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Legislative Assembly

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD)

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 7 March 2018

The SPEAKER (The Hon. Shelley Elizabeth Hancock) took the chair at 10:00.

The SPEAKER read the prayer and acknowledgement of country.

[Notices of motions given.]

Bills

STATE DEBT RECOVERY BILL 2017

Second Reading Debate

Debate resumed from 21 November 2017.

Mr CLAYTON BARR (Cessnock) (10:12): I lead for the Opposition in debate on the State Debt Recovery Bill 2017, which was introduced by the Minister on 21 November 2017. The Opposition will be opposing the bill in this House. However, in the New South Wales upper House we will seek to work with the Government to bring about much better outcomes for the people of New South Wales. We would welcome the Government's support on that front. Despite the view of those opposite, they do not represent the font of all knowledge and, as I am about to explain, the bill has a number of unintended and unacceptable consequences that need to be, and should be, dealt with prior to this bill being enacted. We will seek in the upper House to refer the bill to a committee for review and engagement with affected stakeholders so that the consequences of the bill can be further discovered. The New South Wales Parliament needs to ask whether or not this bill is appropriate at all. The explanatory notes to the bill state:

The object of this Bill is to authorise the Chief Commissioner of State Revenue (the Chief Commissioner) to take certain actions to recover State debts without taking court action. These actions are referred to as debt recovery actions.

The Bill authorises the Chief Commissioner to take debt recovery action to recover the following debts, each of which is a State debt:

- (a) a debt owed to a public authority that is referred to the Chief Commissioner for debt recovery action (a referable debt),
- (b) a debt owed to the Chief Commissioner under the Taxation Administration Act 1996 (a tax debt),
- (c) a debt owed to the Chief Commissioner under the First Home Owner Grant (New Homes) Act 2000, the Payroll Tax Rebate Scheme (Jobs Action Plan) Act 2011 or the Small Business Grants (Employment Incentive) Act 2015 (a grant debt). The three classes of debt are: a referable debt, a tax debt and a grant debt. The overview of the bill states:

A public authority includes a public or local authority constituted by or under an Act of New South Wales. This means that debts owed to councils for rates or charges are treated as State debts and can be referred to the Chief Commissioner for debt recovery action under the Bill.

That is probably the most significant part of this bill. Indeed, in his second reading speech the Minister spent quite a bit of time using an analysis of figures and statistics to try to justify that enactment—an enactment that allows for local council debts to be recovered under this bill. Significantly, that is probably the most contentious part of the bill: whether it is appropriate for the State Debt Recovery Office to be used as a tool to recover outstanding rate notices and whether the use of the State Debt Recovery Office is a fair playing field for those businesses and industries that currently exist in this field—that is, debt recovery agencies.

Some parts of the bill are logical and make sense. I refer to the elements identified in paragraphs (b) and (c) in the overview of the bill. It is fair and reasonable that a debt of tax owed to the State should be and could be recovered by the State debt recovery process. It is also fair, of course, that grant funds that have been forwarded to a person and that later were found to have been inappropriately claimed by that person should be returned to the State. Recovery of tax debt and grant debt owed to the State is a principle that we can all support, but those matters are minor in the scope of the impact as a result of this bill. The remaining impacts far outweigh these relatively minor matters and, as such, the bill does need to be opposed.

The primary concern of the New South Wales Labor Party lay with the nature and definition of "referable debts". I emphasise that these referable debts, as stated in this bill, deal directly and explicitly with the debt owed due to two things—ambulance fees and outstanding council rates. If the Government were to strike out the referable debts parts of this bill we could have a bill that, with a few minor amendments, could be passed through Parliament with the support of all—but that is not the bill before us today. I will address a number of serious

concerns that I have with the Minister's second reading speech. The second reading speech is used as the context, the platform and the grounds on which justification is made for this bill.

I will talk about a number of errors that I deem to have been accidental or an oversight, because they are quite large and glaring—and if they have been placed deliberately that would be unsatisfactory. I note for the record that the Minister normally has a very high standard for his second reading speeches, and I applaud him for that. The Minister generally seeks to articulate the problem and to tell us how we got there, what we need to change, what the changes will be and where the changes will take us. That is generally the standard offered by this Minister. He also generally talks about the financial implications of the changes to which he is referring. Unfortunately, in this case that high standard was not pursued or realised and, as a result, the Minister's speech is riddled with mistakes and inaccuracies. I do not make that claim as a matter of opinion; it is simply a statement of fact. Shortly I will offer data and statistics to back up my claim.

I will begin with the Minister's early claim that "we do not have the framework to support efficient and effective collection of debt" in the area of local council rates. The State Debt Recovery Office currently has a return rate or recovery rate of approximately 75 per cent. Having said that the State currently does not have the framework to support efficient and effective collection of debt, the Minister should have sought to uncover the information that reveals the average recovery rate for local councils is 95 per cent, which suggests to me that there are currently in place a significant number and a robust set of efficient and effective tools for debt collection. That has been proven and tested by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal [IPART], the Law and Justice Foundation and the Office of Local Government. Why would we contend that a 95 per cent collection rate is inefficient and try to change the model and method of collection to a rate of 75 per cent? That simply does not make sense. That is the first claim in the Minister's speech with which I have a problem.

The second problem I have is that the Minister went on to state that "more than one-third of all civil claims in the Local Court system" involve councils seeking to recoup outstanding and overdue rates. I note and recall that the Minister cited IPART's 2016 draft report entitled "Review of the Local Government Rating System" to justify his claims. Given the size and scale of the changes this bill might enact, that document is important because it appears that the draft report is something akin to ground zero relative to the more contentious elements of the bill. The short of it is this: It is not right for the Minister to claim that more than one-third of Local Court work comprises local council debt recovery actions.

The figure of one-third, as it used in IPART's report, emanates from a Law and Justice Foundation report of 2016, "Data insights in civil justice—NSW Local Court", that analysed 2014 court data. That report states that 35 per cent of Local Court matters finalised involved local councils pursuing individuals. Based on that 35 per cent, it would be reasonable for the Minister to claim that more than one-third of the work is attributable to local councils. But if the person who wrote the Minister's speech had bothered to read page 9 of that report, the researcher would have found that 99 per cent of that 35 per cent—in other words, 99 per cent of council matters filed with the court—were finalised before being defended or cited in a courtroom.

The report clearly identifies that 99 per cent of the 35 per cent of matters related to local council rates recovery never reach a courtroom but are simply filed through the JusticeLink eServices process, which I will deal with later. The matters were never listed for trial and the parties never attended court, which in practical terms means that, of the 35 per cent of council rates matters listed, 34.65 per cent were settled long before ever being determined by a court. The report also states on page 9 that of the less than 1 per cent of council rates claims that were defended in court, 99 per cent of that 1 per cent of defendants, despite having indicated they would pursue the matter in court, did not do so. The report also states on page 9, "Less than 0.1% of all unpaid council rates claims were finalised by judgment ..."

For the sake of the record, I point out that 0.1 per cent of the total matters filed for trial in the Local Court of New South Wales equates to approximately 250 matters. A foundation purpose that the Minister put as justification for this bill was that more than one-third of all Local Court issues are debt recovery actions for outstanding rates. In reality, each year only 250 such matters are pursued in New South Wales. That is not more than one-third. If it were it would suggest that our Local Courts deal with only 750 matters per year. We all know that is not true. The Minister's first claim was that we do not have the framework in place, yet we have a successful outcome of more than 95 per cent on average. His second claim was that more than one-third of all issues in local courts concern the collection of outstanding rates when in fact it is less than 0.1 per cent.

Fundamentally we are already starting to wonder why this bill is in this House. What problem is it seeking to address? If it is not broken, do not fix it. In my contribution I will pull out parts of the bill that are of concern to us, but the fundamental question is: Why is it here? The Department of Justice has a computer software system known as JusticeLink that provides an effective system that deals with filed matters almost instantaneously and requires no human input other than for software maintenance. It is through JusticeLink that matters are originally filed with Local Courts. It is true and fair to say that 35 per cent of all matters filed through JusticeLink relate to

outstanding rates owed to councils. JusticeLink is a computer software system; it is not a Local Court. It is an arm of the Local Court, but it is not a courtroom.

Through JusticeLink and other means councils and debt recovery firms are able to tackle more than 99 per cent of matters relating to council rates. The software produces a computer-generated letter long before a matter is listed to be heard, a magistrate is required or a court building is occupied. It is important to note that a typical fee for a matter to be filed through JusticeLink is \$198 and that some 30,000 council rate issues are filed through the system in a single year. Doing the maths on that, roughly 30,000 at \$200 a pop equals \$6 million. The computer system is currently collecting \$6 million, and the money is going to Justice. Through this bill the Government could well be depriving Justice of \$6 million a year, yet in his second reading speech the Minister made not one mention of the financial impacts of the bill. I wonder whether the Attorney General knows that a \$6 million hole is about to be blown in his budget.

Moving on from that error in the Minister's second reading speech, the Minister also failed to talk in detail about the broader financial impacts of the bill, which was unusual for him. It is simply impossible for any member who will contribute to this debate or vote on this bill to know its budget impacts. It is impossible for anyone to know whether the budget impacts will be a net gain or a net loss. I made a request for the details underpinning the financial impacts of the bill through freedom of information and had my request refused. Government members will no doubt all espouse the wonders of this bill, but not one of them will be able to identify the financial impact on the State budget bottom line as a consequence of it. Government members might vote to support a bill that will either cost or earn the people of New South Wales millions or tens of millions of dollars, but no-one will know.

Mr Jonathan O'Dea: How would you know?

Mr CLAYTON BARR: I note the interjection of the member for Davidson. I would welcome him making a financial statement in his contribution to this debate. The fourth concern raised in the Minister's second reading speech were the various statements about how unfair it is that some people avoid paying their debts while others pay. By and large, I agree with the Minister. But the truth is that although the Minister made that comment, we are also seeing tax cuts, financial gifts and legislation that benefits corporates to the tune of billions of dollars. On the one hand, we are going to use these extreme measures to pursue an outstanding debt of \$1,000 on rates or a \$300 ambulance fee but, on the other hand, we are giving away billions of dollars.

We should all pay our fair share and I agree with what the Minister said in his contribution to the debate. If the Government seriously wants to go after the free riders, interlopers and those who bludge off the system, such as the big corporate giants give me a ticket—I am in. The Government will have my full support and assistance. It is right, in principle, that we get the money owed by the various people, be it \$1,000, \$100,000 or \$1 million. But this bill seems to go out of its way to target those with the least. The fifth concern raised by the Minister's second reading speech was his reference to the right of review which is available through this bill. On the surface, a right of review is a good idea. We all understand that it is a good principle to give the right of review to someone being pursued for a debt. But in my experience—and, I am sure, in the experience of many in this place—people with debts generally do not face up to them.

People in the margins who are experiencing hardship and have trouble making ends meet are probably doing all that they can to run away from their debts and not face up to them. They are unlikely to seek a review—what they are likely to do is try to run from the debt completely. I appreciate the offer of review that is in the bill, and I note that it is a one-time offer, despite the fact that a person's financial situation may change during the process. But it is hard to imagine a person facing up to his or her debt responsibility. Another element of the Minister's second reading speech that caused concern was the Minister's reference to the "potential for the court to award costs against the debtor" as part of the democratic process and the right of individuals to seek the use of our judicial system to contest the debt they owe.

The use of the word "potential" might suppose that in more cases than not leniency would be given. Certainly, when I heard the Minister's speech, I thought the awarding of costs was quite a benign concept. As if to reinforce this idea, a little later in his speech the Minister said clause 49 "allows a court to award costs to the chief commissioner." The use of the words "allow" and "potential" puts a softer edge on the possibility of costs being awarded against the few people—approximately 250 per year—who seek to have their matter heard in court. This softer tone may have been accidental or deliberate—I cannot know. But the reality is that the clause that allows the awarding of costs has a much harsher edge to it. Clause 49 of the bill states that if "the Chief Commissioner obtains a judgment from a court in the matter that is favourable to the Chief Commissioner, the court is to award the Chief Commissioner costs."

I repeat the phrase, "the court is to award the Chief Commissioner costs." That is a far cry from "potentially" or "allow"; it is a direct instruction that the court is to award the costs. In second reading speeches

in this place, particularly those given by a Minister of the Crown, the intended reality and the outcome of the legislation being enacted should be acknowledged. If the tone and the intent of the Minister's second reading speech had been that sometimes costs would be awarded or in situations where people are deliberately gaming the system costs would be awarded that would have been fine. In fact, it would only require a simple amendment to do that—namely, take out the word "is" and insert the word "may" instead—and that change would be more in keeping with the Minister's second reading speech. I encourage the Government to give that some consideration.

I turn now to licence suspensions. The Minister briefly touched on this issue in his second reading speech but he did not go into any reasonable detail. He mentioned the concept of licence suspension and clarified that it could not include a driver licence. That is a welcome outcome. The licences included in the bill, which the Minister failed to name or to justify, are a strange collection of trade and workplace licences that allow a person to earn a wage. It would have been appropriate for the Minister to explain why certain occupations and licences had been targeted and not others. Perhaps there is some data and evidence to support the targeting of these same occupations and not others. If so, this should have been explained and the information provided. The Minister might have explained why a motor mechanic could have his or her licence suspended but not a hairdresser, or why a real estate agent could have his or her licence suspended but not a financial planner.

The list of licences that can be suspended, which are essentially the way a person makes a living, includes conveyancers, driving instructors, tradespersons and contractors around home building, motor dealers, motor repairers and tradespersons who work under the Motor Dealers Act—mechanics and auto electricians—pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers, property stock and business agents, real estate agents, tattooists and tow truck industry drivers. That is a very specific and prescriptive set of licences. No explanation was given as to why those licences were chosen and others were not. I mentioned earlier the hairdresser and the financial planner not being caught up in this. There is no mention of dentists, accountants, taxidrivers, politicians or consultants. Some can have their licences suspended and the rest of society not.

Why are we introducing legislation in New South Wales that targets such prescriptive groups? It is beyond logic; it makes no sense. If there is a rationale or data to support this list we are entitled to know where it is and we should be able to review it. Indeed, the Minister should have referred to it in his second reading speech. To be clear, the bill seeks to impose the possible suspension of licences as a means to recover debt but that might stop persons from earning an income that would allow them to repay their debt. We are going to say to someone, "I know this is how you make a living and you earn your money, but as you still owe us money we are going to suspend your licence."

How did that provision get through the Liberal-Nationals party room? It is a logical lacuna; it is beyond belief. But the problems with this provision do not end there. What if a small business doing motor repairs, selling real estate or operating a tattoo shop has its licence suspended? That would mean that the five or even 10 people who work for that business cannot earn a living while the licence is suspended. How does the licence suspension work? According to the legislation, the chief commissioner contacts the licensing authority, which sends a letter to the business operator to state that the licence has been suspended. There are no ifs or buts; the operator does not have the right to appeal or to have the suspension reviewed.

The licensing authority does not even have to ensure that the suspension notice is received by the business operator; the only requirement is that the suspension notice is sent by mail. That means that a business might operate for some time despite the licence being suspended, because the licensee has not realised that the licence has been suspended if the contact details of the business are not up to date. Under the terms of this legislation, the licensing authority can suspend licences, which will prevent the business owner or operator from earning money to repay the debt and will mean that employees of the affected business are prevented from earning a living because the business owner has not paid his or her debts.

We have heard in this Chamber that small businesses often have a cash flow problem, so there may be times when the cash flow of a small business operator or licensee results in that operator or licensee not having the necessary funds to pay off an outstanding debt. Operators or licensees might own a swag of land, on which they have historically run cattle but which has suddenly been rezoned to residential. This might lead to their rates bill going through the roof—from having to pay \$2,000 or \$3,000 a year to \$13,000 or \$14,000 a year—while they are trying to operate a small business. They might have cash flow problems, but under this legislation their licence will be suspended because they cannot pay their rates. The boss being unable to pay the rates would have the effect of preventing any employees of the small business from working. That logic is being applied in this bill.

I said at the outset of my contribution to this debate that we have to ask ourselves whether this bill should be debated in this Chamber. The reason I spent so much time speaking on my concerns about the contents of the Minister's second reading speech is that his speech provides the explanation and justification for the legislation before us. I urge those opposite to check some of the statistics and figures I have given, because I believe there are no grounds for this bill to be in this House. There is nothing simple about the changes proposed in this bill;

these changes could be described as seismic, particularly those relating to the recovery of council rates. However, as noted in my earlier remarks addressing the Minister's second reading speech, the case for change has not been made in any actual or factual way. As such I pose this question: If there is no problem to be fixed by this bill, why do we have this bill before us? We are debating a piece of legislation that simply does not make sense. Why are we debating it at all?

In the overview of the State Debt Recovery Bill 2017, the object of the bill is said to be the recovery of what is known as "a referable debt", which is defined in this bill as the recovery of an outstanding fee owed for an ambulance service or an outstanding rates balance owed to a local council by a property owner. Never before has the State Government sought to participate in the area of the collection of local government rates. We have three tiers of government—local, State and Federal—which are quite separate. This bill attempts to get the State Government to creep into the area of local councils for the recovery of unpaid debts, which I will deal with later. Before that I will deal with the recovery of outstanding ambulance fees under the terms of this bill and I will consider the possible consequences of that recovery process, both intended and unintended.

The Minister notes that since 2015 the recovery of ambulance fees has been altered to bring about a higher recovery rate—a good thing—but we need to understand that prior to that change in 2015 ambulance fees were covered under the Fines Act. That meant that if someone was collected by an ambulance and subsequently received an ambulance fee, instead of paying the money that person could seek to have a work order applied to him or her. Through the Fines Act, instead of paying the cash, particularly if someone is a bit cash-strapped, that person could seek to have a work order. People would need to do some work in the community to repay through labour the amount owed for the ambulance fee.

When an ambulance is called it is not normally the person getting in the ambulance who asked for the ambulance. If someone gets hit by a car or has a heart attack or a stroke and an ambulance is called by another person, that person is not the one asking for the ambulance but he or she will incur the cost of the ambulance. One often does not get the choice. A bill or a debt is incurred by someone because he or she is on the ground and unconscious after being hit by a car. Because people such as that can no longer work to pay off that debt they now have to pay cash. It might be the poorest person on the planet, someone who is homeless, someone who is struggling to put food on the table, or someone who is struggling to pay the electricity bills or the rent. Historically, a person could have sought a work order. Under this bill, in pursuit of an ambulance fee, authorities can seize property and garnish a person's accounts down to \$20. They can also suspend people's licences which allows them to work. For those who have the means to pay an ambulance fee I think it is reasonable for them to do so. I understand the ambulance fee was introduced because people were gaming ambulances. People were deliberately calling an ambulance because they wanted to get from A to B—B being the hospital, with the hospital being close to the shops. So instead of calling a taxi people were gaming the system.

I understand why the ambulance fee was introduced and I think it is right and appropriate for those with the means to pay. However, the consequence of this bill and the heavy-handed nature of collecting ambulance fees could lead to a situation like this. Imagine a person getting hit by a car while crossing the road and he or she has a broken leg, a broken hip socket and maybe a busted shoulder. Another person calls an ambulance. The ambulance arrives. The person on the ground is in a position where he or she is struggling for cash. Broken, crippled and busted, the person looks up at the ambulance officer and says, "I do not want to go in the ambulance; I cannot afford it." That is a real and possible consequence of this bill.

What if any of the kids at school busted their ankle, broke their arm or hit their head and an ambulance was called? Schools do not want to carry risks so they call an ambulance and that child's family might be landed with an ambulance bill they do not get a choice in that. The school is definitely not going to give anyone a choice in that and the ambulance is called. Whether intended or unintended, dealing with an ambulance fee as a referred debt to the State Debt Recovery Office is a pretty heavy-handed approach in recovering that money.

Visitors

VISITORS

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): I welcome to gallery student leaders from high schools across New South Wales attending the Young Women's Leadership Program conducted by the Parliamentary Education Office.

Bills

STATE DEBT RECOVERY BILL 2017

Second Reading Debate

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr CLAYTON BARR (Cessnock) (10:50:0): Since the introduction of the State Debt Recovery Bill 2017 the medical fraternity has expressed its concerns about the use of heavy-handed measures such as those outlined in this bill to deal with ambulance fees. The medical fraternity is concerned that people will refuse an ambulance, which is the best possible immediate source of treatment for them, and the medical care that they should be getting. That is a real concern and it needs to be understood that that is a consequence of this bill.

At the other end of the referable debts issue—something that I mentioned earlier—is the recovery of council rates that will also be referable debts. On average 95 per cent of all council rates are paid. This bill will give power to the State Debt Recovery Office to collect unpaid council rates and its percentage of recovery is 75 per cent. Is 75 per cent better or worse than 95 per cent? It is probably not as good, generally speaking. This bill will replace a really effective system which has a 95 per cent recovery rate with one from the State Debt Recovery Office which has a 75 per cent recovery rate. It is not just about that. It is worth noting that 22 councils—there are 128 of them in New South Wales—have a recovery rate in excess of 97 per cent. That is extraordinary, wonderful and fantastic. I am sure we would all be happy to score 97 per cent in our maths, English or legal affairs exam. That needs to be noted.

Mr Jonathan O'Dea: What happens to the other 5 per cent?

Mr CLAYTON BARR: Five per cent or 3 per cent. A well-informed person could easily argue that the proactive personal and flexible approach currently taken by councils and their debt collecting agencies is a model approach and one that the Government should be seeking to copy and not alter. Instead, with this bill the Government appears determined to undermine that process. Any member of Parliament who has dealt with the State Debt Recovery Office on behalf of a housing client, for example, would be well aware that the absence of flexibility does not bring about a better result. It is essential to note that the great bulk of outstanding council debts, with a few exceptions, are incurred by people who simply cannot make ends meet. They are the other 5 per cent. They are the people who are struggling to put food on the table, to register the car or buy a new washing machine, to pay the rent or their electricity or water bills. They are the 5 per cent of people who have outstanding council rates because they have not got the money to pay the rates. They know they have the debt, but they just cannot get to it.

This bill targets the people who have not got the money to make ends meet, while at the same time the Government gives billions of dollars in gifts to the corporates. Under this bill the poor and financially marginal people in our society will be liable to have their property, bank accounts and any government payments owed to them seized. As I mentioned earlier, the Government can take money out of bank accounts leaving only \$20. There are exceptions to this rule. Some people deliberately go out of their way to avoid paying their council rates, even though they have all the money necessary. This bill should be applied to them. They should be pursued, and interest, fines and fees should be imposed on top of the outstanding debt to discourage that kind of behaviour. If the money is available the debt should be paid. People who deliberately go out of their way time and again to avoid paying their debts are known in the industry as frequent flyers and they are known by name. They go out of their way to keep on playing this game.

This bill, or a bill such as this, should apply to them but it does nothing to address them. It shares the load and expense instead of targeting those people. In 2016 the Law and Justice Foundation report on local councils, which I referred to earlier, made some comments about the people who would be most impacted by a process such as this if it were to go ahead. They found that of the 20 councils that brought more than half of all claims to the attention of the Local Court by filing, 11 were in regional and rural New South Wales, and another seven were in Western Sydney. So 18 out of the 20 councils that have more than half of all claims filed are either in rural and regional communities or in Western Sydney. By and large, we understand that there are financial stresses and strains on people who live in those areas and that people often live in those areas for financial reasons. This bill targets those people—it chases the poor.

Mr Jonathan O'Dea: That's rubbish, absolute rubbish.

Mr CLAYTON BARR: Just pause and think about that statistic of 18 out of 20 councils in rural and regional New South Wales. The member for Davidson said, "That's rubbish, absolute rubbish". I will go through this in a little more detail and explain to him why that is not rubbish and who will be affected. Further to this set of statistics, it was found that nine out of those 20 councils that I just mentioned had a Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas, or SEIFA, rating—a rating that the Australian Bureau of Statistics uses to measure the socio-economics of a certain area. Nine out of those 20 council areas that I just mentioned were classified by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as being either disadvantaged or very disadvantaged, which is the lowest category. Those are the people that this bill targets. I said that this bill targets the poor and the disadvantaged and the member for Davidson said that was rubbish. Statistically, a report—which I did not write or influence—written by the Law and Justice Foundation proves my point.

Mr Jonathan O'Dea: It does not.

Mr CLAYTON BARR: I will go further. I was hoping that the member for Davidson would interject. The Law and Justice Foundation also puts a slightly different interpretation on the figures for the standard rates owed to local councils. In a completely separate analysis, the Law and Justice Foundation looked at the rate of court proceedings lodged per 1,000 residents and it found that the 20 most active councils per 1,000 residents were all in rural and regional New South Wales, and that of those 20 councils 14 were disadvantaged or very disadvantaged. Again I make the point: Who does this bill affect the most? Does it affect the wealthy or the poor; those with the most or those with the least? Statistically—not an opinion but from two sets of statistics—the bill clearly targets those less wealthy, those with less means.

One might ask: Where are The Nationals members on this? The Nationals have a significant number of elected members of Parliament from rural and regional areas, and they sit on the same side of the Chamber as Government members who introduced this bill—a bill that will affect rural and regional areas that are disadvantaged or very disadvantaged. Where are The Nationals members on this? If I have not made that point clear enough I will list the most adversely affected council areas according to a different source—the Office of Local Government, which is a government department represented by a Minister on the other side of the House. What councils will be the most severely targeted and affected by this legislation? Albury City Council, Central Darling Shire Council, Bourke Shire Council, Broken Hill City Council, Walgett Shire Council and Warrumbungle Shire Council—those last five councils are all in the Barwon electorate and Albury City Council is in the electorate of Albury, represented by a member on the Government benches.

What other councils will be affected? Richmond Valley Council, which is in the electorate of the member for Clarence—a Government member—will be affected. Also affected will be Junee and Narrandera councils—councils in the electorate represented by the member for Cootamundra—Narromine Shire Council in the electorate of Dubbo and Lismore City Council in the electorate of Lismore. Both of those councils are represented by The Nationals members on the Government side who are introducing this bill to pursue poor people in their communities.

Then there is Balranald, Hay and Wentworth which are all in the electorate of Murray—and the member for Murray is in the Chamber. Poor and disadvantaged people who live in his community will be affected by this bill but he is going to vote for it. Our job is to make people's lives better, not worse. The member for Murray is supporting and voting for this bill but it does not end there. Other councils that will be affected include Shoalhaven City Council in the electorate of the member for South Coast who is a member of the Liberal Party and Speaker of the House; Liverpool Plains Shire Council in the electorates of the member for Tamworth and the member for Upper Hunter, who are members of The Nationals and who sit on the Government benches, and the member for Wollondilly who is a Liberal Party member who also sits on the Government benches. These councils are most affected by this bill where the disadvantaged and very disadvantaged people live and yet the Government has introduced this bill in the House.

We are looking at the people who are most affected but let us also consider the people who are least affected because they have the highest council rates. Those people are doing well financially and can afford to pay their rates. Who are those people? Let us guess where they live—maybe the North Shore of Sydney? The people least affected by this bill live in Hornsby, Lane Cove, Willoughby, North Sydney, Mosman and the Hills. Those people are not affected by this bill. This bill is targeting those with the least wealth, not those with the most wealth. This bill is written by Executive Government whose members live on the North Shore of Sydney. Their communities are not affected. They are saying, "Let us target the poor people in the bush and Western Sydney. This bill will not affect us as we live on the North Shore." What a great piece of legislation.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! The member for Cessnock has the call.

Mr CLAYTON BARR: Where are The Nationals? Where are those Liberal Party members in tan pants? They must have been asleep during the briefing. This bill targets a certain class of people through licences and their wealth, and often the two things go together. I say to those members whose communities will be most affected by this bill: It is one thing to be stupid and not realise what was happening when the bill was discussed in the party room, but it is another thing now that they know, now that I have referred them to reports, to support and vote for a bill that they know is unfair to the people that they represent.

If those members do not care about these people they should at least back their own self-interests. If they are to be re-elected into this place next year those members will need the votes of the people who are targeted in this bill. They should not take my word for it; I have three documents that they can reference—the report of the Law and Justice Foundation, the report of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal [IPART] and the report on the website of the Office of Local Government. Those are the reports to which I have been referring. All members should read those reports. They should show their communities some respect and do some research

before making a contribution to debate or voting on the bill. They should cover their own backsides and show the people they represent some respect. What did some of those local councils say when they discovered that the purpose of the State Debt Recovery Office was for recovering outstanding debts? Willoughby City Council—which interestingly is the home of the Premier of New South Wales—stated:

Willoughby Council is happy with its current recovery process. Council employs a debt recovery agency for part of the process and is satisfied with the agency's flexibility in dealing with different scenarios. Council appreciates the means the SDRO will have at its disposal; however there is some concern over a possible perceived automated and impersonal nature of the recovery process.

That council does not want this process to occur and it does not want this bill. I then wondered what the Deputy Premier's council had to say. I found a comment in the IPART report. The Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council stated:

Council questions why IPART is considering taking such a prescriptive approach to debt recovery. Much of what they are advocating here is already provided by most Councils. In particular, many Councils see the courts as option of last resort and do have in place systems to encourage flexible arrangements for payment with ratepayers who are in arrears. We do not see the need to take a prescriptive approach for dealing with this issue.

The Premier and Deputy Premier are the two most senior people on the Government benches. The Premier's council does not want this bill and the Deputy Premier's council does not want it. From memory, there are others—Wollondilly, Penrith, Port Macquarie, regional areas, local areas, Western Sydney areas. A number of councils do not want this bill. I am supported by the data and statistics in those three reports to which I have referred, but it is not only me who does not want this bill. The Willoughby City Council and Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council do not want this bill. The people who will be targeted by this bill—those with less wealth and less means—do not want this bill. Small business operators who currently own and operate debt recovery agencies will be put out of business by this bill and they do not want it. Licence holders do not want this bill.

Who does want it? What is its purpose? The Minister failed to prosecute a case as to why this bill was introduced. At the time of the IPART report, councils were told that consideration was being given to the idea that the SDRO would become the debt recovery agency and that there would be consultation. They were told the Government would not go down that path until it consulted with them; that it would not enact this bill until it had consulted with relevant stakeholders. Lo and behold, the bill was introduced in this House in November last year without any consultation with local councils, Local Government NSW, small businesses or debt recovery businesses who will be impacted by this bill. They found out over the Christmas break that it had been introduced in Parliament when they read the Minister's second reading speech.

Opposition members can only comment on the draft local government report sent to IPART because they have not yet seen the final report. We are participating in a debate in this Chamber when we have not seen the final report. The final report was sent to the Minister for Local Government in December 2016—15 months ago. To date, neither the Minister nor the Government has responded to that report. Therefore, the final report will not be released until the Minister responds to that report. We cannot read the final report so we can only assume that the draft report is in keeping with the final report. My freedom of information request was refused so we cannot see the figures and numbers. Therefore, we are trying to interpret this piece of legislation based on what we know.

I have an interesting snippet of information about the final report and the Minister for Local Government. This bill was introduced in November 2017. At that stage the Minister for Local Government had had the final report for 11 months. One stakeholder who owns a State debt recovery agency was concerned that this bill might be in the pipeline so he wrote to the Minister for Local Government, with the assistance of his local member of Parliament, who is a member of the Liberal Party. The employment of people in the external stakeholder's business as well as their entire life savings and wealth hinges on this bill. The stakeholder received a response from the Minister for Local Government one month after the bill was introduced. The bill was introduced in November and in December, one month later—I keep saying that because it is important—the Minister for Local Government responded by saying, "We haven't yet decided on a course of action. We haven't yet taken a position."

A bill had been introduced already indicating that the Government had taken a position. However, the Minister indicated in writing that the Government had not taken a position. If anyone has any concerns about whether or not what I am saying is true, I have the letter with me. I will produce it so that it is clear that I am not lying. The letter is dated 18 December. The bill was introduced on 21 November and on 18 December the Minister for Local Government signed a letter stating that the Government was carefully reviewing the final report and the recommendations and that it would respond in due course.

It strikes me as odd that a bill would be introduced to enable a seismic shift in the way in which outstanding local council rates are collected by the State Debt Recovery Office and a month later the Minister for Local Government still did not have a position on it. Whether or not the Minister liked it, the position had been taken. That was a month after the bill had been introduced. Who wanted this legislation? I am yet to find anyone who wanted it other than the State Debt Recovery Office and the Minister. I pose the question: Why are we

debating this bill if the Minister for Local Government does even not know whether she wants it enacted? Its impacts on local government will be extreme.

In all seriousness, we should probably push the pause button and find out exactly what the Minister intends, wants or means. We should be satisfied that at least the Minister, her office and the Office of Local Government want this bill to be enacted but the Opposition will seek to move amendments in the other place. The people of New South Wales might have heard Government members pretending to be the friends of small business. They might have seen them slapping themselves on the back with regard to their distorted version of small business. The reality is that this Government kills small businesses every day, and this bill is further proof of that.

This State has 12 main companies that undertake debt collection work on behalf of local councils. Those businesses are small- to medium-size businesses; they are often family owned, multigenerational businesses, and they have often been operating for decades. Some employees, who are now in their fifties, have worked in those businesses since they left school and have a single skill in that area. Each of those 12 businesses employs between 10 and 20 people. Given that, we can comfortably say that between 100 and 200 people will be directly affected by this bill. Those businesses have made it clear to the Minister, to the Opposition and to crossbench members over the past few months that they will cease to exist if this bill is passed. I am talking about small- to medium-size family businesses. With the stroke of a pen, they will be wiped out as a result of the passage of this bill. That is a serious outcome. Despite all the hoo-ha and grandstanding that I have done in this Chamber in recent times, that is a significant outcome and we must take stock of it.

Members opposite might have heard their colleagues say in this place, or they may themselves have said, that they are the friends of small business. In this instance, they are not. Even though this bill provides that local councils "may" use the State Debt Recovery Office to collect their debts, the reality is that the imbalance of power created by this bill will mean that "may" will become "must". That will not be stated in the bill, but it will create a quasi-monopoly. That demonstrates the Liberal Party's ideological hypocrisy.

Members should understand the concept of competitive neutrality when debating this bill. The principle of competitive neutrality means the Government should not intervene by using its legislative powers to create an unfair advantage for a small number of businesses over others, or an unfair advantage for itself. The outline of competitive neutrality is drafted, controlled and maintained by the Treasurer's office; that is, it must be enacted as an outreach of the Treasury. It is unlikely that the Treasurer will make a contribution to this debate, but he is on record many times proclaiming the benefits of a free market. In this case, one would think that his aim would be to retain a free market instead of enabling unprecedented interference in the market to create a huge benefit for the Government at the expense of the market.

What does that mean? Under the current arrangements, if a council asks a debt collection company to chase moneys owed to it, in the first instance the company would make a direct approach to the debtor seeking cooperation and settlement of the debt. If that did not happen the company would then file the matter using the JusticeLink system in the Local Court to escalate the matter. As I said, the cost of doing that is \$198. The debt recovery company would then add a fee to cover the work it had carried out. In the end, the debtor would owe an additional \$300 or \$350. The existing legislation also provides for councils to charge interest on the debt.

By contrast, this bill will give the Chief Commissioner of State Revenue a range of powers that would allow him or her not to use JusticeLink. Apart from avoiding an extra burden on the JusticeLink system, it also allows the chief commissioner to proceed without having to charge the \$198 that is now added to the debt. Given that less work is involved, the chief commissioner might be able to offer the service for a lower fee; let us say \$100. Nowhere in any of the briefing material provided to members or in the Minister's second reading speech is there a declaration of exactly how much the State Debt Recovery Office will charge for its activity in this space. We simply do not know how much it will charge, but I will work on the basis that it will be \$100.

A private company pursuing these debts now charges about \$300 or \$350, and under this legislation the chief commissioner will charge \$100. That would be a great outcome—it would be \$250 less. However, that can be achieved only by abandoning the principle of competitive neutrality applied by the Treasury. This legislative intervention represents the abandonment of competitive neutrality. However, that can be fixed; we do not need to go down this path. We could reach a point where the State Debt Recovery Office and the private companies all charge about the same amount in a free market. That could be achieved by adopting various processes.

The Government could offer JusticeLink—which is simply computer-generated software—free to everyone and the chief commissioner and the small companies would not be required to use it. That would free up some competitive neutrality and those involved could charge whatever they wanted for their time, energy and effort. The private companies could then compete with the State Debt Recovery Office. It could also be fixed by

providing that the chief commissioner must use the JusticeLink process. However, the point of this legislation is to ensure that that does not happen. It will not happen, but it is an option.

There is a third option. The Government could give the same powers to debt recovery companies that this legislation gives to the chief commissioner. Again, that is unlikely to happen because the debt recovery companies are small businesses and they are not shackled by the regulations imposed by this House. There are ways, whether or not they are palatable, whereby competitive neutrality can be maintained and that would allow for those small businesses to continue to exist and compete with the State Debt Recovery Office.

I acknowledge that I am not 100 per cent emphatically against the State Debt Recovery Office being in this space. Those at the State Debt Recovery Office have a certain method of behaviour which, if it is a fair and even playing field, will lead to councils not choosing them, but if we do not maintain the competitive neutrality and the costing becomes an issue—\$100 competing against \$350 would be unpalatable to most councils, which takes us back to the point at which the legislation states that they may choose the State Debt Recovery Office. I am suggesting that it becomes a quasi-monopoly and they will have to choose the State Debt Recovery Office, which will give it an enormous portfolio of some 30,000 matters each year. The issue is competitive neutrality.

The other issue is that the outcome achieved for \$100 is not always the same as that achieved for \$350. If everything was the same why would somebody buy a \$75 steak versus a \$5 steak or a \$100,000 car compared to a \$10,000 car? The outcomes are not always the same. My experience working with people in housing in my local area and trying to deal with the State Debt Recovery Office is that there is a bit of a sledgehammer approach. I would certainly like to see more flexibility, compassion and empathy, but that is not my lived experience trying to help people with the State Debt Recovery Office. As noted by Willoughby City Council, Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council and a number of other councils, the success of the local council rates pursuit process as it is now relies on flexibility, compassion and empathy.

Finally I will deal with the matter of grant moneys being returned. I said from the outset that I am a real fan of this, but under this bill the grant moneys, if returned, will go back to consolidated revenue. I am concerned about that because I think it will distort the outcome of the grants process. In all those pieces of legislation—the Payroll Tax Rebate Scheme, the Small Business Grant and the First Home Owner Grant—there are already allowances to reclaim the money. The importance of the money going back to the grant fund as opposed to consolidated revenue is about the integrity of that system.

Let us say, for example, the Minister says in this place, "We are going to allocate \$50 million of grants to scheme A, B or C." What if \$2 million or \$5 million of those grants was sent out but then had to be reclaimed because they were falsely applied for? The Minister might still come into this place and say, "Last year we gave away \$50 million in this grants scheme," which is technically correct, but some of that money was also recovered. There is no transparency. If the money goes back into the grant fund there would be transparency about what went in and what went out. There would also be the opportunity for some other people who might have missed out on that particular grant to have a second claim at that returned money so that the intended consequence of that grant is realised.

If the aim was to give out \$50 million in payroll tax rebates, for example, but \$5 million was given back so only \$45 million was given out, there might be some businesses that want access to that \$5 million that was returned because it was claimed under false pretences. It does not make sense that that money would go back into consolidated revenue. Why would that money not go back into the grant fund from which it came? This is a fairly minor adjustment. I ask the Government to make that amendment in the bill. It seems straightforward and sensible. I encourage the Government to give that some consideration.

