

FORGOTTEN AUSTRALIANS

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga—Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) (2.00 pm)—

Mr Speaker, on indulgence: on this day a year ago, almost a thousand people from across the country gathered here at Parliament House to witness the official apology to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants—the more than 500,000 people who grew up in institutions and out-of-home care in the last century. This was a day that finally acknowledged the abuse and neglect that many forgotten Australians and former child migrants experienced as young children in institutional care and foster homes.

For many of these people, childhood was a time of fear and loneliness.

Last year, the Australian government said sorry on behalf of the nation for all of these injustices. I would like to acknowledge and thank the former Prime Minister, the member for Griffith, and the former Leader of the Opposition, the member for Wentworth, who both spoke so eloquently on the day. I would also like to thank the members for Corio and Blaxland, and to mention especially the member for Swan. They all made a very significant contribution to last year's apology.

We are all sorry for the absolute tragedy of childhoods lost. Last year's apology on behalf of the nation was the chance for many to begin the healing process. Many people helped get us to this day and I particularly acknowledge Leonie Sheedy from the Care Leavers Australia Network, Caroline Carroll from the Alliance for Forgotten Australians and Harold Haig from the International Association of Former Child Migrants.

I would also like to acknowledge the contributions over many years of a number of senators from across the political spectrum who really shone the light on this dark period of Australia's history. In particular, I acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of former Democrats' senator Andrew Murray for his tireless commitment to this important issue. Thank you all.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (2.02 pm)—

Mr Speaker, on indulgence:

I would like to associate the coalition with the comments made by the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and congratulate her and, particularly, her staff for the work they did in organising the apology last year. I also acknowledge the member for Griffith, the former Prime Minister, and the member for Wentworth, the former Leader of the Opposition. I note particularly the comments that I received from members of the forgotten Australians and their families who attended on that day about the comment made by the member for Wentworth, 'We believe you.' This was an emotionally charged time in the Great Hall, and for a thousand people who were forgotten Australians and their families it was a time for them to start their lives over and to be acknowledged for the situations they had experienced in institutions around Australia. I also acknowledge the

members for Blaxland and Corio, with whom I worked closely in the committee process in helping to organise the apology. I acknowledge the people from CLAN, the Alliance of Forgotten Australians and also the Maltese and UK migrants.

In June 2009, the *Lost innocents and forgotten Australians revisited* report was tabled. The report contained 16 recommendations, some of which have been met, in particular the Find and Connect Service which was instigated by the government today. I congratulate them on doing that. From the minister's speech this morning, I understand that it will be implemented from April 2011.

This time last year, I did not attend question time but went down to the front of Parliament House and enjoyed the mood and festivity of the forgotten Australians celebrating the apology that they received from the Australian government. For them, it was party time. They believed that they had been recognised and they were in a euphoric state. A woman from Victoria, who had actually got out of her hospital bed to come up to the apology, said that she came up expecting little because it was politicians who were delivering it but that she was now going to go home, back to her state, and move on with her life because she had got far more than she had expected. I congratulate again the former Prime Minister and the former Leader of the Opposition for the amount of emotion they put into the apology, which made those people's visit to Canberra worth while. Again, on behalf of the opposition, I thank you, Mr Speaker, for your indulgence on this issue, and acknowledge the work of the minister and that of Andrew Murray, the former senator from Western Australia, who is here today. His work on this issue has been second to none.