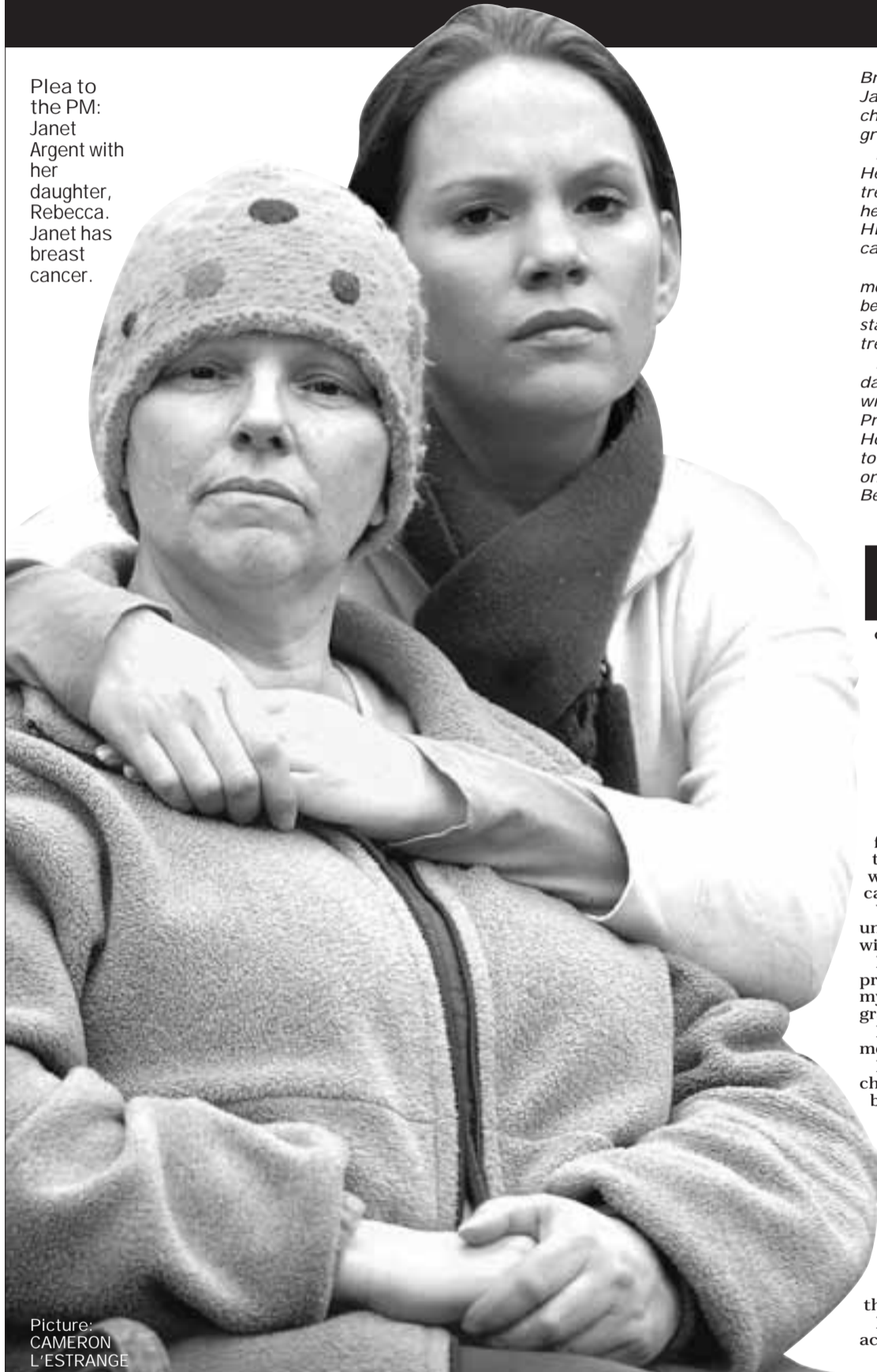


# Mr Howard, please save Mum's life

Plea to the PM: Janet Argent with her daughter, Rebecca. Janet has breast cancer.



Picture: CAMERON L'ESTRANGE

*Breast cancer sufferer Janet Argent wants the chance to see her first grandchild grow up. But she cannot afford Herceptin — the best treatment available for her aggressive early stage HER2 positive breast cancer.*

*The 48-year-old Geelong mother, wife and soon-to-be grandmother needs to start her \$75,000 course of treatment in August.*

*Her 22-year-old daughter Rebecca has written open this letter to Prime Minister John Howard pleading for him to publicly fund the drug on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme:*

**D**EAR Mr Howard, My mother has breast cancer. I have watched her go through chemotherapy and she is now getting radiotherapy.

