

18 November 2009

Social Security Amendment (National Green Jobs Corps Supplement) Bill 2009

Second Reading

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (9.29am) — I rise in support of the [Social Security Amendment \(National Green Jobs Corps Supplement\) Bill 2009](#). This is an important bill that seeks to amend the Social Security Act 1991 to introduce a new training supplement, which will be available to those individuals who will be participating in the National Green Jobs Corps. This is a program that I believe will be very important, not just in terms of what it does in improving the green skills base of our economy and the direct benefits that will be made available to those individuals who are the participants of the program but also in terms of the number of important community projects that will benefit greatly from this program, and the supplement is an important part of ensuring that the program does not provide disincentives or discourage those who are going to be participating in the program.

The supplement will be available to those job seekers who are currently receiving youth allowance or who will be receiving youth allowance (other), Newstart allowance or parenting payment. The supplement will be \$41.60 per fortnight and is principally designed to help defray the costs that are incurred by the participants of the program—in particular, travelling costs. I speak in relation to the impact of travelling costs on young workers and young people in my community, and I know only too well that the costs of getting around can be quite significant. The defraying of such costs by this supplement is an important part of ensuring that this program is successful.

I am a very big supporter of the National Green Jobs Corps program. It will commence on 1 January next year and will run for a two-year period. It will provide up to 10,000 participants with opportunities to engage in structured work experience, as well as accredited training. The target group for this particular program will be individuals between the ages of 17 and 24, with a particular emphasis on those who do not have year 12 or equivalent qualifications. The program typically runs for 26 weeks and involves the training component—130 hours of training will be required as part of this program—leading to a nationally recognised training qualification and structured work experience. An important component of this program is that it does improve the overall green skills base of our economy. Those participants will receive training in key areas when it comes to improving our natural environment. Some of the areas that will be particularly targeted under this program include projects such as bush regeneration, erosion control, developing community information and education projects, beach and dune rehabilitation and habitat protection.

The importance of investing in improving our skills base is something that this government has recognised, not just in this particular initiative but in a number of other initiatives. This initiative, the National Green Jobs Corps program, needs to be understood and viewed in the context of a range of measures that the government is implementing on this front. This measure combines with the 30,000 apprentices that will graduate over the next two years with qualifications that include green and

clean skills and the 4,000 training opportunities that will be made available for insulation installers upon completion of their employment in this field, dovetailing in with the insulation program that is running along at a rate of knots under the stimulus package. We also have 6,000 new local green jobs, allowing unemployed Australians to contribute to environmental sustainability in priority local communities. All of these measures combined will not only bring the national effort in a concentrated fashion toward assisting those in need of employment and training opportunities but do so in a way that will focus those efforts on ensuring that we are improving the green skills base of our economy.

Programs of this sort are particularly important in the current economic climate. We know from experience and certainly from the most recent recessions that this country experienced back in the 1990s and the early 1980s that young people are the ones hit hardest by the economic downturn. Whilst we have managed to avoid a recession in this downturn, there is no question that the impacts of the downturn are being felt by young people in many respects more so than others. One statistic that pays tribute to this is that 40 per cent of those who have contributed to the increase in unemployment over the last 12 months have been young people. So it is important that, in acknowledging that young people are bearing a particular burden—a particularly disproportionate burden—of the economic downturn, we have programs and measures in place that provide assistance to young people throughout these periods.

I can see many similarities between the National Green Jobs Corps program and the Green Corps program that was previously in existence, which was a good program. In some respects, the changes that have been made or the points of difference between the Green Corps program and the National Green Jobs Corps program actually support the proposition that the new program has enhanced or improved some of the elements of the old program. If we have a look at the differences between the two programs we can see that one of the biggest differences between the old Green Corps program and the National Green Jobs Corps program is the size. If we look at the Green Corps program as it existed, it really only funded in the vicinity of 1,700 places annually whereas the new program funds 5,000 places a year, or up to 10,000 places over the next two years. Clearly, this is a program of much greater scale and I would suggest that, coming over the next two-year period, it is coming at a time when it is most needed.

Another point of difference is the target group of the National Green Jobs Corps program. Whilst there was not necessarily the same focus in the old Green Corps program, the new National Green Jobs Corps program will be very much targeted at those young people who have not completed a year 12 or equivalent qualification. I think in the context of the discussion that we have just had, and the comments I have just made in relation to the fact that young people do generally bear the brunt of an economic downturn in a disproportionately high way, it is important that we first help those who require assistance in improving their skills. Clearly, if you do not have a year 12 or equivalent qualification you will fit into that category of job seeker who is most vulnerable. That is why measures of this sort are so critical.