The bill creates a number of significant changes across a broad range of matters. The substantial intent of the bill for more success to be realised in pursuing money that is owed is fundamentally supported. The means by which we achieve that is the cause of this debate, the cause of my concern and the reason the Labor Party opposes the bill. As noted at the outset, when this bill goes to the upper House, Labor will seek to have it sent to committee so that those many and varied matters raised not only by me but also by other members of Parliament in this House and the other place can be properly investigated and dealt with. I urge the Government to not see this effort as a gimmick or a political play. It should be seen as an effort to find the right balance in the way in which we collect owed money. I oppose the bill.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) (11:24): I speak in debate on the State Debt Recovery Bill 2017. Debt can be good. For example, a mortgage can help someone buy a home and a student loan can facilitate students obtaining a solid job. However, debt can also result in difficult situations involving debt recovery. I recall the old adage that the only person who sticks closer to one than a friend in adversity is a creditor. Indeed, Benjamin Franklin—the dead one, not our friend in the upper House—once said, "Creditors have better memories than debtors." With that in mind, as well as the financial health of the State under the current Liberal-Nationals

Government compared with the Labor Government, it is no wonder that those opposite want the public and all of us to forget their time in office.

In 2014 I sat on the Legal Affairs Committee inquiring into the debt recovery framework in New South Wales, which recommended changes to the way debt collection is regulated, including for debts to the State. The legislation before us today deals only with civil debt owing to public authorities including local councils. It does not purport to deal with all debt-related issues, particularly in the private sector, but it is important reform. The intent of this legislation is to establish a framework for centralising debt recovery potentially for all New South Wales government agencies and local councils.

I acknowledge the excellent second reading speech from Minister Dominello on 21 November 2017 in this place, including the significance of specific provisions of the bill. I note the comments of the member for Cessnock that Minister Dominello usually makes outstanding speeches. Indeed his speech on this occasion was one of those. I heard him speak in Melbourne last week to a business forum on innovation and again he spoke very well. He is an intelligent, sensible Minister. I have no doubt that some of the concerns that have been raised by those on the other side will be addressed in his reply, but I will address a number of those concerns because some of the thought processes and illogical assertions that were made by the member for Cessnock are, quite frankly, intellectually bankrupt.

Ms Jenny Aitchison: Harsh.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA: Harsh but true. I say at the outset that the fees or charges payable for services provided by government agencies are in no way affected as a result of this initiative. This bill merely provides a more efficient means of collecting public debts when people do not pay those fees, charges or other amounts. While I acknowledge the member for Cessnock said that people should pay debts, he then seemed to imply that some people should not have to pay their local government rates, which is an unusual gap in logic.

In particular, he referred to a 95 per cent collection rate from local government and compared that to a collection rate of 75 per cent from the State Debt Recovery Office [SDRO]. I am happy to take those figures at face value, but what I cannot take at face value is the absurd comparison between a collection rate of local government rates of 95 per cent and a collection rate from the SDRO of 75 per cent of outstanding debts. If he wants to take that analysis with any degree of credibility, he should be looking at the collection rate of those local government rates which were not paid, which would be closer to the 5 per cent rate that remained outstanding.

It is a clear gap in logic that does not stand up to any basic scrutiny. I welcome the qualified support from those opposite, but I suggest that they need to think through some of their comments before they embarrass themselves in this Chamber. I will point out some of the ways in which they have done that today. Unfortunately, some people choose not to pay their debts if there are no consequences for failing to pay. The small amount of many of the debts that are outstanding to public authorities often make recovery action uneconomic to pursue. It is fundamentally unfair to the majority of members of the community who do the right thing. It is unfair to taxpayers—all of us and all our constituents—to be called upon, as inevitably they will be, to make up the shortfall in agency revenue if some people unreasonably think they can walk away from their debts.

Those people who can afford to pay but who choose not to pay are the real targets of this reform initiative. Some people are doing it really tough. Some people are struggling and cannot make ends meet. Those people should be treated fairly—of course they should be—and with compassion and appropriate sensitivity. Under this framework those people who genuinely cannot afford to pay are provided with plenty of opportunities to make alternative arrangements without being subject to any of the recovery actions provided for in this bill. After consultation, Local Government NSW supported this legislation. The legislation operates on a voluntary basis. Local governments can choose whether or not to use this regime which is fundamentally contrary to what the member for Cessnock was suggesting. There was consultation, there is support from the Local Government Association, and no local government entity is forced to use this scheme.

I turn now to a features based analysis of the legislation, which will highlight how this reform is discerning, efficient, balanced and in the public interest. It is discerning in the sense that there is a choice of application in the public sector, with the arrangement involving Revenue NSW operating for government agencies or local councils on an opt-in basis. If it is not a better system for all ratepayers and it is not a better system for public administration it will not be used. There is a choice. Under this legislation minors are not subject to debt recovery action. The member for Cessnock made the absurd suggestion that children may not want to catch an ambulance because they might be liable for some debt and that schoolchildren might be affected in some way. That is not true. No minor can be subject to debt recovery action.

The primary driver is efficiency. How will this legislation facilitate a more efficient regime or framework? There is less drain on valuable court resources when an agency is not required to obtain and enforce

judgement debts as part of a recovery process. Minister Dominello, in his second reading speech, recounted how one third of all civil claims in our local government system involve councils pursuing overdue rates. I have no reason to believe that that is not the case. He did not say, as was suggested by the member for Cessnock, that it related to a third of the court's time or a third of the judgements. Those suggestions by the member for Cessnock were misleading. Such civil claims for overdue rates are, however, a burden on the court system. [*Extension of time*]

Despite being a burden on the system, the member opposite claimed that the Minister made assertions in his second reading speech which he did not substantively make. I also note that the Opposition has an apparent desire to maintain the status quo and, perversely, protect \$6 million in fees—fees that people are paying—to the Department of Justice. The Government would rather not take those fees but have a more efficient process where people do not have to pay those fees. The suggestion by the member for Cessnock that we should maintain a relatively inefficient system so that the Government can receive fees was absurd and does not make sense.

A consistency in approach results in time savings, as well as a more reliable and predictable approach for everyone. There are cost savings from economies of scale and from utilising the clear experience, expertise, access to information and well-established processes of Revenue NSW. I will set out some financial figures because the member for Cessnock asked for them. An agency's costs using Revenue NSW to recover a debt involving an employee garnishee and property seizure order would be about \$220 instead of \$1,500 using a private debt collection firm. The performance of Revenue NSW is proven. For example, debt collection rates of the ambulance fee rose from around 12 per cent to around 65 per cent to 70 per cent following the function being transferred to Revenue NSW in 2015. The new approach offers and promotes a better customer experience via a simple contact point for all debt owed to the Government, rather than people having to deal with multiple agencies and their representatives. That is a good thing from a customer perspective.

This is a balanced piece of legislation. The proposed system recognises relevant stakeholder interests, with proper notice required before any referral occurs to Revenue NSW. The safeguards that fairly protect debtor interests involve statutory rights to extensive review mechanisms—internally, through the court, and via a new Hardship Review Board. There are flexible debt resolution options such as time-to-pay arrangements and other alternative debt resolution options for disadvantaged customers. As I said before, those who genuinely cannot pay are provided with plenty of opportunities to make alternative arrangements. The ability of Revenue NSW to assess prescribed personal information about debtors to facilitate debt recovery is subject to limits on disclosure of that information.

Finally I address the issue of public interest and outline why this reform is broadly in the public interest. Where a debt is owed to the State it should be collected and not forgotten. That is a basic principle. Public policy is served by proper collection of debt, undertaken the right way. If that is not done it is unfair to the majority of the community and taxpayers who otherwise would have to make up the shortfall in revenue. The extra money gained and saved can be spent on other purposes such as better health, education, and social services, including for vulnerable people, by a government that is working for the community. For the benefit of those opposite I will outline the estimated financial benefits. The debt recovery strategy projects additional debt collection of \$85.5 million within four years, and \$45.5 million to \$97.5 million per year thereafter.

In combination with relevant safeguards in this legislation, clearly it is in the public interest to improve public debt recovery to the collective advantage of New South Wales constituents. The potential centralisation of civil debt recovery in Revenue NSW as a specialised government agency will help to reduce duplication of debt recovery functions and costs across government, while permitting other agencies to better focus on their own core service delivery priorities and deliver positively on public interest considerations. I commend this sensible bill to the House. I also commend the Minister for its introduction.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH (Sydney) (11:39): The State Debt Recovery Bill 2017 allows a government agency or a local council to enter into an agreement with the Chief Commissioner of State Revenue so that Revenue NSW can recover debts on the agency's behalf. Revenue NSW will be able to use its existing powers to garnishee wages, seize property and place a charge on land as well as new powers under the bill to suspend some State-issued occupational licences. It is important that government agencies are able to recover debts but often debtors are people who have little money, low education or complex needs from health, mental health, addiction, trauma or intellectual disability, and many have few prospects of improving their financial position.

Debt collection must be done with the aim of recovering debt without causing serious hardship and in a way that acknowledges the serious challenges facing disadvantaged people in the repayment of debt. Community legal centres work with many vulnerable and disadvantaged people who are under pressure from debt. Community Legal Centres NSW has raised a number of serious concerns with the system proposed under the bill that could result in hardship for those who are in debt. The Redfern Legal Centre, which services my electorate, also has

identified in the bill significant problems that will impact on the vulnerable people whom the centre works to assist. I ask the Government to address those very serious concerns.

The inclusion of Housing NSW debts in the scheme proposed in the bill is not appropriate. Housing NSW debts should be expressly excluded from arrangements with Revenue NSW. Housing NSW debts can arise from honest mistakes made by people with special needs on variable incomes: For example, they sometimes do not fill out forms properly, or at the right time. Many social housing tenants have difficulties managing their affairs and can make honest mistakes that mean their rent is not set correctly. Housing NSW also regularly miscalculates rents owed due to its own mistakes. Generally Housing NSW tenants experience significant disadvantage and are more likely to be unable to repay debts on time. Under the regime proposed in the bill, they are more likely to be referred and be at risk of considerable hardship. It is important that Housing NSW continues to work with its tenants who owe money.

I am concerned that the bill allows for the service of notices by post, with no grace for debtors should a notice be sent to an outdated address. Many people, particularly those on limited means, move regularly. The agency to which they owe money may not have their new address. The Redfern Legal Centre advises me that many of its clients first become aware of their debt when Revenue NSW garnishes their account, as a result of a notice being sent to an old address, and their money has disappeared. Recovering State debts through a court requires a statement of claim to be personally served on the defendant or served by post. When the claim is served by post but not received, it can be argued that a default judgement should be set aside. The bill should adopt the very same approach and either require personal service of a notice or include a clause that allows for a review out of time, if a debtor did not receive any of the previous notices.

I understand that the bill provides for one less notice and less time in which a debtor may seek a review, pay a debt or raise hardship than is currently available under the Fines Act. That is unfair. People must have more than one option to raise hardship: Their circumstances can change over time and unexpected extenuating issues can arise, such as illness or unemployment. It is unclear whether the bill provides debtors with an opportunity to review a debt after it is paid. This is important because sometimes a debtor may realise, after the debt is paid, that it was incorrect. In those situations, options must be available. I do not support provisions in the bill to remove a licence from a debtor as a form of debt recovery. Licences included in the bill are occupational and their suspension would be counterproductive to assisting debtors in the repayment of their debts. Debtors could lose their income, which would make it likely both that the original debt will remain unpaid and that further debts will accrue. Furthermore, they may end up needing government benefits to survive.

Of even greater concern is that if a notice to suspend an occupational licence is sent to a debtor's previous address, he or she will not know that the licence is at risk or has been suspended. Conceivably, without debtors knowing they have lost their licence, they may continue to work, which could result in additional consequences. The bill does not include a requirement for State Debt Recovery to give prior notice or give a debtor any opportunity to be heard, and that is unfair. I understand from community legal centres that most people fail to pay their debts because of financial hardship, not because of avoidance. While the Government says licence suspension will be used only as a last resort and that vulnerable people will be excluded, exclusions are not legislated. There is evidence that Revenue NSW does not have enough information about debtors to determine who is vulnerable. Community legal centres regularly see people whose small bank accounts have been wiped out in one go by Revenue NSW. The Government should work with community legal centres to ensure that the legislation will protect vulnerable people from losing their licence to work.

The bill deems a time to pay application to be refused when an application has not been determined in 30 days. That unfairly places the onus on a debtor to reapply, which will be difficult for people who are experiencing disadvantage. I agree with the Redfern Legal Centre that debt recovery action should be suspended while the chief commissioner considers applications to revoke a debt recovery order. The chief commissioner should be able to make a work and development order, which is currently available under the Fines Act, so that people who have mental illness, intellectual disability or cognitive impairment or who are homeless, experiencing acute economic hardship, or have a serious addiction, will have a viable option to become clear of debt.

Powers in the bill to charge interest on State debts and recovery costs are unfair and should be removed. Obviously, the model in the Fines Act, which allows only charges for enforcement costs, is preferable. Debts under this bill are for unpaid services, not for breaking the law. There is concern that under the proposed system the Sheriff will be able to demand that people provide information or their name and address and suffer penalties for failure to do so. Those processes are usually reserved for criminal situations; they are inappropriate when applied to the debt collection process.

I welcome commitments to develop debt recovery guidelines, which will include provisions to protect those suffering from hardship. I ask the Government to develop the guidelines in consultation with community legal centres, which have experience in dealing with hardship created from debt. The guidelines also should adhere

to Australian Securities and Investment Commission and Australian Competition and Consumer Commission debt collection guidelines. Government agencies and councils need to recover debts, but debt is most often held by people who are vulnerable and disadvantaged. Any debt collection regime should aim at helping people reduce their debt rather than collecting on unpaid debts at any cost. I ask the Government to respond to the concerns I have raised and to work with community legal centres to make this regime fair.

Mrs LESLIE WILLIAMS (Port Macquarie) (11:46): I am pleased to join in debate on the State Debt Recovery Bill 2017 and commend the Minister for its introduction. The main purpose of the bill is to establish a framework for centralising debt recovery for all New South Wales government agencies and local councils on an opt-in basis. The bill provides an opportunity for creation of a more efficient and more streamlined system of debt recovery within the government sector. The framework established by the bill permits government bodies to leverage the specialist debt recovery skills and expertise of Revenue NSW, thereby allowing those government bodies to focus on their core business. It also means that when Revenue NSW is responsible for the recovery of a debt, the courts will not become involved in the settlement of that debt, except when the debt is disputed. The bill also creates a complete and seamless process for the ultimate resolution of debts arising from non-payment of fees, charges and other amounts.

I turn now to examine the details of the bill. Part 2 authorises the Chief Commissioner of State Revenue to recover State debts on behalf of public authorities. Only debts specified in the Act or subject to an order as referable debts can be referred to Revenue NSW. Part 3 requires the issuance of debt notices before debts can be referred by an agency to the chief commissioner. That creates a clear starting point from which to distinguish debts that are subject to the new scheme from debts that will continue to be recovered under current arrangements. Part 3 also provides for making debt recovery agreements between the chief commissioner and an agency. It is entirely a matter for an agency to determine whether it wishes to refer debts to Revenue NSW and therefore enter into an agreement.

In addition, this part provides for internal administrative review of referable debts. This will ensure the accuracy of the debt payable and the correct identity of the debtor before any recovery action is taken. Part 4 of the bill creates debt recovery orders for aggregated debts. This is an essential step to put a debtor on notice before any debt recovery action is taken. Part 5 of the bill establishes a process for disputed debt matters to be heard in court. This ensures that debtors retain the right to dispute the debt in court, consistent with the existing right to mount a defence to a creditor's claim. Part 6 of the bill authorises the chief commissioner to take debt recovery action, comprising of property seizure and garnisheeing and registering a charge on land—the same actions available to judgement creditors to enforce a court judgement for a debt.

The bill authorises also the suspension of certain State-issued licences to assist debt recovery. This recognises that a privilege granted by the State, such as a government-issued licence, can be withdrawn if the person defaults on an obligation to the State, such as non-payment of a debt. Part 7 makes provision for payment arrangements and hardship cases. This allows the individual circumstances of a debtor to be taken into account when determining whether and how to take or continue recovery action. Part 9 imposes interest and debt recovery costs on unpaid debts. As these measures are primarily intended to encourage debtors to make payment arrangements or otherwise engage with Revenue NSW, they will be subject to a power to waive, remit or postpone any interest, costs or fees payable under the Act.

Part 10 of the bill provides for the allocation and refund of payments. Among other things, this ensures that taxation—as the primary source of government revenue—has priority over other types of State debt. Part 12 allows access to certain identifying and other personal information for debt recovery purposes, subject to limits on disclosure of that information. This permits the fast and accurate performance of the functions of Revenue NSW without unduly impinging on an individual's right to privacy. The processes outlined represent an appropriate balance between the obligations of individuals and businesses to pay their debts to the State and their rights to a fair process, including consideration of the individual circumstances of each debtor.

In summary, the main benefits of the bill are the reduction of the cost of debt recovery, improvement in debt recovery success rates and an increase in government revenue. The strategy projects that an additional \$85.5 million worth of debt will be collected within four years and \$45.5 million to \$97.5 million each year thereafter. Of course, the other benefit is that the bill improves the customer experience through a single point of contact for all debt owed to the Government. Our communities expect good customer services when it comes to dealing with government agencies and efficient and effective services. A perfect example of this is Service NSW—another excellent Liberal-Nationals Government initiative. The response and feedback from our communities to Service NSW indicates people's intention to use these services when they are delivered effectively.

The bill also contains various safeguards. Any of the debt recovery actions can be suspended or reversed at any time if the debtor contacts Revenue NSW to arrange a payment solution. I reiterate the point made by the member for Davidson that the vulnerable people in our community who cannot pay their debts have plenty of

opportunities to make arrangements for payment. Debt recovery action cannot be taken against a minor. Debtors have a right to have the debt internally reviewed or to have the matter heard in court. Debtors may enter into time-to-pay orders and have access to hardship reviews. A new Hardship Review Board will replace two existing boards for taxes and fines. I commend this bill to the House and I commend the Minister for its introduction.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland) (11:53): The Opposition has a number of concerns about the State Debt Recovery Bill 2017 which was introduced by the Minister for Finance, Services and Property. I do not intend to examine the bill in detail as my colleague the shadow Minister for Finance, Services and Property did an admirable and comprehensive job. The Government claims that establishing the chief commissioner as a specialised unit to handle outstanding debts will deliver savings to the budget and recoup some of the debt owed to public authorities in New South Wales. That is a fine aspiration. One of the biggest frustrations for any person or entity owed money is that there is no capacity for enforcing the repayment of that debt. When that entity is government we expect it to pursue equally all entities that owe money.

Some people are more vulnerable to debt collection action than others. If we reverse that concept there would be righteous outrage in the community if people in some occupations or some sectors of the economy are protected from having such action taken against them. As the shadow Minister for Small Business, I note that this bill allows for the suspension of licences for builders, carpenters, motor mechanics, conveyancers, driving instructors, real estate agents, tattooists, tow truck drivers and pawn brokers. Why not accountants, company owners, lawyers, financial advisers and board directors? Why have we targeted blue-collar industries? The Minister has not explained the rationale for his decision to exclude some occupations and professions from these provisions.

During his contribution to debate the shadow Minister for Finance, Services and Property passionately defended those small businesses that will be impacted by this legislation. The Government's mantra is that it is the government of small business. In this bill the Government has revealed itself yet again as being no friend to small business. A government that promotes itself as an advocate for small business should at the very least prescribe to the principle, "First do no harm." Removing a licence from a small business that has struggled to pay its debts and bills is the last and final straw. Penalties should be consistently applied and people should not be put in a situation where, because of the nature of their business, their capacity to repay a debt is reduced.

The potential impact on those small business owners and their workers is great. As a former small business owner, I have known firsthand the white-knuckle ride of cash flow issues. This Government purports to be supportive of the small business sector but when it sees businesses in some sectors at the edge of the cash flow cliff it wants to push them off, which is outrageous. Businesses that are in the tenuous financial position of not being able to pay their bills do not need the Government to say, "You no longer have the capacity to pay back the money that you owe." During times of cash flow crisis, my business was always a multi-award winning business. These things happen to businesses during the normal cycle. With the global financial crisis in the early 2010s a whole range of disruptive issues impacted on the operations of small business.

It is incumbent on the Government to support businesses in this State. The Government should not let businesses off their debt but it should ensure that it does not attack those that are vulnerable to this kind of behaviour. What is the Government's rationale for doing this? Small businesses do not need the sword of Damocles hanging over their heads every time they get into a tight corner with debt recovery action; they need to be given opportunities. We are talking about the way in which the Government interacts with small businesses. Opposition members had small businesses coming to them when an error from the Minister's own department resulted in a loss of accreditation. Those small businesses had to wait weeks and months to regain accreditation after losing their licences because of a paperwork error. This is not a focused department that cares about small businesses. I am concerned that the Minister is creating an arbitrary, unfair system for how some small business operators are pursued for their outstanding debts. In his second reading speech the Minister said:

What we have are multiple platforms and systems across the sector for managing debt, with no consistent guiding strategy or approach.

Why is no consistent guiding strategy or approach included in this legislation? By creating a two-tiered system, where some small business operators can have their licences suspended at the whim of the Government under this legislation while others are not affected by these changes, the Minister is perpetuating the lack of consistency in this policy area. This is just more inconsistency for our small business sector. In the current wasteland of government legislation being considered by this House, is this really the best legislation that this Government can come up with, because it further puts pressure on struggling small businesses?

We have to remember that this legislation was brought forward by this Liberal-Nationals Government, which introduced the Payroll Tax Rebate Scheme that advantaged the captains of industry in the central business district of Sydney over the huge numbers of small businesses in our regional areas. We on this side of the Chamber

have done the figures and we know that the Payroll Tax Rebate Scheme advantaged large businesses over small businesses. At the beginning of this term of government, we said that we would not support the rollover of this scheme in the form that the Government put to us, because the scheme was unfair to small businesses. It favours captains of industry in metropolitan areas over small businesses in regional areas. I bring this to the attention of the House, because it is vital for us to call out the Government when it picks and chooses favourites in business.

In his contribution to this debate the shadow Minister for Finance, Services and Property, the member for Cessnock, pointed out that any debts recovered from the non-repayment of grants made under this scheme will be returned to Consolidated Revenue. It should be pointed out that the scheme has been subject to much scrutiny, which is a problem. I have heard about small businesses being audited for four months in order for them to justify the retention of the grant and other businesses having to pay \$7,000 to an accountant in their attempt to justify a \$5,000 grant. We must imagine the stress and economic hardship placed on these businesses during the audit process, which has diverted them from the main game of running their businesses and added extra costs, often not covered by the grant money. When I was running a small business, I did not apply for a payroll tax rebate because I knew the scheme was a disaster.

This bill proposes Consolidated Revenue being the recipient of the scheme's failure, because any debts recovered from the scheme will not be returned to the scheme, and so add to the funds to help other small businesses. That is a disgrace. As the shadow Minister said, this provision attacks the integrity of the rebate scheme. The Government went through a budget process to determine how much money to allocate to the scheme for small businesses in this State, but has now determined that if a small business is found to have incorrectly claimed a rebate because of a mistake or because the scheme was poorly thought out from the beginning and that business now has to repay the grant, that small business will be pursued and its licence will be taken away and the recovered money will be paid back into Consolidated Revenue. That is not helpful for small business, which is a great concern for those on this side of the Chamber. [*Extension of time*]

This Liberal-Nationals Government has introduced other terrible small business policies, such as its attempt to ban greyhound racing in this State. This Government also introduced regulations that put consumers at risk by dumping down the hairdressing industry, which shows that the Government does not understand small business at all. The Liberal-Nationals Government introduced its container deposit scheme, which threw under the bus small business operators that tried to help with the botched implementation of the scheme. The Government said to small businesses that tried to help, "We've really stuffed up here. We don't have all of the reverse vending machines in place, so if you can put them in place, that's great. But we aren't going to make sure that containers are collected in a timely manner, so you will have issues with vermin and cash flow."

This Liberal-Nationals Government has no idea; it has gutted the commercial fishing industry. A bill brought before this Chamber last week concerning the commercial fishing industry attempted to reverse previous legislation that gutted the industry because of compulsory seafood labelling. However, there are still problems with the legislation because the Government just does not care. This Government has no idea about the impact of its policies. Government Ministers are too stupid to listen to stakeholders. They do not care about the small business owners who have been so badly served by this process. We must ensure that small businesses in this State are given a fair run. The Government has often said, "We really meant to help small business, but there's an unintended consequence of the legislation." Let us call that out for what it is: It is poorly thought out or just plain stupid policy. This Government is very good at introducing poor policy for small business, because it does not understand small business. It has no idea about what it is like to own and operate a small business.

This bill is very broad in its coverage. I turn to the payment of ambulance fees. My small business catered for a lot of elderly clients. One of those clients, who has passed on, was called Edie Gresswell. She saved her pension money and went all around Australia in 45 trips with us. One day she fainted in a shopping centre, and we called an ambulance. When she recovered, the first thing she said was not, "Thank you, Jenny, for calling the ambulance," or, "Thank you, Robert, for calling the ambulance," but "Oh my God, I can't afford the money for an ambulance." Her first concern was that she could not afford to pay for the ambulance service. One of the unintended consequences of this bill will be to further entrench the belief that it is the older people in our community who, if they need an ambulance that they cannot afford to use, the Government will go after to recover any debt they incur. That should not happen.

In his contribution to this debate the member for Davidson said that schoolkids do not pay ambulance fees. Let me tell him that their parents pay ambulance fees. A lot of people in this State are very concerned about ambulance fees, and Edie was one of them. The Minister for Health is shaking his head because he wants to clarify ambulance policy. Thinking about that incident with Edie Gresswell, perhaps it happened in Queensland, which has a different ambulance policy. The reality is that the threat of debt recovery will have an effect on the perception of the community, with people thinking that the sword of Damocles is being held over their heads. The Minister for Finance, Services and Property must consider the impact of the Government's policies and the community's

perception of those policies. Those opposite should have a good, hard look at themselves because their policies are failing small businesses rather than helping them.

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) (12:08): I contribute to the debate on the State Debt Recovery Bill 2017 in which I will focus in particular on local councils pursuing overdue rates through the Local Courts. The major burden allegedly imposed on the Local Court by these types of recovery actions was presented by the Minister for Finance, Services and Property as one of the major justifications for this bill. When the available data and research are analysed properly, this argument is seen to be hopelessly flawed and, in fact, quite misleading. I am not sure who originated the claim that overdue rates recovery places such a major burden on Local Courts, but it seems to have slipped through the hands of too many people and officers whose job should have been to make sure such a claim was examined properly. That would have avoided such a meretricious and inaccurate argument from being presented in a second reading speech by a Minister introducing a bill. Turning precisely to what the Minister said, it was:

The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal's 2016 draft report on the local government rating system is telling. It indicates that councils' court orders for overdue rates impose a major burden on the Local Court system, with more than one-third of all civil claims in the Local Court system involving councils pursuing overdue rates. Interrogating this claim leads to the 2016 Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal [IPART] draft report. The slightest acquaintance with the report reveals that this material is not the result of IPART's own research. Chapter 9 of the IPART report is entitled, "Recovery of Council Rates". Page 108 of the draft report states:

... councils' court orders for overdue rates impose a major burden on the Local Court system. The Department of Justice found that just over one-third of all civil claims in the Local Court system involve councils pursuing overdue rates.

The footnote in the report cites as authority for this proposition a Department of Justice letter to IPART dated 5 April 2016. It is not clear on the face of the IPART report whether the claim about a major burden is what the Department of Justice in fact said or whether it is a gloss put on it by the author of the IPART report who, I suspect, is much more likely to be an accountant or an economist than a lawyer—in short, someone with no idea about how the Local Court operates. If information is provided by the Department of Justice it would have been based upon some excellent research by the Law and Justice Foundation. The foundation does extraordinarily important work—even though the Government presently seems content to starve it of funds and let it wither on the vine.

The foundation's research—well known to those paying attention to legal issues—is really the only research carried out concerning who is bringing civil claims in New South Wales, and how often. The particular research into civil claims for the Local Court was for the year 2014. The research was published in 2016 in a document entitled, "Data Insights in Civil Justice." Page 9 of that 2016 report is called, "The Particular Story of Unpaid Council Rates". It has figures stating that more than one-third—in fact 34 per cent—of civil claims in the Local Court during 2014 involved councils pursuing unpaid council rates. So far so good for the claims of IPART and the Minister. But it is all downhill from there.

Civil claims are very different to criminal matters. Criminal matters involve court appearances for each case. Someone is charged or receives an attendance notice and they appear in court. In civil matters court appearances are far less usual. According to the foundation research only 7 per cent of civil matters are defended and must end up in courtrooms—that is, only 7 per cent of all Local Court civil claims use any court sitting time at all. A civil claim commences by the person claiming money—the plaintiff—filing an originating process called a statement of claim. From there several things can happen. If the statement of claim cannot be served on the defendant because they cannot be found or they are a corporation that does not exist, nothing happens.

If the statement of claim is served, one of several things might happen. The defendant may do nothing. If after the prescribed time has elapsed nothing has been done the plaintiff can obtain a default judgement. That is, the court orders that the defendant pay the amount claimed. That is done purely by paperwork and involves no courtroom time at all. One other option if the statement of claim is served is that the defendant pays the claim. Alternatively, they may come to an arrangement that satisfies both parties and settle the claim. That may or may not involve filing further court papers in the court registry. In any event, it certainly involves no courtroom hearing time. Indeed, all of the courses I have just indicated do not involve the use of court hearing time. In none of them does the case ever see the inside of a courtroom. The one other case is where the defendant disputes the claim and files a defence to the statement of claim. That involves hearing time—that is, we at last have a category where a case gets to see the inside of a courtroom and may potentially impose a burden on the Local Court.

With that background, the figures in the Law and Justice Foundation make for fascinating reading. Lots of local councils file statements of claim, but how many are defended and need hearing time? How many of these cases, which IPART and the Minister claim place such an intolerable burden on the Local Court system, get to see the inside of a courtroom? According to page 9 of the foundation's research report, less than 1 per cent are defended. That is not just a minuscule number; it is even less than the normal rate of defending claims. In 2014 the foundation research shows that 7 per cent of Local Court claims were defended. As I said, for unpaid council rates, it is less than 1 per cent. That makes the claim that actions for unpaid council rates place a major and

outrageous burden on the Local Court a complete nonsense—an absolute falsity and stupidity. It is pretty disgraceful; it is a lie.

My suspicion as to the original idiocy is that it is IPART rather than the Minister. This hopeless mistake has all the hallmarks of something done by an economist who thinks he or she knows everything, but has no experience of anything beyond dry economic neoliberalism and the histrionic rantings of Hayek. For a long time I have thought that economists or bankers should never be let near any decision that is important. But as bad as the less than 1 per cent figure is for the Minister's argument, the foundation report has other material that makes his justification for the bill even weaker. It goes from bad to worse. The foundation report, again at page 9, indicates that of the undefended rates claims—that is more than 99 per cent of the claims, none of which occupies court time—24 per cent proceed to default judgement, but 74 per cent just lapse. That is, in three-quarters of these claims that supposedly take up so much court time and effort, nothing happens apart from the original lodging of the document.

Not only do 99 per cent of overdue rates claims not occupy court time; three-quarters of them do not proceed in court registry terms beyond the filing of the statement of claim. As to what happens, it is not clear from the research. Logically, the choices are that the defendant cannot be found and thus cannot be served—which is unlikely if he or she owns land and rates are applicable—or some arrangement is reached with council and the debtors so that rates are paid in whole or part, or over time. The figures may or may not justify the changes proposed in this bill on other policy grounds, but they cannot be justified by the reason proffered by the Minister or IPART. That argument is spurious and fallacious.

I conclude by making a further brief reference to the Law and Justice Foundation, to whose research I have referred extensively in this debate. For some time it has done invaluable work in this State. Self-evidently its research on the Local Court has so powerfully informed the second reading debate as to have obliterated the Minister's primary rationale for the bill. It is for this reason that the present threat to the foundation's viability—that at the end of this financial year the foundation will fall below the minimum level of funding necessary to maintain an effective level of operation—is so outrageous. The Government is aware of this. I have placed questions on notice about this issue. The Government should properly fund the foundation now and in the long run. It needs to get on with it and do it urgently.

Mr JAMIE PARKER (Balmain) (12:15): I speak on behalf of The Greens in debate on the State Debt Recovery Bill 2017. I acknowledge the comments of the members representing the electorates of Cessnock and Liverpool and others, who identified that the rationale for this bill is flawed; there are significant issues with the legislation as it stands. I will not go through the details of the operation of the bill because that has been done effectively by other members in this place. Suffice to say that while the rationale for the introduction of this bill can be understood, if we take the Government at its word it is clear that there are several key concerns that the Government should consider before progressing.

I draw the attention of the House to the suspension of occupational licences. There has been some discussion about this in the House and it is our view that they should not be cancelled in response to a person's debt as it removes the ability of that person to pay the debt and appears counterintuitive to incentivising debt repayment. We are also concerned about the definition of "vulnerable". It is admirable that the Government has looked at hardship and vulnerability in this legislation, but in our view it is too vague and discretionary, and is of significant concern. Later I will address the amount of regulation that is involved and the lack of clarity it gives members who will vote on this bill. The definitions that will be included in regulation are critical as to whether this bill should be supported.

The notification of a debt is also an issue. It ignores barriers to accessing government agencies and resolving debt payments, such as changes in mailing addresses, the lack of phone or internet access and waiting time to contact agencies. We know that Centrelink has tens of millions of unanswered calls each year. The waiting time can be one to two hours. If the State Debt Recovery Office [SDRO] has transferred the compliance role for these debts, for example, will this be combined with extra staff and resources to enable the SDRO to engage with the public? That is a question I request the Minister to address, because the resourcing of the SDRO is important. It must be resourced adequately to deal with these new powers. I ask the Minister: What new resources will be delivered to the SDRO to enable it to respond to its increased workload if this legislation passes?

In our view the SDRO must offer an online communication mechanism and call-back service to ensure that debtors have access to the best information on their debts, and provide an equitable dispute resolution process. This is an important matter that the Minister should address at this stage to ensure that the SDRO can react in a transparent, open and accessible way for everybody in our community. The member for Liverpool addressed the fallacy behind the motivation for this bill regarding local government charges, and said that the inability of people to pay rates and charges is a reflection of the increasing unaffordability of housing in New South Wales. I am sure

this is something that concerns all of us. We believe the Government should look at the reasons why such debts are not being paid, rather than simply increasing enforcement action.

It is unclear what costs a debtor may incur through the debt recovery cost provision, which is to be included in the regulation. I ask the Minister to give more details to the House on what costs a debtor may incur. This is an important point. I understand that the Government proposes to put this in regulation, but it is important because the amount of money may well be significant. This is something that members should be informed about before making a decision on the legislation. Many elements are to be included in the regulation and I ask the Minister to provide the clarity that members need. The chief commissioner's guidelines are yet to be published, but should include direction as to who qualifies as a vulnerable person. We believe it is important to define who is a vulnerable person. I note as part of its submission to this bill that Community Legal Centres NSW [CLCNSW] has asked that it be directly involved in that discussion and the generating of that definition.

In our view it should be drafted in consultation with the Department of Family and Community Services and Community Legal Centres NSW—people and organisations in our communities that work directly with some of the most vulnerable people in our communities, particularly on legal issues—to ensure that we in this House can have confidence that the regulations will protect vulnerable people. I drew the attention of the House to the Community Legal Centres NSW submission, which I note has 14 recommendations. We agree with the majority of those submissions and believe that those are the types of issues that the House should take into account when addressing this bill. I will not go through all of them, but I expect the Minister will have received the broad position of the CLCNSW and its recommendations for the bill. We believe that they are important amendments that should be considered. In particular we believe that we should remove licence suspension provisions—part 6, division 3—from this bill. It is counterintuitive and the Government should not proceed with it.

Secondly, we believe there should be compulsory consultation with the community sectors—clause 12 (2)—which is important, particularly considering what the regulation will contain and its impact on many vulnerable people in our community. Thirdly, work development orders for all State debts should be enabled—clause 99K. Other members have raised work development orders also. It may be more appropriate for some people who are on very low incomes, especially in Indigenous communities, and cultural and linguistically diverse communities, to enable work development orders rather than subject them to the punitive measures outlined in the bill.

We believe the deadline for internal review to supply information should be extended. At the moment it is only 14 days which, in our view, is inadequate. It should be 28 days—clause 28. Further, suspension of debt recovery actions when debtors are taking steps to address debt—part 7, division 1—is an important amendment that should be included. We also think that a provision should be inserted to notify the debtor that the chief commissioner is taking debt recovery action and that extra time should be provided to respond and request extensions of payments. That is a shortcoming within the bill. Provision should be made to notify the debtor of the chief commissioner taking debt recovery action and to offer flexibility at that stage.

We understand that the Government may well be concerned about some issues. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal report identified the State Debt Recovery Office has a lower debt recovery rate than other sectors. We are concerned that without the additional resources the SDRO needs, we will see a contracting out and the transferring of debt collection responsibilities to private companies. We are very concerned about that because they are debts to the State, or local government in some cases, and recovery action must be done in a way that has the full control and the full resourcing of the Government to ensure that these approaches reflect the vulnerability of the people in our community and support them. We also believe that debtors should be notified by post rather than by electronic notifications. Some people use electronic notification very significantly; others might have an email address or some kind of contact. Anyone who has parents who may not have been brought up in the computer age could tell us—

Mr Christopher Gulaptis: We all have parents.

Mr JAMIE PARKER: Some people's parents were not brought up in the computer age and often find it challenging, even though they may have an email address, to access email and use it effectively, and they do not know what the junk box is and so on. Although we acknowledge that the Government introduced this bill to recover debt across a range of different agencies, we believe it has significant shortcomings and that it could be greatly improved. In conclusion I thank all the organisations that made submissions and sent letters, in particular, Community Legal Centres NSW, which did a detailed analysis of the bill and identified 14 key points.

I call on the Government to work with and to respect and engage groups such as Community Legal Centres NSW, because those are the organisations that work directly with some of the most vulnerable people in our community. Although they have had productive discussions it is important to take on board their perspective as organisations that work with disadvantaged communities, including people facing economic hardship, people

with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Organisations such as this advocate for laws to make sure that these people are not forgotten and to ensure that legislation can be robust, caring and valuable for all the people of New South Wales. We do not support the bill in its current state. We believe it should be amended, but we look forward to a productive discussion with the Government.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang) (12:24): Many people from this side of the House have outlined a number of reasons why we oppose the State Recovery Bill 2017. I am the shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and as the Minister is a former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs I ask him whether a study has been conducted on the impact of this legislation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are amongst the most disadvantaged groups in our community. One of their biggest obstructions to accessing the system is literacy levels; another is trust in government organisations. Although the bill provides for people to engage with the department and with the State Debt Recovery Office, it is often Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who do not have the capacity or the support to go through that process. As a result of their lack of understanding of the system and support in accessing it, they easily fall into default.

Ministers should consider how all legislation, but particularly this type of legislation, will impact on particular groups in our community and whether sufficient safeguards have been built in to ensure that the system looks after members of those communities properly. One of the biggest issues with Aboriginal people is that when they lose their licences they drive unlicensed. They live in remote communities and driving is the only way to access medical facilities, shopping and other amenities. As a result they fall into the justice system.

When considering this type of legislation which provides for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to seek assistance—that group will access the opportunity less than other groups—we may be creating another entry point into the justice system. That is something we should try to avoid at all costs. I would appreciate the Minister outlining in his reply how he has worked throughout the consultation period to ensure that the rights and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have been considered in the drafting of the legislation. This is an important area. As a Parliament we should work together to find ways of helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Sometimes we introduce legislation that could make things worse for them rather than better.

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) (12:28): I support the State Debt Recovery Bill 2017. The object of the bill is to authorise the Chief Commissioner of State Revenue to take certain actions to recover State debts without taking court action. These actions are referred to as "debt recovery actions". The bill authorises the chief commissioner to take debt recovery action to recover the following debts, each of which is a State debt. First, a debt owed to a public authority that is referred to the chief commissioner for debt recovery action; secondly, a debt owed to the chief commissioner under the Taxation Administration Act 1996; and, thirdly, a debt owed to the chief commissioner under the First Home Owner Grant (New Homes) Act 2000, the Payroll Tax Rebate Scheme (Jobs Action Plan) Act 2011 or the Small Business Grants (Employment Incentive) Act 2015. This bill sets out a framework that aims to improve the collection of debt owed to government agencies and local councils that is ordinarily managed by each agency. Instead, the bill permits debt recovery action to be taken by Revenue NSW to recover debt owed to government agencies.

