

Hillside



UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITY: *People with a disability face high rates of unemployment*

An easy step towards equality

MEMBERS of parliament from across the political spectrum have supported greater reporting requirements of disability in the workforce to help encourage businesses to hire more people with a disability.

Australia is ranked 13th out of 19 among the OECD countries in employment rates for people with a disability. A recent study by Deloitte suggested cutting the gap in employment rates between people with and without a disability by one-third would add \$43 billion to Australia's GDP over the next decade.

In a motion moved by Shayne Neumann (Blair, Qld) members from all sides of the House supported action to increase employment rates for people with a disability, which fall far below the rates for the wider population.

The motion called for Australian companies with more than 100 staff to report on how many employees with a disability are on their payrolls.

Mr Neumann said such reporting requirements would be a simple, practical and relatively easy step towards equality in the workforce, which would benefit individual businesses and the economy more broadly.

"Hiring people with disability is good for corporate Australia and it is good for

the national bottom line," Mr Neumann said. "People with disability represent a massive untapped talent, particularly as the labour force shrinks with an ageing population.

"Now, more than ever, this nation needs a healthy, highly educated, creative workforce. We need to encourage men and women to work, for we believe that everyone has a right to work, regardless of their gender, race, postcode or disability. As a nation we have gone a long way, but there is much more to be done."

His sentiments were supported by Michael McCormack (Riverina, NSW) who told the House people with disability can face enormous barriers when they try to enter the workforce.

"The most significant barriers to work for people with disabilities still appear to be stereotypical attitudes about what people with a disability can or cannot do," Mr McCormack said.

"Contrary to what may be believed, people with disabilities take fewer days off, take fewer sick leave days and tend to stay in jobs longer than other workers. Furthermore, people with disabilities also have fewer compensation incidents and accidents at work compared to other employees." •

Caring for Landcare

LANDCARE groups make a critical contribution to protecting Australia's environment and need to be supported through secure public funding, Darren Chester (Gippsland, Vic) has told federal parliament.

Mr Chester said there are more than four and half thousand Landcare groups working on practical environmental projects across the country. Most are staffed by volunteers, but Mr Chester told parliament funding is needed to ensure their projects are well run and successful.

"It is primarily a volunteer based organisation but it does need professional coordination to help maximise the volunteer effort, to help strategies for the different networks and to implement new techniques by training landholders on the most effective ways of carrying out the projects that they are involved with."

Mr Chester called on the House to support funding security for Landcare, to give peace of mind to those working in the programs and to allow them to focus on their environmental goals.

"I think it is very important that we recognise in this place that we do not want our Landcare networks and our volunteers having to spend too much time filling out reports and applying for funding to ensure the future security of their facilitators or their coordinators on a more permanent basis." •



ENVIRONMENTAL AID: *Support needed for Landcare programs and workers*