



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

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

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 18 November 2009**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Ms RISHWORTH** (Kingston) (5.03 pm)—I too rise to speak in favour of the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009. Over the past couple of years I have been very fortunate to attend many Green Corps project launches and graduations in my electorate of Kingston, where I have seen and heard of the great work being done by young people involved in the Green Corps scheme. Having seen the valuable contributions they are making, it is a pleasure now to have risen in support of a bill that will encourage more of our youth to get involved in this program and programs like it throughout Australia.

There have been many impressive Green Corps projects which have taken place in my electorate of Kingston. In October this year I attended the launch of the ‘feral fighters’ Green Corps project in the southern Mount Lofty Ranges. This particular project provides the opportunity for 10 young people to work with park authorities to carry out threat abatement activities. And to protect endangered species, these volunteers are involved in conducting flora and fauna surveys as well as weeding and revegetation projects. Those projects are valuable to the local environment, which will benefit with increased biodiversity and restored native species.

In the past 18 months, two Green Corps projects have also been run in partnership with the Willunga Environment Centre. The Willunga Environment Centre is an excellent centre of education. It has a number of volunteers and also some staff who really promote the environment in the Willunga-McLaren Vale region. In this Green Corps project, participants have planted around 8,000 trees on the Willunga Hill space and along the coastal area of Aldinga. These two projects have also included reef watch monitoring activities and the improvement of local trails and fences and maintenance work on local heritage buildings.

Importantly, the participants have gained valuable skills, many receiving a Certificate I in Conservation and Land Management and a senior first aid certificate. Many participants have also completed a number of units towards their certificate level II. In addition to these formal qualifications, the program has developed valuable workplace skills such as good communication and others concerning an introduction to occupational

health and safety standards, and the importance of a good work ethic. But, more importantly, this program has also developed many intangible skills and elements as to these young people. What has really impressed me is seeing some of these young people when they attend the launch at the beginning of the project and then seeing their development after the 26 weeks at the graduation. What I have seen in all of the graduations that I have attended is a huge increase in self-esteem for these young people. In all of the graduations I have attended, they have got up and said a few words about the things that they have achieved. And apart from all of the more tangible skills and the certificate levels, it has been making friends, it has been developing self-esteem and, most importantly, feeling ‘a sense of agency’ towards being able to get involved and work. Certainly there has been a huge impact that this program has had, and I have been so pleased to be able to witness that improvement in these young people.

This project has also had great success in achieving significant outcomes with the environment. As I have mentioned, there has been so much done. You can look at pictures only of two years ago and see that there were no trees whatsoever on the Willunga Hills. Slowly we are starting to see the Willunga Hills becoming greener from the hard work of the Landcare group, the Willunga Environment Centre and the contribution that the Green Corps students have made. The other important element to this, I believe, is the huge connection that these Green Corps projects have had in terms of the awareness and preservation of the local Indigenous culture of the Kuarna people. This has been a significant theme throughout all the Green Corps projects that have gone through that I have attended.

Another exciting Green Corps project has been taking place in the last two years at McLaren Flat in partnership with Gemtree Vineyards. In this project the Green Corps volunteers have helped return 10 hectares of barren land to its natural condition as wetlands. Gemtree have some representatives here tomorrow for the export awards—they do a great bottle of wine—but they also have a huge commitment to the environment on the land they manage. This has been a great project. Volunteers have been involved in building pathways and platforms and revegetation. Reports back from the partnership have been glowing. I have been told that the volunteers involved have been sensational and

incredibly driven, partly because they have been able to see the fruits of their labour transform the local environment. The work being done in these wetlands is also improving the habitat of a number of threatened species, including the Mount Lofty southern emu-wren.

I want to speak about one more project in my electorate, which is in Hallett Cove. This is a Green Corps project that has been restoring the ecosystem of the Lower Field River in partnership with the Friends of the Lower Field River. I have spoken to the Friends of the Lower Field River. This is a group of people who have been working to revegetate this area, but they are all people who are working in daytime jobs and as volunteers they could only meet once a month. The Green Corps project has been able to escalate the revegetation that they have been working on. Participants involved in this program have planted 4,500 trees and propagated 8,000 seedlings. They were also involved in making mosaics, mulching, fencing and the construction of seats. The youth development outcomes of this included confidence and self-esteem, as I mentioned before, based on public speaking, setting goals and then actually achieving and celebrating those achievements, and making a huge difference to the community.

