



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**Federation Chamber**

**CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS**

**Men's Shed Week**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 17 October 2018**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

<b>Date</b> Wednesday, 17 October 2018	<b>Source</b> House
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<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> O'Brien, Ted, MP	<b>Question No.</b>

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**Mr TED O'BRIEN** (Fairfax) (10:40): Recently, I visited some amazing men's sheds in my electorate of Fairfax for national Men's Shed Week. I was delighted to announce federal funding commitments for the men's sheds at Coolum and Sunshine Valley.

Men's sheds around Australia now number more than 1,000, and this milestone comes at a critical time. Australia is a great country, and we have much to be proud of. However, we do face a number of serious social issues, from suicide to substance abuse and homelessness, to name but a few. While lasting solutions to these problems prove elusive, there is also an increasing reliance on government to meet these challenges. Such difficulties are further compounded by a corresponding weakness of the traditional pillars of civil society—an erosion that we've seen especially over recent decades. While rebuilding civil society may be critical to finding lasting solutions, any idealistic attempt to simply turn back the clock to a time when the family unit, the church, and the traditional volunteer organisations were dominant in the social landscape is not the answer. This is where the men's sheds movement comes in.

While efforts to address today's social challenges have met with mixed success, men's sheds have played an increasingly relevant role, especially when it comes to issues of mental health and social inclusion. By tackling such issues head-on yet in an understated way, the men's sheds are becoming the standard-bearers of a new type of civil society. But government must catch up. Government must catch up by recognising the value of such organisations and adjusting public policy to support their expanding role. This includes changing their tax treatment. While continuing to support one-off grant applications from individual men's sheds, a lasting solution can only come from extending deductible gift recipient, DGR, status to all men's sheds so future donations to them can be tax deductible. I've witnessed the frustration of men's sheds which are routinely denied DGR status, despite political activist groups enjoying such status. I encourage the government to consider a more comprehensive approach to supporting Australia's men's sheds by effectively granting them a special DGR listing in their own right. This would be value for money and help rebuild civil society.