But now she really needs Herceptin. My Mum desperately needs to get the treatment to improve her chances of living.

But we can't afford it. I am begging you to fund Herceptin treatments for women with early stage breast cancer like my Mum.

You of all people should understand after your wife went through cancer. I am eight months' pregnant and this will be my Mum's first grandchild.

I need my Mum now more than ever. I want her to have a chance to enjoy seeing my baby, her grandchild, grow up.

She has been such an amazing mother to me, I know she will bring so much to the life of my child and teach my baby many things. We lost my brother to cancer 10 years ago and I don't want to go through that again.

Dad had a serious accident years ago as well

## Drug cuts mortality

**A GLOBAL trial of the breast cancer drug Herceptin has produced conclusive evidence it saves lives.**

Results of the two-year trial of 5000 women across the world were released this week at a conference in Atlanta.

The trial, sponsored by drug maker Roche and known as HERA, found if women were treated early with Herceptin their chances of survival increased 34 per cent and chances of the cancer returning were cut by 50 per cent.

But dozens of women could die before the drug, which costs \$75,000 a year, is publicly funded in Australia.

Health Minister Tony Abbott said yesterday he had fast-tracked the drug for listing on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), but was yet to negotiate a price with Roche. Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration approved Herceptin's use for early stage HER2 breast cancer in April, but it may not be available as a subsidised PBS drug

SUELLEN HINDE  
Health reporter

until December. The Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) meets on July 5 to recommend whether it will gain PBS listing.

Four thousand Australian women are diagnosed with aggressive HER2 breast cancer each year and doctors say delays in using the drug put them at greater risk. Breast Cancer Network Australia policy manager Terry Smith said doctors were not prescribing Herceptin for women because it was so expensive.

Royal Melbourne Hospital oncologist Dr Richard de Boer, who attended the Atlanta conference, said results proved Herceptin "saved lives".

"We do not normally see results like this. It is a very good result for such an aggressive cancer," he said.

"The earlier these women are treated, the better chance of survival."

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and has had difficulty working ever since. For what Mum has been through, she is truly amazing.

People in Geelong have rallied to help us and we have so far raised \$5000 through sausage sizzles and raffles.

That is enough for Mum's first treatment.

But we need another \$70,000. Mr Abbott said he would fast track the drug, so I hope he doesn't change his mind. Please

can you do something. My family needs our Mum.

**Mr Howard's response yesterday:**

"The Government is well aware of the public support for the drug and the need to consider potential listing of this drug as quickly as possible.

"The Government is moving to ensure the necessary processes are completed in minimum time."

## JACKO BABY MYSTERY

COURT documents to be released next month will claim Michael Jackson is not the natural father of his eldest son and daughter.

A judge in California has ordered that the documents, relating to Jackson's divorce from the children's mother, Debbie Rowe, be made public as part of the couple's bitter custody battle.

Jackson, 47, and Rowe married in 1996 and had son Prince Michael, now 9, and daughter Paris, now 8. Rowe gave up rights to the pair in October 2001 for a multi-million-dollar settlement.

But four months ago, a court granted her access after she claimed Jackson had "abducted" them by taking them to Bahrain on allegedly faked passports, the *Daily Mail* reported.



Custody: Michael Jackson with one of his children.

## Ablett cash grab

CARLY CRAWFORD

THE naming of footy legend Gary Ablett as the Cats' greatest-ever player was marred by controversy last night when it emerged he had tried to sell a DVD of his acceptance speech to a television station.

The footy great demanded \$20,000 from Nine News for the DVD of his speech in which he thanked his teammates, friends, family and God.

Nine last night reported negotiations ended when a price could not be agreed on.

Ablett contacted the station from his Geelong Hospital bed, where he is recovering from injuries to his foot sustained in a lawnmower accident.

It is the latest twist in the saga of Ablett, who battled depression after his retirement from football in 1997.

He confessed to using heroin and ecstasy in the hours before 20-year-old Alisha Horan died of a drug overdose in his hotel room in 2000.

And his daughter, Natasha, 23, was last month convicted of attempted robbery and assault and placed on an 18-month community-based order and fined \$1500.

Ablett was named the best player in Cats' history at a special ceremony last night.

Ablett had hoped to attend

the function at the Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre.

But the lawnmower accident last weekend meant he remained hospital-bound.

Former and current players voted for the greatest player. Ablett's induction into the AFL Hall of Fame last year ignited fierce debate.

A player's character and integrity are considered when deciding who to induct.

The move to name Ablett, a seven-time All-Australian, three-time Coleman medallist and Norm Smith medallist, sparked public outcry due to his chequered past.

Cats' big night, Page 46



Controversy: Gary Ablett.