In his second reading speech, the Minister referred to the 2016 Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal draft report, which noted that local council court orders for overdue rates place an administrative burden on the Local Court system. The bill aims to alleviate that burden by permitting local councils to enter into agreements with the Chief Commissioner of State Revenue for the recovery of the agency's debts without obtaining a court judgement. The Minister also noted that the bill allows debt recovery action to be taken only when a debtor has failed to engage with the chief commissioner's attempts to encourage him or her to enter into a payment plan. Debtors will have the option of entering into a payment plan, applying for a review of the debt, or electing to have the matter dealt with by a court.

The bill amends the Fines Act 1996 to enable the Commissioner of Fines Administration to make a work and development order in respect of a State debt for which a debt recovery order has been made under the proposed Act. Such an order may currently be made in respect of an unpaid fine and requires a person to undertake unpaid work, training or medical or other treatment in order to satisfy an unpaid fine. The proposed amendments will allow such an order to be made in respect of a State debt only if the person also has unpaid fines and consents to the order being extended to the person's State debt.

The Fines Act 1996 is also amended to abolish the Hardship Review Board, to authorise the Commissioner of Fines Administration to use the name "State Debt Recovery" in the exercise of functions under the Fines Act 1996, and to make other consequential and minor amendments. The bill amends the Health Services Act 1997 to provide that unpaid ambulance fees will no longer be recoverable by the Commissioner of Fines Administration under the Fines Act 1996. Instead, unpaid ambulance fees will be referable debts under the proposed Act and will be dealt with accordingly. A debt notice may be issued under the Health Services Act 1997 and the debt may be referred to the chief commissioner for debt recovery action under the proposed Act.

The bill also amends provisions relating to unpaid council rates, charges, fees and other amounts. It amends the Local Government Act 1993 to enable unpaid rates, charges, fees or other amounts under that Act to be treated as referable debts under the proposed Act and to be dealt with accordingly. A council may refer an unpaid rate, charge, fee or other amount to the chief commissioner for debt recovery action. After referral, the council cannot charge interest in respect of the rates or charges and cannot take action to recover the rates or charges. However, the chief commissioner can charge interest and take debt recovery action under the proposed Act. As unpaid rates and charges will continue to be a charge on land under the Local Government Act 1993, the amendments include provisions that require the chief commissioner to provide information to councils for disclosure to potential land buyers about unpaid rates and charges that have been referred to the chief commissioner for debt recovery action.

The bill makes amendments to the Taxation Administration Act 1996 to provide that debts payable by taxpayers, which are currently collected by the chief commissioner under that Act, are treated as State debts under the proposed Act. The Taxation Administration Act 1996 is also amended to provide for a debt notice to be served on a taxpayer requiring a tax debt to be paid by a certain date and advising the taxpayer that, if the debt is not paid by that date, debt recovery action may be taken under the proposed Act, to enable the chief commissioner to apply a refund due to a taxpayer to any grant debt or referable debt owed by the taxpayer, and to abolish the Hardship Review Board, which is reconstituted under the proposed Act and continues to have functions under the Taxation Administration Act 1996.

As I said, the bill makes amendments relating to grant debts. It amends the First Home Owner Grant (New Homes) Act 2000 to provide that if a person who was paid a first home owner grant under that Act is required to repay the grant, because the grant was paid in error or for any other reason, that amount is treated as a grant debt for the purposes of the proposed Act; to enable the chief commissioner to serve on the person a debt notice requiring the grant debt to be paid by a certain date and advising the person that if the debt is not paid by that date debt recovery action may be taken under the proposed Act; and to make it clear that the chief commissioner's powers to write off liability for a grant debt under the proposed Act extend to hardship cases.

The bill amends the Payroll Tax Rebate Scheme (Jobs Action Plan) Act 2011 to provide that if a person who was paid a rebate under that Act is required to repay the rebate, because the rebate was paid in error or for any other reason, that amount is treated as a rebate debt for the purposes of the proposed Act; to enable the chief commissioner to serve on the person a debt notice requiring the rebate debt to be paid by a certain date and advising the person that, if the debt is not paid by that date, debt recovery action may be taken under the proposed Act; to enable the chief commissioner, instead of paying a rebate to a person to apply it towards any State debt for which a debt recovery order has been made under the proposed Act in addition to the existing option of applying it towards any payroll or other tax payable by the person; and to make it clear that the chief commissioner's powers to write off or remit liability for a rebate debt under the proposed Act extend to hardship cases.

The bill amends the Small Business Grants (Employment Incentive) Act 2015 to provide that if a person who was paid a grant under the Act is required to repay the grant, because the grant was paid in error or for any other reason, that amount is treated as a grant debt for the purposes of the proposed Act; to enable the chief commissioner to serve on the person a debt notice requiring the grant debt to be paid by a certain date and advising the person that if the debt is not paid by that date, debt recovery action may be taken under the proposed Act; to enable the chief commissioner, instead of paying a grant to a person, to apply the grant towards any payroll or other tax payable by the person or towards any State debt for which a debt recovery order has been made under the proposed Act; and to make it clear that the chief commissioner's powers to write off or remit liability for a grant debt under the proposed Act extend to hardship cases. As I said, I support the State Debt Recovery Bill 2017. It makes sense to have all these issues in one place and for them to be dealt with by the State Debt Recovery Office. I commend the bill to the House.

Visitors

VISITORS

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Geoff Provest): I welcome to the Chamber three women executives from Tweed Shire Council and the General Manager, Mr Troy Green. Suzanne Richmond is the Executive Manager People, Communications and Governance; Doreen Harwood is the Enterprise and Emergency Management Officer; and Kym Kranen is the Senior Economic Officer. They are accompanied by the member for Lismore, Mr Thomas George, and are attending for the 2018 Women in Local Government Awards. I hope they enjoy their visit to Parliament House. On behalf of the Parliament, I thank them for the great work they do in the Tweed.

*Bills***STATE DEBT RECOVERY BILL 2017****Second Reading Debate****Debate resumed from an earlier hour.**

Mr RON HOENIG (Heffron) (12:38:0): I make a contribution to debate on the State Debt Recovery Bill 2017. I understand that the member for Cessnock made a detailed contribution to this House on the Opposition's position in relation to this bill. I endorse his remarks, whatever they might have been. Nothing I say should be seen to be either expressly or by implication inconsistent with the remarks or the views that he has expressed. I express my concern, though, in respect of this bill, as I did for the amendments to the fines legislation when ambulance accounts or bills were given to the commissioner for enforcement. That is because it is a fundamental breach of principle. For the princely outstanding amounts of \$130 million, mentioned in the second reading speech, the Parliament seeks to empower the Executive Government with, effectively, the power of the judicial arm of government that it used to enforce debts. That is a fundamental breach of principle.

If a person owes money, whether to the Government or to another person, the remedy is to seek proceedings in the court and to obtain a judgement debt. Therefore the remedies proposed by this bill—for example, property seizures or garnishee orders or, alternatively, writs of execution—are in fact sanctions and powers vested in the judicial arm of government. They should not be vested in the executive branch of government. My learned friend the member for Epping has indicated to me he is going to speak in support of the bill. Whilst he is a member of the Government, he is required to do so, but he indicated to me that he believes the bill is correct and compared it to the issue relating to traffic fines.

An exception was made by the Parliament some decades ago relating to traffic fines because unpaid fines resulted, effectively, in the police department having to lay information and issue summonses for every unpaid fine. It involved courts or magistrates sitting day in and day out under the then section 75B of the Justices Act and imposing penalties, and the courts providing for notification. The legislature made an exception then in the ways in which it went about enforcing fines and it was an exception that the Parliament enacted for cost purposes. Part of the problem with that system now is that the Government knows there are some 1,200 people—that it knows of—being wrongly fined by the technology and wrongly losing their licences.

When the Government imposes penalties upon people for alleged wrongdoing—and traffic offences are wrongdoing—there is something fundamentally wrong with that system that requires review. However, in this case there is no reason to empower the Executive Government with these excessive judicial powers over \$130 million that might be outstanding to the State, let alone empower local councils to refer to the commission the ability to collect rates. Already under the Local Government Act a failure to pay rates results in a charge on the land in any event, and very high interest, so there is already a deterrent for non-payment of rates. However, councils should not through the commission be able to garnishee people's wages or, alternatively, effectively issue writs of execution either on their chattels or sell up their land. For outstanding rates for five years councils can already effectively sell up landholdings, so they do not need this excessive power.

It seems to me that if the Executive Government which administers these government departments is doing it efficiently, these government departments should be able to recover, as a debt, the money it says is owing. It is no big deal to issue a statement of claim, or what used to be called a default summons, to give someone the opportunity of filing a defence, to get a default judgement and then to enforce it through the courts. One does not require the intellect of the member for Epping to be able to do it. There is a fundamental principle at stake—that is, unless there are exceptional reasons, and there are not any. Unless there are exceptional reasons, do not give the Executive Government what is effectively judicial power to enforce debts. The reality is that whilst those who might live in the electorate of the member for Epping or those with a Watsons Bay address might understand a particular notice that comes to them, I imagine the contribution of the member for Liverpool—although I did not hear it—was to give examples of people who would not necessarily understand the ramifications of the paperwork that they receive.

Those opposite are not only empowering the commissioner to exercise judicial power to recover debt; they are also authorising him to suspend a variety of licences over people who are engaged in a lawful business. Under this bill, licences can be suspended for builders and carpenters, motor mechanics, real estate agents, tattooists, tow truck drivers and pawnbrokers for non-payment of a debt that has not been established in accordance with the normal rules of law. I repeat: Other than in imposing a fine, for example, where a fine is effectively a judicial sanction when someone owes money to the State, it is no different to when someone owes money to another person. The whole concept of the rule of law is that it binds the Government and the State as it binds an individual. Unless there are exceptional reasons to empower the State to take a citizen's property, it

should not be permitted to do it unless it is being done in accordance with an order of the court by the authority of the judicial arm. It is a citizen's ultimate protection.

I find it extraordinary that this bill was introduced by a finance Minister who would probably have no idea about the doctrine of separation of powers, no idea about the concept of the Westminster system, and no idea as to the sorts of principles that need to be preserved. It is a wonder that the Attorney General has not expressed a view in relation to this matter. He is the chief law officer of the State. It is his fundamental duty to preserve the doctrine of separation of powers and to make sure an executive is not authorised to exercise judicial power for virtually no purpose—for \$130 million that is owing to the State. The Minister for Transport and Infrastructure wastes that every day through his own inefficiency, so really this is not the time to effectively allow Treasury officials and finance department officials to allow the Executive Government to have this excessive power.

Mr DAMIEN TUDEHOPE (Epping) (12:48): I speak in support of the State Debt Recovery Bill 2017, as was foreshadowed by the member for Heffron. I start by saying that the contributions of the member for Cessnock and the member for Maitland demonstrate completely why the Opposition will never be ready for government. The contribution of the member for Cessnock was a consummate display of ignorance—a display put on for a gallery of school students whom he thought he could con with a most easygoing approach to a piece of legislation that is fundamentally appropriate to the circumstances in which it was introduced. Instead of saying that both sides of Parliament should embrace this legislation, the member for Cessnock embarked on a performance that sought to demonstrate why Labor would not support this bill. Neither the member for Cessnock nor the member for Maitland made one point that demonstrated any flaw in the bill, although I think that there are some things which we could do to make it better.

I will go through a number of the issues that have been raised in relation to the bill. When I read some bills I think that there may be some things that could be improved, but when I read this bill I thought that the Opposition would support it and that I would not have to prepare a great deal for this speech. But the Opposition does not support this bill and has wheeled out the heavy artillery to try to shoot it down. The Opposition opposes the bill because members on the other side of the Chamber are the henchmen—the people who go in to bat—for the vested interests who ask them to support some of the law firms and debt collection agencies that make money out of this process. Currently, it costs \$1,000 to recover a debt using a debt recovery agency, but it costs only \$230 if Revenue NSW collects the debt. So which option should we go with? Those opposite are saying, "We'll go with the \$1,000 model, because that puts money in the pockets of debt recovery agents. We are here to support debt recovery agents." Members of the Opposition dress up that decision by pretending that they are supporting vulnerable people, but it is those on this side of the House who are supporting vulnerable people.

If members examine the bill closely they will see that the Hardship Review Board, which has been established as part of Revenue NSW, is an innovation that takes into account vulnerabilities and hardships of people who have debts they are unable to pay. The Government has established the Hardship Review Board because it understands that sometimes people have difficulty paying debts. I make one caveat: the issue of Work and Development Orders, addressed by the member for Balmain. I am a great supporter of the use of Work and Development Orders in circumstances where people have difficulty paying off debt. This was an important innovation when the Fines Act was amended in order to give Revenue NSW an opportunity to negotiate with vulnerable people who are in debt and to give them a way to pay those debts. I think we ought to consider delivering that innovation to people who cannot pay the debts that are the subject of these arrangements.

When agencies refer a debt to Revenue NSW for recovery, one of the conditions of the referral ought to be that Revenue NSW is able to negotiate with the debtor in respect to paying off the debt over time through some sort of Work and Development Order. That is exactly what the Government is doing now in relation to the Fines Act and it is something which, by way of regulation or otherwise, could be considered with respect to this regime. With that caveat, I think that the protections given to vulnerable people under this legislation should be acknowledged and applauded by those opposite.

A lot was made by those opposite in relation to the problem of licence forfeiture as part of the regime relating to debt recovery. If a person who owns land does not pay the rates, rather than lodging the matter with the courts it is lodged with Revenue NSW. Similarly, if a person does not pay a fine for a driving offence, Revenue NSW is able to send him or her a number of notices, the final one of which will say, "Your licence is about to be suspended." The great complaint from those opposite is that if we take someone's licence away he or she might not be able to earn any money to pay the debt back. That is fair enough, but why is the same argument not being made in relation to the person who has a fine? If we take their licence away they will have no ability to work to earn money to pay off the fine. There is an inconsistency in the arguments of those who come into the Chamber and bleat about this legislation depriving people of the ability to earn a living to pay off money which they owe to an agency—for example, rates which they have not paid on land which they own. That argument is entirely

hypocritical and inconsistent because it differentiates between the person who owes money relating to a driving offence and a person who has not paid the rates. The same argument applies to both.

A licence should be valued. It is an incentive to pay a fine. Often a driver who does not value his or her licence will not pay a fine. In circumstances where someone cannot pay a fine, under this legislation there is an opportunity for that person to approach the Hardship Review Board. Every person who owes money to an agency has that ability under this legislation. This legislation takes away from the rest of the ratepayers the expense of having to go to court to recover this money. The ability to go to court to recover money benefits those for whom Opposition members are running a protection racket—the protection racket for the collection agencies and the small group of law firms which do collection work. In many cases those firms employ other people who are knocking on doors to recover the debt by other means—but that is another matter.

There is no part of this bill that should be the subject of any objection. It is a streamlined way of creating a debt recovery service for agencies that are owed money. Rather than having the rest of the ratepayers or taxpayers of this State bearing the cost of that debt recovery, it gives Revenue NSW a streamlined way of recovering debt. It is important to note that the Government has put processes in place to ensure that debts are recovered properly. Rather than run down this bill—which those opposites have sought to do—members ought to be commending the Minister for an innovative piece of legislation. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr CHRIS PATTERSON (Camden) (12:59): I support the State Debt Recovery Bill 2017. Members who preceded me in this debate have dealt extensively with the key features of the bill. Prior to this debate taking place, I had not appreciated how wonderful the bill is, but having listened to the speeches made by other members, particularly the speech made by the member for Epping, I am inspired to participate in the debate. I commend the Minister for Finance, Services and Property, Mr Dominello, for his fine work in formulating this legislation. Members sometimes take legislation for granted, but it is appropriate to recognise that the introduction of a bill represents a great deal of hard work.

Yesterday during party room discussions, I spoke to the Minister, as I speak to all Ministers who have bills before the House. To illustrate the type of person the Minister is, I mention that he took me aside and said, "Chris, as much as you will gush over me and give me credit for this wonderful bill, I want you to know that my staff and the department have done an outstanding job in preparing this legislation." I hope that the departmental officers in the Speaker's gallery will convey to all members of staff, including those in the Minister's office, my thanks for their wonderful work. The Minister specifically wanted to make me aware of the fine work of departmental and ministerial officers.

Although members who have preceded me in this debate have dealt extensively with the bill, I will deal with matters that appear to me to be critically important. The purpose of the bill is to establish a framework for centralising debt recovery for all New South Wales government agencies and local councils. I highlight that the scheme will be implemented on an opt-in basis. We should not lose sight of that important point, which was made so abundantly clear by members who preceded me in this debate. The bill is part of a strategy to consolidate all debt recovery functions in New South Wales and to bring debt recovery within the ambit of operations of Revenue NSW. As all members would be aware, Revenue NSW has consulted with the Department of Justice, including the Privacy Commissioner, and Transport for NSW.

Among other important benefits of the bill is a reduction in the cost of debt recovery. For example, the cost incurred by an agency for using Revenue NSW to garnish an employee's income or to seize property could be approximately \$220 compared to a private debt collection firm's cost, which conservatively could be \$1,500. Improvement in debt recovery success rates will increase government revenue. Projected additional debt collection as a result of implementation of this legislation is \$85.5 million within four years and between \$45.5 million and \$97.5 million each year thereafter. Improved debt recovery success rates and consequential increased revenue will bring obvious benefits for the people of New South Wales. A key component of the bill is protections for debtors. The debts recovery scheme that will be established by the bill is designed to encourage debtors to engage with Revenue NSW to set up arrangements that are appropriate for the circumstances of the individual debtor. I emphasise that the reforms will protect debtors who have genuine reasons for non-payment of debts from any excessive impact of the new processes.

First, the bill establishes clear and fair procedures that will require notice of debt collection to be given. Initially, a debt notice will advise of the unpaid debt, which makes sense; the due date for payment, which is critical information; the consequences of non-payment; and, because every consequence should be accompanied by a review, the review options available as well as information on how to apply for time in which to pay. Subsequently, notice of a debt recovery order will advise of a final date for payment; the consequences of non-payment, including costs and interest; the review options available; and the option of having the debt dealt with by a court. It is important for debtors to know the costs involved and the interest that will be applied should failure

to settle the debt eventuate. The provision of financial disincentives associated with default may encourage people to choose to pay on time, if possible.

Secondly, the bill creates a new statutory review process for referable debts. The grounds for review will vary depending on the type of debt, but in all cases will allow changes to be made to address errors in the amount of the debt or mistakes of identity. Thirdly, the reforms will avoid unnecessarily dragging debtors through the courts, which I am sure everybody would agree is a good thing. In most cases, debts are not disputed by the debtor, but the only means available to the creditor to recover the unpaid debt is the initiation of court proceedings. Providing a non-court process to commence recovery saves both parties time and cost. Any measure that saves parties time and cost and delivers an increased level of debt recovery to the State proves the benefit of introducing this bill and represents greater benefits for the people of New South Wales. Although a principal aim of the bill is to provide non-court processes for debt recovery, debtors nevertheless will retain the right to be heard in court if they dispute the liability after a review confirms the debt notice.

Fourthly, the bill contains specific protections for vulnerable people and for people experiencing hardship. The need for specific protections for vulnerable people and people experiencing hardship has been recognised by all members of this House during this debate. Debt recovery guidelines, made by the responsible Minister in consultation with the Attorney General and published on the Revenue NSW website, specifically will address debt recovery action in relation to vulnerable persons. [*Extension of time*]

A "vulnerable person" is defined as a person who has a mental illness, who has an intellectual disability or cognitive impairment, who is homeless, who is experiencing acute economic hardship or who has a serious addiction to drugs, alcohol or volatile substances. Revenue NSW will be able to build on its experience of dealing with vulnerable persons in fines debt. The chief commissioner will have the power to cancel debt recovery action due to the financial, medical or personal circumstances of the debtor and to suspend or cancel debt recovery action in other specified circumstances. The aim of this legislation is to tidy up the process and efficiently recover outstanding debts. However, it is clear that the Minister has given a great deal of thought to ensuring that the most vulnerable in our community are protected and will not be caught up in unfair debt recovery. That is an important part of this bill.

The debt recovery guidelines, which have been made by the responsible Minister in consultation with the Attorney General, will ensure that the i's are dotted and the t's are crossed. The Attorney General leaves nothing to chance. I know that the Attorney General and his department have gone over this with a fine toothcomb to ensure that the guidelines and the spirit of this legislation are met and adhered to. The chief commissioner will have the power to cancel debt recovery. A new Hardship Review Board, which will replace the two existing boards under the Fines Act and the Taxation Administration Act, will have the power to review decisions of the chief commissioner as to time to pay arrangements and hardship applications. I thank my colleagues who have come into the Chamber to listen to my contribution. It clearly demonstrates that when we have great minds at work, such as those of Minister Dominello and Minister Speakman, a layperson can deliver and the people will come. Their support is much appreciated and very inspiring.

Ms Felicity Wilson: We want to hear more.

Mr CHRIS PATTERSON: Thank you, I will continue. The regulations will give a broad power to waive, remit, postpone or refund any interest or costs of fees payable under the Act. It needs to be acknowledged that a number of debtors who find themselves in a difficult circumstance will make genuine efforts to repay that debt. This will prevent debt from snowballing when the debtor makes genuine efforts to pay off the debt. Finally, the bill contains privacy provisions that restrict the purposes to which information can be used and includes strict limits on the disclosure of personal information obtained in the administration or execution of the Act. I commend the bill to the House.

Business interrupted.

JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2018

Returned

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Geoff Provest): I report receipt of a message from the Legislative Council returning the abovementioned bill without amendment.

Community Recognition Statements

WORLD'S CHAMPIONSHIP BAR-B-QUE CONTEST

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) (13:14): I inform the House of the recent World's Championship Bar-B-Que Contest held in Houston, Texas, a fortnight ago. It is regarded as the most prestigious

event in the United States barbecue circuit. At the same time as our Premier was impressing United States Governors, I am pleased to report that an Australian entry was impressing barbecue judges and stunning more than 250 United States-based teams and international teams. The Australian team finished runner-up in the coveted brisket division. The team, which was led by Grant Coleman from Wingham Export Beef, included his wife, Fiona, and his daughter Grace, along with Ash Turner from Wingham, Central Coast butcher Stephen Cooke from Tumby Meats, and Mark Bateman from Sydney. What makes this win all the sweeter was that the Aussie team was the only entry in the competition not using beef sourced from the United States. In preparation for the event, Grant had airfreighted Wingham beef to Houston. Congratulations to Grant, his team and all those who ensure that Wingham beef is the best in the world.

WALLSEND ELECTORATE CRIME REDUCTION

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (13:15): Last week Wallsend Town Business Association held a special networking meeting to discuss a worrying spike in crime at Wallsend. I applaud local businesses for being proactive. I thank Tiffanie Campbell, President of the Town Business Association, and the board of the Town Business Association for organising the event. I thank also Superintendent Brett Greentree of the Newcastle City Local Area Command and Senior Constable Jeff Milton for speaking with business owners and listening to their concerns. The free flow of ideas and interaction between business operators and police is an important step towards reducing crime in our community.

ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF GRAFTON BISHOP SARAH MACNEILL

Mr CHRISTOPHER GULAPTIS (Clarence) (13:16): Recently I attended the final service and laying down of the pastoral staff by the Right Reverend Dr Sarah Macneill, Bishop of Grafton. Bishop Sarah has attended to the needs of the diocese for the past four years and has done so with great compassion and leadership. I spoke at the service about it being a sad day for the church and the wider community because Bishop Sarah brought us closer together through her warmth and grassroots compassion. When she arrived the church was in turmoil but she brought peace and tranquillity. I liken the arrival of Bishop Sarah to Grafton with the television show *The Vicar of Dibley*. I do not suggest that because of any physical resemblance but rather for the humility, humanity and humour Bishop Sarah brought to the community. She broke the mould of what we expect in a bishop. I wish Bishop Sarah and her husband, Ian, a long and healthy retirement.

CHINESE ASSOCIATIONS OF GREATER WESTERN SYDNEY

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) (13:17): I had the great privilege of attending the Chinese Associations of Greater Western Sydney annual Australia Day and Chinese New Year celebrations, which were held at the Golden Palace in Cabramatta. The Chinese Associations of Greater Western Sydney are made up of more than 30 Chinese associations that all contribute tremendously to our local community. I acknowledge a number of the speakers on the evening: Mr Guiguang Wu, Mr Zhongping Yang, and Mr Chi Hua Lo, who all contribute greatly to our wider community. I acknowledge and commend all of the associations for their unwavering kindness, support and generosity to our local community. The Chinese Associations of Greater Western Sydney strive tirelessly to improve our region. I look forward to continuing to work alongside them in Fairfield to make it a better place. Our local area is fortunate to have the Chinese Associations of Greater Western Sydney working together with our region's local community leaders to achieve so many great things for our community.

TRIBUTE TO MARY DALE

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) (13:17): Mary Dale of Henty died on 18 February 2018 aged 83. Mary was one of the best known identities in Henty and the surrounding region. She and her husband, Les, owned the local supermarket. Mary was also involved in the other family businesses—the hardware and electrical stores. Mary's formative years were spent in Chiltern where she helped on the farm driving tractors and mustering sheep. She won many Belle of the Ball competitions in the region. In 1956 she became Belle of the Belles as well as Brocklesby's Miss CWA. Mary was a talented dressmaker, organist and baker. She was one of the pillars of her community. Mary moved to Henty in 1959 after her marriage to Les and became heavily involved in local events. She was the spearhead of Henty's 1986 centenary. The majority of the township of Henty attended Mary's funeral, which was conducted by her son Kenneth, who was recently ordained into the Anglican Church. Much loved and much respected, we will all miss you, Mary Dale.

MORISSET LIONS CLUB DRIVER REVIVER REST STOP

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) (13:19): I acknowledge a large and very dedicated team of volunteers within Morisset Lions Club which until last January had operated the Driver Reviver station on the M1 for the past 23 years. Many motorists heading north of Sydney through the Hunter region would have seen this driver rest stop at Beresfield. The station, which was run entirely by volunteers, began in 1994 in an effort to reduce driver fatigue and cut the State's road toll. The service has undoubtedly done that in more ways than we

know. With a new intersection to be built in that location, the station finished operating on 1 January this year. At its peak, the club served as many as 15,000 cups of coffee daily to holiday motorists. I have no doubt that without this service some of those holidaying families would not have made it home safely. I congratulate and thank Morisset Lions Club for its 23 years of extraordinary and invaluable service and I thank every volunteer and member who contributed.

TRIBUTE TO FATHER TONY SMITH, SJ

Ms FELICITY WILSON (North Shore) (13:19): I commemorate Father Tony Smith, SJ, who sadly passed away last month. Father Tony made an enormous contribution to the North Shore community and will be remembered most as the twentieth and longest serving headmaster of St Aloysius' College at Milsons Point. From 1986 he served the school and continued for 17 years until 2003. During that time he was a role model for thousands of students who attended the school. Though well known for overseeing numerous construction projects, it is through his pastoral care that Father Tony left his strongest legacy. Father Tony was not just there for the students in the chapel or the classroom, he was there for them throughout their lives, at weddings and baptisms and consoling them with support at funerals and times of need. Following his retirement from St Aloysius' his pastoral care work continued, with his appointment to Sacred Heart Residence North Sydney. Here he started Father Tony's lunch, a free Christmas lunch catering for up to 200 people who had nowhere else to go on Christmas Day. He passed away last month. He lived a life of service. I join the entire North Shore community in thanking him for the thousands of lives that he touched.

CENTRAL COAST SHIRLEY SHUTTLE

Ms LIESL TESCH (Gosford) (13:20): The Shirley Shuttle is a Central Coast institution, and it is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year. It was started to honour Shirley Galvin who endured a two-year battle with cancer between 2004 and 2006. Shirley and her daughter Barb Galvin saw just how bad circumstances were for Central Coast residents accessing treatment. Access to transport for cancer patients on the coast can be difficult or impossible, particularly for those with limited resources and without carers. Shirley and Barb saw the struggles people were facing—a patient in a wheelchair left on a footpath to wait for a taxi after radiotherapy treatment; another who had to take two buses and a taxi to get home from chemo. This was appalling and unacceptable to them and so they acted. Shirley Shuttle was born when Barb donated the first vehicle in 2008 and she has continued the service through fundraising and sponsorship over the past 10 years. There are now four Shirley shuttles on the road transporting cancer patients to treatment and improving the lives of so many in our community. I thank and congratulate Barb and the team at Shirley Shuttle who make the Coast a more caring and open-hearted place.

SOUTH COAST ELECTORATE LOCAL WOMAN OF THE YEAR GLENDA STANIFORD

Ms SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast) (13:21): On 8 March 2018, International Women's Day, we rightfully celebrate the achievements and contributions women make in our communities, in business and in leadership roles. Glenda Staniford is one such woman from the South Coast electorate who has made a significant and vital contribution to her local community and to the people of New South Wales. That is why this year I nominated Glenda as the South Coast's 2018 Local Woman of the Year. For over 20 years Glenda has campaigned tirelessly and professionally for the installation of seatbelts on school buses to keep school children safe as they travel to and from school. Glenda was a founding member of the Belt Up for Safety Action Group and has lobbied all levels of government in a number of different roles to make seatbelts compulsory on regional school buses. I am extremely proud to be part of this Government, which committed \$29 million to install seatbelts on all regional and rural buses by 2021. I am also proud to recognise the dedication and absolute commitment of Glenda Staniford who has helped bring about this important initiative. Well done Glenda Staniford, South Coast Local Woman of the Year.

ORANGE ELECTORATE LOCAL WOMAN OF THE YEAR ROCHELLE ASHCROFT

Mr PHILIP DONATO (Orange) (13:23): I recognise Rochelle Ashcroft, 2018 Local Woman of the Year for the Orange electorate. Rochelle co-founded the charity named Let's Make Better which focuses on assisting those most vulnerable. Uniquely, the charity passes on 100 per cent of every donation. Over the past year, Rochelle has overseen the charity deliver more than \$100,000 in donations and hundreds of volunteer hours to those in need. Through her charity, Rochelle has sponsored through World Vision 11 children living in Africa and collected and donated food to Riding for the Disabled Association NSW, Ronald McDonald House, the Canobolas Rural Technology High School's Clontarf Academy and Girls Academy, and the St Vincent de Paul food van. Let's Make Better has furnished six houses which are used for women and children escaping domestic violence, has provided breakfast four mornings a week to a local school at Bowen to nourish children, and has collected essential items to be given to men's and women's shelters. The charity addresses loneliness and isolation experienced by the elderly through a program of volunteers who socialise with residents of the Calare and Gosling Creek nursing homes. I congratulate Rochelle, who is an inspiration to all women and the wider community.

PARRAMATTA DIOCESE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Mr MARK TAYLOR (Seven Hills) (13:23): During this Catholic Schools Week, I acknowledge the fantastic three Parramatta diocese schools in my electorate of Seven Hills. In Winston Hills, St Paul the Apostle Primary School is known as "the school on the hill" and was established years ago by an order of Irish nuns, the Holy Faith Sisters. The school's Principal, Ms Marian Bell, leads a fantastic group of inspiring teachers who educate more than 14 classes of local students. Mother Teresa Primary School [MTP] was established a few years ago but has already made a great positive impact upon the Westmead community. The school boasts hundreds of students and is led by Principal Ms Elizabeth Devlin. MTP is known as a great school that is focussed on fostering an environment of creative minds and moulding gentle hearts, as per their motto. Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School on Grantham Road, Seven Hills, is another great Parramatta diocesan school. The school has 16 classroom teachers and the Principal, Mr Kieran Byrne, does a fantastic job. The school was founded in 1963 and has served the local Seven Hills community for more than 55 years. I wish all diocesan educators and students a great Catholic Schools Week.

TRIBUTE TO MARIA GIBBS

Mr PAUL SCULLY (Wollongong) (13:24): Last week, along with many family and friends, we said goodbye to Maria Gibbs. Maria was born in Wales. In 1963 she married Charlie, who lived only a few streets away from her, and immigrated to Australia in 1965. Apart from a brief period in Queensland, Maria, Charlie and family made Wollongong home. Growing up in Wales, Maria heard the seafaring lodgers who stayed at her home talk of Port Kembla. Of the three Australian towns she and Charlie considered, the talk of those lodgers helped her and Charlie to make the decision to settle there, and many people are so glad that she did. Maria will be sorely missed. On behalf of the Labor Party, I thank her for her contribution. Having been inspired to get involved during the Whitlam years, she was always willing to offer her support, energy, effort and ideas. I am grateful for the support she showed me. On behalf of everyone whose lives Maria touched, I pass on our collective condolences to her husband, Charlie, to Paul and Linda, to Nikki and Dean, and to her grandchildren, Rohan, Rheanna, Liam, Amy and Kate.

ARMIDALE ATHLETICS CLUB

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands—Minister for Tourism and Major Events, and Assistant Minister for Skills) (13:25): I recognise each of the 19 athletes comprising the Armidale athletics club on their magnificent performance at the recent New South Wales Junior Athletics Championships held at Sydney Olympic Park. I pay tribute to their coach and club president, Jay Stone, on the wonderful way that he has coached these young men and women to great success. I recognise Lawson Fittler on achieving gold in the 400 metres and bronze in the 800 metres, Andre Cooper on achieving gold in the 200 metre and the 100 metre sprint, Oliver Garrett on achieving gold in the long jump event, Henry Sindel on achieving gold in the 2,000 metre steeplechase, Matt Campion on achieving silver in the 3,000 metre steeplechase, and Armidale athlete Millie Mazzei who achieved a bronze medal in the 200 metres. I congratulate all of those athletes on the hard work they have put into their sport and again say well done to Jay Stone. Good luck to all of those athletes at future championships.

PORT STEPHENS INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY BREAKFAST

Ms KATE WASHINGTON (Port Stephens) (13:26): I acknowledge the generous support of local businesses, community groups and residents who will be joining me and the Federal Member for Paterson, Meryl Swanson, at our inaugural International Women's Day Breakfast. It is to be held this Friday at the beautiful Hunter Region Botanic Gardens. The breakfast will focus on showcasing and supporting young women in Port Stephens, alongside the impressive women we have across our community. This includes local artist Jenny Crozier, whose beautiful paintings and sculptures will be auctioned in support of the Port Stephens Family and Neighbourhood Service, a service that supports so many women and families in need in our region. At our breakfast, we will be hearing from young women school leaders from Irrawang High School and Hunter River High School, together with Principal Deb Dibley. I am excited to see that already more than 110 tickets have been sold to our event. Our inaugural Port Stephens International Women's Day Breakfast is only possible because of the generosity of MarketPlace Raymond Terrace, Tomago Aluminium, Newcastle Airport, Hunter Water, and the Hunter Region Botanic Gardens. I thank these local businesses for their support and look forward to celebrating International Women's Day with all of them.

BANKS PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENT LEADERS

Ms TANYA DAVIES (Mulgoa—Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Women, and Minister for Ageing) (13:27): I was honoured to be invited to the Banks Public School 2018 Student Leaders Induction Ceremony which was held on Wednesday 28 February. I congratulate Hannah McMillan and Morteza Hazara on being inducted as the 2018 school captains. I congratulate the school prefects Hayley Beekman, Hayley Cleverley,

Luis Contreras Villajuan and Sylvia Sharma. I had the privilege of presenting badges to the student representative council: from year 2 Hannah Daniel, Kaden Reid, Mackenzie Place and Breiana Jenkins-Littlefield; from years 2/3 Abbie Power and Charlize Halligan; from year 3 Matilda Joyce, Jye Frail, Katelyn Cogan and Lucas Moore; from year 4 Jarred Manuel, Jazmin Catic, Jacob Gandy and Natalia Sharma; and from years 5/6 Amelia Caruso, Brock Rattray, Grace Xerri, Callum Xia, Tai Daniel and Ja'da Talitonu. I congratulate the house captains and vice captains Toby Brown, Carolyn Holton, Blake Gavin, Charlie Hart, Layla Leoni, Blake McCaughey, Mason Moore and Kyana Frail. I wish all the student leaders a successful year in representing their school.

MACQUARIE FIELDS ELECTORATE LOCAL WOMAN OF THE YEAR PAULINE JAMES

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG (Macquarie Fields) (13:29): I pay tribute to Pauline James, whom I have chosen as my electorate's Local Woman of the Year for 2018. Pauline was nominated by her husband, Ray. This amazing couple has made significant contributions to the RSL movement, both locally and statewide. Pauline works tirelessly in her volunteer roles with the Ingleburn RSL Sub-Branch and the Ingleburn Women's Auxiliary and as State President of the RSL NSW Central Council of Women's Auxiliaries. Pauline's charitable efforts include instigating the "Lest We Forget Quilt" project, which raised more than \$64,000 for DefenceCare. Pauline's outstanding efforts have helped bring into the spotlight what is often the behind-the-scenes work of the Women's Auxiliaries. Pauline is also spearheading the Invictus Games 2018 project for Women's Auxiliaries branches in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania. The project will see 550 laundry bags depicting Australian themes handed out to all participating athletes, a quilt made for each participating country, a quilt for all Australian team members and a special quilt for His Royal Highness Prince Harry. Pauline is an amazing member of our local community.

SAVE OUR KIDS YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION PROGRAM

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal) (13:29): Last week I was delighted to attend the beneficiaries and benefactors dinner for Save Our Kids, or SOKS as it is more commonly known. SOKS is a youth suicide prevention and enrichment program on the Central Coast, an initiative of Lifeline and the Rotary Club of Gosford North. The Minister for Mental Health, the Hon. Tanya Davies, also joined me for the event, and I thank her for demonstrating our Government's support for this fantastic initiative. Figures show that almost half of all Australians experience a mental disorder at some time in their life. That is why the State Liberal Government invested a record \$1.9 billion in mental health services in the 2017-18 financial year. Indeed, in 2015, \$60,000 was provided to SOKS by Premier Mike Baird to support suicide prevention and intervention in our local area. This work is truly invaluable. In recent years it is estimated that 250 suicide interventions have been made over the four years that SOKS has been running. I thank Lifeline and the Rotary Club of Gosford North for their fantastic work.

CAMPBELLTOWN SENIORS FORUM

Mr GREG WARREN (Campbelltown) (13:30): I thank all the guest speakers and members of the community who attended my second Campbelltown Seniors Forum. Held in October last year, the forum provided a variety of information to older residents of the Campbelltown community. Far too many of our senior citizens are being left behind or are simply not fully aware of the myriad services available to make their lives easier. I sincerely thank the numerous guest speakers who gave up their time to give presentations and provide contact details. Those include Kristie Forrest and Shirley Bouffier from the National Seniors Association; Lyn from the local office of Meals on Wheels; Nannette Peters from Senior Cyber Seekers; Lyn Bright from South West Community Transport; Renica Adam from Macarthur Diversity Services Initiative; Senior Constable Michelle Wills from Campbelltown Local Area Command; and, lastly, my colleague and dear friend Sophie Cotsis, MP, the shadow Minister for Ageing. I again sincerely thank all guest speakers and attendees and hope this event was of assistance to each of them.

JUNEE REMEMBRANCE DAY PROJECT

Ms STEPH COOKE (Cootamundra) (13:31): I have great pleasure in recognising a remarkable group of ladies from Junee. Members of the Junee-Illabo Red Cross and the Junee Evening Branch of the Country Women's Association have joined forces to knit and crochet thousands of handmade poppies to commemorate the centenary of the end of World War I. After being displayed in Junee in the lead-up to Anzac Day this year, the poppies will be passed on to the Australian War Memorial to be included in its installation of 62,000 poppies in the five weeks leading up to Remembrance Day in November to represent the number of Australians who died in World War I. The community has a proud history of people serving their country and this gives the ladies the opportunity to honour them.

