

Congratulations to year 12 achievers

Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, Laurie Ferguson, has congratulated students from refugee and migrant backgrounds for ranking among the highest achievers graduating from year 12.

“Some of these young people have had to start their schooling with little previous education and it is so wonderful to see how quickly they have embraced the opportunities our education system has offered,” Mr Ferguson said.

“They have faced many obstacles in the past and also many challenges in settling into a new life in a new country.

“However they have proven through hard work and determination that success is possible for any young person who is prepared to give it a go.

“These young people are future leaders in our diverse country. I hope their example will inspire other young Australians to strive hard and realise their dreams.

“Many of these families who come from traumatic situations in parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle-East can help us all appreciate an education system many take for granted.

“You only need to look at photographs of this year’s highest HSC achievers to appreciate that we are succeeding at becoming a wonderfully diverse nation of many cultures.”

Laurie Ferguson MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services



Productivity Commission review may end Australian humour

WHEN the funny vomit scene complete with reference to peas and carrots was cut from her book, best-selling children’s author Emily Rodda realised Americans would never get Aussie humour or our language.

Since then, biscuits have made way for cookies, mum for mom, pavement for sidewalk - and even sniggers for snickers.

Rodda, author of the Deltora Quest fantasy series and the Wizard Of Rondo, said even her American publishers were embarrassed at removing "sniggers".

"It had the word nigger in it and might be taken the wrong way," she said yesterday.

Now there are fears that proposed changes to copyright laws will kill our publishing industry and lead to Australian-isms disappearing from books altogether.

The Productivity Commission is reviewing copyright laws, including key changes in 1991 that defined Australia’s copyright as separate to the US and UK.

It guaranteed that books must be published by the local publisher and copyright holder in Australia within 30 days of their release overseas.

It is the rule that rebuilt the country’s publishing business after its doldrums of the '60s and '70s, according to Maree McCaskill, CEO of the Australian Publishers Association.

But without the rule, genuine Australian copyright would cease to exist, there would be no more Australian-published books and most books sold here would come out of America, she said.

It would mean the unique Australian take on the English language disappearing from books completely.

Premier announces plan to kick-start housing construction

Premier Nathan Rees today announced the Government’s plan to boost the NSW housing industry and improve housing affordability for families.

Mr Rees said that the Government will deliver much needed reforms to infrastructure levies.

“The Government will reduce levies that are charged on new developments by up to \$64,000 per lot,” Mr Rees said.

“Water levies, state government levies and local government levies charged to new developments will all be reduced as part of the plan, including:

Cutting state infrastructure charges in the south west and north west growth centres from \$23,000 to around \$11,000 per lot until June 2011.

Abolishing infrastructure levies payable to Sydney Water Corporation and Hunter Water, saving up to



\$15,000 per lot.

Capping infrastructure contributions payable to local councils at \$20,000 per lot – with all contributions exceeding \$20,000 requiring approval from the Planning Minister.

“We have listened to industry and local government and it is clear in some areas levies have been too high and have been slowing the construction of new homes,” Mr Rees said.

“We have also changed the timing of the payment of the reduced levies – they will no

longer be charged up front and will now be charged when the lot is sold.

“The NSW housing sector has been hit especially hard by the economic downturn.

“Last financial year there was a 4.6% drop in development applications across NSW and only 16,000 new houses were constructed – compared to 31,000 in Victoria and 30,000 in Queensland,” Mr Rees said.

“There is a clear need to stimulate the housing industry, which is vital to the state’s economy.

“That’s why we are delivering the necessary changes to create the right conditions for a recovery in the housing sector.”

Mr Rees said today’s plan to improve housing affordability builds on recent measures to help families including:

An additional \$3,000 grant for families building their first home or buying a newly-constructed home – taking the total grant to \$10,000;

Delivering cheaper public transport for families - every Sunday from December 21 families will be able travel anywhere in Sydney by bus, ferry or train for just \$2.50

per ticket; and Offering \$1 fares for children over summer travelling to any of the of the 360 destinations on the CountryLink network.

The reforms follow a review of infrastructure levies announced as part of the Mini Budget in November. The review has included consultation with industry groups and local government.

“These changes simplify the structure of levies, reduce unnecessary holding costs and reduce the overall contribution required from new developments,” Mr Rees said.

“They will reduce the cost of developing land, particularly in north west and south west Sydney, and I want to see those savings passed on to home buyers.

“As interest rates continue to fall, and land is able to be developed more cost effectively, the conditions will be right to support a recovery.

“Housing construction is one the great multipliers in our local economy and these measures are designed to stimulate construction and create jobs.

Planning Minister Kristina Keneally said that the NSW Government has made significant reductions to state infrastructure levies, and we hope to see councils follow our example.

“In particular, we do not want to see Voluntary Planning Agreements impact on the Government’s efforts to make housing and development more affordable,” Ms Keneally said.

“We’ll continue to work with the housing industry and with councils to see what can be done to make houses more affordable, make land available more quickly, and ensure a fair level of contribution.”



by Ilias Macris