# Herald Sun Sunday



**Women are suffering:** Tony Abbott, it is time to stop playing politics with their lives.

## Free this drug now

**A**TENTION Tony Abbott, Minister for Health, Canberra: It is time to stop playing politics with the lives of Australian women.

The breast cancer drug Herceptin works. Tests have proved its efficacy.

It has been recommended by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. There are no excuses on medical grounds for delaying its full inclusion in the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

So why are you sitting on your hands?

Women are suffering. Women are dying. They are a walking tightrope of stress and uncertainty while you guard Canberra's dollars.

Yes, Herceptin is expensive — as are many modern wonder drugs. Many drugs on the PBS list — drugs for conditions much less serious than breast cancer — have pedigrees less impressive than Herceptin.

So what is your rationale for delay?

We ask not about your heart. Nor your conscience. We ask about your head — because here is a therapy that saves the lives of Australian women.

Mr Abbott, Herceptin has won your approval for secondary breast cancer. It makes no sense to stop there.

Your stubbornness is costing some families their houses, their security and their futures to give mothers fighting chances.

Each day sees as many as eight women diagnosed with HER2 positive primary breast cancer — women whose lives could be prolonged or saved if they could afford Herceptin.

## Inhuman stance

Melbourne's Maree Bissels had to raise \$84,000 for a year's supply.

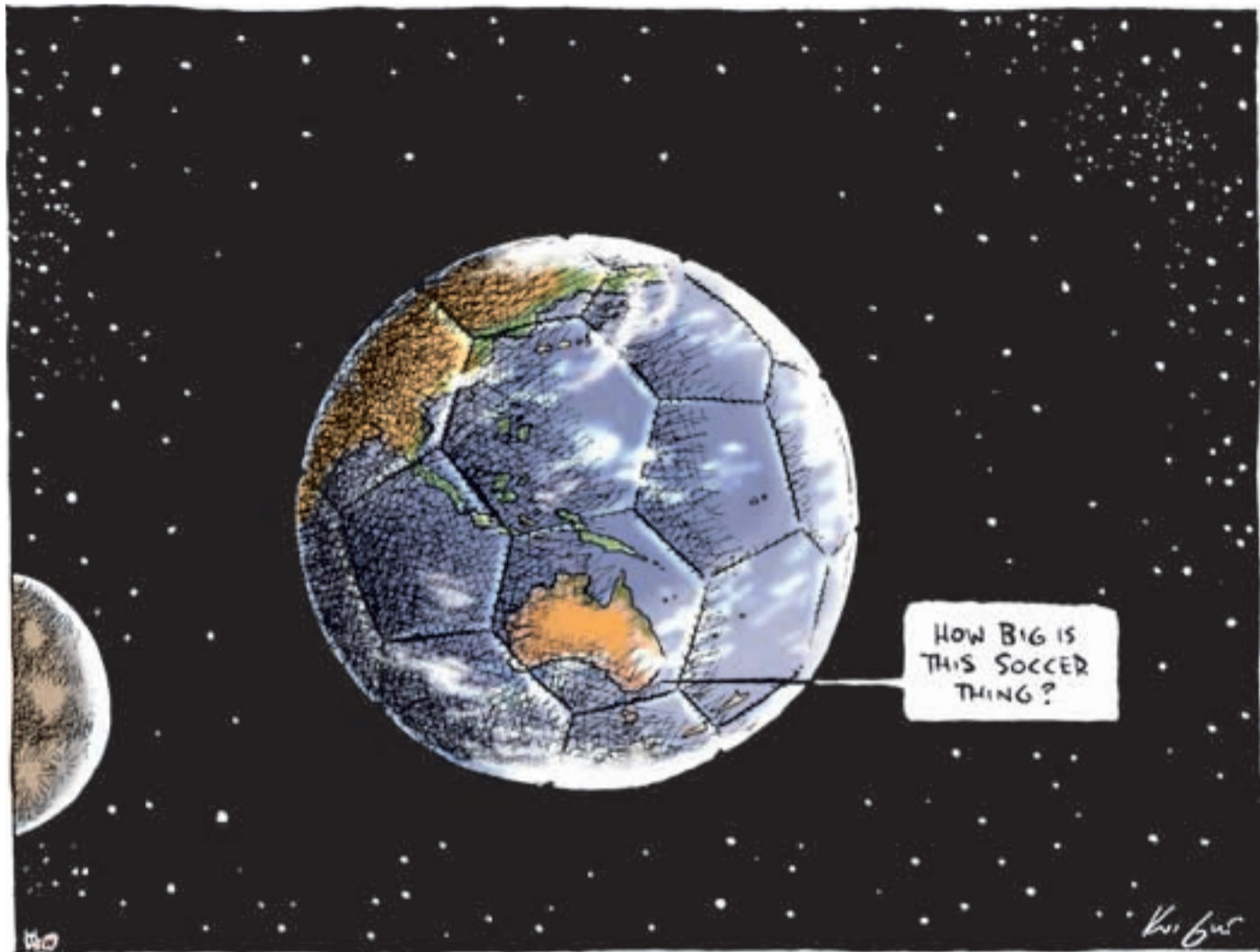
And now there is Janet Argent, who wants to see her first grandchild grow up. It may be a forlorn hope, given that she has raised only \$5000 of the \$75,000 she needs for the drug judged her best shot at survival.

