon David Speirs.

Meeting with representatives from Magnetite Mines Ltd to discuss opportunities for the development of a green iron hub in South Australia.





Liberal Senator for South Australia

Deputy Chair, Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

**Suite 4, 13/100 King William Street, Adelaide SA 5000**

**(08) 8205 1040**

**[senator.fawcett@aph.gov.au](mailto:senator.fawcett@aph.gov.au)**

**[www.senatorfawcett.com.au](http://www.senatorfawcett.com.au)**

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