

Former Labor Party national president Michael Williamson, labelled 'Mr Millions' by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, also took his share. He, together with Craig Thomson, allegedly accepted a secret commission in the form of a credit card from a company which produced the HSU's newsletters. These allegations are currently being investigated by the New South Wales Police Force while Victoria Police are investigating Craig Thomson's alleged misuse of his union credit card. Fair Work is also looking into Mr Thomson's exploitation of the HSU money tree and is due to finish its investigation by the end of this year.

In these circumstances, if discrepancies of several million dollars appeared on the HSU's financial returns, then there is clearly an obligation on the AEC to investigate. In the HSU's 2009-10 return, this was exactly what happened. On 19 October 2010, HSU East lodged an associated entity disclosure return with the AEC for the financial year 2009-10. The return disclosed that HSU East had received no income for that financial year, had outgoings of \$22,000 and debts of \$17 million. Then in three separate amendments submitted by HSU East between 30 August 2011 and 1 September 2011 HSU amended these figures. Outgoings went from \$22,000 to \$16 million and then finally settled at \$25 million. Incomings went from nil to \$18 million and then to \$25 million. While in the returns HSU East had particularised how it calculated its debts of \$17 million as incomings of \$25 million, no explanation was provided in the returns as to how the HSU had calculated its payments of \$25 million for the financial year of 2009-10.

It is now incumbent upon the AEC, in my view, to use its powers to compel the HSU to provide evidence which substantiates where it actually spent that \$25 million in 2010. This is a reasonable request. We are not talking small figures. We know already that members of the HSU are trying to get their subscriptions refunded, and I now urge the AEC to conduct a full audit. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

Department of Health and Ageing

Senator PARRY (Tasmania—Deputy President of the Senate and Chairman of Committees) (19:06): I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

I rise to speak on document No. 35 on page 17 of today's *Notice Paper* the Department of Health and Ageing report for 2010-11 and the corrigendum that is making a correction to the report. The report that the corrigendum corrects is a great report. I wish to address a couple of remarks in relation to outcome 1 Population Health in that report, and specifically to the Immunisation Program.

The Immunisation Program aims to reduce the incidence of vaccine preventable diseases and targets a range of such diseases, in particular polio. I note that Senator Colbeck is in the chamber with me. Both of us are Rotarians within the Tasmanian district of 9830—we both joined Rotary in the 1980s. In our particular Rotary club and in Rotary clubs in Tasmania and throughout Australia and the world polio has been a targeted campaign. We thought in the late 1980s that we had eradicated polio, but it appears that is not the case. Citizens around the world in recent efforts have raised just over \$1 billion to fight polio. CHOGM recently addressed the polio issue, where it was highlighted that, in relation to polio, the Australian government is committing, the Canadian government is committing \$15 million over two years, Nigeria has increased funding from \$17 million to \$30 million for the year and philanthropist Bill Gates is personally contributing \$40 million. That is how serious polio eradication is being taken by many entities and individuals.

Currently, there remain only four countries where polio is endemic: Afghanistan, India, Nigeria and Pakistan. However, polio can and will spread from these countries if it is not checked. Without the eradication of this disease, all unimmunised children are at great risk. We are down to the last one per cent in the world, but it appears that the last one per cent are the hardest to eradicate. We are so close, but we need just to further this aim and really get to the end of polio in the world. It would be great to be rid of this disease. It will take mainly money and the effort that that money will assist with. I commend anyone who has an opportunity to contribute to this cause through Rotary International or through any other avenue to donate to anything that will eradicate this disease. The disease is close to eradication. It is simple to get rid of it. It is now just a matter of money and targeting that money in the right way. I commend that action and I commend those aspects of the report to the Senate. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

Wet Tropics Management Authority

Senator McLUCAS (Queensland—Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers) (19:10): I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

First of all, I commend the chair of the Wet Tropics Management Authority, Associate Professor Peter Valentine, and all members of the authority's board for the enormous work that they put into managing this World Heritage asset that we have in Far North Queensland. In doing that, I also pay tribute to Andrew Maclean, who is the Executive Director of the authority, and his staff for the enormous work that they do in preserving and presenting our Wet Tropics World Heritage area.