CUMBERLAND FESTIVAL OF COLOURS

Dr HUGH McDERMOTT (Prospect) (13:32): I acknowledge the wonderful Cumberland Festival of Colours, or Holi, that was held on 3 March at Civic Park, Pendle Hill. This wonderful celebration was organised by the Hindu Council of Australia and was proudly supported by Cumberland Council. More than 2,000 people attended the event, throwing around colours and paints, dancing and having an absolutely amazing time. It was the first time the festival was held at Pendle Hill in the electorate of Prospect and it is wonderful that it was such a wonderful success. From now on I expect the festival to be held every year in the electorate of Prospect. I congratulate Councillor Suman Saha, the first Hindu elected to Cumberland Council, who organised and supported the event; and Jay Raman, OAM, the New South Wales President of the Hindu Council of Australia for his support and his leadership. I congratulate them and wish them happy Holi.

PYEONGCHANG PARALYMPIC WINTER GAMES ATHLETE JOANY BADENHURST

Mr AUSTIN EVANS (Murray) (13:33): It is my pleasure to recognise the achievements of Joany Badenhurst from Griffith. Joany is an extraordinary young athlete who will compete in the snowboarding events at the Paralympic Winter Games in Pyeongchang. Joany also has the honour of co-captaining the Australian team with Mitchell Gourley. Originally from South Africa, Joany and her family moved to Australia in 2009 and now live in Griffith. Joany lost her lower leg in a farming accident in 2005. Her rise to sporting fame is quite an interesting one. She was recognised as a potential snowboarder by accident when the Australian Para Snowboard coach, Pete Higgins, saw her testing a prosthetic leg by running in high heels. I understand coach Higgins offered Joany the opportunity to try snowboarding. Never having tried it before but always keen to give everything a go, she gave notice to her employer that day and promptly joined the snowboarding program. Needless to say, she has gone from strength to strength since beginning the sport in 2013.

HOMELESSNESS

Mr RON HOENIG (Heffron) (13:34): I acknowledge the remarkable Rabbi Mendel Kastel, Chief Executive Officer of Jewish House. Jewish House is a non-denominational, not-for-profit organisation that offers accommodation, counselling services and other essentials for people in crisis. Rabbi Kastel believes that "we should not have a homelessness problem the way we do in Australia, and every person should have their basic needs facilitated in this country, and making a difference to homelessness is a good start". That passion has led Jewish House to become one of the leading independent agencies in New South Wales that is taking a community-based approach to addressing the immediate distress of homelessness, breaking the cycle of homelessness and delivering stable housing. This year marks Rabbi Kastel's tenth year serving as Chief Executive Officer of that organisation. Last year he was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for his services to the community and to our youth. Visiting Jewish House and Rabbi Kastel provides a real insight into understanding homelessness and how inspirational their work is for those who need it most. Our community is richer for their contribution.

NORTH COAST ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY AWARD RECIPIENT PAUL AGER

Mr CHRISTOPHER GULAPTIS (Clarence) (13:36): I offer congratulations on behalf of the House to local Yamba musician Paul Ager. At the North Coast Entertainment Industry Association Showcase night held late last year, he took out the Dolphin Award for the Best Country Release with the song *It Ain't Too Far to Fall*. I wish Paul continued success with his songwriting in future.

MAITLAND SHOW YOUTH AMBASSADOR CAITLIN HIPWELL

Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland) (13:36): I congratulate Ms Caitlin Hipwell, who was recently named Miss Maitland 2018 at the annual Maitland Show, run by the Hunter River Horticultural and Agricultural Society. Caitlin will spend the next 12 months as youth ambassador for young people in our city. The role gives young women experience as a young leader and involvement in many civic opportunities that they would not otherwise experience. Ms Hipwell has a long association with the show as a rural woman and is closely connected to the land. She is familiar with the daily struggles of regional and rural life and balancing the demands and responsibilities of today's teens and young adults. It was lovely to meet her last weekend, and I wish her hearty congratulations. Maitland looks forward to her year ahead as the bright young female ambassador for our community. I also thank former Miss Maitland, Miranda O'Brien, for her great service to our community over the past year.

WALLAMBA DISTRICT AGRICULTURAL AND HORTICULTURAL ASSOCIATION ANNUAL SHOW

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) (13:37): Last weekend I attended the Wallamba District Agricultural and Horticultural Association's 106th annual show at the Nabcac Showground. The show committee

put together a jam-packed schedule which included the Exhibition Hall, a carnival, markets, entertainment and the main ring events. A country show like this does not happen without a committed group of citizens. I congratulate President Dave Reeve; Secretary/Treasurer Lyn Reid; horse stewards Jodie Reeve, Cherie Paterson and Leonie Paterson; cattle stewards Mark and Judy Farley; poultry steward Tony Schubert; produce stewards Janice and Ray McDonald; Mary Webber and Christine Heffernan for hall exhibits; and the kitchen committee headed by Jean Paterson. I also acknowledge all those who ensure everything is ready for the gates to open: John Baker, Ross and Cindy Dearing, Colin Henderson, John Baker, Warren Gregory, Lauren Styles and Gail Robinson. I also thank all the volunteers who assist. Without them, there would not be a show.

NORTHLAKES HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL MERRILYN ROWLEY

Ms YASMIN CATLEY (Swansea) (13:38): Teachers in our public school system have an important task at hand. Their job is to help shape the developing minds of our young people, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to ensure they have the capabilities to live fulfilling and meaningful lives. It is not an easy task, and rarely is it glamorous. That is why I believe it is important to acknowledge those who have dedicated their working lives to education. Merrilyn Rowley, Principal of Northlakes High School, is retiring this year. I take this opportunity to thank her for her service and reflect on the incredible job that she did for more than 40 years. Merrilyn began her career at Deniliquin High School as a French teacher, eventually transferring to Gorokan where she worked as an English teacher. In 1997, Merrilyn earned a position as Head Teacher—Welfare at Northlakes High School, where she has been ever since, working her way up to become the principal in 2011. Having spent half of her working life serving the Northlakes community, she has demonstrated an admirable commitment to public education. She is a motivational leader who has transformed Northlakes High School. Merrilyn has made an enormous contribution to the Northlakes community and I wish her well in her retirement.

EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms FELICITY WILSON (North Shore) (13:39): Recently some incredible students from my electorate of North Shore came to visit me in Parliament. Mosman Public School students Jacob Drew, Michelle Plon, Piers Alcott and Amy Thompson, accompanied by Deputy Principal Ms Nadia Tobia and Principal Steve Connelly, joined me in the wonderfully refurbished Jubilee Room and observed this House in question time. Mosman Public School is another example of an educational facility that has benefited from this Government's ongoing investment in education. Recently I was pleased to secure additional funding with the help of its Parents and Citizens Association for playground access upgrades and a ramp in the students' playground area. Mosman High School students Kiera Burke, Emma Day, Lauren Gordon, Jane Hugo, Xavier King, Niamh O'Kelly, Daniella Olyae, Josh Parkinson, Ruby Peckham, Paloma Ploeg, Christian Scott, Kai Takagi and Jack Williams also visited Parliament. They were accompanied by their teacher Sarrah Shapley. It was a pleasure to host such fantastic students and provide them with some insight into Parliament. I commend their teachers and parents, Mosman Public School and Mosman High School for raising fine individuals.

CHARMHAVEN LIONS CLUB

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang) (13:40): The Charmhaven Lions Club is a longstanding organisation in my electorate. The club consists of a small group of people who volunteer and raise funds to help the local community when it is needed. On 4 March the Charmhaven Lions Club participated in Lions Awareness Day at Lake Haven Shopping Centre, highlighting the fantastic work that the network of clubs does every year. The work includes an average of 70 hours of volunteering time per member every year and an average of \$1,750 is raised per member per year. Lions Clubs Australia has more than 30,000 members across 1,350 clubs in Australia. The Charmhaven Lions club may be small, but its contribution is large, even before considering the broader Lions organisation. I congratulate the club on its extensive community work to date and look forward to seeing it thrive in future.

THE HILLS SPORTS HIGH SCHOOL

Mr MARK TAYLOR (Seven Hills) (13:41): On Wednesday 28 February it was my pleasure to welcome the Minister for Sport to my electorate of Seven Hills. We called into The Hills Sports High School in Seven Hills to meet with Principal Mitchell Struyve, the school leaders and some of the great Western Sydney sporting champions of tomorrow. While there, we inspected the sporting fields, gymnasium, aerobics centre and tennis courts, all of which are provided to help the talented students achieve sporting success. Around half of the 950 enrolled students attend the school to foster their elite sporting talents while completing their secondary school academic studies. The school's Talented Sports Program is designed to offer elite coaching to students of Sydney's west and north-west. The program allows students to hone their special talents and obtain a pathway to various institutes of sport with State, national and Olympic Games representation. I acknowledge the great work of the teaching and sporting staff who are providing a great service to the local community's next top athletes.

BLUE MOUNTAINS ELECTORATE EVENTS

Ms TRISH DOYLE (Blue Mountains) (13:42): I recognise the fabulous work of Marilla North, author of the *Come in Dymphna* biographical series, which includes *Yarn Spinners* and *Dymphna Cusack: Lucky in Love*. The fascinating life of Dymphna has been uncovered in Marilla's brilliant recreation of her life. On 10 February, I was honoured to launch the second volume of the series at the Alexandra Hotel in Leura and saw the brilliant performance of Marilla's play *We've been So Lucky, Fella*, starring the incredible Claire Jones as Dymphna Cusack and Tiriell Mora as Norman Freehill. The afternoon Blue Mountains celebration launch also included hearing the Wombats Crossing ensemble of Christine Wheeler, Rebecca Daniel and Leigh Birkett who performed two pieces from Dymphna's love poems and a ballad called *Boggabri* by Nerida Grant. I congratulate Megalong Books, Marilla North, the Blackburn family and all involved in this wonderful event.

CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA DAY

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) (13:43): The Myall Lakes electorate is bounded by pristine beaches, rivers, estuaries and national parks, but keeping our local environment clean from litter and debris is no easy task. I recognise the contribution made last Sunday around the Myall Lakes electorate for Clean Up Australia Day. Site coordinators rolled up their sleeves and took charge to protect our environment. I thank Jennie Cameron of Marlee; Laurie Hagan of Old Bar; Irene Hannan of Caparra; Malcolm Doyle of Black Head; Ruth Hoare of Wingham; Julia Rankin of Mondrook; Alison Allan of Wherrol Flat; Ken Hunt of Wallis Lake; Adrian Axisa of Rainbow Flat; Meg Goodsell of Cundeltown; Sarah Jane Huntley of Coomba Park; Lyn Martin of Tuncurry; Bill Dennis and Belinda Christensen of Taree; and Gregory Butterworth, Carl Atchinson, Aaron Dodds and Laura Thurtell of Forster.

CLEAN UP AUSTRALIA DAY

Ms LIESL TESCH (Gosford) (13:44): Clean Up Australia Day was activated across the Gosford electorate with a large number of local organisations lending a hand. The 1st Woy Woy Sea Scouts is always doing great work in our community. Most importantly, the club is supporting youngsters and connecting them with our beautiful waterways. On Saturday, loads of bags of rubbish were plucked from the local area and sorted. Some of the rubbish will be recycled while some will be moved to Woy Woy Waste Management Facility. The sea scouts are champions at maximising their use of the Brisbane Water. They always make it look like learning combined with fitness and, most importantly, fun. Every weekend we see young people out and about in sail boats, kayaks and canoes. They launch safely, always wear life jackets and are consistently courteous to members of the public. If any local kids would like to join in the fun they should contact the 1st Woy Woy Sea Scouts. They are always happy to welcome new members and new volunteers. I thank the sea scouts for their great work in the community.

PACIFIC SCHOOL GAMES SWIMMER ISABELLA DONNELLEY

Ms FELICITY WILSON (North Shore) (13:45): Isabella Donnelley of Wenona School in North Sydney is an incredible young girl who is proving to be one of the nation's rising swimming stars. In Adelaide recently, Isabella competed in the Pacific School Games for the second year in a row. This is an extraordinary achievement, with qualification requiring placing in the top three at her school carnival, the Independent Primary School Heads of Australia zone carnival, the Combined Independent Schools Sports Council regional carnival, and the New South Wales State carnival. She represented us individually in the 50 metre backstroke and 100 metre backstroke and in two team relay events. She placed fifth in all four races against the rest of the nation, as well as teams from China, India and New Zealand. I congratulate Isabella on her successes and thank her parents for their continued commitment to her passion. To compete across the nation takes extraordinary support and determination, and this is truly a triumph for her family and Wenona.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Geoff Provest): I shall now leave the Chair. The House will resume at 2.15 p.m.

Visitors

VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I welcome the former member for Murray and former Minister for Education Adrian Piccoli. I welcome students and teachers from Northern Beaches Secondary College Cromer Campus, guests of the Minister for Health, Minister for Medical Research and member Wakehurst. I acknowledge students and teachers from Armidale High School, guests of the Minister for Tourism and Major Events, Assistant Minister for Skills and member for Northern Tablelands. I also acknowledge in the gallery the Deputy Mayor of Uralla Shire Council, Councillor Isabelle Strutt, also a guest of the Minister for Tourism and Major Events.

I welcome Rachael McFadyen, Emily Riddle and Lucy Kuilman, who are members of the Lord Howe Island Preschool Committee, guests of the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional and Rural Health and member for Port Macquarie. I welcome Bailey Britt and Samantha Sharpe, guests of the member for Kiama and the member for Lismore. I welcome Lorraine Rodden, former Mayor of Sutherland Shire Council, guest of the member for Heathcote. I extend a warm welcome to former member for Epping Andrew Tink—whom I remember very well—who is accompanied by Jeff and Patti Milson, who are visiting Sydney from Silicon Valley in California.

Notices

PRESENTATION

[During the giving of notices of motions]

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Kiama to order for the first time. I call the member for Kiama to order for the second time. I call the member for Kiama to order for the third time. Government members will come to order.

Question Time

SYDNEY STADIUMS

Mr LUKE FOLEY (Auburn) (14:26): My question is directed to the Minister for Sport.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Minister for Counter Terrorism, Minister for Corrections, and Minister for Veteran Affairs to order for the first time.

Mr LUKE FOLEY: Will the Minister give the House an assurance that neither he nor his office was responsible for last week's leak of the KPMG strategic business case for the Allianz stadium?

Mr STUART AYRES (Penrith—Minister for Western Sydney, Minister for WestConnex, and Minister for Sport) (14:26): Yes.

EDUCATION LITERACY AND NUMERACY TEST RESULTS

Mr GLENN BROOKES (East Hills) (14:27): I address my question to the Premier. How is the New South Wales Government investing in education to provide jobs for our students and related matters?

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby—Premier) (14:27): It was with great pleasure that the member for East Hills, the Minister for Education and I visited Picnic Point High School this morning to talk to students, teachers and the principal about their outstanding National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy results. The member for East Hills informed us that his son had attended the school and as a child would accompany his father when he was painting the school as a contractor. This full circle demonstrated to me the sense of community spirit. I thank the member for telling us that anecdote. I note that the former Minister for Education is in the gallery and that the current Minister for Education, Minister Stokes, is in the House. It was pleasing for us as a government that the results achieved by Picnic Point High School and 38 other schools across New South Wales were not just great results but some of the best results across the nation. This demonstrates that our approach to education and learning is achieving these results.

Our vision as a Liberal-Nationals Government is to ensure that every child in this State, no matter which school they go to or where they live, has an opportunity to be their best. It is important to have statewide policies that give principals more power to employ quality teachers, that give local communities more of a say in the use of funding opportunities, and that achieve results. I was buoyed by the fact that 39 schools have markedly improved their results. We will learn from that and apply that knowledge across all schools. New South Wales came first in every category in the numeracy and literacy results bar one, in which it came second. There is always room to improve. I know that schools in many communities around the State can achieve better results. That is why I am pleased that this Government is providing record investment in infrastructure, classrooms, schools and upgrades to improve the learning environment and to achieve results.

In addition to our statewide policy, the Government is looking at the needs of each school in order to improve results. I commend all those schools for achieving their outstanding results. I thank Minister Stokes and the former Minister for their contributions and decisions, which have achieved those results. Every child across the State must have an opportunity to be their best. I commend Picnic Point High School Principal Miss Byron, a new principal who has already achieved great results. I commend also the maths teacher whose year 9 class we interrupted. The students were all engaged and enthusiastic. When I asked them whether their maths teacher was a good teacher they burst into rapturous applause. Investment in education not only leads to brand new classrooms

and buildings but also provides quality learning environments which enable students to improve their results and give them every opportunity to further their studies.

Ms Tania Mihailuk: It means nothing.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: The member for Bankstown said it means nothing that students will be able to improve their results. I point to our multibillion dollar investment in education over the next four years and our record. Integrity is important to education and to all parts of government. I ask the Leader of the Opposition to demonstrate that same integrity. Do Labor members think that their leader will not spend money on stadia? Is that a correct assumption? Has the Leader of the Opposition been giving the impression that he will not spend money on stadia? Let me put on the record what he said on the Ray Hadley 2GB program today. Opposition members do not want me to do this. Yesterday we taunted the Leader of the Opposition to put his plans on the record, but now secret plans are now coming out. He was asked by Mr Hadley:

... you want Parramatta Stadium, which is well underway, to be finished?

His answer was, "Yep." The next question was:

I would think you would be happy for ANZ Stadium to be made a rectangular stadium ... so rugby league, rugby union and soccer can be played there ... am I right there?

His answer was, "Yep." That is what he said. [*Extension of time*]

When Mr Hadley put to him a number of options concerning Allianz Stadium he said:

Look, I am happy to look at all the options ...

This Government is proud to be spending record amounts on health, education, roads, schools, hospitals and rail. We have an opportunity to invest in our sporting infrastructure and cultural institutions. The comments from Opposition members that they will not be spending any money on stadia was blown out of the water today. The people of New South Wales deserve to be told how much the Opposition will spend. How much is the Opposition spending? Is it any wonder that when the Leader of the Opposition is asked what he stands for the truth comes out?

Yesterday morning I was scratching my head and wondering why the Leader of the Opposition promised to disclose his diary entries for 1 March. Every two months he promises to disclose his diary entries. When he meets with the National Rugby League we know it is a case of nudge, nudge, wink, wink: "Don't worry; I will build your stadium." When he meets with different organisations behind closed doors it is a question of nudge, nudge, wink, wink: "Don't worry; I am really doing this." Why does he not disclose his diary entries when he said that he would? Why does he not tell us who he has been meeting with and what he has been saying? If he cannot keep his promises in opposition, how the heck will he keep them in government?

Mr Luke Foley: Apparently I met with two criminals as well.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: The Leader of the Opposition is in Cabinet with them. This Government is making record investments in schools, hospital, roads and rails. I say to Opposition members to come clean with your plans. I say to all those who care about schools to look at the results the Government has achieved for our students. We will continue to deliver for the people of this great State.

SYDNEY STADIUMS

Ms PRUE CAR (Londonderry) (14:35): My question is directed to the Minister for Sport. Given that this Government's stadiums policy depends on three National Rugby League teams playing 30 games at Parramatta Stadium and doubling the number of NRL games played at Allianz, does that mean that the Penrith Panthers will not be playing at Penrith?

The SPEAKER: Order! Before I call the Minister for Sport, with all of the experts in the room correcting each other's usage of the plural of the word "stadium", I inform members that "stadia" or "stadiums" are both acceptable.

Mr STUART AYRES (Penrith—Minister for Western Sydney, Minister for WestConnex, and Minister for Sport) (14:36): I am happy to inform the member for Londonderry that the only people who will determine where the Penrith Panthers play are the Penrith Panthers.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Keira to order for the first time. I call the member for Keira to order for the second time. I call the member for Keira to order for the third time.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr DAMIEN TUDEHOPE (Epping) (14:37): My question is addressed to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. How is the New South Wales Government investment in public transport infrastructure creating jobs and securing the future of transport in New South Wales? Is the Minister aware of any alternative plans?

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order and stop shouting and interjecting. I do not want a commentary from the member for Maroubra.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega—Minister for Transport and Infrastructure) (14:38): What a great question from a great member who is excited about the Sydney Metro in his patch. Those magical trains, which will appear next year, will provide services in the good member's electorate. What is great about the metro project is that it is delivering some 30,000 jobs, many of which will be in Western Sydney. One pleasing aspect about the Sydney Metro Northwest project is that around 500 of those jobs will be for people under the age of 25. As part of a training program with Sydney Metro Northwest, jobs are being created and people are being skilled up, particularly as we expand services between Chatswood and Sydenham and Sydenham and Bankstown as part of the Sydney Metro City and Southwest project.

This morning, as a member of the Government I signed a contract with Laing O'Rourke, one of 16-odd contracts that are being signed as part of the Sydney Metro City and Southwest deal, which will transform Central. This \$955 million contract will see the commencement of construction of a metro station in the heart of Central, which is great news. As part of that, we are also going to build Central Walk, a new concourse at our grand station that will have lift and escalator access between suburban platforms and link people from the light rail project to the existing heavy rail network through to the metro trains.

It is pleasing that Laing O'Rourke has been awarded the contract, as that enterprise has an enormous degree of experience. What is also particularly exciting is that this is the first major step towards the revitalisation of Central station. As everyone is aware, it is looking a little tired and it is a rabbit warren for those trying to get around the platforms. Every year one million people from the country go through that station. For them, the ability to access other parts of the network is exciting. Central station is our largest interchange, with around 250,000 people travelling through it every day.

With the exit of the Rail Operations Centre in 2019 we will be able to revitalise the entire precinct, which is exciting. This concourse, with the metro trains moving in, will be transformative and thousands of jobs will be created during its construction at Central station. I am pleased to see the metro progress, in particular, the Sydney City and Southwest projects. The Sydney Metro Northwest project is taking shape and over the next few months more trains will be tested. The trains potentially can carry up to 46,000 passengers per hour. It will be a turn-up-and-go service with a train frequency of every two minutes, which is on par with elsewhere around the world. We will be starting with a train every four minutes but have built futureproofing into this network.

The other exciting thing about the metro system is that by separating the lines we are able to build greater capacity into the existing heavy rail network. That is important. At the moment, approximately 120 trains move the morning peak into the city. This is constrained by the fact that we have the City Circle. The metro, coupled with the existing suburban network, will enable us to move almost 200 trains into the city in the morning peak. That is exciting news about the metro investment, which has created 30,000 jobs. Our mega projects across the State are delivering 55,000 jobs. [*Extension of time*]

The member for Epping asked about alternative plans. I understand from those opposite that they have no alternative plan other than the cancellation of contracts. The Labor Party is opposed to the Sydney Metro and Southwest project and has suggested that we should not be building it. I can only presume that the policy of the Labor Party will be to cancel the contract. In fact, the Leader of the Opposition is not even in the Chamber today. They are operating better without him. It is a much better Opposition without Luke Foley. Of course, the Labor Party wants to cancel the metro. I am trying to understand why members opposite would oppose it.

Mr Rob Stokes: They hate transport.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: They do hate transport. However, I think it might have something to do with their relationship with the Rail, Tram and Bus Union.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Cessnock to order for the first time. I call the member for Cessnock to order for the second time. I call the member for Londonderry to order for the first time. I call the member for Rockdale to order for the first time.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: Members opposite want to cut 1,500 services for the people of Western Sydney. The member for Londonderry wants to cut 1,500 services for the people— [*Time expired.*]

Mr Clayton Barr: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister has finished his answer. The member for Cessnock will resume his seat.

CHILD PROTECTION

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) (14:45): I direct my question to the Minister for Family and Community Services, Minister for Social Housing, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. A senior member of the Government, the Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox, said that investment in vulnerable children and their families "may cost more than one or two stadiums but its return over time will be immeasurably higher". Why is the Minister putting stadiums before vulnerable children?

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn—Minister for Family and Community Services, Minister for Social Housing, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault) (14:46): I have been waiting for a question from the Opposition for almost a year. There is a reason that I waited so long, and it is that this Government is the champion of social reform.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will cease interjecting. I call the member for Rockdale to order for the second time.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is because this Government is investing record amounts of money in child protection, homelessness, domestic violence and public housing. It is because this Government has reduced the number of children being taken into care by 24 per cent for the first time in 10 years. The members opposite did not do that.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Bankstown to order for the first time.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is because this Government is ensuring that more children at risk are being seen than ever before. The members opposite did not do that.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Bankstown to order for the second time.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is because this Government has delivered a record number of out-of-home care adoptions. The members opposite did not do that. It is because this Government is using internationally tried-and-tested, evidence-based models to keep families together. The members opposite did not do that. It is because this Government has built a system to deal with domestic violence. The members opposite did not do that. It is because this Government targets perpetrators of domestic violence like never before. The members opposite did not do that. It is because this Government has created the nation's biggest social housing building program. The members opposite did not do that. It is because this Government has invested \$1.1 billion in a social and affordable housing fund. The members opposite did not do that.

The SPEAKER: Order! Interjections will cease or members will be removed from the Chamber.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is because this Government is creating more social housing by successfully renewing old estates. The members opposite did not do that. It is because this Government knows how to work with community housing providers to deliver better outcomes for social housing tenants.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Maitland to order for the first time.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is because this Government has delivered five purpose-built social housing properties for every Millers Point property sold. The members opposite did not do that.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Maitland to order for the second time.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is because this Government has been proactive in housing rough sleepers. The members opposite could not do that. The members opposite talk in the media about transparency.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Cessnock to order for the third time.

Ms PRU GOWARD: What hypocrisy! Transparency is nowhere evident in the Opposition's plans. Members opposite cannot even spell the word.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much noise in the Chamber.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is timely to remind the Opposition that I was the Minister who published social housing wait times by allocation zones. The members opposite did not. I was the Minister who published caseworker vacancy information. The members opposite did not. I was the Minister who published annual child death reports. The members opposite did not. Members opposite have no credibility in this space. They do not believe in transparency and they did not for 16 years. They are also talking about investment in social policy. It is

this Government that allocated \$7 billion in this year's budget to the Department of Family and Community Services, which is a \$459 million increase on last year's budget. That is almost \$500 million.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Maitland to order for the third time.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It is this Government that committed an additional \$190 million over four years in this year's budget to provide services to vulnerable children and families.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Bankstown to order for the third time.

Ms PRU GOWARD: It was this Government that launched new, evidence-based service models to improve family preservation by introducing multi-systemic therapy for child abuse and functional family therapy child welfare services, which will help at least 900 children. The members opposite did not do that. These services are now operating in Penrith, Blacktown, Nowra, St Marys, Macarthur, Wagga Wagga, Tamworth, Wyong, Shellharbour, and Coffs Harbour. Members on this side of the House are very proud of the work we have done to improve the lives of the most vulnerable children in the State. Members opposite hate that we are the champions of social reforms and that we put them to shame.

SYDNEY STADIUMS

Mr ALISTER HENSKENS (Ku-ring-gai) (14:51): I address my question to the Minister for Western Sydney, Minister for WestConnex, and Minister for Sport.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members who are continuing to interject will be removed from the Chamber without further warning.

Mr ALISTER HENSKENS: Can the Minister update the House on any new-found support for the Government's ANZ Stadium policy?

Mr STUART AYRES (Penrith—Minister for Western Sydney, Minister for WestConnex, and Minister for Sport) (14:51): I can and I will.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will come to order.

Mr STUART AYRES: I have the transcript of an interview with the Leader of the Opposition conducted by Ray Hadley, which states:

RAY HADLEY: I know that because you come from Western Sydney you support Parramatta Stadium which is well on the way to be finished.

LUKE FOLEY: Yep.

RAY HADLEY: Ok, so you want that done.

I would think that you'd be happy that ANZ Stadium be made a rectangular stadium, forget the AFL so Rugby League, Rugby Union can be played there we need to modernise the stadium despite the fact that it was only built 20 years ago.

LUKE FOLEY: Yep.

RAY HADLEY: Am I right there?

LUKE FOLEY: Yep.

RAY HADLEY: Where do you stand on Allianz Stadium? What do you want to do with it?

Luke Foley likes the ANZ Stadium proposal so much he twice said he supported it. As the Premier said earlier, when he was asked about Allianz Stadium he replied:

I—I—I—I don't support a knockdown rebuild of a stadium that's simply not big enough to host our major events, State of Origin, Grand Finals, our Rugby Union Bledisloe Cup. It's—it's a second-tier stadium.

The Leader of the Opposition did not support knocking it down, but he did want to keep his options open. I will detail the options: Parramatta Stadium, \$300 million, and ANZ Stadium, \$1.25 billion. He has been talking for the past three months about the Government buying back the stadium. Even though the Government is paying for it out of free cash flow, he has been adding that cost, so I will also include it. That is the lowest possible cost of doing anything at Allianz Stadium.

The SPEAKER: Order! I warn the member for Cessnock for the last time.

Mr STUART AYRES: Considering all of the options, at least \$300 million will be spent. The stadium policy of the Leader of the Opposition will cost \$2 billion. Members opposite have been circulating little cards across New South Wales stating, "Schools and hospitals before stadiums". The problem is that they support the ANZ and Parramatta stadiums. The only stadium they do not support—

Ms Jodi McKay: Point of order: Madam Speaker, I ask that you direct the Minister to address his comments through the Chair.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr STUART AYRES: They have been out sending these postcards everywhere—on which they have printed their screen that they stand in front of all the time. But they are supporting stadiums, because the Leader of the Opposition said so. He is so committed to building Parramatta Stadium and ANZ Stadium that he went out and told the whole world today.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Londonderry will cease shouting.

Mr STUART AYRES: He has had the member for Wyong and the member for Campbelltown telling chief executive officers all over the National Rugby League [NRL], "Don't worry. It'll be fine. We're going to build both. We're just having a little bit of fun." And then today they tell the NRL—

Ms Jenny Aitchison: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! Members from both sides will come to order.

Ms Jenny Aitchison: My point of order relates to standing order 73. Just because the Minister has lost support on his own side, he should not pretend he is getting it from our side.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr STUART AYRES: Don't worry, member for Campbelltown. Just stretch your collar a little bit more, mate; it will be fine. What we have here is that the fraud has been exposed. The members on the other side of the Chamber want to build Parramatta and ANZ, but they are happy to deceive people across New South Wales just so they can score a few political points. They even tell the NRL, "Don't worry. We want to build ANZ. We want to build Parramatta." If they have a real policy, they should tell people what it is. They should not hide it; they should come out and tell people what it is. Their policy, even as they stated it today, based on the same figures that they have thrown at me—

Mr Alister Henskens: I ask that the Minister be given an extra two minutes to complete his answer.

Mr Chris Minns: Point of order: Why are we going through this pantomime? You are going to backflip. We all know you are going to backflip. Stop the pantomime.

The SPEAKER: Does the member for Kogarah have a point of order? There is no point of order. I place the member for Kogarah on three calls to order.

Mr STUART AYRES: If they do not want stadiums, they should just tell us which ones they will not build. Unfortunately, the Labor backbenchers have been handing out this rubbish card when their own leader went on the radio today—

Mr Luke Foley: Point of order: The thing is, Stuart, my backbenchers will win their seats on your stadiums policy; yours will lose their seats, mate. Keep talking about stadiums, Stuart. Keep talking, mate.

The SPEAKER: Does the Leader of the Opposition have a point of order?

Mr Chris Minns: See if you can get more stadiums, Stuey.

The SPEAKER: I know the member for Kogarah wants to leave the Chamber this afternoon, but he can stay. I will not even put him on a call to order. The Minister will be given a two-minute extension when I say so.

Mr Michael Daley: Give him 10 minutes so he can keep talking about stadiums.

The SPEAKER: Perhaps I will do that. Government members will cease shouting and screaming. Members on both sides of the House will come to order. I remind the member for Bankstown that she is on three calls to order. The Minister has two minutes in which to complete his answer, which I will extend to five minutes if there are any interjections.

Mr STUART AYRES: I love nothing more than the Leader of the Opposition interjecting just after the member for Kogarah has stood up. It always reminds me just how sensitive that side of the Chamber is about that guy.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will come to order.

Mr STUART AYRES: No matter which way one looks at it, if Labor is supporting ANZ Stadium and Parramatta Stadium and is still considering its options on Allianz Stadium, it is building stadiums.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Maitland is close to being removed from the Chamber. I call the member for Londonderry to order for the second time. The member will be removed from the Chamber shortly.

Mr STUART AYRES: That is what Labor's policy is. That is what those opposite revealed today. The simple fact of the matter is that they have cracked under the pressure.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Rockdale to order for the third time.

Mr STUART AYRES: They have gone out after Ray Hadley asked the question, "What do you support? Would you support ANZ?" and they have said, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes." That is exactly what they have done. Their fraud has been exposed. There is no way—

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! I will stop the clock because of the level of noise in the Chamber. Government members will cease making noise. Does the member for Maroubra have a point of order? The previous two Opposition speakers did not have a point of order.

Mr Michael Daley: This is a fair dinkum point of order. Under Standing Order 129, 197,000 people who signed Peter FitzSimons' petition think you are a liar, mate, so keep on gobbing off.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr STUART AYRES: It is good to know Labor has finally got a fair dinkum stadium policy, because its leader went out and told everyone today. There is not a person in New South Wales who does not think Labor will not finish Parramatta Stadium, costing \$300 million.

The SPEAKER: Order! I direct the member for Londonderry to remove herself from the Chamber for a period of three hours.

[Pursuant to sessional order the member for Londonderry left the Chamber at 15:00.]

Mr STUART AYRES: There is not a person in New South Wales now who will trust those opposite with what they say about stadiums because they all know what we are building and they now know what Labor is building and I can tell you it costs \$2 billion—the same as the stadiums we are committed to building—because their stadiums are exactly the same as ours.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will cease their juvenile behaviour.

Mr Greg Warren: They've been doing it all day, Madam Speaker.

The SPEAKER: I agree with the member for Campbelltown, but members on his side of the Chamber have been behaving the same way. This is a very disorderly question time. The House will come to order. Order! I direct the member for Rockdale to remove himself from the Chamber for a period of two hours.

[Pursuant to sessional order the member for Rockdale left the Chamber at 15:01.]

The SPEAKER: Order! It is just as well the member for Swansea is not on a call to order. I wonder who is provoking her. Perhaps it is the Minister for Corrections. The member for Maitland will cease calling people a disgrace and will cease interjecting.

RECYCLING

Ms KATE WASHINGTON (Port Stephens) (15:02): Madam Speaker—

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will cease interjecting.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Tomaree Kate.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Minister for Health to order for the first time.

Ms KATE WASHINGTON: My question is directed to the Minister for the Environment. What action is the Government taking in response to the crisis that has led 12 councils to consider ceasing their kerbside recycling collections this month?

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON (Vaucluse—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Local Government, and Minister for Heritage) (15:02): I thank the member for Port Stephens for the important question, though I should say she does not even know what her own party has done in her own electorate. She has no credibility, but she has asked a good question today.

Ms Jenny Aitchison: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 73. Why did the Minister have to attack the member who has asked a question? She should be grateful for the opportunity to correct the record and stop wrecking the environment in the member's electorate.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. I remind the member for Maitland that she is on three calls to order.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I welcome a constructive question for the first time from the member for Port Stephens—the first time.

Ms Kate Washington: So questions about Williamstown are not constructive?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Port Stephens will cease interjecting. She has asked the question and she will listen in silence.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: The member for Port Stephens plays politics too often. This is the first sensible question she has asked of me.

Ms Kate Washington: A question on Williamstown is not constructive?

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Port Stephens to order for the first time.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: This is the first sensible question you have asked of me.

Ms Kate Washington: Williamstown, just saying.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Port Stephens to order for the second time. The member for Port Stephens will cease interjecting.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON: I welcome the opportunity to address the question the member for Port Stephens has asked. At the moment we have much of our recyclable product going to international markets, in particular, China. China is saying that it will enforce a policy not to take contaminated recyclable product anymore. With that in mind, I met with all of the stakeholders across New South Wales on Monday. We came up with a way forward. We discussed how that is impacting them, their businesses and their local communities, and how the Government can help. The Government is working with industry—that is what a good government does—to work out some short-term, medium-term and long-term solutions to this issue, which is about the world market for recycling product. This also allows our Government to realise—as good governments do—the opportunities brought about by this situation.

The Government has the opportunity to create new markets for employment in metropolitan and regional areas for recycled product and to do a much better job in what we do already. But this is a work in progress, and this is what good governments do. This Government is working to assist stakeholders, local communities and local councils on this issue, which is an international issue that has been brought about by a policy change of the Chinese government. I look forward to receiving assistance from all the members in this Chamber to deliver some sensible solutions to this issue, which this Government is going to embrace. This Government is going to move forward with stakeholders to ensure that there are some really good outcomes, including taking care of some of the short-term challenges. Again, I welcome this sensible question from the member for Port Stephens.

HOUSING SUPPLY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr JOHN SIDOTI (Drummoyne) (15:06): My question is addressed to the Minister for Planning, Minister for Housing, and Special Minister of State. How is the New South Wales construction boom creating jobs, and are there any related matters?

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove—Minister for Planning, Minister for Housing, and Special Minister of State) (15:06): I thank the member for Drummoyne for his interest in this matter and the support for this matter in his own community and others. The great challenge of our economic and political times is how we, as a government, can give confidence to business to create opportunities for investment across this great State. I am pleased to inform the House that the New South Wales Government is responding to this challenge. This is the Government for construction and for infrastructure. This is the Government for jobs. This Government is providing the certainty and the policy clarity that business needs to trigger the much-needed investment that drives growth in our State.

But there is a problem. There is a dark cloud still hanging over this State from years ago, and that dark cloud is the New South Wales Labor Party. Labor is that wonderful party of debt and deficit. Labor is the party of mates rates and union favours. The Labor Party never saw a deal or an infrastructure project it could not cancel or kick over. That is not what the businesses in New South Wales want. Businesses want builders, not wreckers.

If we want growth, success, investment and jobs in this State, now is not the time for wreckers. It is the time for builders.

Those on this side of the House are builders. We have a strong record on that. This Government has abolished the dodgy part 3A that was a policy of the previous Government. We have new and better planning laws to make it easier, fairer and more transparent to build. We have stronger and more independent approval processes to give businesses certainty and wipe away the grime of Labor's dodgy deals on councils. The Government has supported first home buyers because growth begins at home, in the home, with a home. This Government is making it easier than ever before to buy a home. But what is the most important part? What is the one thing to do to make it easier to buy a home in a booming market? The one thing to do is to build homes.

The problems that we are addressing today are of Labor's making. The Labor Government said that Sydney was full and stopped the development of homes. It stopped the supply and forced prices to rise for first home buyers and families. Let me look at this Government's record versus the record of those on the other side. CommSec's "State of the States" report released in January of this year showed that dwelling commencements are now 53 per cent higher than under Labor, construction work is 25 per cent higher than under Labor, and economic growth is 26 higher than under Labor. We know where the unemployment rate is going: it is now 12 per cent lower than under Labor.

Mr Clayton Barr: That is not true.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Maybe it is more. It is probably a lot more. I said it was 12 per cent lower but it is probably 21 per cent lower.

Mr Clayton Barr: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Cessnock that I have called him to order three times, and he has been warned several times. His point of order had better be valid.

Mr Clayton Barr: Under Standing Order 74 the Speaker has the ability to prevent quarrels across the Chamber. The Minister is not telling the truth; that is going to create quarrels.

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Madam Speaker, this is from the CommSec report.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Cessnock will remove himself from the Chamber for two hours. I warn the member for Cessnock not to speak again or he will be asked to leave the Chamber for the rest of the day.

[Pursuant to sessional order the member for Cessnock left the Chamber at 15:10.]