Another difference between the old Green Corps program and the new National Green Jobs Corps program is the requirement for accredited training. Whilst, in my experience, many of the Green Corps programs did in fact involve securing a qualification that was nationally recognised, that was not always the case. But under this program that will be the case and I think that is a good thing. It is a good thing because it ensures that this is not just a work experience program; it is a program that genuinely leaves the participants with not only an increase in their skills but skills that are nationally recognised and a qualification that reflects that. I think all of these measures manage to strengthen what was a good program in the old Green Corps program, but they also strengthen that program for the benefit of those who will become participants and the community more generally.

I would like to take this opportunity to reflect upon some of the activities that participants in the Green Corps program were involved in within my local community. I have had the opportunity to work closely with some of the projects that have been undertaken in my local community. A couple of projects at the eastern end of my electorate in the St Marys area, the Oxley Park area, have been undertaken. This is work that has generally been undertaken along South Creek and Ropes Creek, two of the significant riparian corridors throughout Western Sydney. These corridors are significant not only for their biodiversity but when it comes to the history of our nation, having been places where the first interactions between white and

Indigenous Australians occurred. It creates some consternation and some bother for me when I see the level of disrepair—not just disrepair but the extent to which foreign and noxious weeds have started to overrun the riparian zones—that these waterways have descended to. These matters cause me great concern. When it comes to our natural history they are not only important natural assets in our local community but also meeting places of significance.

That is why I was very pleased to see some of the projects that were undertaken by Greening Australia under the leadership of two fine individuals. The team leaders that they had running these programs were Jess Phippen and Janne Anderberg. They were outstanding leaders—people who have a passion not only for horticulture but for training young people. I saw some tremendous results. Those results could be seen not just in the course of the environmental repair that was undertaken over the 26-week period of each of those programs but in the real improvement in the outlook, the skills and, most importantly, I believe, the confidence of the participants who were involved in those programs. Having seen the participants at the start of the program and then having returned at the end of the 26-week period for the graduation ceremonies I noticed the difference. It was visible, it was clear and it was evident to me that, in the course of the 26 weeks, each of the individuals involved had benefited greatly from these programs and, of course, the community benefit was considerable.

I just want to make one additional point. When I identified the range of projects that the National Green Jobs Core program will fund I mentioned community education as one of those components. I think that this is important, and I just want to reflect upon some of the activities of the Green Corps groups that I have just spoken about and the impact that they have had. Greening Australia and their teams out at Ropes Creek have been involved on occasions in activities at Mamre Homestead, which is a significant local homestead, a significant historic building within our local community. It was once the home of Reverend Samuel Marsden. In a historic sense, it is an icon in our local community. There are many good things occurring at Mamre Homestead, some of which involve the preservation of the architectural history that is contained within the building. There are significant Aboriginal places on that site and it is also a significant site environmentally.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge Sister Mary Louise and her team at Mamre Homestead for the great work that they do there. The partnership that emerged from discussions between the Green Corps team and Sister Mary Louise and her team involved in the Mamre project led to some of the young participants in this program leading the Frogs and Furry Discovery Tours at Mamre Homestead. The Frogs and Furry Discovery Tours are a matter of some interest to me, because my children had the opportunity to participate in those activities. What came of that was an opportunity for young people, in obtaining skills themselves, to take young children along on tours, impart some knowledge and wisdom and show them some of the natural wonders of our local community. So the benefits that have flowed from programs of this sort are considerable and extend well beyond the confidence and the other job skill considerations that we often talk about in these matters.

I also want to take the opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of MTC Work Solutions and, in particular, Job Futures, who were carrying out the program at Huntington Reserve, which is on the other side of my electorate, on the other side of the Nepean River. Huntington Reserve and Hollier oval are areas that in part provide recreational assets to the local community but also in part reflect a lack of care from the local community in preserving some of our natural creeks and waterways. The work that was undertaken there—and I acknowledge Steven Fleischmann from MTC Work Solutions, who was the coordinator, and his team—really has lifted the appearance of that area. It has made it accessible. In the course of clearing out noxious weeds, the team also secured pathways that now give local residents the opportunity to walk through that area, an area through which previously no-one would have considered trying to run the gauntlet. The Green Corps team out there have done a great job and I acknowledge their great efforts.

I should note some of the activities they were involved with that were not of a strictly environmental character. The team undertook some fundraising activities. They ran a barbecue down at Bunnings and various other activities. As a result of the funds that they raised and as part of their overall program of works, they undertook some works at a local nursing home and retirement village—a renovation rescue, if you like, a makeover of the garden of that nursing home. I know that that provided great pleasure to the residents of

that home. It also gave the young participants an opportunity to meet and interact with some of the elderly residents at the home.

These are some of the benefits that will flow from programs like the National Green Job Corps program. It is important to acknowledge, as we are doing through this bill, the efforts of those involved in this program, so that they are not just receiving the allowances that they would otherwise receive but also receiving an additional supplement in recognition of the costs that they will incur, particularly the travel costs in getting to the job each day. This is a good bill. It is a bill that supports an important supplement which is an important part of a significant program. I wish to add my voice in support of the bill.