This is what she says in the *Sunday Herald Sun* today: "I am worried about my family if I go. You take a mother out of a family and away from her children and it causes disruption."

Mr Abbott, you must listen. You have blustered for too long. Women need access to publicly funded Herceptin now, not later.

Surveys say Australians want action — urgent action. They regard inaction as an obscenity. Pointing to Australia's prosperity and your Government's enormous reserves, they ask you to justify your miserly attitude.

It is not only stingy, Minister. It is inhuman.



Hand-signed Mark Knight cartoons are available from the Herald Sun Shop (03) 9292 1928 or visit [www.heraldsun.com.au/shop](http://www.heraldsun.com.au/shop)

## 'Labor were not going to get caught again ...'

GLENN MILNE SAYS CO-OPERATION ON EAST TIMOR IS WEARING THIN



**H**OW long will the worthy bipartisan political support — necessitated by having Australian troops in a very dangerous situation in East Timor — last?

The signs aren't good that it will last long.

Accusations are flying within Labor ranks that the Opposition's continued backing for the Government's political strategy in East Timor — as distinct from its military strategy — is being tested by the behaviour of Foreign Minister Alexander Downer.

The claim is that Downer has exploited the Australian intervention to promote his own profile at the expense of his opposite number, Kevin Rudd.

The charge is that Downer deliberately snubbed Rudd when he wanted to visit Dili and that he directed Australian Defence Force command on the ground in East Timor not to provide the Opposition spokesman with a full security briefing.

The Opposition says Downer's actions have betrayed the spirit of co-operation and bipartisanship that has marked relations between Labor and the Government since the current crisis began.

Needless to say, the story as Labor sees it and Downer's view of events are very different.

What's not in contest is that Rudd sent Downer a letter dated Monday, May 29, which, after analysing events on the ground in Dili, added: "Finally, given the bipartisan nature of this operation, could I respectfully request that you consider including me, as the



**On the ground:** An Australian soldier patrols near the airport in Dili.

Shadow Minister, in any travel to East Timor that you may be planning in the immediate future."

Rudd still hasn't received a reply.

After sending the letter, Rudd continued phone discussions with East Timorese ministers. Through these conversations he discovered Downer had arranged to visit Dili the following Saturday.

Rudd's chief of staff again wrote to Downer, saying that, given there had been no word on their first letter, they assumed Downer wouldn't be giving Rudd a seat on his government plane.

In that case, the second letter said, the Opposition spokesman would accept an invitation from East Timorese Foreign Minister Jose Ramos

Horta to visit Dili on the Sunday. The letter went on to say: "Mr Rudd is very conscious of the difficult, dangerous and important work being performed by the Australian Embassy in Dili and the Australian Defence Force deployments. He wishes to make it absolutely clear that he does not seek the assistance of the Embassy or the ADF and does not wish to in any way to divert their resources for the purposes of his visit."

Rudd's intentions were serious. In the case of the current Timor crisis, the Australian response is mostly being shaped by what is happening in the internal politics of the country: the power struggle between Horta, President Xanana Gusmao and Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri.

Labor were not going to get caught again as they were on the Iraq war, accepting second-hand intelligence briefings from the Government as the basis for their commitment. Rudd wanted to see for himself; the condition of continuing Labor support for the operation.

In the end, the ADF sought Rudd on the ground in Dili, at their own initiative, and offered him help. But to their embarrassment, they said, they had been directed not to provide him with a formal security briefing.

At least that's how Rudd saw events. Downer says otherwise.

According to the Foreign Minister's version, Rudd's initial letter was sent through the cumbersome Parliament House internal mail system. The letter, dated Monday, wasn't sighted in Downer's office until Friday, by which time Downer was on his way to Dili via Adelaide, Broken Hill and Darwin.

And, he says, he had to take Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty, the Chief of Naval Staff, advisers and other representatives of the Federal Police and military. There simply wasn't room on the plane.

As for any directive to the ADF not to brief Rudd, Downer says Rudd specifically asked not to divert military resources. Wherever the truth lies, the spirit of bipartisanship over events in East Timor has soured. Expect a change in tone, if not substance, on the issue when Parliament resumes this week.