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS: Was the member saying that he does not trust the banks? He hates the banks, he hates public transport, and he hates mining. It gives me no pleasure to inform the House that, under Labor, construction completions flatlined to 13,000 in 2009—the same rate as in 1957. Labor left us a legacy of a deficit of 100,000 homes—that is, 100,000 homes that should have been built for young families but which were never built until we came along. This Government is creating jobs and it is filling jobs. It is overseeing an economy with more new jobs than a Labor Party-backed super union. *[Extension of time]*

The Housing Industry Association State outlook that was released this month showed that there has been \$34 billion in home renovations in the last 12 months and 221,000 housing starts through to 2021. That is a lot of work. At an average of two new jobs per dwelling, that is a lot of new hires. It represents a lot of young people getting a foothold in the building and construction industry. Contrast that with New South Wales under a Labor government. I refer to the headline from the wonderful paper the *Sydney Morning Herald*, "Job Losses Hit NSW Hardest". The story said:

WORKERS in NSW are losing their jobs at the rate of 500 a day, early casualties of an employment market deteriorating much faster than expected.

What a difference the Coalition Government has made. The housing market has finally, after years of floundering under those opposites, reached a point where the supply of housing is meeting demand. That is happening for the first time in 15 years. In December 2,410 new home buyers entered the market. My favourite figure is that the Government is forecast to deliver \$126 billion in investment in housing by 2021. That is \$30 billion more than under the last four years of the Labor Government. That is an extra \$30 billion in investment in jobs. It is an investment that families in this State would not have benefited from if the Coalition had not won the 2011 election. This confidence will continue to underpin growth and jobs creation. This confidence will continue to underpin New South Wales. This is the party of confidence and growth. My party will continue to support the workers. We are the party of the workers, the party of jobs.

WEST BYRON DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

Ms TAMARA SMITH (Ballina) (15:13): My question is directed to the Minister for Planning. Will the Minister act on the concerns of my community about the development proposal for West Byron and the negative impacts raised about the social, environmental and economic harm of such a mega development to iconic Byron Bay?

Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove—Minister for Planning, Minister for Housing, and Special Minister of State) (15:14): I sincerely thank the member for Ballina for her question today and for her constant advocacy on behalf of her community. My office has received representations from the member concerning this issue and I have kept tabs on it for her. I have been advised that the Byron Shire Council currently is working to finalise its assessment of this current subdivision proposal. As part of the council's assessment, it is required to address the concerns raised in public submissions. The independent Northern Joint Regional Planning Panel is the determining authority for this application. As the panel is the consent authority, I, as the Minister, have no role in the matter.

This Government has implemented fantastic reforms to create a transparent planning system. From the Independent Planning Commission to Independent Hearing and Assessment Panels, this Government has emphasised the importance of an independent process. The Government's planning system assesses every project on its merits. I inform the House and the member for Ballina that when the council staff completes the assessment report, it will be provided to the panel for determination along with copies of all public submissions that have been made relating to the proposal. Prior to making its determination, the panel will hold a public meeting to ensure that the community's concerns are heard. The panel is required to provide written reasons for its determination.

I will not pass judgement on the merits of the proposal. However, with the indulgence of the House, I will examine some of background of the proposal. The site was first identified by the council in 1993 under the former Labor Government. That was at a time when Byron was just a few tents and a surfboard, and mostly was just a road stop for hippies on their way to Nimbin. I remember that. It was a time when the Leader of the Opposition probably still had long hair. In 2009, the site was proposed by Labor as a State significant project. The project has been around for a long time. I know there is much community concern around this development. I have been advised by the Parliamentary Secretary for the North Coast, Ben Franklin, that he has heard from many locals who also have expressed many reservations.

Since the question asked by the member for Ballina has brought this matter to my attention, I have become very concerned about where Labor stands on this issue. The member for Ballina may not be aware that unfortunately she has a couple of Labor representatives in her electorate. My Special Minister of State unit made some inquiries and has found that the Byron Bay Labor secretary, Asren Pugh, was quoted on 6 March 2018 in *Big Rigs*, which is the official magazine of the transport industry and not what members may be thinking, as saying, firstly, that I, as Minister, should intervene and stop it, and, secondly, that "Labor has never supported the development". I point out that Labor started the proposal.

The *Big Rigs* article cites the Byron Labor secretary saying that he is "calling on Mr Franklin to demand the Minister intervene on both the proposed developments". That reminds me of another member of the upper House who used to ask planning Ministers to intervene all the time. His name was Eddie Obeid. It seems that Byron Bay Labor is still pining for the days when Eddie Obeid and Ian Macdonald were members of the upper House. I know that Byron Bay is a long way from metropolitan centres and that the people at Byron Bay get their news from *Big Rigs*, but they would have to have been living under a rock on Mars to not know how dodgy Labor's part 3A policies were.

I state for the record and for the information of the member for Ballina that I sympathise with both communities and developers in this situation and similar situations, but I must ensure that the system is transparent and fair. That means hearing everyone out and making the decision independently—as this Government and the independent panel will do. I add a thought about "stadia", to which many members have referred, and I pay my respects to my learned erstwhile Latin teacher Ed Rorty. Etymology shows the term was Greek but it progressed to the Latin "stadia" and thence to Middle English "stadiums". It is quite true that the term could be "stadia" or "stadiums", but I will refer the matter to an upper House committee for an inquiry and report.

REGIONAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Mr MICHAEL JOHNSEN (Upper Hunter) (15:19): My question is addressed to the Deputy Premier, Minister for Regional New South Wales, Minister for Skills, and Minister for Small Business. What is the New South Wales Government doing to provide opportunities through vocational education for regional students? Are there any alternative approaches?

Mr JOHN BARILARO (Monaro—Deputy Premier, Minister for Regional New South Wales, Minister for Skills, and Minister for Small Business) (15:19): I thank the member for Upper Hunter for his question. In this House he prosecutes the case for the benefit of the Hunter region to ensure that skilling, employment and jobs creation in all the industries that are so important to his region—mining, agriculture and viticulture—are supported and thriving. As everybody knows, the Upper Hunter region contributes significantly to the State's economy. I welcome his question because this afternoon we heard from several Ministers, including the Minister for Planning, Minister for Housing, and Special Minister of State, refer to jobs that are currently in the marketplace right across the State—regional areas as well as metropolitan areas—in industries such as construction, tourism, hospitality, and jobs that are being created by the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS]. New South Wales is the State for jobs, jobs, jobs.

New South Wales has the lowest rate of unemployment in the nation and has the highest rate of jobs creation. This progress is underpinned by the State's \$80 billion-plus infrastructure program over the next four years. To sustain that progress, it is necessary to build a workforce not only for the present but also for the future. For that reason, the Government is focusing on ensuring that people involved in our workforce and young people who will become part of the workforce in the future are equipped with requisite skills. The Government's budget for ensuring the rollout of skills acquisition across the State is \$2.4 billion. The Government's policy changes under Smart and Skilled connect workforce training and skills to jobs that are currently in the marketplace and will be created in the future. The benefit of the current skills policy is that in the future people will have a better chance of obtaining employment than would otherwise be the case. The Government has improved chances for jobs skilling and training right across the State.

The Government contends that its reform of TAFE and vocational education and training are now paying significant dividends. Enrolments in skills courses have increased. In ensuing weeks in this House, the Assistant Minister for Skills and the Minister who is responsible for TAFE will update the House about enrolments in TAFE for the past 12 months and this year so far. The Government has always argued that its focus on vocational education and training is about promoting opportunities for training, which is essential for building a future workforce. In contrast, Labor Opposition members have visited campuses to scare away students, families and fabulous teachers within TAFE. The shadow Minister for skills, the member for Londonderry, stood in front of the TAFE campus at Kingswood against a background of demolition cranes and people in fluorescent hi-vis vests and said that the campus would be closed down, despite the Government's investment of \$20 million and knowing full well that the Government is focused on creating opportunities.

In recent weeks the Leader of the Opposition jumped onto the TAFE cuts bandwagon. He travelled to regional Newcastle, which reminds me of Labor's definition of "NSW"—Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. However, I must admit the Leader of the Opposition learned the lesson from the shadow Minister's Kingswood TAFE visit. He sent an advance party to ensure there were no fluoros or cranes in the background, so he turned up and said, "Cuts, cuts, cuts." Despite that, Newcastle's Hamilton TAFE campus enrolments have increased.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Newcastle that question time is not a debate. I call the member for Newcastle to order for the first time. The member for Newcastle is continuing to interject. I call the member for Newcastle to order for the second time. The member for Newcastle will cease interjecting. I call the member for Newcastle to order for the third time.

Mr JOHN BARILARO: Hamilton TAFE enrolments increased as a result of the Government's subsidised places, and more students means that more teachers are needed. The Teachers Federation supports the Government's policies and TAFE reforms because previous back-office expenditure is now being invested in employing more teachers, which of course means more opportunities for students. This Government places students at the forefront of its policy of skills training. That is evident from the Government's policies on pre-apprenticeship training and skills legacy. Across the State, the Government has linked training outcomes to its infrastructure spend. At Darling Harbour, Barangaroo and regional areas of the State, such as the Lismore Base Hospital, the skills legacy program connects infrastructure expenditure to skill and training outcomes, which will result in the employment of more tradies, more apprentices and more women in non-traditional fields.

The Government is also focused on a range of other targets to ensure we deliver opportunities for young people to obtain training. The greatest threat to maintaining the strength of the New South Wales economy is not having a skilled workforce. A threat to building the State's workforce is Labor's campaign against TAFE and vocational training generally. When we announced the 12 connected learning centres across regional New South Wales, those opposite called it a shopfront.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Newcastle that he is on three calls to order. The member for Newcastle is not listening.

Mr JOHN BARILARO: I would love to hear what those opposite have to say to Emily from Ku-ring-gai— [*Extension of time*]

The SPEAKER: Order! I direct the Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms to remove the member for Newcastle from the Chamber for the rest of the day under Standing Order 249.

[*The member for Newcastle left the Chamber at 15:23 accompanied by the Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms.*]

Mr JOHN BARILARO: When we announced the connected learning centres, which enabled us to deliver training through TAFE in places that had never seen a TAFE footprint and to expand the offering on the ground, those opposite called it a shopfront. I would love to hear them say that to Emily from Ku-ring-gai, who has been able to complete her Advanced Diploma of Building Surveying since the Connected Learning Centre opened. Emily no longer has to travel to Newcastle. It is no wonder the member for Newcastle is upset. He is upset because people will not have to go to Newcastle. This Government wants our regional kids to stay in our regional communities and be part of the community.

Those opposite have mocked the reforms of this Government, including the Smart and Skilled program which is targeting our subsidies into training to drive outcomes. They have mocked the TAFE reforms that are now delivering more than \$1.8 billion of investment across the State and are ensuring that people have a chance. What is the Opposition policy? In 2015 the Leader of the Opposition said, "TAFE has put a toe in the water but should now dramatically increase its activities." I was wondering what activities he was referring to, so I looked it up—

The SPEAKER: Order! I direct the member for Maitland to remove herself from the Chamber for three hours.

[*Pursuant to sessional order the member for Maitland left the Chamber at 15:26.*]

Mr JOHN BARILARO: What is the solution this great oracle brings? The Leader of the Opposition wanted to see TAFE increase its activities in India. His policy for TAFE was to increase TAFE's footprint in India. He wanted to offer young Indians the greatest chance for getting a job in Australia, perhaps on a 457 visa. Labor has moved away from China and is now promoting India. I have said this before and I will say it again: the greatest threat to TAFE and young people in this State is those opposite and their plan for TAFE and skills in New South Wales.

Petitions

PETITIONS RECEIVED

The SPEAKER: I announce that the following petition signed by more than 10,000 persons was lodged for presentation:

Banksia Acute Mental Health Unit

Petition calling for the upgrade and redevelopment of the Banksia Acute Mental Health Unit in Tamworth, received from **Mr Kevin Anderson**.

The SPEAKER: I set down discussion on the petition as an order of the day for a future day.

The CLERK: I announce that the following petitions signed by fewer than 500 persons have been lodged for presentation:

Pet Shops

Petition opposing the sale of animals in pet shops, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Companion Animals on Public Transport

Petition requesting that companion animals be allowed to travel on all public transport, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Business of the House

PARRAMASALA

Reordering

Dr GEOFF LEE (Parramatta) (15:28): I move:

That the General Business Notice of Motion (General Notice) given by me this day [Parramasala] have precedence on Thursday 8 March 2018.

Everyone in this House should acknowledge and celebrate the good things in our community. Parramasala is now an iconic event in Western Sydney. Since its inception eight years ago, Parramasala has grown in importance and patronage and it demonstrates a great partnership between the State Government, the City of Parramatta Council and the Western Sydney community. Parramasala has become a much-loved, community-building festival that celebrates all the good things in our community. Recently I was joined by the Minister for Multiculturalism, Ray Williams; Parramasala Chairman and Chief Executive officer of Multicultural NSW, Dr Harry Harinath, OAM; and Parramatta Lord Mayor Andrew Wilson to announce that the New South Wales Government will provide an additional \$600,000 over three years to support Parramasala. That is great news.

It would be remiss of me to not acknowledge the previous Minister for Multiculturalism, the Hon. John Ajaka, for his four-year commitment to the funding of Parramasala. This is important because with year-to-year funding we could not plan properly. Now we have wonderful funding that enables us to plan for the future of Parramasala and to grow it even bigger and better in the capital of Western Sydney, Parramatta. That investment brings the State Government's investment commitment for Parramasala since 2016 to \$2.2 million. Parramasala is one of the largest multicultural arts and cultural festivals held in New South Wales and attracts more than 35,000 people each year. This year's theme of "Many Cultures, One Sydney" will attract more than 500 performers who speak more than 40 languages.

This motion should be given precedence because it is timely. Commencing this Friday, we can expect a three-day program that celebrates our cultural harmony in a festival like no other. There will be dancing in the streets in Parramatta. We will have a street parade, which I invite everybody to come to see. It will not be quite the same as last weekend's street parade but a multicultural street parade that we are all proud of. It is the eighth year since Parramasala's inception. We have broadened the focus of the event to include our wonderful diverse, multicultural communities with a South Asian focus. This motion should be accorded precedence for the reasons that I have outlined.

Mr JIHAD DIB (Lakemba) (15:31): My Federal colleague Tony Burke summed it up best when he said that there are only two Australian stories: the story of the Indigenous Australians who saw the first sunrise on Australia; and every other story, which are migrant stories, whether it was the *First Fleet* or the subsequent waves of immigration. Every one of those stories, including today's 24 million stories, have written a chapter in the book that is the story of our incredible nation. I have been crystal clear about what we on this side of the House are against, but let me be clear about what we are for. On this side of the House, we are for celebrating and protecting our social harmony, because this is the most successful modern multicultural nation. We are for mutual respect and recognising and celebrating our diversity. We are for fairness and the opportunity for everyone to reach their full potential to live a productive and happy life. We are for recognising that all the individual strands when weaved together create this great nation of ours. That is what we are for on this side of the House. That is what we acknowledge and want to protect.

Extremist single-focus parties such as One Nation try to make people feel better for a little while as they lash out at others, divide communities and create a sense of "us and them". Ultimately, parties such as One Nation do not offer any real help or practical solutions. They offer only opportunistic bigotry and simplistic slogans. Every time One Nation raises its ugly head and spews its vile, the hardworking people who do whatever they can to make this nation even better put their heads in their hands because they know the damage has been done. All of the ugly talk, which is based on ignorance, is picked up by the media and social media platforms in particular. Racism totally undermines the work of these hardworking people. One Nation feeds on fear and creates division. Let us not make any mistake about it: that is what One Nation does. That is what the New South Wales Labor Opposition will never do. On 3 August, we asked the Premier and Deputy Premier, "Will you rule out a deal with One Nation?" They hid behind the fact that One Nation had not been registered.

Mr Gareth Ward: What do you call the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions [BDS] campaign against Israel? What about The Greens in the BDS?

Mr JIHAD DIB: The member for Kiama should listen and be quiet; he might learn something.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Kiama that he is on three calls to order.

Mr JIHAD DIB: The Government cannot hide behind the fact that One Nation is not registered because it is. I ask the Premier, Deputy Premier and every Government member if they rule out a deal with One Nation or if they will go to Harmony Day events and talk up multiculturalism. The Government does not have the guts to rule out a deal. It should rule it out. It should not get into bed with an extremist, racist party. The Government is good at talking but it needs to start taking action. Government members must show us that they are not gutless. Government members should vote to debate my motion. They are gutless.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that the motion standing in the name of the member for Parramatta have precedence on Thursday 8 March 2018.

The House divided.

Ayes48
Noes28
Majority.....20

AYES

Anderson, Mr K
Barilaro, Mr J
Conolly, Mr K
Coure, Mr M
Dominello, Mr V
Evans, Mr L
Grant, Mr T
Hazzard, Mr B
Johnsen, Mr M
Maguire, Mr D
O'Dea, Mr J
Perrottet, Mr D
Roberts, Mr A
Stokes, Mr R
Tudehope, Mr D
Williams, Mr R

Aplin, Mr G
Bromhead, Mr S (teller)
Constance, Mr A
Crouch, Mr A
Elliott, Mr D
Fraser, Mr A
Griffin, Mr J
Henskens, Mr A
Kean, Mr M
Marshall, Mr A
Patterson, Mr C (teller)
Petinos, Ms E
Sidoti, Mr J
Taylor, Mr M
Upton, Ms G
Williams, Mrs L

Ayres, Mr S
Brookes, Mr G
Cooke, Ms S
Davies, Mrs T
Evans, Mr A
Goward, Ms P
Gulaptis, Mr C
Humphries, Mr K
Lee, Dr G
Notley-Smith, Mr B
Pavey, Mrs M
Provest, Mr G
Speakman, Mr M
Toole, Mr P
Ward, Mr G
Wilson, Ms F

NOES

Atalla, Mr E
Chanthivong, Mr A
Finn, Ms J
Harris, Mr D
Hornery, Ms S
McKay, Ms J
Minns, Mr C
Scully, Mr P
Warren, Mr G
Zangari, Mr G

Bali, Mr S
Dib, Mr J
Foley, Mr L
Harrison, Ms J
Lynch, Mr P
Mehan, Mr D (teller)
Park, Mr R
Smith, Ms T F
Washington, Ms K

Catley, Ms Y
Doyle, Ms T
Greenwich, Mr A
Hoenig, Mr R
McDermott, Dr H
Mihailuk, Ms T
Piper, Mr G
Tesch, Ms L
Watson, Ms A (teller)

PAIRS

Berejiklian, Ms G
Gibbons, Ms M
Hancock, Mrs S
Rowell, Mr J

Cotsis, Ms S
Lalich, Mr N
Haylen, Ms J
Daley, Mr M

Motion agreed to.

Announcements

MEMBER FOR CANTERBURY

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On behalf of the Speaker, and I am sure on behalf of all members of the House, I extend to the member for Canterbury our good wishes. She and her family are in our thoughts.

*Motions Accorded Priority***MEMBER FOR PORT STEPHENS****Consideration**

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) (15:42): It gives me no pleasure to seek the support of members for this motion to be accorded priority. This matter deserves to be accorded priority because last week the member for Port Stephens, who sits on the Labor frontbench, twice misled the people of the Hunter. First, she incorrectly claimed that the Government was privatising Tomaree Community Hospital, without realising the previous Labor Government was behind outsourcing some of the hospital's medical services in 2009. Second, shortly after the New South Wales Government announced a \$5 million boost to preschool capital funding, she claimed that there has not been investment in capital infrastructure in preschools for a long time.

These comments show that the Opposition is unfit for the job of governing this State. Those opposite cannot get simple things right, which shows that they do not deserve to hold government. Members who mislead the community do not deserve to be in this Parliament. The most important part of the relationship between the Government and the people of New South Wales is that the people can trust the word of their representatives. Those opposite have shot down that trust. The most important thing for a local member is to have the trust of her people. Those opposite do not have that trust. Even worse, when confronted with the facts, the member for Port Stephens said:

It turns out the tender is something a former Labor government has put in place, even if I don't agree with everything that previous Labor governments have done...

For me, I still don't believe there is a role for private companies to profit from public health and my position won't change on that, ever. There you have it. What are we going to do? Are we going to unroll Labor's policy to outsource services in the health system? Are we going to unroll Labor's policy to outsource services in education? Are we going to unroll Labor's private jail at Parklea? Absolutely not. What can we trust from this member? What does she mean? The Labor Party does not stand for anything when it introduces policies and later wants to roll them back. We heard questions today about the stadiums. Labor will say anything, straight out of Graham Richardson's playbook, to get into government. It does not care about the people or the truth. All it wants is power for power's sake. Labor wants Eddie Obeid and Ian Macdonald and all those other crooks back in government.

CHILD PROTECTION**Consideration**

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) (15:45): My motion deserves priority because this Government has failed to prioritise the welfare of thousands of our most vulnerable children in this State by putting stadiums ahead of them. This is a government that is willing to ruthlessly ram through spending more than \$2.5 billion on stadiums at the expense of the 85,000 vulnerable children who last year were reported as being at risk of significant harm. Barely 30 per cent of those children were seen by a caseworker, which means that 60,000 children potentially remain at risk of significant harm. In the past 12 months they have never been seen by a caseworker. This is a government that could care less about these vulnerable children.

Let us be clear, every time a school principal, a doctor, a nurse or a teacher makes a mandatory report to advise that they have concerns that a child might be at risk of significant physical or sexual harm, that their life might be endangered, only 30 per cent of those children will be seen by a caseworker. This Government thinks it is okay to make stadiums a priority. My motion deserves priority because there has been inquest after inquest into the deaths of vulnerable children in this State, all highlighting the shortcomings of a broken system that this Government is failing to repair. Cases have been shut because of competing priorities, but this Government wants to make stadiums a priority in New South Wales. Let us be clear, 20,000 children in this State are in out-of-home care.

The system is broken. So concerned was former Premier Baird that he commissioned David Tune to undertake a report into out-of-home care. That report has been buried by Premier Berejiklian. She does not want the findings to come out. The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox, who was in Cabinet at that time, has finally leaked that document. He has given an opinion piece, a press conference, highlighting the failings of this Government. He has made it clear that this Government is trying to hide the findings. The Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox has risked being chastised by those opposite—and no doubt he has been chastised—to make the message clear, as have the people of New South Wales, that vulnerable children should be put ahead of stadiums. [*Time expired.*]

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that the motion of the member for Myall Lakes be accorded priority.

The House divided.

Ayes48

Noes29

Majority..... 19

AYES

Anderson, Mr K	Aplin, Mr G	Ayres, Mr S
Barilaro, Mr J	Bromhead, Mr S (teller)	Brookes, Mr G
Conolly, Mr K	Constance, Mr A	Cooke, Ms S
Coure, Mr M	Crouch, Mr A	Davies, Mrs T
Dominello, Mr V	Elliott, Mr D	Evans, Mr A
Evans, Mr L	Fraser, Mr A	Goward, Ms P
Grant, Mr T	Griffin, Mr J	Gulaptis, Mr C
Hazzard, Mr B	Henskens, Mr A	Humphries, Mr K
Johnsen, Mr M	Kean, Mr M	Lee, Dr G
Maguire, Mr D	Marshall, Mr A	Notley-Smith, Mr B
O'Dea, Mr J	Patterson, Mr C (teller)	Pavey, Mrs M
Perrottet, Mr D	Petinos, Ms E	Provest, Mr G
Roberts, Mr A	Sidoti, Mr J	Speakman, Mr M
Stokes, Mr R	Taylor, Mr M	Toole, Mr P
Tudehope, Mr D	Upton, Ms G	Ward, Mr G
Williams, Mr R	Williams, Mrs L	Wilson, Ms F

NOES

Atalla, Mr E	Bali, Mr S	Catley, Ms Y
Chanthivong, Mr A	Daley, Mr M	Dib, Mr J
Donato, Mr P	Doyle, Ms T	Finn, Ms J
Greenwich, Mr A	Harris, Mr D	Harrison, Ms J
Hoening, Mr R	Hornery, Ms S	Lynch, Mr P
McDermott, Dr H	McKay, Ms J	Mehan, Mr D (teller)
Mihailuk, Ms T	Minns, Mr C	Park, Mr R
Piper, Mr G	Scully, Mr P	Smith, Ms T F
Tesch, Ms L	Warren, Mr G	Washington, Ms K
Watson, Ms A (teller)	Zangari, Mr G	

PAIRS

Berejiklian, Ms G	Lalich, Mr N
Gibbons, Ms M	Cotsis, Ms S
Hancock, Mrs S	Foley, Mr L
Rowell, Mr J	Haylen, Ms J

Motion agreed to.**MEMBER FOR PORT STEPHENS****Priority****Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) (15:54):** I move:

That this House:

- (1) Notes last week that the member for Port Stephens twice misled the people of the Hunter by:
 - (a) incorrectly claiming the Government was privatising Tomaree Hospital, without realising the previous Government was behind the outsourcing of some of the community hospital's medical services in 2009; and
 - (b) claiming there has not been investment in capital infrastructure in preschools for so long, shortly after the Government announced a \$5 million boost to preschool capital funding.
- (2) Calls on the member for Port Stephens to apologise to the Hunter community.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Clerk will stop the clock. Six members are on three calls to order. Members with the call will be heard in silence.

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD: The member for Port Stephens, who sits on the frontbench of the Labor Party, the alternative government, is saying to the people "Vote for us", but she is misleading the community. One of the most important things a politician can have is the trust of the people. The Labor Party has trashed and burned that trust. I will explain why. First, Tomaree Hospital issued private contracts for services in 2009. The member for Port Stephens is saying that this Government is privatising health when it was privatised by her own Government in 2009. She has misled Parliament.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I direct the member for Kogarah to remove himself from the Chamber for a period of one hour.

[Pursuant to sessional order the member for Kogarah left the Chamber at 15:56.]

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD: Secondly, she claimed that there had been no investment in capital infrastructure in preschools shortly after the New South Wales government announced a \$5 million boost to preschool capital funding. I can inform her that the last Labor Government budget was for \$200 million. Our budget for this financial year is \$400 million, an increase of 100 per cent. Inflation is running at 1.6 per cent per year, over seven years that is 10 per cent. Did we increase it by 10 per cent? No, we increased it by 100 per cent. That is the second time she has misled Parliament. On behalf of the Labor Party, she has made two faux pas in two weeks. The Labor Party will say anything to mislead the community so it can be elected to office at the next State election.

Ms Yasmin Catley: Point of order: The member for Myall Lakes should refer to the member by her correct title.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Members will be referred to by their correct titles.

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD: The member for Port Stephens, affectionately known in her electorate as Kamikaze Kate, will say anything. The member for Port Stephens, who is on the frontbench of this Labor Party rabble, will crash and burn. The worst thing is that we all know that Kamikaze Kate from Port Stephens is determined to undo the contracts—

Ms Yasmin Catley: Point of order—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I do not need to hear the point of order. The member for Port Stephens will be referred to by her correct title.

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD: —that this State relies upon. The people of this State rely on the Government to work with private enterprise to provide services in many areas, for example, health, education, and Parklea jail. By saying, "I will not change my opinion", is she saying that if the Labor Party were elected it would try to undo those contracts that this State heavily depends upon? The people cannot trust what Labor members say. We endured 16 shameful years of Labor in government with Eddie Obeid and Ian Macdonald. We witnessed the corruption that existed in the Labor Party and we are seeing it again. The member for Port Stephens has been personifying Graham Richardson in the past two weeks by saying anything and doing anything. *[Time expired.]*

Ms KATE WASHINGTON (Port Stephens) (16:00): Although I cannot believe this Government would waste the time of the House on this motion, I am not surprised. Time and again this Government has proved that it has its priorities wrong. It is all about politics for Government members, not people. By moving this motion it is blatantly clear that all Government members want is to gain votes in the electorates they never should have lost to Labor. The Government lost the Port Stephens electorate for good reason, and it will not be returned any time soon because the people in my community do not trust anything this Government does.

Every time I raise issues of importance in my community, the Government has a go at me but does nothing. Every time I raise corruption in this House, the Government has a go at me but protects its mates. Every time I raise the Williamstown contamination, where people are living in a cancer cluster, the Government has a go at me but does nothing. Every time I raise the Government's promises that have been made to my community, it has a go at me but does nothing—a big zero. It is blatantly obvious that the Government wants to win my electorate but is not prepared to do the work. In 2011, the Minister for Education stood in my electorate and promised the Medowie community that it would make a public high school in the area shovel ready. We have received nothing. Now our kids cannot even fit on the buses. If they are lucky enough to get on the bus they have to stand in the aisle or sit three to a seat.

In 2015, Premier Baird stood on Nelson Bay Road and committed that \$70 million will be spent "to fully duplicate it all the way". We have received nothing. This Government has not delivered anything to my community. Then in the lowest-of-low acts the Government sold off core koala habitat at Mambo Wetlands to a developer in an online auction for \$250,000. It is the only place in the world where koalas walk from the wetlands

onto the beach to lick the sand. There is no other place like it and this government is going to allow a developer to build a house on core koala habitat. What is extraordinary is that even though our koalas are endangered, they cannot be listed as endangered because this Government changed the Act to make it impossible for the status of koalas to be changed from "threatened" to "endangered". This Government is failing to deliver to the environment and it is failing to deliver to my community every day.

Mr Stephen Bromhead: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. The member should be brought back to the leave of the motion. The motion is about the member for Port Stephens misleading the community.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. This is a wideranging debate. The member for Port Stephens may continue.

Ms KATE WASHINGTON: This is about me delivering for my community. I will deliver every day and I will protect members of my community from members opposite any day. It is in their DNA to keep privatising everything, and my community will not trust them. Newcastle Buses is performing very well for the Government. However, a girl told me that she stood on the side of the road crying because she could not catch a bus and as a result missed a mental health appointment. She had to catch three different buses and she had great difficulty finding them. What has the Government done to disability services in this State? It has privatised the lot; it has washed its hands of responsibility for the most vulnerable people in New South Wales. What is the Government doing to disability advocacy services? It will leave people with disabilities high and dry because they will have no funded advocacy services after 1 June. This Government is failing the most vulnerable people and my community. It would be great if members opposite started thinking about how they will deliver on some of their commitments and whether they will make people rather than stadiums their priority.

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal) (16:05): If the conduct of the member for Port Stephens is anything to go by then it is clear that the Labor Opposition cannot be trusted. I was shocked when I first saw the *Newcastle Herald* and *Port Stephens Examiner* reports that the member for Port Stephens had falsely claimed that the Government was privatising Tomaree Hospital. That statement is made even worse by the fact that it was her side of politics that was responsible for outsourcing medical services as far back as 2009. Despite the mistruths spread by members opposite, it is this Government that is delivering record levels of investment in public hospitals. The Central Coast community has seen more than \$500 million invested in the Gosford and Wyong hospitals. Unlike the member for Port Stephens, who has made her feelings very clear in this Chamber and in the newspapers, this Government supports both public and private hospitals across the State.

The member for Port Stephens also claimed wrongly that there has been no investment in capital infrastructure for preschools. Once again, the member has not bothered to do her homework. Just a few weeks ago, the Premier and Minister Mitchell together announced funding of \$5 million for capital works and a further \$10 million for the Quality Learning Environments program. When it comes to early childhood education, it is members on this side of the Chamber who are delivering for families across the State. Thanks to the hugely successful Start Strong reforms, preschool fees are decreasing and enrolments are increasing. Not only is the member for Port Stephens misleading tens of thousands of people in her local area but she is also misleading every family with preschool-aged children in New South Wales.

Mr Greg Warren: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 73. The vexatious comments and the conduct of members opposite are nothing more than a petulant attack on an honourable member—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The member for Campbelltown will resume his seat.

Mr ADAM CROUCH: The member for Port Stephens should know better. As an elected representative, she is in a position of responsibility and she should not be spreading false information. She is so arrogant that she cannot apologise when called out by her local newspapers.

Mr Greg Warren: Point of order: My point of order again relates to Standing Order 73. The derogatory remarks about the member for Port Stephens—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The member will resume his seat.

Mr ADAM CROUCH: This again demonstrates that the Labor Party cannot be trusted. After 16 years of failure we are again witnessing the arrogance of members opposite. The member for Port Stephens is incapable of making a simple apology for misleading her constituents, which was publicly demonstrated in both local newspapers.

Ms YASMIN CATLEY (Swansea) (16:09): We always know when a member is doing a great job. Clearly the member for Port Stephens is because the member for Myall Lakes, who represents a neighbouring

electorate, has moved this motion. He knows damn well that hers is a household name in his electorate. She has done a great job shadowing him. In fact, there are more photographs of her in his local newspapers than there are of him, and I suspect he is a little jealous. The only sensible thing the member for Myall Lakes could do would be to talk about the funding cuts to disability advocacy services. I know that is of great concern in the Port Stephens electorate.

The member for Myall Lakes could also talk about the Government's women's refuge funding cuts or the social housing funding cuts. The member for Bankstown talked about the 85,000 at-risk children in out-of-home care. The member for Myall Lakes could also talk about them. These are the things that the member for Port Stephens fights for daily. He could also talk about the Mambo Wetlands. Members opposite sold that land for \$250,000 to one of their developer mates. Of course, that did not surprise anyone on this side of the House. I will go through them again. There was Baumann, Port Stephens; Owens, Newcastle; Cornwell, Charlestown; Edwards, Swansea; Webber, Wyong; Spence, The Entrance—

Mr Gareth Ward: Point of order—

Ms YASMIN CATLEY: And let us not forget Hartcher, Terrigal.

Mr Gareth Ward: Sit down, sit down.

Ms YASMIN CATLEY: I will not be told to sit down by you, mate.

Mr Gareth Ward: We are being very aggressive today.

Ms YASMIN CATLEY: Are you going to massage the truth again?

Mr Gareth Ward: Do not rub me up the wrong way, sweetheart. It is nice to see how you treat victims of crime. I am glad that is on the record.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The time of the member for Swansea has expired. The member will resume her seat.

Ms Yasmin Catley: That is not fair.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member's time has expired. I direct the member for Kiama to remove himself from the Chamber for a period of 30 minutes when a Minister is found to replace him at the table.

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) (16:12): In reply: I thank the member for Port Stephens, the member for Terrigal and the member for Swansea for their contributions to this debate. The first comment of the member for Port Stephens was that this debate was a waste of time. That again highlights the problem with the Labor Party. Members opposite think that letting the community know when someone has misled them is a waste of time. It is not a waste of time. The member for Port Stephens also misled the House when she said that I had attacked her about the Williamstown issue. I spoke in support of the petition tabled in this place; I supported it 100 per cent. At no time did I attack her.

Ms Yasmin Catley: What petition?

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD: It was either a petition or a motion.

Ms Yasmin Catley: Point of order: The member for Myall Lakes knows that he should refer to the member for Port Stephens by her correct title. He should not refer to her as "she". We should not have to tolerate that behaviour in this place. We find it offensive.

Mr Gareth Ward: After what you said to me you should not be giving lectures.

Ms Yasmin Catley: What did I say? You can interpret it as you wish.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I direct the member for Swansea to remove herself from the Chamber for a period of 30 minutes.

Ms Yasmin Catley: I will walk out when he walks out.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I direct the member for Prospect to remove himself from the Chamber for a period of 30 minutes. I have asked the member for Swansea to leave the Chamber.

Ms Yasmin Catley: It is just outrageous.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: What is outrageous?

Ms Yasmin Catley: You have also asked the member for Kiama to leave the Chamber.

Dr Hugh McDermott: He is defying your order.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: So are you. I direct the Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms to remove the member for Prospect from the Chamber for the rest of the day. Members cannot leave the Chamber then return and argue. This has been a heated debate, but there are rules in this place. That behaviour was a disgrace. The member will be referred to by her full title.

[Pursuant to sessional order the member for Kiama left the Chamber at 16:14.]

[Pursuant to sessional order the member for Swansea left the Chamber at 16:14.]

[The member for Prospect left the Chamber at 16:15 accompanied by the Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms.]

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD: The member for Port Stephens further misled the community in October 2017 when she attacked the Government for privatising X-ray services at Tomaree hospital. Later that same month when the Government announced the contract she welcomed it and said it was as a result of her own achievement. That is what the member for Port Stephens does. I assure members that Bellbird Pre-School, Adamstown Heights, Mindaribba Local Aboriginal Land Council, Lower Hunter children's activity van— *[Time expired.]*

Mr Greg Warren: That was a disgrace. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I direct the member for Campbelltown to remove himself from the Chamber for a period of 30 minutes.

[Pursuant to sessional order the member for Campbelltown left the Chamber at 16:16.]

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that the motion be agreed to.

The House divided.

Ayes46
Noes22
Majority.....24

AYES

Anderson, Mr K
Bromhead, Mr S (teller)
Constance, Mr A
Crouch, Mr A
Elliott, Mr D
Fraser, Mr A
Griffin, Mr J
Henskens, Mr A
Kean, Mr M
Marshall, Mr A
Patterson, Mr C (teller)
Petinos, Ms E
Sidoti, Mr J
Taylor, Mr M
Upton, Ms G
Wilson, Ms F

Aplin, Mr G
Brookes, Mr G
Cooke, Ms S
Davies, Mrs T
Evans, Mr A
Goward, Ms P
Gulaptis, Mr C
Humphries, Mr K
Lee, Dr G
Notley-Smith, Mr B
Pavey, Mrs M
Provest, Mr G
Speakman, Mr M
Toole, Mr P
Williams, Mr R

Ayres, Mr S
Conolly, Mr K
Coure, Mr M
Dominello, Mr V
Evans, Mr L
Grant, Mr T
Hazzard, Mr B
Johnsen, Mr M
Maguire, Mr D
O'Dea, Mr J
Perrottet, Mr D
Roberts, Mr A
Stokes, Mr R
Tudehope, Mr D
Williams, Mrs L

NOES

Atalla, Mr E
Daley, Mr M
Finn, Ms J
Hoenig, Mr R
McKay, Ms J
Park, Mr R
Tesch, Ms L
Zangari, Mr G

Bali, Mr S
Dib, Mr J
Harris, Mr D
Hornery, Ms S
Mehan, Mr D (teller)
Scully, Mr P
Washington, Ms K

Chanthivong, Mr A
Doyle, Ms T
Harrison, Ms J
Lynch, Mr P
Mihailuk, Ms T
Smith, Ms T F
Watson, Ms A (teller)

PAIRS

Barilaro, Mr J
Berejiklian, Ms G
Gibbons, Ms M
Rowell, Mr J

Foley, Mr L
Cotsis, Ms S
Haylen, Ms J
Lalich, Mr N

Motion agreed to.

*Bills***STATE DEBT RECOVERY BILL 2017****Second Reading Debate**

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO (Ryde—Minister for Finance, Services and Property) (16:22): In reply: I thank the following members for their contributions to the debate on the State Debt Recovery Bill 2017: members representing the electorates of Davidson, Port Macquarie, Myall Lakes, Epping, Camden, Cessnock, Sydney, Maitland, Liverpool, Balmain, Wyong and Heffron. I will respond in globo to some of the comments and concerns that were raised and then deal with some in specie. I reiterate that this Government is committed to driving down the cost of managing and collecting government debt.

These reforms are aimed at providing more efficient means of collecting debts that arise from non-payment of government fees, charges and other amounts. The efficiency of debt collection will be improved by building on the proven expertise of Revenue NSW in debt collection and reducing duplication of functions across agencies. This reform will also allow other government agencies to focus on their own service delivery priorities and provide improved customer service by providing a single point contact for businesses and individuals who owe debts to multiple government agencies.

I will address some of the issues raised by the member for Cessnock in his contribution to debate. First, I remind the member that the State Debt Recovery Office was abolished in 2013. The functions that are vested by this bill in the Chief Commissioner of State Revenue will be carried out by Revenue NSW, which incorporates the former State Debt Recovery Office. The member suggested that making the services of Revenue NSW available to local councils for debt recovery was a case of overreach. I think he said, "Never before has the State sought to offer this service." Why should this service not be available? It may have escaped the member's attention that council rates are taxes.