Non-government organisations have been helping these young people in these projects. I would particularly like to pay tribute to the Willunga Environment Centre, Mission SA and Greening Australia. They have been the bodies that have provided the team leaders that have worked with these young people and allowed them to achieve.

I would also like to at this point make mention of the friendship groups. These are all volunteer groups. In each of these projects a friendship group has been involved. What has been really lovely for me to see at the graduations is the strong connection that these young people have made with the volunteers in the friendship groups that are usually—not always, but usually—a little older. This connection between these young people and the volunteers in the area is really important. Certainly a lot of young people I spoke to said that they were learning the value of volunteering and were in fact thinking of volunteering themselves. I think that connection is really appreciated. Friendship groups have been able to impart some of their experience, some of their knowledge to these young people, while the young people, as part of the Green Corps, have been able to fast-track some of the things that the volunteers have not had time to progress.

The outcomes have been incredibly important in my electorate of Kingston. We are also seeing some impressive figures nationwide. Nationally the Green Corps participants have planted more than 14

million trees, erected over 8,000 kilometres of fencing, collected 9,500 kilograms of seeds, and have built or maintained over 5,000 kilometres of boardwalk or walking tracks. As has been the case in Kingston, other electorates will have been significantly improved as a result of the Green Corps program. The Green Corps participants have been a great asset to communities in my electorate and, as I mentioned, to the community groups, as I am sure they have been around the country.

The bill before us today, the Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009, will provide for a supplement of \$41.60 per fortnight for eligible participants in the National Green Jobs Corps between 1 January 2010 and 31 December 2011. Eligible participants are those receiving youth allowance, Newstart allowance and parenting payment. This money will help cover the expenses incurred by participants involved in the program. It will also act as an incentive for young people to get involved in the schemes being offered in their local area. The 10,000 places provided throughout the life of the program will be targeted at 17- to 24-year-olds without year 12 qualifications who are finding it difficult to engage in the education and training system. During the 26 weeks of the program these participants will be required to undertake skill development and work experience, including 130 hours of accredited training. At the end they will receive a nationally recognised certificate level II qualification.

The scheme forms part of the Prime Minister's learn or earn policy and is also part of Minister Kate Ellis's compact with young Australians where, from 1 January 2010, all youth allowance recipients will be required to be in study or training until they receive either a year 12 or certificate II level qualification.

In designing this scheme the government has been guided by past experiences during economic downturns where it has been young people without skills and qualifications who have suffered the most. Our government realises that, just as in the case of the nineties, young people are being hurt by the current economic downturn. To put things in perspective, youth unemployment accounts for a staggering 40 per cent of the growth in unemployment in Australia in the past 12 months.

This bill offers support and incentives for young people to participate in the scheme, which offers skills and qualifications needed in today's workplace. It goes some way towards helping those most affected by the downturn. We all know how difficult it can be to break into the labour market as a young worker with minimal experience. I hear stories every day from young people in my electorate talking about the difficulties and indeed I hear it also from their parents.

The bill before us today is targeted at government support for young Australians who are finding it hard to make that transition into their working life.

The Green Corps scheme is an important scheme that has a lot to offer our communities. It is about developing our communities, it is about connection in our communities and it is really about giving young Australians, who may have found it difficult, help to develop their formal skills and, as I mentioned, those intangible, informal skills that really will equip young people not just for the workforce of tomorrow but actually for an improved quality of life and improved confidence. I think that is so incredibly important.

In closing, I would like to congratulate everyone that has been involved in the Green Corps projects in my electorate whether they be the community groups, whether they be the non-government training organisations or whether they be the young people themselves. What I have seen in my travels around and looking at these projects is a very good scheme and the amendments before us today will make this scheme even better. I commend the bill to the House.