The report as usual is an excellent report and provides a great summary of what has been achieved in the past 12 months. The Wet Tropics Management Authority has an international duty for the protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the area. It does that very well. In the report Associate Professor Valentine refers to quite a number of highlights. I would like to bring some of those to the Senate's attention. Firstly, the work the authority is doing on building landscape resilience in the Atherton tablelands is significant. It is working very closely with James Cook University, which has identified this landscape in research as being 'particularly important as a cool climate refuge against the risk of global warming'. Senators may be aware that the wet tropics rainforest area goes from the coast, where the rainforest meets the reef, to some very high areas in Far North Queensland. Already we are seeing the effects of climate change on those quite high areas where, in particular, the lemuroid possum has not been identified in an area where it was seen regularly. That is attributed to the effects of climate change that are happening right now.

I also bring to the Senate's attention the work the authority is doing in presenting the World Heritage Area to the world. The authority has identified that for many years there has been no central focus for the orientation of visitors to the north so that they can understand the hugeness of the area and the diversity of landscapes in that area. The authority has now secured a grant from the Queensland Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation that will assist in the preparation of a pre-feasibility study for a World Heritage gateway to Cairns. That is to be commended. Because the area of the wet tropics ranges from Paluma, just north of Townsville, in the south almost to Cooktown, it is important that there is an entrance and some central point where people can get a broader understanding of the diversity of the area. The authority is also very keen for that work to point to other World Heritage Areas in Australia and around the world. It would be terrific if we could get that through the feasibility stage.

I also commend the authority for the work it is doing on building quality in the guiding industry. Our guiding industry is growing well, even though we have had a bit of a downturn following the global financial crisis. The authority is doing some terrific work on developing standards for guides and guiding so that potentially we will be able to credit guides in the future. The authority in that respect is working with the Queensland Tourism Industry Council to advance that work, and I think that will be a great asset to the north.

In conclusion, I would like to recognise the enormous amount of work that the authority is doing with the Indigenous people of Far North Queensland and North Queensland. The authority is assisting the

Eastern Kuku Yalanji people to return to country. As I have said on many occasions in this place, I look forward to the time when we relist the Wet Tropics World Heritage area for its Indigenous values along with its environmental values.

Finally, I thank outgoing directors, Ms Allison Halliday, Mr Russell Butler and Dr Elaine Harding, for the work they have done in guiding the authority's work. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

Australian Institute of Marine Science

Senator McLUCAS (Queensland—Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers) (19:16): I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

I wish to thank Dr Ian Poiner, who is the retiring CEO of the Australian Institute of Marine Science. He has been a particularly strong leader for marine science in the north. We wish him all the best in his future and welcome the new director of the institute. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.

Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research

Senator COLBECK (Tasmania) (19:18): I move:

That the Senate take note of the document.

I want to take particular note of the work that is being done through the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, ACIAR, particularly work that is being done through the Grains Research and Development Corporation, GRDC, in supporting a germ plasm improvement project to enhance the productivity of oilseed brassica production.

I want to comment on the situation that the GRDC finds itself in now, where it does not have a board because the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has allowed the previous board to lapse and has not got around to signing off on the brief that appoints the new one. This is an organisation with an annual turnover of about \$120 million. It collects levies from its constituent growers and also includes the incorporation of taxpayer funding in matching grants. For the minister to allow an organisation of this scale to effectively operate for five or six weeks without a board I think is quite outrageous. It follows a pattern of events we have seen recently, where on Monday we were asking questions of the minister about forestry in Tasmania and it was clear that he was not aware of the issue, which is a significant one and quite pertinent to current events in Tasmania. In relation to the briefing notes released under FOI, on a number of occasions the minister had not signed off by critical dates. I am concerned about this pattern of behaviour. I seek leave to continue my remarks later.

Leave granted; debate adjourned.