Revenue NSW has considerable expertise in collecting taxes—a fact with which I hope not even the member for Cessnock would disagree. Moreover, Revenue NSW already collects fines debts for councils and has been doing so for decades, ever since the State Debt Recovery Office [SDRO] was formed under legislation introduced by the Labor Party in 1996. This is worth considering for a moment. Labor vested responsibility for the collection of fines debts in the SDRO, a specialist debt recovery agency possessing the requisite powers to pursue outstanding fines debts efficiently. Moving forward to 2018, the Labor Party now opposes this bill, which offers the same expertise to councils for civil debts. I cannot understand the logic.

Councils are already asking Revenue NSW to collect some fines. The top 10 councils, based on the number of fines this financial year to date, include the City of Sydney council, 198,907 fines; Inner West Council, 57,999; Northern Beaches Council, 42,453; Waverley Council, 42,030; the City of Parramatta, 35,259; Woollahra Council, 32,512; North Sydney Council, 31,899; City of Canterbury council, 31,707; Fairfield City Council, 27,652, and Sutherland Shire Council, 21,929. The primary types of fines issued in New South Wales which have been collected by Revenue NSW relate to parking, speeding and other traffic offences. Revenue NSW also collects State debt on behalf of NSW Ambulance for unpaid ambulance fees and on behalf of Victims Services for unpaid victims' restitution orders.

On any view, Revenue NSW is already collecting, right across the board, a number of fines and debts relating to local councils and State government agencies. We have not heard any rancour from those opposite about what is already taking place. The proposal now is to provide councils with the ability to opt in, in the event that, in addition to farming out fines to Revenue NSW, they want to farm out the collection of outstanding council rates. For the life of me, I cannot understand the concern. As the member for Epping said, I thought this would have been received gratefully on both sides of the Chamber, because we are providing a citizen-centric approach. Rather than having a citizen paying fines to one arm of government and then paying debts to another arm of

government through a different mechanism, we are trying to bring it all together so that we have a bigger picture and can make it easier, particularly for more vulnerable citizens.

Because Revenue NSW already collects fines debts for councils, this legislation places it in a unique position to develop a profile of ratepayers, some of whom would have interactions with fine systems as well as the rate system. Revenue NSW can use this information to determine the fairest and most appropriate way of recovering a debt or a fine, depending on individual circumstances. Part of the long-term vision for the Government is to work with the citizens of New South Wales as individuals and to ensure that the services they receive are tailored to their individual needs. For example, if a person has outstanding debts to a local council because he cannot pay his rates, he may have to come to an arrangement with a debt collection agency in relation to those debts.

On the other side of the equation, that person may be struggling to pay fines and will have to go through Revenue NSW. That would be a terrible experience for that citizen. It would be far better for one agency—in this case Revenue NSW—to see that there are outstanding amounts relating to council rates and that there are also outstanding amounts relating to fines. Revenue NSW would be able to see that this is a vulnerable person and work out the best thing to do for the citizen to make sure he is treated with respect so that the fines are paid appropriately and that the best outcomes are achieved. At the moment we have local councils on one side and Revenue NSW on the other and the citizen is being squeezed. We are trying to remedy that by giving councils the ability to opt in.

The member for Cessnock was concerned that repaid grant moneys were paid into consolidated revenue instead of to the grant fund from where they came. Eligibility for the grant in question is determined by reference to statutory criteria and not from a limited grant fund. They are paid from the Consolidated Fund, so it is appropriate that they be repaid to the Consolidated Fund. The member implied that councils were more efficient at collecting debt than Revenue NSW, referring to recovery rates of 95 per cent for council rates as opposed to 75 per cent for Revenue NSW. As the member for Davidson correctly pointed out in his contribution, this is an illogical comparison. It is not comparing apples with apples. The rate of debt recovery for Revenue NSW refers to all debts that it collects, including tax debts and fines debts, which generally are more challenging to collect than outstanding rates. Revenue NSW informs me that it expects it would easily exceed the 95 per cent figure for councils referred to by the Opposition.

The member for Cessnock suggested that I had falsely claimed that one-third of the time of the Local Court was consumed by local council rates matters. I did no such thing. I referred to publicly available figures that show that one-third of civil matters pursued through the Local Court involve outstanding rates. The member for Cessnock thinks the fact that only a small percentage of rates matters end up being defended in a court hearing is somehow proof that the court's time and resources are being used appropriately. The fundamental purpose of the Local Court is to resolve disputes. But as the figures quoted by the member for Cessnock show, it is being used to chase debts where there is no dispute at all. The member highlighted the fact that 99 per cent of matters do not proceed to a court hearing.

I accept the argument of those opposite that it may not be time intensive but in many ways it is an abuse of the court's processes to use it to chase a debt that is not in dispute. That is why there are other mechanisms such as the agency formerly called the State Debt Recovery Office—an office established by those opposite many years ago to provide a seamless, fairer and more humane process than the arduous process of going through courts and debt collection agencies. The member for Cessnock ignored that point but then suggested that undisputed rates matters are not placing a burden on the courts. However, he spoke positively about the JusticeLink system. We agree that it is a good system. While the number of matters that proceed to court hearings are relatively small, the large number of undisputed claims still impose a burden on the court as they require court registry processing of the initial claim and any subsequent default judgement and enforcement action. The suggestion that uncontested matters are simply dealt with electronically is not correct. As I said earlier, it is misleading.

The Opposition suggested that it is impossible to know whether the budget impact of the bill will be positive or negative. Revenue NSW will collect debts on a fee-for-service, cost-recovery basis using a more efficient process and achieving an improved rate of debt recovery. There will be no negative impact on the budget. The bill is not a revenue-raising exercise; it is designed to improve the rate of recovery of outstanding debts. There is no intention to increase these fees. The member for Cessnock raised the issue of costs being awarded against a debtor and quoted from clause 49 of the bill, which states that if a judgement is favourable to the Chief Commissioner "the court is to award the Chief Commissioner costs". He suggested that this should be changed to "the court may award the Chief Commissioner costs". The member has taken the quote from my speech out of context. Clause 49 is already qualified to indicate that the court is to award costs unless it appears to the court that some other order should be made as to the whole or part of the costs. Clearly, the bill already provides that the awarding of costs is entirely at the discretion of the court, as it should be.

On the question of recovery of ambulance fees, the member for Cessnock could not have been more wrong. The only thing he got right was that the recovery rate for ambulance fees improved dramatically since the Government's reforms of 2015. He also stated that before 2014 ambulance fees were recovered under the Fines Act. However, ambulance fees are not fines and they never have been. He has used the same scare tactics that the Opposition used when opposing the Government's ambulance fee reforms, which was to suggest that those reforms would discourage people from using ambulance services because of the fear of debt they would incur. In fact, none of the adverse consequences predicted by Labor Opposition members eventuated. The ambulance fee reforms have been a huge success, which is why they were used as the basis for the scheme introduced by this bill.

There has been some erroneous speculation on the privatisation of Revenue NSW. I categorically state that Revenue NSW will not be privatised and that the assertion is misleading as well as false. In addition, any suggestion that the core functions of debt collection outlined in this bill will be outsourced also are incorrect. The member for Cessnock spoke at length about the draft Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal [IPART] report on the local council rating system and suggested that this bill is in some way out of step with the fact that the report remains under consideration. In the first place, this bill was never prompted by the IPART review. I should say that that review covers a whole range of matters that go well beyond the issue of debt recovery. The fact is that this Government introduced reforms to allow Revenue NSW to collect ambulance fee debts and has done so successfully. It is on the back of that successful initiative that the Government decided to make the services of Revenue NSW available to the whole of government, should government bodies wish to utilise those services.

I now will deal with the issue of occupational licences. First, I will address some queries that were raised about why the particular licences in the bill were selected. The licences listed in schedule 2 to the bill were chosen because they are licences that already are capable of suspension by the licensing authority for disciplinary reasons. Licences that are not currently capable of suspension were not considered. Other licences were excluded because they operate under national laws or uniform laws under which suspension of the licence could be in breach of national agreements or would otherwise be contrary to a national scheme. However, the substantive issue raised in this debate is whether the chief commissioner should have the power to direct suspension of an occupational licence. It is an important issue because it is a new power that is not currently available to the chief commissioner in other spheres.

Although protections are included in the bill to protect vulnerable and disadvantaged people against the use of this power, the Government appreciates there is some disquiet about the new power and is prepared to consider it further when the bill is received in the Legislative Council. I note that the member for Maitland spoke in detail about this matter. For the benefit of the member for Maitland, I indicate that the Government will consider the matter in greater detail after the bill is received in the Legislative Council. I emphasise that the Government recognises that some government bodies may wish to continue using existing services. For that reason, the bill operates on an opt-in, non-compulsory basis. The bill follows successful reforms introduced by the Government in 2014 to transfer debt collection functions for ambulance fees to Revenue NSW.

The Government is satisfied that the scheme for debt recovery introduced by this bill achieves the correct balance between improving the State's collection of overdue revenue and the rights of individual New South Wales residents. To that end, the bill contains comprehensive protections for debtors to make debt recovery a fairer and simpler process for most debtors. Those protections include a statutory right of review, the right to elect to have the matter dealt with by a court, and special provisions to deal with vulnerable persons or those in difficult personal circumstances. The Government also will introduce debt recovery guidelines to govern various aspects of implementation and will consult with Legal Aid NSW, Community Legal Centres NSW and others to ensure that the guidelines are appropriate. The bill also has appropriate protections for privacy rights. Importantly, the bill will not apply retrospectively but will apply only prospectively to debt notices issued after the new Act commences. The scheme established by the State Debt Recovery Bill is a substantial reform to the management of government debt. I refer to the views of two key stakeholders that have been involved in this reform. The President of Local Government NSW, Linda Scott, wrote to me on 22 February 2018 stating:

I am pleased to advise that as a result of those consultations, Local Government NSW [LGNSW] has no objections to the Bill proceeding. We believe that the reforms, as they have been explained, may provide councils with an important alternative for the management and recovery of outstanding rates and charges, beyond in-house management or the use of private debt collection agents. We recognise that changes also have the potential to enhance efficiency and improve outcomes for councils' ratepayers.

The other key stakeholder is Community Legal Centres NSW. There has been a series of correspondence expressing concerns and responses to concerns exchanged between my office and Community Legal Centres NSW. This morning I received a letter from that key stakeholder, which states:

Thank you again for taking the time to consider the opinions of community legal Centres regarding the State Debt Recovery Bill.

We appreciate that the Bill was drafted in good faith, and welcome the opportunity to provide feedback based on how [community legal centres] CLCs see this Bill operating in communities, and the impact that it might have on the people that we work with on a daily basis.

We believe that minor amendments—

I emphasise "minor amendments"—

to the Bill along the lines outlined above will make it fairer for the people that community legal Centres work with daily, some of the most vulnerable and at-risk people in our state, without compromising the intent or integrity of the Bill.

None of the minor amendments in the letter of today's date suggests there is any problem with Revenue NSW recovering local council debts for non-payment of rates on an opt-in basis. The minor amendments go to vulnerability issues. As for those minor amendments suggested by the Community Legal Centres NSW, they will be considered in the Legislative Council. I believe that this is a good bill. It follows the very successful implementation of the collection of ambulance fees by Revenue NSW. I believe it will provide a better and clearer user experience for the citizens of our State. I commend the bill to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is that this bill be now read a second time.

The House divided.

Ayes43
Noes28
Majority..... 15

AYES

Anderson, Mr K
Bromhead, Mr S (teller)
Constance, Mr A
Crouch, Mr A
Evans, Mr A
Goward, Ms P
Gulaptis, Mr C
Humphries, Mr K
Lee, Dr G
O'Dea, Mr J
Perrottet, Mr D
Roberts, Mr A
Stokes, Mr R
Upton, Ms G
Wilson, Ms F

Aplin, Mr G
Brookes, Mr G
Cooke, Ms S
Davies, Mrs T
Evans, Mr L
Grant, Mr T
Hazzard, Mr B
Johnsen, Mr M
Marshall, Mr A
Patterson, Mr C (teller)
Petinos, Ms E
Sidoti, Mr J
Taylor, Mr M
Williams, Mr R

Ayres, Mr S
Conolly, Mr K
Coure, Mr M
Dominello, Mr V
Fraser, Mr A
Griffin, Mr J
Henskens, Mr A
Kean, Mr M
Notley-Smith, Mr B
Pavey, Mrs M
Provest, Mr G
Speakman, Mr M
Tudehope, Mr D
Williams, Mrs L

NOES

Atalla, Mr E
Chanthivong, Mr A
Donato, Mr P
Greenwich, Mr A
Hoeing, Mr R
Lynch, Mr P
Mihailuk, Ms T
Scully, Mr P
Warren, Mr G
Zangari, Mr G

Bali, Mr S
Daley, Mr M
Doyle, Ms T
Harris, Mr D
Horner, Ms S
McKay, Ms J
Park, Mr R
Smith, Ms T F
Washington, Ms K

Catley, Ms Y
Dib, Mr J
Finn, Ms J
Harrison, Ms J
Leong, Ms J
Meehan, Mr D (teller)
Piper, Mr G
Tesch, Ms L
Watson, Ms A (teller)

PAIRS

Berejiklian, Ms G
Gibbons, Ms M
Hancock, Mrs S
Rowell, Mr J

Cotsis, Ms S
Foley, Mr L
Haylen, Ms J
Lalich, Mr N

Motion agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO: I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Matter of Public Importance

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Ms TANYA DAVIES (Mulgoa—Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Women, and Minister for Ageing) (16:48): As many in the House know, tomorrow marks International Women's Day, a day to celebrate the economic, political and social achievements of women. It is also a day for us to reflect on the journey that lies ahead. Although in theory International Women's Day is celebrated as one day, in practice it has become a week of events and celebrations. This week the member for Coogee and I visited Randwick Girls' High School where I hosted a panel session highlighting the achievements in women's leadership and employment in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics [STEM] and discussed women's issues more generally. I was joined by a panel of speakers, including consultant, coach, mentor and author Avril Henry, BCAL Diagnostics Chief Scientist Dr Dharmica Mistry and Brian Seidler from the Master Builders Association and who is also a member of the Council for Women's Economic Opportunity, which I chair. As I mentioned in the House yesterday, I also met 15-year-old Christina Suarez, a shining example of a person who broke ground against workplace gender stereotypes while undertaking a traineeship at the Sydney Metro construction site at Chatswood.

This week I also had the opportunity to visit Medtronic for its Women in MedTech event, meet with employees and highlight the importance of gender diversity in Australia's medical technology sector. This Government is committed to encouraging more women to join the medical technology sector. I commend Medtronic for its work in this area. This morning I visited the Google Australia offices in Pyrmont as part of its Google Digital Garage International Women's Day event. I was pleased that the event focused on empowering women who head up small businesses, are entrepreneurs and who bravely step up into the start-up space. Tomorrow morning I will host the New South Wales Government's signature International Women's Day event, the NSW Women of the Year Awards. The theme for International Women's Day this year is "PressforProgress". How better to advance the cause of women than to acknowledge the contributions of pioneering women across our State with a gala awards breakfast. I congratulate all the finalists and wish them good luck for tomorrow.

I congratulate also all of the local Women of the Year Award recipients. The local women awards provide an opportunity to acknowledge women who are making a significant impact in the places where we live and work and in the lives of people around them—women like St Clair High School Relieving Principal Sally Smithard, from my electorate of Mulgoa. As Minister for Women, I meet many inspiring women who are breaking boundaries every day. These women are taking up the call to action and they are pressing for progress. They have learnt to embrace their unique talents, celebrate their own contributions and use their voices. They are breaking down not only societal barriers but also some of the barriers women place in front of themselves. They cannot do it alone. It is incumbent on us all to embrace women, to lift their aspirations and to press for progress.

In New South Wales women are facing challenges in the quest for equal rights and treatment. The latest statistics reveal some good news but there is always more to do. One of the major indicators is the New South Wales gender pay gap. Differences in women's and men's pay during their working life can exacerbate the gender gap in retirement savings and impact on women's financial security later in life. For the period ending November 2017, the gender pay gap was 14.3 per cent, down from 15.7 per cent in November 2016. I am pleased that New South Wales had a greater decrease than any other State, except the Northern Territory, which had a 2 per cent decrease. The gender pay gap is trending down to where it should be: zero. There is more good news. This Government's excellent economic management, investment pipeline and reforms across a range of sectors have enabled an increase in women's economic participation.

Women are driving the most recent jobs boom in New South Wales. I am proud we have made inroads in encouraging women to join the growth sectors of our economy, such as STEM occupations, as well as male-dominated industries such as construction. From 2012 to 2017, women increased their employment share in male-dominated industries and occupations. From 1995 to 2017, there were increases in the share of women commencing and completing apprenticeships and traineeships. This Government is making great strides in advancing the status of women, while also acknowledging that there is still more work to do. I am proud to stand in this Chamber today in support of International Women's Day and the Women of the Year Awards as an opportunity to celebrate our progress towards gender equality. I encourage all members to join me in celebrating this important event.

Ms KATE WASHINGTON (Port Stephens) (16:53): International Women's Day is an important occasion to reflect on how far we have come as a society in the struggle for gender parity. It is an important time to recognise that we have a lot more to do to achieve this goal. The theme for this year's International Women's Day is "PressforProgress". When I consider the increasing number of women in many fields of our daily lives, from politics to work to community leadership, it is essential to remember that we need to get more women into leadership roles and, most importantly, that we all have a role to play in the press for progress to gender parity. It is a call to arms to all levels of society to consider what more we can do to advance the status of women in our country. In the context of New South Wales, it is clear that there is much more that the State Government could be doing to improve the status of women.

Pressing for progress towards gender parity in New South Wales requires a coordinated, whole-of-government approach. The Coalition Government has moved Women NSW from the Department of Premier and Cabinet, where it was under Labor, to the Department of Health and then to the Department of Family and Community Services, which makes a whole-of-government approach much more difficult. Women NSW is the government agency tasked with improving the lives of women by promoting policy development and collaboration to work towards gender parity. In order to achieve a whole-of-government approach, Women NSW must be a part of the Department of Premier and Cabinet. This is the heart of government decision-making and policy development. Tackling gender inequality should be at the forefront of government policy within New South Wales.

Government has a role to play in increasing the number of women on the boards of corporations, non-government organisations and within government itself. The evidence shows that when there are more women at the table of decision-making, the decisions that are made are better. One of the biggest challenges we face in achieving gender parity is the scourge of domestic violence and sexual assault. These crimes overwhelmingly affect women, and there is much more to be done by Government and society as a whole. We need to address the social attitudes that lead to crimes against women. Our kids must know that it is never okay to disrespect, harm or degrade women. Introducing respectful relationship training from kindergarten to year 12 is a vital step towards addressing sexist attitudes that underpin gender-based violence. These preventive measures aim to stop domestic violence and sexual assault before they occur by instigating social change. However, governments must introduce policies that support victims and deter perpetrators when these crimes do occur.

Unfortunately, the Berejiklian Government has failed to step up and introduce comprehensive responses to either of these crimes. In the context of domestic violence, the Government's policy response is a glossy eight-page infographic. When we compare this response to that of Victoria, which has held a royal commission into family violence and committed hundreds of millions of dollars to implementing its recommendations, it is clear that New South Wales is falling way behind. The Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Pru Goward, promised that a comprehensive sexual assault strategy would be released in 2016. Then she announced that it would be released in November 2017. Unfortunately, both dates have come and gone without any sign of a strategy. This is simply not good enough from a government that has a poor track record—

Ms Tanya Davies: Point of order: This matter of public importance is about International Women's Day, and we should be joining together to celebrate this important day.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I agree with the Minister's point of order. I thought International Women's Day would have been a joyous occasion. I draw the member for Port Stephens back to the leave of the matter of public importance.

Ms KATE WASHINGTON: We would like this to be a joyous occasion, but we would also like to point out that a lot more could be done to achieve gender parity, which is the theme of International Women's Day. There is a lot more to be done by this Government and by everybody. From its devastating cuts to domestic violence refuges in 2014 to its tepid rollout of domestic violence leave to New South Wales government employees, this Government has repeatedly failed to advance the status of women. In contrast, the New South Wales Labor Opposition has committed to extending 10 days of domestic violence leave to every worker in this State. We have also committed to ensuring that New South Wales joins every other jurisdiction in Australia in signing up to Our Watch—

Ms Tanya Davies: Point of order: As I said previously, this matter of public importance is about International Women's Day. I have acknowledged that there is more work to be done on achieving gender parity. Unfortunately, the member for Port Stephens is seeking to politicise this day, which is meant to highlight achievements for women, what has been done for women and what still needs to be done. We are working towards this goal.

[Time expired.]

Ms STEPH COOKE (Cootamundra) (16:58): Tomorrow, on International Women's Day, I am joining the Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, the Deputy Premier, John Barilaro, the Minister for Women, Tanya Davies, and many others from this place to celebrate the extraordinary achievements of women in New South Wales at the 2018 NSW Women of the Year Awards breakfast at the International Convention Centre. I am delighted that I will be joined by the Cootamundra Local Woman of the Year, Pam Halliburton, and her husband, Alan, who have made the trip to Sydney to celebrate the extraordinary achievements of women in Cootamundra and across the State. I also want to wish Associate Professor Faye McMillan the best of luck. Faye has been nominated for the NSW Aboriginal Woman of the Year Award.

Professor Faye McMillan is a proud Wiradjuri yinaa woman, originally from Trangie in the Central West of New South Wales. Faye is Director of the Djirruwang Program—Bachelor of Health Science (Mental Health) at Charles Sturt University. As well as her Doctor of Health Science, Master of Indigenous Health Studies and Bachelor of Pharmacy, Faye has graduate certificates in Wiradjuri language, culture and heritage and in Indigenous governance. Alongside her esteemed career in academia, Faye is a proud mother to Kye and Ethan and she runs a business, Australian Patrol Vehicles Pty Ltd, with her three siblings. Faye is a board member holding various roles for Indigenous Allied Health Australia, the Murrumbidgee Primary Health Network and the University of Notre Dame Australia Wagga Wagga Clinical School. She is also an Atlantic Fellow, one of a global community of leaders collaborating to advance equity, opportunity and human dignity. Faye was recognised in the *Australian Financial Review* and Westpac 100 Women of Influence in 2014 and in the *Who's Who of Australian Women* in 2017. On behalf of the whole Cootamundra community, I wish her the best of luck tomorrow.

Now is the time to celebrate the achievements of women and girls like Faye throughout New South Wales. It is also a time to "press for progress", as we celebrate the economic, political and social achievements of women while also calling for greater equality. As a government, we are committed to supporting women and girls to reach their full potential and to address the social conditions that challenge gender equality. I thank members for joining me to celebrate the achievements of the women of New South Wales and women across the world and to reflect on the journey ahead to reach genuine gender equity.

Ms FELICITY WILSON (North Shore) (17:01): By leave: I contribute to the discussion on this matter of public importance to acknowledge International Women's Day and I congratulate the Minister for Women, Tanya Davies, on raising this important issue. International Women's Day will be celebrated tomorrow, so it is timely to reflect on the contribution women make in our community as well as the journey we have travelled to date to achieve gender equality and the road for us to travel from now. I am proud to represent the electorate of North Shore, which has the highest proportion of women of all 93 electorates, at about 53 per cent of my community. On International Women's Day we women parliamentarians need to reflect on whether our voices are adequately heard across our community and in this place.

I acknowledge the work that has been done by this Parliament and this Government to promote the voice of women, particularly by the first female Speaker of this Chamber, Shelley Hancock, who has been instrumental in making this Parliament a family-friendly environment. I note that having a family at the same time as being in politics is a hurdle that prevents more women from entering Parliament. I also acknowledge the first female Liberal Premier of New South Wales, Gladys Berejiklian, who is a champion for women in our community. Significant changes have been made with the appointment of the first Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, Pru Goward, in her work to address the scourge of domestic and family violence. To this day, too many women are being killed at the hands of their partners or former partners. Women should not feel afraid to be in their home because of economic or psychological abuse, and we need to address this issue.

I also acknowledge the work of the Minister for Women, Tanya Davies, who in ensuring the journey towards gender parity is progressed is investing time and effort in our community. This Parliament must be a strong voice for women every day of the year, not just on International Women's Day. We must recognise the women in our community but also their rights and needs by making representations about their areas of concern. We must continue to be a champion for the women we represent. I wish members a happy International Women's Day. I congratulate Australia on offering greater opportunities for women than many countries do, but I acknowledge that we have further to go to achieve gender equality.

Ms TANYA DAVIES (Mulgoa—Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Women, and Minister for Ageing) (17:04): In reply: I acknowledge the contributions made by the members representing the electorates of Cootamundra, Port Stephens and North Sydney on this matter of public importance, International Women's Day. I highlight the advancements made by the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government in giving opportunities to women and enabling them to participate in the workforce, even in this Parliament. As the member for North Sydney said, it was this side of politics that installed the first female Speaker of this House, the Hon. Shelley Hancock. She and the President of the Legislative Council worked together to establish the

Parliament's first parents' room to enable people such as me to perform the juggling act that is a challenge for many working mothers: raising healthy children while pushing ahead and building careers. The first parents' room in this place was opened by the Liberal-Nationals Government.

There has been a decrease in the gender pay gap in this State. The Government has prioritised a target that, by 2025, 50 per cent of all senior leadership roles in the public service will be held by women, and we have established a program to make that target a reality across our government departments and agencies. I acknowledge that the Premier of New South Wales, the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, is firmly committed to seeing all women achieve their personal best and reach their full potential. I look forward to continuing to work with the Premier and my Cabinet colleagues in the development of a whole-of-government women's strategy. We are finalising the details of that strategy and its implementation plan, based on the incredible amount of feedback we received from consultations across the State last year.

I acknowledged at the beginning of this discussion on the matter of public importance that there is much more to be done, and I agree with those opposite on that point. However, unlike those opposite, I note that this Government already has the runs on the board and is leading the way in tackling gender inequality. There is more to be done in this space, and we will do more. I will be very proud to announce the detail of the women's strategy and the implementation plan when they are finalised.

Private Members' Statements

SEVEN HILLS ELECTORATE EVENTS

Mr MARK TAYLOR (Seven Hills) (17:07): Recently I was fortunate to visit the fantastic people of Karabi Community and Development Services seniors knitting group at the Reg Byrne Community Centre. It was a pleasure to award the ladies a \$500 NSW Seniors Festival grant to fund more wool for their knitting products, which include beanies for premature babies and blankets for cancer patients, particularly at Westmead Hospital. The ladies—including some very special long-term members in their nineties—meet each fortnight, collect what they have made during the week and start their knitting projects for the community for the next week.

I asked Sylvia, the group's organiser, how many products were knitted per fortnight and to my surprise she pointed to a table that was overflowing with beanies, bears, blankets and many more beautiful handcrafted items for community members in need. Each member brings a gold coin per fortnight, which allows the group's organisers to pay for more wool. When the group asked for my support, of course I was more than happy to help. Their woolly gifts provide comfort and warmth to the patients of Westmead Hospital's cancer and premature babies units. Kind and generous acts such as these from constituents in my electorate of Seven Hills go to show the good hearts of the Karabi seniors knitting group and their incredible support for those in need.

Recently I recognised Wendy Lazanas of Toongabbie, who was voted Local Woman of the Year in my electorate of Seven Hills. Wendy is a fierce local warrior for Toongabbie. Last week it was my pleasure to chat in my office with her husband John and special friends Peter and Dayle Schaffer. Wendy has been head of Toongabbie's local community group, Stop Tucks Road Units. I have attended a number of public meetings regarding this matter with Wendy, including a very large public gathering at Toongabbie Public School, and assisted Wendy and her group with their representations to the City of Parramatta Council regarding their concerns about the planning application.

Wendy and the group are, of course, fully aware of my views on the proposal; however, I am here today to speak in celebration of her award, which recognises her local advocacy efforts. Wendy is a great lady who stands up on everyone's behalf and rallies behind different groups of people to deliver outcomes that are favourable to all within her community. Wendy, John and their team have been tireless in distributing information flyers and keeping their local Facebook page up to date. It is one thing to be passionate about local issues but it is great to have someone like Wendy, who is a true community champion for Toongabbie.

Toongabbie Anglican Church on Binalong Road—commonly known as TAC—was recently awarded \$15,000 under the Community Building Partnership [CBP] program. This grant will help build a new light-emitting diode sign at the front of Toongabbie Anglican Church. Head Pastor Raj Gupta plays a tremendous role for not only the congregation but also the community as a whole, and I commend his work to this Parliament. Toongabbie Anglican Church offers individual outreach programs, weekly sessions and mentoring to men's, women's and senior's groups, a kids group called ToonieKids, and a teens group called One80 Youth. In previous years Toongabbie Anglican Church has installed a kids playground and expanded the children's ministry and community programs. It is great to again support such a worthy recipient of CBP funds. I also thank the Families Pastor Minister Murray Colville, Youth Mission and Membership Pastor Ben Allen and their student ministers, Stuart Jansen, Kate Hamer and Jack Hamer for their great work for locals in the Toongabbie area.

Last weekend I had the pleasure to help out at the annual Clean Up Australia Day event in my electorate of Seven Hills. This time it was held at Third Settlement Reserve in company with the Winston Hills Girl Guides. Also in attendance was the Federal member for Mitchell, the Hon. Alex Hawke, whose team from The Hills was much appreciated for their help in cleaning up the local reserve and park. Clean Up Australia Day was founded in 1990 and continues to be a very important annual occasion for environmental awareness, rubbish and pollution issues, and education on such issues—things that affect us all both at a local and State level. It is incredible to think that in the past 27 years Australians have devoted in excess of 32 million hours for this annual clean-up, collecting more than 340,000 tonnes of rubbish.

I acknowledge all the public and Catholic schools in my electorate who participated in this year's great event, who continue to take pride in helping to clean up their school and community areas and who make our environment such a wonderful place. I also acknowledge the schoolteachers who do a wonderful job each year in educating the children in my electorate on the local and national environmental issues facing them and on how each and every one of us can do our part in creating a better environment.

LUNAR NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) (17:12): Over the past few weeks I have had the pleasure of attending a number of events in Bankstown to welcome in the Lunar New Year. The Chinese, Indochinese and Vietnamese communities who celebrate their Lunar New Year within Bankstown bring their rich cultures to our community. I am very proud of the contribution these communities make to Bankstown and New South Wales. It has been a great honour to join them in their celebrations. The Chinese New Year has its origin at the turning of the lunisolar Chinese calendar each year. The first day of the Chinese New Year falls on the new moon between 21 January and 20 February each year.

In 2018 the first day of the Lunar New Year was Friday 16 February, and in China this initiated the Year of the Dog. This year I was pleased to attend a number of community events in my electorate to celebrate the Lunar New Year. On 10 February I joined the Vietnamese community in Bankstown for our traditional Lunar New Year celebrations in Saigon Place. Ten years ago when I was the Mayor of Bankstown I initiated our first Saigon Place festival, and I am delighted that it continues to go from strength to strength.

On 21 February I joined another very well-known organisation, the Chinese Australian Services Society's [CASS], for its annual Chinese New Year celebrations at Bankstown Seniors' Centre, which was a very well-attended event. On 28 February I had the opportunity to attend CASS' volunteers thanksgiving party at Bankstown RSL, and I was delighted to present a number of awards to the many hardworking volunteers of that group. I pass on my special thanks to Emeritus Chairperson Dr Leng Tan, Harry Pan, OAM, and the entire executive team from CASS for their amazing leadership and hard work in ensuring that thousands of Australians of Chinese heritage are given immense support in accessing a number of services across Sydney, particularly in my region.

I also acknowledge the local Indo-Chinese Senior Citizens Association of NSW, which held its event in Bankstown, and in particular Mr Quang, its longstanding president, and the entire executive for their wonderful hospitality. The Indo-Chinese community is a very strong community in the Bankstown and south-west Sydney region. It conducts a number of programs throughout the year and works with council and a range of health and other migrant services to provide the necessary support to the communities.

I acknowledge the Vietnamese Community in Australia NSW Chapter [VCA] and thank it for its wonderful Tet Festival that was held at the Fairfield Showground on 24 February—another well-attended event. Over the three days of the event, approximately 60,000 people attended to celebrate the Lunar New Year. I acknowledge the newly elected President, Mr Paul Hing Nguyen, and the executive team of the VCA for their immense efforts in putting that huge festival together. I was delighted to join my good friend the member for Fairfield, Guy Zangari, at the event, as well as the Leader of the Opposition, Luke Foley, and many other members of Parliament, councillors and dignitaries that attended the formal part of that festival.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge Mr Tut Nguyen, OAM, who played a huge role in the Saigon Place Lunar New Year Festival at Bankstown. For many years he has coordinated our Bankstown Children's Festival and committee, which commenced as a festival put together by the VCA. Not only does Mr Tut Nguyen support the Bankstown Children's Festival but he also ensures that the Saigon Place Lunar New Year Festival continues to be a well-attended event in Bankstown. It gives me great pleasure to thank all of these community groups for the great work that they do in our community and to wish them wonderful Lunar New Year celebrations, a happy New Year and a very prosperous Year of the Dog.

TRIBUTE TO DAPHNE GWENDOLINE JOHNSTON, OAM

Mrs LESLIE WILLIAMS (Port Macquarie) (17:17): I inform the House of the passing of one of the most outstanding citizens of the Hastings and Camden Haven, Daphne Gwendoline Johnson, OAM. On Thursday 1 February we lost our Daphne—a true people's champion who served our community without fear or favour for decades. Daphne was an inspirational woman whose outstanding service to local government and the community of the Hastings was deservedly recognised with a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2005. She dedicated much of her life to helping others and for more than 25 years was our community advocate as a councillor on Port Macquarie-Hastings Council—a testament to the respect and the admiration we had for our Daphne.

Whilst most people who think of Daphne automatically think of her as a councillor, her community work extended much further. In her time living in the Camden Haven, Daphne served as chairman, vice chairman or member of many community organisations. These included the Port Macquarie-Hastings Seniors Citizens Centre Management Committee, the Camden Haven Community Health Centre, Laurieton School of Arts Management Committee, Camden Haven Sport and Recreation Management Committee, Hastings Macleay Community Transport Service, Camden Haven Meals on Wheels and Hastings Rural Fire District Committee. Daphne chaired the committee that founded the Camden Haven branch of the Australian Red Cross. She was on the Bonny Hills Community Hall Management Committee and the Camden Haven Ratepayers Association, and she served as a director of North Power and of Oxley Electricity.

Daphne was also patron of many groups, such as the Laurieton Swimming Club, where on many occasions we shared the responsibility of medal presentation poolside. The list goes on: Camden Haven Show Society, Laurieton Redbacks Football Club, Friendship Quilters, the Koala Band, Kendall Pony Club and the Hastings Netball Association. For her outstanding service to the community, Daphne was also recognised with the New South Wales Premier's Award in 1996 and was the Hastings Municipal Council Citizen of the Year in 2002. We farewelled Daphne on 8 February at a service attended by many community members who simply wanted the opportunity to pay their respects to this amazing woman.

Three former mayors—Ray Cooper, Frank Harrison and John Barrett—attended, as did current Port Macquarie-Hastings Mayor Peta Pinson, as well many colleagues who served alongside Daphne as councillors. As former mayor Mr Cooper said, "I have never experienced that before." Daphne was born on 10 December 1928 and grew up in Belmore, Sydney, with her four siblings. During the service we heard of Daphne's love of motorbikes, which was surprising to many. She was also a successful businesswoman, running a number of delicatessens in Sydney before retiring with her husband, Peter, to Laurieton in 1978. Obviously her retirement did not last long. Luckily for us, it gave her the chance to begin her tireless community work, and for that we are eternally grateful. As priest Michael Roohan summarised:

It was not simply what she did, it was the way she did it. Daphne really challenges each one of us to be the very best we can be and to help those around us.

I had the opportunity to visit Daphne at the nursing home. Although she was in declining health, the conversation was lively and inquiring, as usual, and she was keen to get an update on local issues, as always. The Camden Haven has lost a staunch and determined community advocate, a devoted and hardworking volunteer and, for so many of us, a loyal and genuine friend. I extend my deepest condolences to Daphne's three sons, Ray, Alan and Michael, and their families. Vale, Daphne Gwendoline Johnston.

MAMBO-WANDA WETLANDS CONSERVATION GROUP

Ms KATE WASHINGTON (Port Stephens) (17:21): On Thursday afternoon this Chamber will pause to debate a petition signed by almost 15,000 residents which calls on the New South Wales Government to buy back the Mambo Wetlands. Six hectares of the Mambo Wetlands was sold by this Government to a property developer in 2016 for the paltry sum of \$250,000. In tomorrow's debate I will outline why this low act represents everything that is wrong about this Government's priorities, but today I acknowledge the amazing people who have done all they can to protect this precious piece of land.

I firstly acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, the Worimi people who walked these lands for centuries before any of us. Prior to the Government selling it off, Worimi elder Carol Ridgeway-Bissett sought protection of the Mambo Wetlands as an Aboriginal place. Carol has addressed the community forum and numerous rallies we have held, speaking of the importance of the land and her people's connection to it. I also acknowledge Walter and Margaret Lamond and their fellow members of the Mambo Wanda Wetlands Reserves and Landcare Committee. Walter, Margaret and their fellow Landcare workers have spent the past decades caring for this land.

On 7 May 2016, the "for sale" sign went up. Residents rallied in an effort to stop the sale. Eileen Donaldson set up the first Facebook page to keep people connected and to disseminate information. Many locals joined the push, with more than 200 people attending a community forum and many more attending rallies. I give a special mention to Guy Innes for his beautiful photographs of the wetlands, from soaring sea eagles to iconic shots of koalas licking the sand on the beach, capturing a little-known activity that occurs nowhere else in the world.

Wildlife rescuers such as Ron Land, Simone Aurino and Carmel Northwood from Port Stephens Koalas have contributed enormously to our understanding of the importance of this special parcel of land to our community. I also acknowledge the support I have received in this campaign from shadow Minister for the Environment Penny Sharpe, shadow Minister for Education Jihad Dib, local Labor Party members and members of the Port Stephens Greens, including Robyn Williams and Nigel Waters. The impressive cross-section of community that has supported this effort shows just how much my community cares about this parcel of land that was sold to developers by this Government.

Some months after the sale, a development application was lodged with Port Stephens Council for residential accommodation on the site. A committee of local residents was formed as the Mambo Wanda Wetlands Conservation Group. Spearheaded by Kathy Brown and Irene Jones, these residents lead the fight against the development application and set about organising the petition that will be debated in this place tomorrow. Other valuable members of this group include Heather Callister, Pamela Churchman, Anne Cordwell, Margaret Manning, Robyn Williams, Kassia Klinger, Nigel Waters, Margaret and Walter Lamond, Brian Tehan, Sue Van Mechelen, Jennifer Warman and Sue White. This group held stalls throughout summer, and from early December to late January was able to collect the more than 14,000 signatures necessary to trigger the discussion that will be conducted in this place tomorrow.

As well as the stalls being arranged by the group, the petition was placed in many supportive businesses. They were: Terry White Pharmacy, Nelson Bay; Nelson Bay Discount Pharmacy; Nelson Bay Health Foods; Nelson Bay Gloria Jeans; Nelson Bay Tile House; Our Place Preschool, Nelson Bay; Let's Go Adventure scuba diving, Nelson Bay; Corlette General Store; Marine-Tek at The Anchorage Marina; Port Stephens Pet Warehouse, Taylors Beach; Webster's Newsagency at Little Salamander Bay; McCauley's Bottle Shop, Little Salamander Bay; Hunter Physiotherapy, Salamander Bay; Port Stephens Pet Barn, Salamander Bay; Jax Tyres, Salamander Bay; Amcal Chemist Salamander Bay; Shoal Bay Pharmacy; Horizons Golf Resort; Soldiers Point Bowling Club; Hunter Wetlands Centre; Karuah Centre; Karuah and District RSL Club; Fibonacci Coffee, Raymond Terrace; Meryl Swanson, MP's office Raymond Terrace; Nelson Bay Information Centre; Macadamia Cafe at Medowie; Peninsular Hotel, Nelson Bay; Iggy's Bazaar, Nelson Bay; Nelson Bay Bowling Club; Gloria Jeans, Salamander Bay; the Marina Ice Creamery, Nelson Bay; Lemon Tree Passage Visitor Information Centre; and St Philips Christian College.

I apologise if I did not mention anyone who has contributed to this campaign. I hope the Government recognises how much effort has been put in and the wide cross-section of the community that has been involved in opposing its sale of this precious parcel of land. This has been a true community campaign. I hope it will resonate on the floor of this House tomorrow afternoon when the voices of 14,000 people will be heard in this place. After all, it was not the Government's land to sell; it belonged to the people of New South Wales and it never should have been flogged off to a developer.

BATHURST ELECTORATE LOCAL WOMAN OF THE YEAR AWARD RECIPIENTS

Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst—Minister for Lands and Forestry, and Minister for Racing) (17:26):

It is a great pleasure to draw the attention of the House to International Women's Day, which we will celebrate tomorrow. It is a great opportunity to acknowledge the achievements of many women across this State. I will acknowledge some women in my electorate who are doing amazing things. All members have incredible women in their electorate who are involved in business, sporting organisations, volunteering and community events, and who work tirelessly on behalf of our communities.

The Minister for Women and the Minister for Local Government acknowledged 17 incredible women at Parliament House today during a celebration of the achievements, drive and innovation of women in local government in New South Wales. One of those women was Rebecca Ryan, who was the first female to be appointed as the General Manager of Blayney Shire Council. She is an amazing and hardworking woman who has the respect of the councillors and the entire community. She travels around the area to listen to people and to deliver the projects that the community needs most. The 13 years of local government experience that Rebecca brought to Blayney gave her an appreciation of what a rural council might face. She works diligently with Mayor Scott Ferguson and the council directors. The work she has done in the villages is second to none. She has lobbied and worked with the State Government to transform Millthorpe, where nearly \$1 million of State Government

and council funding has been invested in the local oval. The families in that area are now enjoying the benefit of a State Government and a council working well together.

Local roads have also attracted incredible investment, including the \$10 million being spent in the Errowanbang Road area, which will open up opportunities for farmers, and make it safer and quicker for people driving on the Errowanbang Road to the Acardia mine site. The kitchen, the oval and the fence at the Blayney Showground have also been upgraded. That will make a big difference for community events such as the annual show. Rebecca Ryan does not think only about Blayney; she also has a regional perspective. It is wonderful to have someone with a vision for the growth of the entire Central West. I congratulate Rebecca on being announced as the winner of the General Manager/Senior Staff Member—Rural or Regional Council award.

I also acknowledge Vicki Wilson, who is one of four finalists in the Rex Airlines Regional Woman of the Year Local Award. Vicki has been nominated as the Bathurst 2018 Local Woman of the Year and previously has been named as the Citizen of the Year. She has been organising the Royal Bathurst Show Showgirl Competition for a number of years, and has been a member of Rotary International, Quota International, and the Bathurst Women's Network. She has also been involved in the Rockley Rodeo and has organised the Young Rural Achiever program at the local show. Vicki works tirelessly in the community and I wish her all the best at the ceremony being held in Sydney tomorrow. I also acknowledge my wife. She is an incredible woman and she deserves to be mentioned because of what does in looking after our children. I also acknowledge my mum.

CENTENNIAL PARKLANDS MAINTENANCE

Mr RON HOENIG (Heffron) (17:31): Since the suburb of Centennial Park was redistributed into my electorate at the 2015 State election I have become increasingly concerned about the governance of and the direction being taken with our precious parklands. Some of the attempts to commercialise Moore Park were addressed by the previous Minister for the Environment, the Hon. Mark Speakman, SC, when he intervened. My residents are witnessing the ongoing commercialisation of the parklands, and as recently as last Sunday they complained to me about associated abuses. They watch as the Government creeps closer to the parklands, seeking to excise a piece here and annex a parcel there, such as the light rail annexation when there were clear alternatives.

The Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust is desperate for revenue and it continues to use, or otherwise alienate, its valuable land in the interests of earning a quid. Residents are desperately concerned about the mistreatment of the parklands in association with some events that involve heavier use of the park. The failures of the trust and the abuses of the parklands are a direct result of this Government's ideology and the way in which it treats our open spaces as vehicles for revenue raising. The parklands are not financial instruments; they are not there to deliver a commercial return to the Government.

The parklands are emphatically the people's park. They were first gifted to the people of the colony of New South Wales in 1811 by Governor Lachlan Macquarie, and again by Premier Sir Henry Parkes in the late nineteenth century. The parklands are perhaps Parkes' greatest achievement, after Australian Federation. They were his vision; he introduced the bill in this place that created them, and he presided over their dedication on 26 January 1888. He would be distressed to see their current condition. We have witnessed the saga of the Albert "Tibby" Cotter Bridge and the Kippax Lake Stadium debacle, but there remains fears about the future of Driver Avenue, and there is significant unrest about the future of the Entertainment Quarter.

But commercialisation is happening already and it is continuing apace. What I mean is high-use activities of the parkland. Two such examples are the Electric Gardens Festival and the Sydney City Limits Music Festival. Whatever the merits of music festivals, it is undeniable that those events attract large numbers of people, and concentrate them in a particular place for a specific period of time. This burdens the parklands. Such events can also encourage antisocial behaviour in a small cohort of attendees. And, of course, young people having a good time does entail, to a certain degree, the use of illicit substances.

It must be acknowledged that the trust has been hamstrung and let down by this Government. The trust's figures indicate that it has not received a recurrent funding contribution from the New South Wales Government since 2012-13. It has essentially been cut adrift by the State Government. The trust is fully self-funded, with significant revenue streams coming from commercial and sporting activities. The trust has seen a 30 per cent increase in revenues since 2011, but it has increased its expenditures by only 18 per cent over that same time, and that is obvious. My residents are frustrated at the cutbacks on maintenance. One gentleman was even told that a segment of grasslands near the park's entrance that was dried out and dying could not be watered because there was no money in the maintenance budget. I suppose this is what happens when an executive director and members of the trust have no horticultural experience.

There is a tension at the heart of managing the parklands, which arises from the fact that the objects of the Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust Act, namely to maintain and improve the trust's lands and to maintain

the right of the public to use of the trust's lands, are fundamentally at odds with this commercial direction. Ordinary users of the park are being locked out on event days so that preparations can be made for these large events. This is so that the trust can make the money it needs to be self-sustaining. However, it is not an object of the Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust Act 1983 to be financially self-sustaining or to generate significant revenue streams. It is time for the Minister for the Environment and the Treasury to restore the funding that has been cut from the trust's budget, to repent from the path of commercialisation, and to ensure that the trust's activities in maintaining the parklands as a birthright for all the people of New South Wales is done in keeping with the objects of the Act and not the rubbish we hear from corporate governance consultants.

RUGBY LEAGUE CHARITY SHIELD MATCH

Mr TROY GRANT (Dubbo—Minister for Police, and Minister for Emergency Services) (17:36):

Today I am very proud to congratulate the Mid-Western Regional Council and the communities of Mudgee, Gulgong, Kandos, Rylstone and the surrounding areas of one of the most beautiful parts of the region on their hosting of the historic charity shield match between the South Sydney Rabbitohs and the St George Illawarra Dragons that was held recently at the magnificent Glen Willow Regional Sports Stadium. In this House at this lectern I have, in layman's terms, given the National Rugby League [NRL] some grief for its lack of investment into Country Rugby League [CRL].

At the CRL awards dinner at which I was invited to speak, I have taken the opportunity, in the presence of then Australian Rugby League [ARL] Commissioner John Grant and the Chief Executive Officer [CEO], Todd Greenberg, to give them a gobful about my thoughts on the lack of investment in CRL in regional areas and support for those wonderful volunteers. Coincidentally, I gave them a gobful at the final country versus city match that was held at Glen Willow stadium about a lack of support for fostering rugby league in our areas.

Today I am pleased to congratulate and thank the new ARL Commissioner Mr Peter Beattie and CEO Todd Greenberg for supporting the move of a number of games into country New South Wales. I feel vindicated by each of the gobfuls that I gave the governing body of rugby league in this State because, as I said at the time, if it moves these games and has the right teams competing in areas that have a connectivity and a synergy with the places in which they are playing these games, the crowds will come. And that is what occurred at Mudgee just a couple of weeks ago.

Glen Willow stadium has a seating capacity of 10,000. It is considered probably the best regional football ground in New South Wales, if not in Australia. I know that Coffs Harbour will try to make the nonsense argument that its grounds are better. If it is not first, Apex Oval at Dubbo may be second, so Coffs Harbour is probably around third. I am very proud to represent two communities with the number one and number two rugby league grounds in this State. As I was saying, the magnificent Glen Willow stadium is the home of the Mudgee Dragons. It was pleasing to see—a number of hours before the match—that the line-ups to enter the ground were kilometres long. Everyone was decked out in either their South Sydney Rabbitohs kit or their St George Illawarra Dragons kit, such is the passionate following these two clubs have in western New South Wales. More than 9,100 people packed Glen Willow stadium on a pretty hot day with thunderstorms and some threatening weather. They were not to be deterred and almost packed out that ground.

It was a cracking game of rugby league, as it usually is between these fierce rivals—essentially clubs that share the number one and two positions in the number of premierships won in the competition. I was very pleased to meet the boards of the South Sydney Rabbitohs, who were essentially the home team on the day, and the St George Illawarra Dragons. I thank each of the boards, the administration and the support crew who came out to Mudgee. The way the ground was turned out is a credit to the Mid-Western Regional Council staff. Their operational staff did an exceptional job. It was thoroughly enjoyed by the community.

This is why I wanted to make this statement in this place: The value that game brought to that region was not only on the day with the 9,000-odd people generating income for the town and contributing to the day. The two clubs came and invested time after time with the kids of our region. In one session alone the South Sydney Rabbitohs engaged with more than 650 schoolchildren in our area. They gave them an experience and contact with superstars of the game. A good mate of mine, Greg Inglis, told me how much he loved that component of it. The town responded.

This is not commonly known, but I am happy to place it on the record: As the players were staying in town, the local moteliors organised for people to loan the players their vehicles for the day so that they could easily explore the Mudgee region. It is one of the most beautiful regions in this State. That is country hospitality 101. The players were a little surprised at how well they were welcomed; I was not. I know what a gracious and wonderful community Mudgee is. This is a message to the NRL: It should continue to invest in Country Rugby League because the dividends and the results last for generations and they will continue to help the game of rugby league to grow. If the NRL does not do that, I promise to return to this lectern and hold it to account.

WOMEN IN ENGINEERING AND IT COOPERATIVE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT RACHEL BIRRELL

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater—Minister for Education) (17:42): Today I congratulate Rachel Birrell of Avalon Beach on being the recipient of a Women in Technology and IT Cooperative Scholarship. Rachel, who is 18 years old, completed her Higher School Certificate [HSC] at Barrenjoey High School and is now studying data engineering at the University of Technology Sydney. On applying for a Women in Engineering and IT scholarship, she was hopeful of taking home a \$10,000 grant to support her studies. She was subsequently told her application was so outstanding that she would receive a \$66,000 four-year scholarship. She would also be provided with three industry internship placements with Westpac, Macquarie Bank and Woolworths that she will require to finish her course.

Rachel first saw engineering as a potential career path while taking part in Barrenjoey High School's accelerated engineering course in years 10 and 11. She has also taken part in the University of New South Wales Women in Engineering Camp program, where she met students with similar interests and women with careers in engineering. The camp also gave her the chance to explore opportunities that studying and working in engineering could bring. On behalf of my local community I say how very proud we all are of Rachel and what she has achieved.

This scholarship is a testament to Rachel's dedication, determination, passion and prodigious talent for engineering. It is also a great tribute to Barrenjoey High School and our local community more generally to have provided the environment in which Rachel has been able to thrive. Rachel has pointed to the accelerated engineering course at Barrenjoey as a catalyst. It was key to her pursuing a career in engineering, and doing so with great distinction. It is no secret that here in New South Wales we want to encourage and support our young people to participate in engineering, as well as science, technology and mathematics. This has benefits not only for individual students but also, and more importantly, for our entire community. A 2015 Federal Government report states that advanced physical and mathematical sciences make a direct annual contribution to the Australian economy of about \$145 billion, or about 11 per cent of gross domestic product.

We want our education institutions at all levels to foster deep knowledge, strong achievement, and a great love and passion for these subjects. In particular, we want to ensure young women are welcomed to participate in these disciplines at all levels of education, should they wish to do so. Although no-one may intentionally exclude women from these courses and their subsequent fields of expertise, we must be mindful of how male-dominated professions—and even study areas at universities and schools—can impact a young woman's ambition to chase her dreams. An unspoken but nonetheless pervasive attitude that engineering and technology are men's jobs can have a chilling effect on a young woman's desire to take on a career or a university course in these areas, or even just to have a crack at these disciplines at school.

Rachel has described the rather daunting experience of walking into her classes, and being the only woman. But Rachel was supported by her school—in particular through its accelerated engineering course. With the love and support of her parents, Rachel has seen that engineering is a career path she can pursue, and in which she can shine. Through initiatives such as the University of New South Wales Women in Engineering Camp, through the University of Technology Sydney's Women in Engineering and IT Co-operative Scholarship and other wonderful scholarships women are encouraged to take up engineering, science and maths degrees. I wish Rachel all the very best in her future studies and everything she sets out to do. She should be immensely proud of what she has achieved. I have no doubt she will make a great contribution to her future profession and to her community. She is, and will continue to be, a shining example of what young people can do when they put their minds and their hearts to something.

In the same way that women in science and engineering might draw strength from the double Nobel Prize winner Marie Curie, Brooklyn Bridge engineer Emily Roebling and the inventor of Kevlar, Stephanie Kwolek, there could be young women in the future pursuing their dreams of being mathematicians, web designers, shipbuilders and astronauts, who say they drew strength from Rachel Birrell's achievements and exploits. Indeed, I hope that young women across our State and our nation, now and into the future, can say they were supported, encouraged and inspired by their schools, their families and their communities to believe they can excel in engineering, science and maths.

This week we mark International Women's Day. In my local community of Pittwater we celebrated the occasion with a breakfast this morning, at which Gailene Keen from the Be Centre was honoured as the Pittwater Woman of the Year. I was reminded of the fact that Maybanke Anderson, one of the pioneering suffragettes of early New South Wales, was a Pittwater resident. I am sure that Maybanke would be proud of the achievements of Rachel Birrell—another exemplar from the Pittwater community of a young woman pursuing her dreams.

KING OF THE RANGES STOCKMAN'S CHALLENGE AND BUSH FESTIVAL

Mr MICHAEL JOHNSEN (Upper Hunter) (17:47): I take this opportunity to inform the House that recently in the Upper Hunter community a well-known festival took place for the fifteenth year—the renowned King of the Ranges Stockman's Challenge and Bush Festival at Murrurundi. This popular festival kicked off to a cracking start on Thursday 22 February and went on until Sunday 25 February. It attracted crowds from all over the district and interstate. Back in 2001, local stockmen competed in the Snowy River Challenge in Corryong in Victoria. Talks around the campfire during that event soon centred around the idea of starting something similar in the Upper Hunter. Initially, gaining support was difficult but finally, at the end of 2002, Earl Kelaher the then Mayor of Murrurundi Shire—later to be part of Upper Hunter Shire—offered the Rosedale Horse Complex as a possible venue. So began what has now become one of the premier stockmen challenges in Australia.

During those early discussions a skilled stockman from the early 1900s named Archie "Bung" McInnes was mentioned. He was known as King of the Ranges when working around Moonan and the Barrington Tops. So there it was—Corryong has the Man from Snowy River, and now Murrurundi has the King of the Ranges. Archie Bung McInnes became the inspiration for the challenge. Archie has been described as a character of bygone years, a champion buckjumper, a true blue bushman and just a good fellow. Arch was a true bush legend and his spirit lives on in the iconic festival. He was known throughout the Hunter Valley as the King of the Ranges for his hazardous work as a stockman on the spurs and in the ranges. Arch joined the 1st Battalion Light Horse at the outbreak of World War I, and fought in the desert campaign. He was wounded and decorated with a military medal.

After the war Arch continued his life as a stockman and champion buckjumper. He died in 1940, literally in the saddle, while drafting cattle. For the next 78 years his grave remained unmarked. However, thanks to the persistence of the King of the Ranges Committee members—including Earl Kelaher, Bob Paton, Hilary Turner, Errol Dutton, Graham Clydsdale, Warren Bramley and Doug McIntosh—along with Bung's nephew Barry Moss, negotiations with the Department of Veterans' Affairs have resulted in Bung finally receiving the recognition he deserved. As a result of successful negotiations, I recently had the honour of attending a commemorative ceremony held at the Scone Catholic cemetery, surrounded by King of the Ranges Committee members and guests including Upper Hunter Deputy Mayor Maurice Collison and Barry Moss. The Department of Veterans' Affairs had formally marked Bung McInnes's gravesite with a commemorative plaque. It is due recognition for the iconic stockman and World War I decorated Light Horseman.

This year the King of the Ranges festival staged a range of categories, which included packhorse and stock handling, whip crack, a bareback obstacle course, horse shoeing and a cross-country course plus goat racing. Prize money and trophies were up for grabs. I attended the festival this year. What an outstanding festival it is, attracting many locals and tourists of all ages. I congratulate the executive committee and make special mention of the numerous volunteers, including Kim Clydsdale, Carol McIntosh, Wendy Seckold, Bronnie Johnson and Sue Chacksfield, who contributed their time and expertise for a very successful carnival.

I take this opportunity to congratulate Brian Hunt, OAM, who has been the festival's announcer for many years, along with Des and Sid Collison, and Jim Callinan. Without these hardworking volunteers festivals of this standard would not take place. I encourage everyone, in February next year, to buck on up to the Upper Hunter to attend the next King of the Ranges festival. The committee members have put in a lot of work over the 15 years. They started off with nothing, and it is now becoming very well known as a national event. Stockmen come from all over the country to compete in this very prestigious event. All credit goes to the committee members who have, over the 15 years of the event, diligently and with great passion and commitment, made sure that this festival is now on the national calendar, and it should be recognised as a national event. I congratulate them all.

EPPING ELECTORATE ARMENIAN COMMUNITY

Mr DAMIEN TUDEHOPE (Epping) (17:52): I take this opportunity to acknowledge the many constituents of Armenian descent in my electorate. When people think of the diverse communities in Epping, they immediately think of the Chinese, Korean, and Indian communities, but some members may be surprised to know that my electorate is also home to many Armenian Australians. In fact, there is an Armenian church in my electorate. Epping truly is a multicultural success story. Recently representatives from the Armenian Australian community met with me to tell me more about their people, their culture and their history. Armenians are a proud people, and their path has not always been an easy one, particularly over the past 100 years or so. On 20 February in the Strangers' Dining Room there was a dinner commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the recognition by this Parliament of the Armenian genocide.

In 1997 this Parliament, under Premier Bob Carr, unanimously condemned the Armenian genocide and honoured the memory of the 1.5 million men, women, and children who were killed at the hands of Ottoman forces between 1915 and 1917. Since then members from all sides of politics in this place have acknowledged the

genocide, including the present Premier, who is of Armenian descent. The horrific events of the Armenian genocide and the massacre of innocent civilians over 100 years ago remains a source of ongoing distress for the Armenian people, with some governments still unwilling to acknowledge that it actually happened. That is why, in February this year, the Armenian community commemorated another anniversary—30 years since the Sumgait massacre, when Armenians living in the town of Sumgait were targeted by mobs of Azerbaijani citizens.

It is difficult to ascertain the casualties from the days that followed. There were casualties on both sides. Officially the total was 32 people comprising 26 Armenians and 6 Azerbaijanis, though some have put the actual figure in the hundreds. Tensions between the Armenian and Azerbaijani people have remained heightened ever since the events at Sumgait. The Republic of Artsakh, which also is known as the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, is a region within the borders of Azerbaijan and is home to mostly Armenian people. In a 1991 referendum, the people of Artsakh voted for independence and self-determination. In 2012 this was formally recognised unanimously by the New South Wales Legislative Council. Several States in the United States of America also have recognised the independence of Artsakh, and it continues to campaign for recognition by other governments. The 2012 acknowledgement by the New South Wales upper House is made even more significant because so few jurisdictions around the world have done so.

Hostility in the region continues. As early as February this year, a 20-year-old Artsakh Army officer, Hayk Kalantaryan, was shot dead by Azeri fire at the border that is meant to have an internationally enforced ceasefire. Hayk is not alone. Around 50 Armenian deaths were recorded last year and more than 100 the year before. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [OSCE], which is known as the Minsk Group, is charged with the task of bringing peace to the region. In an effort to return the parties to a more productive negotiation table, the organisation has backed three suggestions that came from the United States Congress: The removal of snipers from the line of contact; increased OSCE monitors on the ground; and the installation of gun-fire locator systems to confirm who is at fault for the constant breaches of the ceasefire, like the one that resulted in young Hayk Karapetyan's death on 9 February. Artsakh and Armenia have agreed to those suggestions. Azerbaijan has not.

The experiences of the Armenian people over the past 100 years or so and the ongoing tensions they are facing in their homeland should make us stop and think about how lucky we are to be living in Australia. That we should be living in a safe, tolerant, and free society is something we should never take for granted because it is something people who live in other parts of the world so desperately want in their own country. I thank the Armenian Australian community for the contribution they make to my electorate and join them in remembering these important anniversaries.

ROADS INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr GLENN BROOKES (East Hills) (17:57): I am a proud member of this Government, which is getting on with the job of delivering infrastructure across the State. Whether we are talking about the bush or Western Sydney, this Government is spending record amounts on road infrastructure projects, upgrading bridges, and fixing roads that will result in reduced travel times and safer travel—all the things that Labor neglected. Despite the benefits that all communities receive from road infrastructure projects, on behalf of the people of East Hills I raise the issue of an important road project that our community desperately needs.

Henry Lawson Drive is a major arterial road that runs all the way from Peakhurst, which is in the member for Oatley's electorate, through my electorate of East Hills to the Meccano Set of lights. It serves as an important link for major employment lands in Western Sydney that are earmarked to expand in the future, especially the Bankstown aerodrome area. Currently, Henry Lawson Drive is a bottleneck, particularly between the M5 and the Meccano Set of lights. Henry Lawson Drive funnels traffic from six lanes both ways on the M5 and six lanes both ways on Woodville Road down to a two-lane road. Simple logic says that the roadway is inadequate.

Every morning and afternoon, residents from my community and beyond are stuck sitting in traffic rather than spending time with their families and doing other things they enjoy. On behalf of all the people who have been stuck in this traffic, I ask the Government to turn its attention to this road and have it fixed. As I stated earlier, this Government and our roads Minister are fixing pinch points across our State. The Liberals and The Nationals are the only parties that build roads and get the job done. I ask the Government to get on with the job of widening Henry Lawson Drive.

WARNERVALE TRAIN STATION

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong) (17:59): On 5 March, Adel wrote to me and stated:

Hi David, For the first time in ages had to park at Warnervale Station. No parking available. What I did, and then sat watching four more do, was try parking on Platform 2 side. Full. Negotiated a tight U-turn and tried Platform 1 side. Full. U-turn again and managed one of the few spots left at the back of Warnies—

Warnies is a local business—

For such a growing area, this wasn't right. Five of us went through the same process, and it's frustrating and stressful. Thankfully I had time on my side. We need our station and frequency of trains [as] a priority.

I totally agree with Adel. It is time the Government provided an answer to the question of what is happening with parking spaces not only at the Warnervale station but also at Wyong and Tuggerah stations. To put members in the picture, in 2009 a new railway station was proposed to be constructed for North Warnervale. Part of the Regional Development Australia [RDA] documentation shows that it would probably cost \$43 million to build a new station with a transport interchange. The cost of that project now has probably blown out to \$50 million. Warnervale is quite a small station. Trains stop there infrequently and it has very little parking. If it were not for a local business, Warnies, which allows people to park on its property, there would be significant issues. Hundreds of new houses are being built in that area but the infrastructure provided by this Government simply is not keeping up.

People are becoming more and more frustrated, not because they suspect infrastructure will not be put in place, but because currently there is no sign of infrastructure. People feel the same sense of frustration concerning redevelopment of the Warnervale Town Centre, the North Warnervale railway station and a number of other locations. There is a planned upgrade for the Pacific Highway at Wyong, which will include moving a transport hub from the western side of the rail line to the eastern side. Part of that will be construction of a new multilevel car park, which will be good for the area. However, after spending \$24 million on planning alone—which would have met most of the cost of construction—there is still no start date for upgrading the roads and construction of the parking station. People at Wyong also cannot find a place in which to park their cars.

In 2009 the Labor Government proposed a \$4.4 million upgrade of parking at the Tuggerah railway station that would have meant the addition of a number of new parking spaces. In 2014, it was recognised that an additional 250 car parking spaces would be needed in the form of a multilevel car park. The proposal is documented in a submission from Regional Development Australia, Central Coast, which calculated at the time that the addition of a multilevel car park would cost \$10 million and the installation of lifts would cost a further \$2 million. The former Labor Government commenced building, but the incoming Coalition Government reprioritised and withdrew funding. Now there is a hole in the ground and there are no lifts, yet Tuggerah is still recognised as a major transport hub. It is close to Westfield and it is the main bus interchange from all of the coastal suburbs. Buses come across from The Entrance so people can catch the train. However, there are insufficient numbers of car parking spaces.

Recently Parliamentary Secretary for the Central Coast Mr Scot MacDonald announced that he would consult with the Wyong Shire Council and the RDA about what projects would attract the proceeds from the sale of the Snowy Hydro Scheme. I suggest to the Parliamentary Secretary that a substantial list of projects already exists; the priorities have been established. Let us get on and start building some of the projects instead of creating new lists. The work has been done. Regional Development Australia has done the work over a 10-year period. The council would agree that all of the things I mentioned, such as parking and station upgrades, are priorities. Let us start allocating some money towards getting those projects underway. Having to wait for years for a project is not good enough. We built more parking spaces at Tuggerah, but it is already full. Let us get on with the job.

MORIAH COLLEGE SEVENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON (Vaucluse—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Local Government, and Minister for Heritage) (18:04): In February, Moriah College kicked off its seventy-fifth anniversary celebrations. Moriah College is an independent Orthodox Jewish school close to my electorate of Vaucluse. The school allows students to complete the New South Wales school curriculum to a high standard while promoting awareness amongst its students of Jewish traditions and ethics and a commitment to Orthodox Judaism. Led by Principal John Hamey and chaired by Giora Friede, it is one of the premium Jewish schools in Australia. It is one school I regularly visit and with which I enjoy a close relationship. The college was founded in 1943 by Abraham Rabinovitch at the height of World War II. Abraham's vision was for a Jewish school in Sydney that could rival any in the broader community—a school where every child, regardless of academic aptitude or financial standing, would have access to an excellent general education and comprehensive Jewish education.

At the launch of the seventy-fifth anniversary celebrations, Moriah College played host to five members of the first kindergarten class from 1943. The school was then known as the North Bondi Hebrew School and Kindergarten. David Scheinberg, Agnes Ginges, Hanni Chalmers, Gary Marx, and Professor Betty Cass were treated to the current students performing a re-enactment of the school's opening day. To date, Moriah College has thrived and produced more than 7,000 graduates who have gone on to bolster their community and contribute

to my electorate of Vaucluse and beyond. The students often feature amongst those across the State who achieve academic excellence in the Higher School Certificate.

In 2017, the school was ranked fifteenth in the State. The students consistently achieve excellent Australian Tertiary Admission Ranks, with at least 60 per cent of students achieving an ATAR over 90 in 2017. Academic achievement has become a cornerstone of the college's reputation and graduates have an excellent foundation for further studies, careers and contributions to our community. Regardless of these academic successes, Moriah College has proved to be a strong institution for children of the Jewish faith and community, and it also supports them to achieve their community and personal goals. I am very proud of the achievements of the many students and alumni who, I am sure, are very thankful to have had the foundation of such an exceptional educational experience

I have had the great pleasure of attending many events at Moriah College over the years, including the year 12 graduation in September last year. It was wonderful to see so many young Jewish people succeed in the school environment. The warmth, genuine affection and respect that I witnessed between students, staff and the broader community was remarkable. Given that it is the seventy-fifth anniversary, it is important to look at the history of Moriah College. The school has a long, rich past; it was borne out of the horrors of World War II. There are many testaments to its immense value to the Jewish people of my electorate and the State of New South Wales. The school also plays a broader role in the community and often hosts important visitors and events. Early last year, the Prime Minister of Israel, Bibi Netanyahu, and his wife, Sarah, visited with the children when they were in Sydney, as did distinguished Harvard Law Professor Alan Dershowitz last week.

When I spoke to Professor Dershowitz, he said his visit to Moriah College, meeting with the children and hearing their musical performances was the highlight of his trip to Australia. It would be remiss of me to not highlight the incredible work and commitment of the people who support the fantastic Moriah College. Principal John Hamey and President Giora Friede are leading the success of Moriah now, and are ensuring its lasting legacy for years to come. I thank also some of the past leaders, principals, presidents and patrons, such as Sir Frank Lowy, AC. Moriah Foundation President Judy Lowy and Chairman Brian Schwartz, AM, have made a strong commitment to making Moriah College the outstanding institution it is today. I commend my private member's statement to the House.

GOULBURN COMMUNITY CABINET

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn—Minister for Family and Community Services, Minister for Social Housing, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault) (18:09): Last week I was lucky enough to host the first community cabinet for 2018 in my electorate of Goulburn. I was delighted to welcome the Premier, Deputy Premier and Ministers of the New South Wales Cabinet to visit and experience the Goulburn region. Several exciting events took place over the week, including some excellent funding announcements and openings of government-funded facilities. First, the Bundanoon District Community Preschool was officially opened with the help of a \$815,000 grant from the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Government. This large investment, which saved the community years of fundraising, clearly demonstrates that this Government is committed to early childhood education and ensuring that our children have the best start in life.

The funding will allow enrolment in Bundanoon to increase from 25 places to 86 places. It is not only about our support for this growing region; it is, as the Premier said before she cut the ribbon, a recognition that early investment in a child's education must be for all children in New South Wales, including those in regional areas. The Premier also had a great chat to families and some very excited children. Next, the Premier and I travelled an hour and a half down the road to Yass, one of the fast growing areas in my electorate. The Yass Valley Men's Shed received a \$20,000 funding boost to upgrade its facility with solar panels and air conditioning. I have seen firsthand the positive social and mental impacts that men's sheds have on our rural communities and I was pleased to be able to make this dream a reality for them.

Whilst in Yass, the Premier, Minister for Health Brad Hazzard and I also announced the new Yass ambulance station location on the Yass District Hospital campus. This \$3.76 million project will include internal parking for up to four emergency vehicles, a multipurpose room, relief accommodation, staff parking, a delivery bay and much more. I am thrilled to be a part of such a big project that was so warmly received by the Yass community. In keeping with our commitment to high education standards in all our regional areas, the Premier also met with students at Yass High School who are studying robotics; it was very hands-on. We were all pleased to finish a great day at the Goulburn Tattersalls Hotel. The culmination of the visit was a community morning tea that preceded the community cabinet. Local leaders of organisations had the opportunity to talk with Ministers and their staff and raise issues relevant to them.

The community morning tea was the perfect setting to announce the 2018 Local Woman of the Year Award recipient, Ms Kerry Hort. Kerry is a staunch advocate for health services in our region and has championed the upgrade of Goulburn Base Hospital. She is also a determined defender of the interests of the broader Goulburn community and is much loved by us all. As a result of community lobbying, the transport Minister, the Premier and I also announced new coach services that will improve transport links between Goulburn and Sydney, and a new day return link between Goulburn and Canberra. The Goulburn community has advocated for further access to Sydney and Canberra, and I was thrilled to announce this coach service trial in response to local concerns. Customers travelling between Goulburn and areas like Bundanoon and Marulan will benefit from a new coach connection to trains each morning. The new service will deliver commuters to Sydney by 8.10 a.m.—half an hour earlier than existing services.

Community consultation on these services will start this weekend. I encourage all in the Goulburn electorate to have their say so they can achieve the most out of the new services. The successful funding announcements continued with \$200,000 for the Goulburn Soldiers Club for a kitchen upgrade to assist in times of local emergency. The Minister for Lands and Forestry, and Minister for Racing the Hon. Paul Toole and I met with the manager to announce their successful application to the ClubGRANTS infrastructure program, which will be very welcomed. Historically, the Goulburn Soldiers Club has only been able to offer cold sandwiches in times of natural disaster or crisis. Although I would never hope for such a serious emergency, it is comforting to know they will now be able to offer a hot meal and comfortable area for the Goulburn community to stay when and if the need arises. This Government has invested record funds in the Goulburn electorate in the areas of health, schools, sports facilities and emergency services. I am pleased and proud that the New South Wales Cabinet had the opportunity to witness firsthand the effects of this funding and the strengths of this magnificent region and its growth possibilities.

POKER MACHINES

Ms TAMARA SMITH (Ballina) (18:14): New South Wales has the most poker machines in Australia, and Australia has 20 per cent of the world's poker machines. New South Wales has the highest rate of community losses on poker machines in the country, and we spend the second-highest amount of money on pokies in the world, second only to Nevada, which is not something we should be proud of. Across my electorate, approximately \$40 million annually is blown on poker machine gambling. Poker machines are designed to earn revenue for the venue owners, not to provide a win for players. The structure and design of poker machines can also trick a player into thinking that they are not betting much money and therefore have nothing to lose.

With more than half a million problem gamblers in Australia—and this is a conservative figure—we know those addictive machines that do not give returns on investment is impacting families and communities in an insidious way. Money that should be going towards feeding children and paying rent is being drained by pubs, clubs and the New South Wales Government, which returns less than 2 per cent of the profits to the community in the form of grants. We also know that the clubs donate huge sums from their profits to the Liberal Party, The Nationals and the Labor Party to ensure their unfettered gaming success.

We have only to look at the recent Tasmanian election to see the power of vested gambling interests and their ability to out-spend any party that challenges the status quo. Federal Independent member of Parliament Andrew Wilkie recently said that whistleblowers had revealed that hotels owned by Woolworths kept databases of customers who gamble, including their habits and behaviours. This is not a nanny State and we welcome people being offered free food and drinks and other perks while visiting clubs. Some might ask: What is the big deal? The Greens will watch this situation carefully because the big deal is that clubs are preying on vulnerable people who have an addiction. A secret database used to exploit vulnerable people and boost gambling profits is totally unacceptable. Woolworths is a company that trades on a family-friendly image, but this behaviour targets the most vulnerable people in our community. The Greens are calling on Woolworths to do the right thing and get out of the pokies business.

I recently met with Reverend Tim Costello, patron of World Vision Australia, to recognise the Beach Hotel Byron Bay as the first hotel in a regional area of New South Wales to remove gaming machines because of the social harm gambling causes to many families. The State Government announced yesterday that it would impose caps on poker machines in local communities, but it fails to reduce the gambling harm that poker machines are designed to inflict. As with any addiction, knowing that the odds are stacked against the player—and we know that on a standard five-line poker machine with a top prize a player has a one in 9.7 million chance of winning—does not counter compulsive gambling. Any pokies plan that fails to rapidly reduce the total number of machines in New South Wales continues to lock in increasing harm to people and communities. Those measures will not stop the addictive features that exploit people. They do not rein in the predatory behaviour of clubs and hotels to maximise profits, and they do not keep people and communities safe from a gambling addiction.

If the Government is serious about tackling the impacts of pokies then it must regulate the addictive features of these machines, introduce \$1 maximum bets and adopt measures such as The Greens have proposed in a comprehensive plan for rapidly reducing the number of pokies in New South Wales. Under The Greens' Putting An End To Pokies plan, machine owners will need to pay a Commonwealth levy on poker machines at a fixed price per machine. Those levies would then be put into a Commonwealth compensation fund and paid out annually to States once they agree to phase out pokies. State governments would be able to access the compensation fund only when they commit to freezing poker machine licences and phasing out machines over time.

My father, grandfather and great-grandfather are all war veterans. In my meeting with Reverend Costello I raised my concerns about veterans and problem gambling. He told me that veterans are the category of people who contact him the most about problem gambling. RSL clubs were designed to support veterans and their families. The idea that those clubs prey on the vulnerable and play a part in harming families due to problem gambling would not be supported by any veteran I have ever known.

HEARING AWARENESS WEEK

Ms FELICITY WILSON (North Shore) (18:19): Hearing Awareness Week has just taken place and has again drawn attention to the importance of hearing health in our community. I supported the formation of the Parliamentary Friends of Hearing Health and Wellbeing, which is underway, and I remind all members of my invitation to reflect on the importance of hearing and to join me in raising awareness of this issue. Hearing Awareness Week is one step towards increasing awareness of this issue, and I invite members of Parliament to participate in the projects of organisations like Hear For You, an amazing organisation focused on helping young people who are deaf or hard of hearing. The organisation was first brought to my attention by its chief executive officer and North Shore local David Brady.

Due to barriers to education and social integration, loss of productivity, cognitive decline and depression caused by hearing loss, unaddressed hearing loss is estimated to cost the economy \$750 billion. While hearing aids have come a long way from the ear trumpet in the early twentieth century to twenty-first century digital in-ear aids, which can tune into specific audio wave lengths and frequencies, we still need to work towards a cure. This is more apparent to me than ever after joining Hear For You to take part in its Silent Hour Challenge. For one hour special ear buds are used to simulate what it is like to live with a hearing loss of 40 to 60 decibels. During this challenge I tried to take part in my normal day. To be frank, this was one of the biggest challenges I have undertaken. Trying to go about my daily job, which involves communicating with and listening to constituents and businesses, was a struggle and a huge eye-opener. It was a fantastic experience for me to gain some small understanding of how hearing loss impacts millions of Australians every day.

I spent the day of the challenge in Crows Nest speaking to businesses and constituents and I found there were many small difficulties. Like all good politicians, I love to talk and I try my best to listen. However, this hearing impairment made it very hard to communicate naturally. My language was more stilted because of the distraction in my head of my own voice. It was also hard to be in a group and feel part of a conversation. Even though people tried to include me, I could not catch every word. Therefore, it was hard to engage in the flow of the conversation. It was easier to engage one on one because I could look at the other person's facial expressions and read their lips, but if the person turned away or we were walking side by side, it was difficult for me to hear them. An interesting side effect was that I found it hard to remember what I had done in the hour because I spent so much energy focusing on trying to understand everyone. It gave me some small insight into the struggles faced by people with a hearing impairment and how hard everyday tasks become with just a reduction in hearing. I give special thanks to the young people from Hear From You, Jackson and Olivia, who guided me through the experience, as well as Pauline Findlay of National Acoustic Laboratories and David Brady from Hear For You, who organised the simulation.

Hearing and quality of life are closely linked. Poor hearing affects both the person with the loss and those with whom they communicate. A recent study on the effects of untreated hearing loss on adults as well as their families found that hearing loss impacts on our social, emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing. People with a hearing impairment can experience embarrassment, loss of confidence, irritability and anger, depression, a feeling of being ignored, dependence on others, withdrawal, isolation and loneliness, exclusion from family and social activities, and extreme tiredness. Family members and close friends may find themselves talking for the other person or having to continually explain or interpret for them. They may sacrifice engaging in activities or make assumptions about what hard-of-hearing people think or need. They may feel frustrated or embarrassed in their company or feel tired. Those effects mean that hearing loss can place very real strains on relationships. While hearing aids can make a huge difference, prevention is the best cure. The major cause of hearing loss is noise injury, and 37 per cent of those injuries could have been prevented.

Hearing loss is on the increase, particularly among young people and farmers. This is due to leisure activities such as the use of personal music players and social and recreational noise. Farmers turn up their music player headphones to block out machinery noise such as that made by tractors. This noise injury also increases their risk of tinnitus. The message from Hearing Awareness Week is that people should get tested if they are concerned about a hearing loss, or if they are concerned about a family member or friend. Hearing loss is not only preventable but also easily treated. It is one of the most common disabilities in the world. One in six Australians—3.55 million people—has a form of hearing impairment. The number of Australians with a hearing impairment is expected to increase to one in four by 2050. Let us acknowledge Hearing Awareness Week and ensure that we all seek access to treatment and prevention. [*Time expired.*]

Visitors

VISITORS

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Adam Crouch): I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of Sonia Phillips, former Mayor of Hills Shire Council, together with her guests from the United States. I hope that they enjoy their time this evening in the New South Wales Parliament.

Private Members' Statements

NEWCASTLE BUS SERVICES

Ms JODIE HARRISON (Charlestown) (18:25): Yesterday I was unable to contribute to debate on the motion of censure of the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure because the Government gagged that debate. Today I will draw attention to the concerns of my constituents and the issues they would have liked me to have raised in debate on the censure motion. I repeat what Hunter members of Parliament and I have said time and again: Newcastle bus route changes have limited operating hours and significantly increased journey times, which has impacted on my constituents, in particular, schoolchildren and people with disabilities. Yesterday the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure said there had been no changes to school bus services in the Hunter. This morning the 819 bus did not get children to school by 9.00 a.m. This bus is continually late and sometimes it does not show up at all. It is unacceptable and ludicrous that a school bus does not get children to school well before 9.00 a.m.

Private operator Keolis Downer said it has given priority to ensuring that students are able to travel to and from school, that it will be monitoring school services closely, and that it remains open to making changes if necessary. At what point will it be necessary to make changes? Will it make changes when school buses stop arriving within half an hour of schools finishing? Last week a St Marys school bus did not arrive until 4.00 p.m. Students were standing on the side of the road waiting and teachers were kept waiting with them. My electorate office staff and I rarely received inquiries about school buses, but now we receive them daily. We have Newcastle Buses on speed dial. Regardless of what the Minister said, it is clear that these buses are broken. Yesterday the Minister's response to the censure motion was that this Government was delivering 1,200 extra transport services. Our constituents are angry as the Government is not listening. The Minister also said that patronage on Newcastle Buses has risen 5 per cent. Michael, one of my constituents, said in response:

How stupid is the Minister? If you split what used to be one trip into two or three, your numbers should double if not triple. So overall this actually shows a 50 to 75 per cent downturn in relativity.

Daniel said:

Your sly trick of making everyone catch two or three buses to get anywhere is not fooling us. It is the same amount of people; they are just catching more buses.

Jo took the words right out of my mouth when she wrote:

If you're seeing positive signs, then I say you need your eyes checked.

It is not the agenda of the Hunter Labor members of Parliament to make this a publicity stunt; it is our agenda to provide quality representation for our constituents. I repeat what the member for Newcastle said yesterday: Government members are welcome to come to the Hunter to speak to people about our buses. In light of the fact that they refuse to do so and insist that this is a publicity stunt, I will provide the House with more direct quotes. Gabrielle said:

You can turn your figures any way you want. The people of the Hunter now have a much worse service than they had previously. Affected mostly are those least able to speak for themselves like the disabled. Shame on you.

The message is clear: Commuters who caught one bus are now catching two or three. It is simple maths. Patronage is not up and my constituents know that the Government is lying.

Mr David Harris: Smoke and mirrors.

Ms JODIE HARRISON: As the member for Wyong said, it is smoke and mirrors. The New South Wales Government should wake up to itself and stop treating people in the Hunter like fools.

BANKSIA MENTAL HEALTH UNIT REDEVELOPMENT

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth) (18:30): I am continuing my push to build a better Banksia Mental Health Unit in Tamworth by lodging a community petition in the New South Wales Parliament calling for its redevelopment. I am proud to be able to lodge this petition, which contains 13,080 signatures. I thank Tamworth Mental Health Carers Support Group facilitator Di Wyatt and her dedicated team as well as every community member who signed the petition. It clearly shows that the community is behind this project. I am determined to ensure that this mental health facility is upgraded. Recently I invited the Minister for Mental Health to visit Banksia. Following a statewide audit of mental health facilities Tamworth is now being considered for State Government funding, which is fantastic news for our community and a massive step forward in my campaign to build a better Banksia.

Planning is the next step and an important part of that process is community consultation. I want to ensure that that occurs through the Tamworth Mental Health Carers Support Group, and I want our communities involved. Built in 1993, Banksia desperately needs to be upgraded. It is a 25-bed facility and under the Mental Health Act it accepts both voluntary and involuntary patients over the age of 18 years. Incredible work is being done by dedicated staff in the existing unit. We need to support them as well as the patients who are acutely unwell and who need treatment. They need the best environment to assist them in their recovery. I am proud to say that we have the best staff. I now want the facility to match. I will share some of the letters I have received from people who have contacted my office. I have met with many community groups and individuals, and I will relate some of their stories. One couple said:

We have a daughter with bipolar. Our daughter was in Banksia last year after attempting suicide. We heard a lot of stories about Banksia and unfortunately they were all true. We found Banksia to be dismal and dilapidated. We found it difficult to get in and difficult to get out. There was no privacy while we were visiting our daughter.

Another couple said:

We speak from our own family's experience. We have a lengthy personal experience with our mental health service and with Banksia in particular since its opening in 1993 and in 1987 as our son developed schizoaffective disorder and has frequently been an inpatient at Banksia.

One family said:

My first introduction to Banksia was when my eldest son became unwell in 2018 with mania, delusions and risky behaviours. My first impressions of Banksia were jail-like, drab and dingy. It was located at the back of the hospital, a long walk uphill from the hospital's emergency department and no support person to assist me in my crisis, shocked and frightened state.

Another individual stated:

When my son becomes unwell it usually means he has to be taken to Banksia by police and/or ambulance, and he gets extremely paranoid and anxious and is too unwell for me to get him there any other way. Then to be admitted to that depressing jail-like facility, through no fault of his own, it is upsetting, frightening and degrading for him, and devastating for me. He is not a criminal. My relief at having him admitted for help is always overshadowed by worrying about him being harmed. Another family states:

My daughter has been in many mental health facilities over the years, from Goulburn to Coffs Harbour and most in between, as well as Banksia a number of times. Banksia, unfortunately, I would have to say, is in such poor condition that patients feel they are often discharged in a poorer state than when they are admitted. I cannot place blame on the staff, as they work under difficult situations and are often not trained in the mental health field.

I am pleased to be able to lodge this petition on behalf of my community. The petition will be discussed in this Chamber on Thursday 15 March 2018. This is only the first step towards securing the funding to make it happen and to build a better Banksia Mental Health Unit for Tamworth.

CASTLE HILL ELECTORATE INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Castle Hill—Minister for Multiculturalism, and Minister for Disability Services) (18:35): It is with great pleasure that I update the House on the continued growth and transformation of the Castle Hill electorate. This evening there is a special dinner in the Strangers' Dining Room commemorating the Battle of Vinegar Hill, which occurred 220 years ago. This battle is of significance in my area as it is directly linked to the convict uprising and the Castle Hill rebellion. As an ancestor of Robert Allen who was among the Irish political convicts sent to these shores on board the *Marquis Cornwallis* in 1796, we were fortunate he was not involved in this battle, given all participants were hanged for treason. Rather, Robert Allen was fortunate to receive a land grant on Castle Hill Road thanks to the emancipation of convicts by the father of Australia, Governor Lachlan Macquarie.

We in the Hills have come a long way since our humble beginnings. The settlement of our area followed the construction of its two main arterial roads—Windsor Road to Windsor and Old Northern Road to Wisemans

Ferry and the Hawkesbury River. Much of the land in the early years following settlement was farmed and at one stage produced most of Sydney's citrus. Much has changed since then with the area now a vibrant and thriving community that offers modern schools, high-quality housing, excellent shopping centres, employment and some of the best sports fields and facilities in the State. This weekend I will be attending the official opening of the Hills Basketball Stadium—the jewel in our sporting crown. The Hills Basketball Association had outgrown the existing stadium venue. With New South Wales Government grant support, the \$4.3 million extension has increased the number of full-size courts to six, making the Hills Basketball Stadium the largest basketball facility in New South Wales.

New sports fields have also been provided at Caddies Creek Reserve. These fields and facilities have been designed to cater for various sports. The land originally intended for trunk drainage was donated by the New South Wales Government and developed with the generous support of the Hills Shire Council. This reserve has set a new benchmark in providing much-needed sporting facilities and achieving excellent environmental sustainability through the preservation of sensitive riparian corridors and wetlands, which adds to the amenity and enjoyment of local residents. When completed, stage 1 of the new sporting and recreation reserve will deliver four new sporting fields, two amenities buildings, two kilometres of shared pedestrian cycle paths, which incorporate four new bridges, and an abundant parkland for the community to enjoy. Facilities like these significantly add to our quality of life and reflect the unique nature of the Hills area. I commend this Government and our local Hills Shire Council for recognising the north-west's potential and bringing this vision to reality. Our area offers it all, including a much sought after aspirational and coveted lifestyle.

This week new trains have been tested for the Sydney Metro Northwest, which is due for completion in 2019. The spectacular new bridge across Windsor Road has been completed, and it has put Rouse Hill on the map. The new rail bridge, which is a smaller replica of the Anzac Bridge, provides a seamless crossing for rail commuters accessing Rouse Hill town centre rail station. With the widened M2, the M7, the Sydney Metro Northwest, NorthConnex and WestConnex and the recently announced North South Rail Link to the new Badgerys Creek Airport, Castle Hill is more connected than ever to the broader metropolitan area—a far cry from the dismal days under the Labor Government, which only ever produced colour brochures and press releases but nothing tangible such as services or outcomes for our growing communities.

Improvements to our main arterial roads are making a significant difference and upgrades to sub-arterial roads are improving access within the electorate. From the \$60 million upgrade of Showground Road to new important link roads such as Samantha Riley Drive and Foxhall Road, these improvements will have a massive impact on the daily lives of our local constituents. Work is about to commence at the intersection of Old Northern and Glenhaven roads—one of the most notorious intersections in our area. The tender process is complete and a construction management company has been tasked with upgrading this busy and dangerous intersection. After the relocation of services the next step of the project includes reconstruction and widening of Old Northern Road and Glenhaven Road, and the installation of traffic signals. I commend the council, Roads and Maritime Services and the New South Wales Government for jointly funding the \$9 million road improvement project, which will significantly improve road safety and traffic conditions for residents in this area.

I note the increase of 700 new bus services since January last year, which is providing residents with additional services to Parramatta, Macquarie Park and the Sydney CBD. The existing commuter car parks are now full each day with new park-and-ride facilities well underway in readiness for the commencement of the new metro rail line in 2019. Residents across the Hills are finally receiving high-quality infrastructure under this Liberal-Nationals Government, which, as I said, is a far cry from the promises made by the Labor Government for decades—promises of new rail and bus links to our area which were never delivered. We never received any tangible infrastructure investment, which contrasts with the investment that has been delivered by this Liberal-Nationals Government.

WESTERN SYDNEY TRANSPORT SERVICES

Ms PRUE CAR (Londonderry) (18:40): Over the weekend State and Federal governments and the Blue Mountains, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Hawkesbury, Liverpool, Penrith and Wollondilly councils announced the Western Sydney City deal. The most significant announcement made as part of that deal is that the first stage of the North South Rail Link from St Marys to the Western Sydney airport will be built. The Labor Party welcomes the decision to build part of the new Western Sydney rail line project. The Federal Labor Party and NSW Labor have been saying for some time that the rail line must be operational from day one of the Western Sydney airport.

The Western Sydney airport will be a game changer for Western Sydney but only if public transport investment and planning are right from day one. If the airport is to be a success, the remaining components of the rail line must be built. It was disappointing that the announcement did not include the necessary link to Macarthur and the extension to Rouse Hill—connections that are vital if this deal is to succeed. On many occasions I have

advocated that this rail line must be built. All the research and advice suggest that this project will be the catalyst for new jobs and industry associated with the aerotropolis, as well as growth in housing and population. As everyone knows, Western Sydney's population is already booming. I have spoken before in this place about how we need to properly plan and adapt to the challenges that come with exponential growth in our part of the world. I believe that this announcement is just the beginning.

Investment in the North South Rail Link is welcome and long overdue, but proper planning and consultation are vital if the project is to succeed. Early indications show that the North South Rail corridor will be built through the suburb of Claremont Meadows and surrounding suburbs in my electorate of Londonderry. If the Government is to acquire homes in order for the rail line to be operational from day one of the Western Sydney airport, residents deserve to know now. The Government needs to tell us. Residents have a right to know whether their homes will be acquired or whether they will be living next to this new rail line. They have a right to be consulted and listened to by their Government.

It is disappointing that the State Government has been so slow to guarantee public transport corridors in Sydney's growth regions—an issue I have spoken about ad nauseam in this Chamber. In some suburbs in my electorate families have been waiting years—in some cases decades—for the Government to come clean and to release public transport corridors. Since the weekend I have been contacted by hundreds of residents who, after watching the nightly news, have raised legitimate concerns about their houses being acquired. As the local member it is my job to fight for residents who may be affected, to keep the community informed and to ensure that our voice is heard.

Residents in Claremont Meadows deserve to be heard, given that many of them have already faced significant disruption in their community. I have written to the Minister for Planning and asked that he instruct the department to hold a community meeting in Claremont Meadows to answer outstanding questions resulting from this weekend's announcement. Residents in Claremont Meadows and surrounding suburbs and I await the Minister's response. These residents should not be ignored in this Western Sydney City deal.

CHARLESTOWN ELECTORATE WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AWARD RECIPIENT MAREE EDWARDS

Ms JODIE HARRISON (Charlestown) (18:44): In celebrating International Women's Day, I draw the attention of the House to a couple of notable women in my electorate. I congratulate Maree Edwards, the winner of the Women in Local Government Award Non-Senior Staff Member—Rural or Regional Council category. Maree is a proud descendant of the Wonnarua people and she has been Lake Macquarie City Council's Aboriginal Cultural Development Officer for five years, acting as a link between the council and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. She loves her dog, Fifi, her son, Cody—who loves her in return—her friends, her council and her home. She loves her culture and constantly seeks to learn more about it for her own identity and also so that she can share her knowledge with others, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

In addition to her role at council, Maree is a volunteer representative on Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery's Aboriginal Reference Group and a board director at the Centre for Hope, which is a Lake Macquarie based not-for-profit that works to empower disadvantaged youth through community outreach and mentoring programs. I have spoken about that centre in this place previously. Maree also works with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, guiding groups of all ages through the Glenrock State Conservation Area and sharing her knowledge of local Aboriginal history and culture. Maree facilitates a number of key programs in Lake Macquarie, including the council's annual Close the Gap, Reconciliation and NAIDOC Week events, grants programs, cultural displays at council facilities, and awareness training for council staff and external stakeholders. Maree is also the editor of the quarterly *Koori Grapevine* newsletter.

Maree provides the acknowledgment of country at the council's regular citizenship ceremonies. Her moving acknowledgement is always commented upon by the new citizens from dozens of countries around the world. Over the weekend, Maree acknowledged country at the NSW State Surf Life Saving Championships held at Blacksmiths Beach, which the hundreds of competitors listened to incredibly intently. In 2013 she authored a report that was successfully endorsed by Lake Macquarie City Council to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags permanently displayed within the council chambers. I am pleased that I was the mayor at that time and so was able to support her recommendation.

In addition to her active promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through events and cultural awareness programs, Maree has helped to facilitate effective consultation with elders, local Aboriginal land councils and the wider community on a number of key strategic documents, including the council's Statement of Commitment and Aboriginal Community Plan. Maree's work contributed significantly to the council being named the NSW Aboriginal Council of the Year in 2016 and to ensuring that other council staff were recognised

at the awards. She submitted successful nominations in the Young Achiever and Outdoor Employee of the Year categories.

In recent years Maree, in partnership with the NSW Police Force, has helped to facilitate the Tunbilloko Exchange Program in Lake Macquarie, which aims to broaden the horizons of young Aboriginal boys from regional areas by introducing them to educational, recreational and cultural opportunities with local police, educational institutions and community groups. Boys from Lake Macquarie, Bourke and Brewarrina high schools are nominated to participate in the program based on their positive record with the police and good attendance and behaviour at school. After their five-day city exchange, participants are encouraged to inspire others by sharing their experience with their peers.

Following the success of Tunbilloko Exchange Program, this year Maree helped to launch Wungkun Nubalan, which means young women learning together. The exchange program aims to help young Aboriginal women from regional areas to realise their potential by connecting them with educational, recreational and cultural opportunities that showcase the array of opportunities available to them post-school. Maree is also a mentor with the Sista Speak Program, which sees her visit local high schools to offer advice, encouragement and guidance to young Aboriginal women. She actively promotes and participates in Walk a Mile Koori Style, White Ribbon Day, 16 Days of Activism, and Got Your Back Sista. I cannot think of a more worthy winner of the Women in Local Government Award Non-Senior Staff Member—Rural or Regional Council. I congratulate Maree Edwards

ZONE LASER TAG AUSTRALASIAN CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) (18:49): The scene was apocalyptic and the atmosphere tense as Albury became the home of the Zone Laser Tag Australasian Championships. The event was far from nerdy; in fact, it was full of action. It is also a terrific boost to the local Albury economy. It was a vision not of the future but of an alternative present that has existed under the radar for some time, growing in reach and impact, mostly, but not exclusively, among the young. These championships—it is the twentieth time they have been held—are taking place at the premises of Zone Laser Tag Albury over 10 days, from 1 March until 10 March. It might come as a surprise to members to learn just how popular laser tag has become and the impact the championships can have, particularly on a regional town or a city such as Albury.

The 2018 tournament pitched 37 teams in competition, comprising some 216 registered players in total. When one adds the players, administrators and guests, and builds in the length of stay in town, the economic benefits for hospitality and associated industries become clear. Teams came to Albury from most capital cities in Australia, with participants from New Zealand and the United States. One team travelled from Finland. Four teams were local to Albury, which again demonstrates the impact of the championships in bringing visitors to our city. Members should not underestimate the drive and commitment of those who participate in this activity. Far from the lazy viewpoint that portrays young people as inactive spectators tied by digital ropes to a couch-bound lifestyle, the participants in this tournament are on their feet, darting around and engaging in physical and mental activity.

Surprisingly, competition begins at 8.00 a.m. and concludes each day at midnight. It is an unusually lengthy competition compared with many other sports. There is no rest for those with a laser in their hands. Competitors wear a device that registers every hit from a laser gun. They can tag people as well as bases, which have significance in the game. Points are awarded and scores appear on an electronic board. The playing field is a 500 square metre custom-built arena. Players must negotiate a challenging course, moving around carefully placed walls and obstacles that offer both protection and concealment. Tension is heavy in the air, even when a player is standing still. This is a game of skill and of strategy, and it is played in the dark. Members can appreciate how it gets the pulse racing.

There are five players per team, and three teams join in competition against each other in a single game. Players at these championships ranged in age from 12 to more than 50. When they were not at the tournament centre they could be seen around the streets of Albury in graphic T-shirt uniforms. Barry and Kerry Elliott, the proprietors of Zone Laser Tag Albury, have put on a carefully managed and challenging tournament for participants, from the opening ceremony to the closing dinner for 260 later this week, to be held in one of Albury's large clubs. Barry explained the action. Data is crunched and presented constantly to those waiting outside the arena. Games are streamed live to more than 5,000 fans across the world. Melbourne-based company Zone Laser Tag was driving the data collection and manipulation. The software has set the international standard and is used in 1,200 locations around the world, including the United States and Europe. In preparation, pre-nationals were held last June, with 19 teams coming from across Australia and New Zealand. That was a record number.

This tournament was won by Adelaide team Wolfpack. Last year's Australasian championships, which were held in Adelaide, attracted 33 teams. This is another record beaten by Albury and is surely a sign of things to come. The Finnish team won the opportunity to participate in this Australasian tournament when it was

victorious in the 2017 World Championships held in France. I spoke with Izi Provialer of team GP about his experience in Albury. He said that he found the going "very tough" and it was "a high level competition", but he was enjoying his time in Australia with his teammates. Back home in Finland, Izi works in his family business making traditional products from reindeer horn and wood, such as the kuksa cup. Crafted from birch, this is a personal wooden cup of the arctic region that a person might keep for life. It seems a long way from laser games!

Dan Baker, a participant at the games, was also one of three tournament coordinators, helping lead a substantial volunteer workforce. He explained how the stop-start nature of the activity was akin to netball. "Australia has the biggest laser tag competition in the world," he told me, outlining a vision for expansion of the sport onto a bigger stage. I know we will see and hear more about Zone Laser Tag in Australia. Its special fusion of technology, strategy, team building, and physical activity is helping to build a community of like-minded followers around the world. I thank Barry and Kerry Elliott for running Zone Laser Tag Albury and for taking on the mammoth task of holding the games. I send my congratulations to all participants, volunteers and tech people who have made this two-week tournament in Albury an amazing, mythical experience.

CHILD SEXUAL ASSAULT

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong) (18:54): Tonight I raise quite a difficult subject. I raise this issue in the House because some parents are very frustrated about the way the system works. At the same time, I am not being critical of the system because it is such a difficult issue. I refer to the question of what our schools do when a young student, particularly in kindergarten to year 2, is interfered with sexually by another student in K-2. I have been informed of two recent cases, one at a private school and one at a public school. One case involved a kindergarten student who was assaulted on a bus and the other involved a year 1 student who was assaulted in the school toilets.

This is a very difficult area because I believe the schools and the systems involved have done their utmost to address the situation. But in both cases we are left with a situation where the parents of the victims are reticent to send their children back to school because the other children involved are still students there. The schools are in the difficult position of having perhaps used suspension or some other measure but being unable to remove the perpetrator from the school because the perpetrator's rights must also be protected. In both the cases I mentioned the recommendation made to the parents of the victims was that maybe they needed to move their child to another school.

Both sets of parents—the incidents are totally separate and the parents do not know each other—have come to me expressing similar thoughts: If they tell their young child, who enjoys being at the school with their friends, who likes their teacher and who likes being in class, that they have to move it might cause their child to think somehow it was their fault that they were assaulted. I understand the parents' reasoning when they ask: Why is the perpetrator not moved? It is a very difficult situation with no easy resolution. My question is: What do schools and parents do to support the students involved, both perpetrators and victims?

As a former school principal, I worry about what I would have done in a similar situation. There are no clear answers because both sets of students have rights that need to be maintained. Both are too young to be criminally liable for any wrongdoing. In the normal course, one would go through the usual process of informing Family and Community Services and assume that some sort of investigation would be conducted. But even if we do everything we are supposed to do—all the boxes are ticked—we must ask: Are the victims being supported enough? Are the perpetrators being supported enough? Both sides need to be considered. It is very difficult.

I also worry about the serious time constraints on school counsellors. School counsellors now spend most of their time doing assessments. For example, students who are to be funded for disability support must be assessed. This has become almost an industry and it takes up most of school counsellors' very precious time. They might not have adequate time to deal with students who are in the situation I have described, so parents are forced to go outside the system—which they may be unable to afford to do—to get support for their children.

In both the cases I mentioned, as far as I am aware—at least up until last week—the parents have not returned the children to school. It then becomes an issue of attendance and truancy because the parents are keeping their children at home. My heart bleeds for them because, as a parent, I do not know what I would do if I knew that my child had to go to school every day and see the child who had assaulted them in the playground or in the classroom—two of them are in the same class.

I do not know what the answer is, but I raise the issue in this place because such incidents seem to be occurring more often. When I first became a principal I had not heard of any instances. But by the time I finished teaching, 23 years later, these incidents had happened at several schools that I knew of—luckily not at any of the schools where I was employed. My wife has had to deal with such a situation recently at her school. It is a very difficult area and might be something that the Attorney General can examine with the education department. It is

a matter not only for the education department but also for the Catholic education system. All schools are grappling with the question of how to support children in this difficult situation.

GOSFORD ELECTORATE PLANNING

Ms LIESL TESCH (Gosford) (18:59): I thank the member for Wyong for his comments, which were very thought provoking. On that note I say, "Go Gosford, bring it on!" It is a city at the starting blocks ready to go. The plans have been done, the private developers are starting to build and cranes are on the horizon. And what are we getting from the Government? A new plan. Is this Government completely out of touch with rural and regional New South Wales? Is it really listening to the people of Gosford? I thank the Government for the simultaneous arrival of the new coordinator general and Labor's victory in the by-election last year. The planning Minister visited the beautiful Gosford electorate for his holidays and described Central Coast Coordinator General Ms Lee Shearer as a "head kicker" who will get things done for the Central Coast. Go Lee! Let us see this happen.

The people of Gosford want real government investment so that we have jobs on the coast, rather than the sale of Crown land to developers for a profit and the transfer of public servants due to job cuts in other locations. The people of the Gosford electorate and on the coast have planning fatigue. We have been planned to death and may soon die if we do not get some real action. Surely someone in the Liberal Party has told the Liberal Government we are sick to death of plans. I would much rather go to the election next year with lots of successful changes in Gosford. Many years and plans ago precincts were established as the best way to manage Gosford's development in the medical, education, cultural and commercial areas and on the waterfront. Still to this day the plan is to look at developing by precinct.

It is time to implement the precincts and to invest in real change for the people of the city of Gosford. The problem is that the Federal Government and now the State Government have plonked administrative buildings on the waterfront, contrary to the previously outlined precincts. What a shame that the covert State Government sale of the school site has deprived our community of the long-term benefits of an active, enlivened waterfront, which includes our performing arts centre. I have here today a handful of previous plans, records of old public consultations, bunches of newspaper reports, and transcripts. What is the point if the precincts can be overrun on the whim of the government of the day? Why oh why did the Government sell our Crown land? That land belonged to the people of Gosford and to the people of New South Wales, and now it is in the hands of private enterprise, the profit makers, for central business district [CBD] jobs. It is our waterfront.

The sale of that public land created the opportunity for an out-of-town developer to make a quick quid at the expense of what could have been a public facility on the waterfront. The Doma Group swallowed the government contract and sold off the brand new building before it was even finished for a nice \$47 million. The buyer scored the Commonwealth Government as anchor tenants for the next 10 years. That represents 97 per cent of the total asset worth. Instead of following one of the many plans to have a unified and considered cultural precinct, the Government sold our public land in the face of massive protests by the community and put CBD buildings on the waterfront.

I am confident we will have a fabulous waterfront zone, despite the commercial buildings on our precious land. While I welcome jobs and more people coming into our city, our CBD is still dying and crying out for jobs to be close to the cafes, restaurants, specialty stores and services, not down the other end of town locked away from the heart of the city. We are crying out for more investment in our community and real government investment in changes to our tired old cityscape. It is not just about building new office buildings. We need more parking and consideration given to how residents, workers, and visitors move in and out of the city. The previous Chief Executive Officer of Gosford Council sold Kibbleplex on the eve of council amalgamations. That 600-space car park building, which was originally bought for car parking with Federal Labor funding and belonged to the people, was sold by the Liberal council.

Now the City of Gosford no longer owns the parking facility and the lease for the building is due to expire. Council is working on a sorely needed strategy for parking. To cater for the growth we want in Gosford, parking will be vital and should be a consideration for all three levels of government when looking to invest in our city. I thank the Central Coast Council for its approval of private residential developments in our city on privately owned land for new residents to purchase. I thank those developers investing in our city who are catalysts for the growth we need. I do not envy the new Central Coast Council. It is battling through an amalgamation and has a non-local administrator making decisions about the future of Gosford. She then disappears into the night leaving the local staff and new councillors to pick up the pieces.

The administrator decided on a location for the Regional Performing Arts Centre, but now it might not be possible to fit in with the Government Architect's plan so it has to be moved again. Because of the changes made by the Government's own architect, the project might be delayed. The Government is threatening to withdraw funding because of the delays. We would laugh at the absurdity of the situation if we were not crying.

To the Minister for Planning, let us see real investment on the coast. We want to see Ms Shearer get things done. [*Time expired.*]

PENRITH COMMUNITY KITCHEN

Mr STUART AYRES (Penrith—Minister for Western Sydney, Minister for WestConnex, and Minister for Sport) (19:05): With great pride I talk tonight about the Penrith Community Kitchen. Cathy Craig and June Woolard answered a call by the Uniting Church to launch a soup kitchen back in 1993. Whilst it closed temporarily in 1996, Cathy and June were not deterred and by 1998 the Penrith Community Kitchen was up and running. As a young student at St Dominic's College in Kingswood, I often spent afternoons in the Penrith Soup Kitchen, as it was called back then, helping the ladies chop the spuds for people who needed a little help and who were not as lucky as I was.

The Penrith Community Kitchen is a not-for-profit organisation that has been supporting the less fortunate in the local Penrith area for the past 20 years. Its lunch service operates most weekdays, culminating with a special Christmas lunch at the end of the year. Operated entirely by volunteers and funded by donations from the local community, businesses, schools and church groups, the Penrith Community Kitchen feeds more than 500 homeless and underprivileged people every week. The volunteers at the centre join together to provide this selfless service, and I commend them for their long-term commitment. Cathy and June were both awarded with the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2012 for their leadership of the Penrith Community Kitchen. While June retired from the kitchen in 2008, Cathy remains as a coordinator of the kitchen for three days per week.

In recognition of the kitchen's twentieth birthday, a celebration was recently held to mark the occasion, with all volunteers receiving certificates to acknowledge their contributions. I think every one of these people needs to be recognised here in the New South Wales Parliament. They are Cathy Craig, Kath McInerney, Robyn Price, Norma Price, Barbara Stonham, Evelyn Surgeor, Susan Soury, Mandy Rideout, Maureen Hutchinson, Denise Smith, Gaynor Stack, Olga Mouromtseva, Wilma Bourke, Ursula Gomez, Maria Alcautra, Carmel Vagg, Lorraine McConnell, Helen Harpur, Paula Ewings, Norma Parsons, Phyllis Reynolds, Elena Jamais, Sharyn Rogan, Elvie Panlilio, Heidi Bond, Ginny Dixon, Lorraine Robins, Dianne Stokes, Patricia Kelly, Jenny Dickson, Nola Costa, Irena McKenzie, Jack Weyman, Fiona Small, Don Small, John Drennan, Mary Drennan, Edwin Werner, Helen Werner, Anna McDonald, Anna Weyman, George Gibbins, Julie Gibbins, Kevin Hewitt, Joe Tenberge, Don Bate, Margaret Bate, Greg Gossip, Tim Brown, Bruce Howarth and Trish McCall.

Last year it was my privilege to visit the kitchen with the Premier to provide a grant to assist in the upgrade of their ageing equipment, including a chest freezer, signage, café bar, display board and heavy-duty tablecloths and chairs. It was fantastic to have the Premier visit the community kitchen. She was able to see firsthand the heart and soul that these volunteers put in to making this kitchen their home. Anyone who uses this kitchen would think that it is just like sitting in the dining room of their own house, such is the warmth and feeling of love that you get from these passionate volunteers.

They continue to give up their time to make sure those who are less privileged than us and who have fallen on harder times get the fantastic things that come from people who actually care. I also take this opportunity to recognise the board members who run the kitchen: current President Bob Baines, Secretary Rebecca Liu Brennan, Gai Hawthorn, John Cottey, Pat Baines, Derek Hawthorn and Kath McInerney. I know that in a volunteer organisation being on the board or the committee is often the hardest work—structuring an organisation on the smell of an oily rag, finding the next lot of donations and sourcing food to make sure the people being helped do not go hungry. Twenty years of service to the community kitchen and 20 years of service to the Penrith community is an extraordinary effort. This is one of those organisations that makes me immensely proud to be the member for Penrith.

F6 EXTENSION

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Attorney General) (19:10): We all know the benefits of an F6 extension—reduced travel times for motorists; reduced fumes spewing out around schools, playgrounds and homes; taking the growing number of trucks off our roads; making our local roads safer and less congested; and getting rid of traffic rat-runs. We all know this, but I express my alarm and disappointment that yet again we see Labor members of Parliament, and the Labor Party, moving to obfuscate and obstruct an essential development for southern Sydney.

We have not seen an F6 not only because of the massive infrastructure backlog that this Government has had to clear but also because of the inertia and obstruction of successive Labor governments. As far back as 1951 a road reservation for an F6 was set aside connecting central Sydney with the then planned Southern Freeway at Waterfall. The Department of Main Roads established a program of purchasing land in that corridor, but the only

section developed to freeway standard has been Captain Cook Bridge and its approaches. When in government Labor's record on the F6 was not merely one of inaction but one of outright opposition.

Under Labor governments much of the corridor was sold off or otherwise abandoned. In 2002 Minister Carl Scully announced the abandonment of the F6 extension. In 2005 the then member for Miranda Barry Collier told this House that when he picked up his local paper he found that Minister Costa had put the F6 back on the agenda. The then member for Miranda said he would fight it tooth and nail. In 2007 he told the *Sydney Morning Herald* that the F6 would be built over his dead body. The February 2010 Metropolitan Transport Plan did not even mention the F6, because emails tabled in the Legislative Council showed that fewer than 10 days before the plan's release, Premier Kristina Keneally personally intervened to remove any mention of it.

Yet again we see the Labor Party obstruct and oppose the F6. Last weekend a meeting was held in the St George area. It has been reported that at the meeting it was resolved that there should be an immediate halt to construction and planning for stage 1 of the F6. Apparently that resolution was endorsed by the member for Kogarah and the member for Rockdale. The ABC reports that the Federal member for Barton condemned the project. The member for Kogarah and the member for Rockdale were reported in the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* as telling the meeting that the Labor Party was firmly opposed to the move. The member for Rockdale said the Government is camouflaging it and calling it the F6 extension, but it is a connection to WestConnex.

I am astounded that, when the Government is planning stage one of the F6 underground to minimise disruption, property acquisitions, damage to sensitive wetlands and the loss of open space and parklands, the member for Kogarah and the member for Rockdale, who could not have it any better, are still opposing this project, still opposing the improvement of vital infrastructure for southern Sydney and still condemning motorists in southern Sydney to gridlock. As I said, the member for Rockdale said that this is just a connection for WestConnex. That complicates the problem because the construction of WestConnex stage 3 is vital to the successful conclusion of F6 stage 1. But again the Opposition is all over the place.

In January 2017 on ABC Radio the Leader of the Opposition said that the Opposition supports stages 1 and 2 and, "We are yet to be convinced of the merit of stage 3, and frankly the Government hasn't come up with a final plan." In December 2016 the Opposition roads spokesperson and member for Strathfield was reported as having signed an open letter opposing the WestConnex project, thereby threatening its future under a Labor government. Moreover, the member for Heffron has been telling us that WestConnex is a ridiculous project. The Opposition has been all over the place spreading its condemnation of the basic link for the F6, namely WestConnex, being completed.

I support stage one of the F6 and I support in principle the connection from Kogarah to Loftus, but it must be done properly. The link should be underground as far as is possible. Open space should be preserved. The roadway must be properly filtered. An assurance must be given that local roads will not be closed and that it is not under-engineered, as the M5 East was under Labor, and that it will not be completed at the expense of timely and appropriate upgrades of T4. Last night in this House the member for Miranda made a number of observations about the importance of preserving open space. I endorse her remarks and her general comment about supporting in principle the extension of the F6.

COPETON DAM COD FISHING COMPETITION

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands—Minister for Tourism and Major Events, and Assistant Minister for Skills) (19:15): As we all know, many people who live in the rural and regional areas of New South Wales love to wet a line. There is no greater feeling than being on the water when the line tugs and reeling in a big Murray cod. People who live in the Northern Tablelands electorate are fortunate in having access to a wonderful facility, Copeton Dam, which is renowned not only in Australia but also throughout the world as perhaps the very best spot for Murray cod fishing. All anglers would know that Copeton Dam is unique because there is no restricted season for Murray cod fishing in the dam. It is the only place in Australia where anglers can legally catch and take Murray cod from the water all year round. Because of that, Copeton Dam is an absolute tourist mecca.

In the past 12-month period, for the very first time Copeton Dam attracted more than 80,000 visitors. That is on the back of millions of dollars of investment by the State Government to improve its facilities, such as a kiosk, a camping ground, potable water from every tap, a new water filtration and storage system and, most recently, an extension to the major boat ramp at the dam at a cost of \$70,000. Tonight I wish to discuss a world first for Copeton Dam, which is the Cod Cash competition. The competition will be held at Copeton Dam in April. I congratulate Inverell Shire Council and particularly its Mayor, Paul Harmon, on this wonderful initiative. The competition will be a nine-day competitive fishing event. MOTackle & Outdoors of Inverell has been named as the major sponsor and an overall prize of more than \$25,000 will be offered to anglers.

Already interest has been expressed by people from Tasmania, Western Australia and overseas countries. Over the nine days of the competition, anglers will be trying to catch an undisclosed number of tagged cod that will be released into the beautiful waters of Copeton Dam. Registration is free and can be completed online or at the Inverell Visitors Centre. Anglers simply need to register and pick up their individually numbered certificate. If anglers are lucky enough to catch one of the tagged cod, they should place them on the brag mat, take a photograph, and cut out the tag and bring it into the visitor centre to claim a prize. Last weekend I had the privilege of spending some time with Peter and Ron Randall, who have successfully operated for years the Gwydir Fish Native Fish Hatchery. The hatchery is near the edges of Copeton Dam and stocks cod, yellow belly and perch. I was there with the Mayor of Inverell, Paul Harmon, and we checked out of some of the legal-sized cod weighing between 4.5 kilograms and five kilograms that have been grown in the hatchery. They will be released into the waters of Copeton Dam for this magnificent inaugural world-first competition.

It is expected that this competition alone will attract in excess of 1,000 new anglers to Copeton Dam, and hopefully they will bring their families. Given the location of Copeton Dam, as the State's tourism Minister, I am acutely aware that the vast majority of people will be driving to the area and will be camping over several days. When anglers and fishers travel to the State's wonderful inland waterways, they spend money on fuel for their cars and boats, food, and camping equipment. When they are in the beautiful sapphire city of Inverell or the delightful Bingara, which is near Copeton Dam, they will shop and spend their money. I am absolutely thrilled about the prospects for the success of this competition. We have not even held the first round.

I acknowledge the other businesses for the support they have provided to the competition. They include Camping World and Compleat Angler Inverell, the wonderful community mutual bank Regional Australia Bank Simply Print Anything; Inverell Fishing and Hunting; the State Government through Northern Tablelands Local Land Services; the Australian Hotel at Inverell; H Hardware in Brissett Street; and Inverell Shire Council. I commend the council for a wonderful initiative and everyone who has played a role in organising the event. I am absolutely confident that it will be successful and will wonderfully showcase a premiere inland freshwater fishing spot in Australia. It will also showcase all the wonderful recreational activities available there. As I said, we have been developing Copeton Dam as an inland tourism mecca, and it is. The fact that more than 80,000 people visit the site each year shows that it is something special. The Cod Cash competition will take it to the next level and I would love to see it become an annual event. Come one, come all. I invite all anglers to Copeton Dam. They will not be disappointed. Even people like me can catch a tagged Murray cod, and they will too.

Bills

PROPERTY, STOCK AND BUSINESS AGENTS AMENDMENT (PROPERTY INDUSTRY REFORM) BILL 2017

SAINT JOHN'S COLLEGE BILL 2017

Returned

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Adam Crouch): I report receipt of messages from the Legislative Council returning the abovementioned bills without amendment.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to standing and sessional orders, at 19:21 until
Thursday 8 March 2018 at 10:00.**