



New South Wales

Legislative Assembly

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD)

**Fifty-Seventh Parliament
First Session**

Tuesday, 4 February 2020

Authorised by the Parliament of New South Wales

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Visitors	1863
Visitors	1863
Business of the House	1863
Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Routine of Business.....	1863
Announcements.....	1863
Parliament Live Streaming	1863
Motions	1863
Bushfires	1863
Business of the House	1875
Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Routine of Business.....	1875
Motions	1875
Bushfires	1875
Members	1878
Member for Myall Lakes	1878
Member for Maitland.....	1878
Member for Dubbo	1878
Visitors	1878
Visitors	1878
Documents	1878
Letters from the Prliaments of Scotland and Wales.....	1878
Announcements.....	1878
Death of Alfred Hugh Dennis, Former Member for Blacktown.....	1878
Death of Phillip Joseph O'Neill, Former Member for Burwood	1878
Death of Douglas James Shedden, Former Member for Bankstown.....	1878
Bills	1879
Fines Amendment Bill 2019	1879
Statute Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2019	1879
Right to Farm Bill 2019	1879
Water Supply (Critical Needs) Bill 2019.....	1879
Music Festivals Bill 2019	1879
Electoral Funding Amendment (Local Government Expenditure Caps) Bill 2019.....	1879
Transport Administration Amendment (RMS Dissolution) Bill 2019	1879
Justice Legislation Amendment Bill (No 2) 2019	1879
Road Transport Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill 2019	1879
Electoral Funding Amendment (Cash Donations) Bill 2019	1879
Better Regulation Legislation Amendment Bill 2019	1879
Gambling Legislation Amendment (Online and Other Betting) Bill 2019.....	1879
Children's Guardian Bill 2019	1879
Assent.....	1879
Governor	1879

TABLE OF CONTENTS—*continuing*

Administration of the Government	1879
Question Time	1879
Bushfires Inquiry	1879
Bushfires	1880
Bushfires Inquiry	1881
Bushfire Recovery Assistance	1882
Sydney Metro City & Southwest	1883
Bushfires	1884
Sydney Metro City & Southwest	1885
Bushfire Recovery Assistance	1886
Eraring Power Station	1888
Bushfires and Service NSW	1888
Documents	1890
Children's Guardian	1890
Reports	1890
Inspector of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission	1890
Reports	1890
NSW Ombudsman	1890
Reports	1890
Ageing and Disability Commissioner	1890
Reports	1890
Inspector of the Independent Commission Against Corruption	1890
Reports	1890
Department of the Legislative Assembly	1890
Reports	1890
Committees	1890
Public Accounts Committee	1890
Reports	1890
Joint Select Committee on Sydney's Night Time Economy	1891
Government Response	1891
Documents	1891
Auditor-General	1891
Reports	1891
Office of Transport Safety Investigations	1891
Reports	1891
Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal	1891
Reports	1891
Balranald Shire Council	1892
Reports	1892
Petitions	1892
Petitions Received	1892
Responses to Petitions	1892

TABLE OF CONTENTS—*continuing*

Business of the House	1892
Business Lapsed	1892
Announcements	1892
Parliament Live Streaming	1892
Visitors	1892
Visitors	1892
Motions	1892
Bushfires	1892
Private Members' Statements	1911
The Albury Project	1911
Social Housing	1911
Drought and Regional Businesses	1912
Oatlands Motor Vehicle Accident	1913
Energy Prices	1913
Cudgen Surf Life Saving Club	1914
Camden Electorate Australia Day Awards	1915
Guildford West Public School	1915
Port Hacking Putters Regatta	1916
Wollongong Entertainment Centre	1917
Davidson Electorate Australia Day Awards	1918
Warnervale Airport	1919
Bernie Shakeshaft	1920
East Hills Electorate Australia Day Events	1921
Tribute to Geoff Dingle	1921
Central Coast Road Infrastructure	1922
Oxley Electorate Australia Day Awards	1923
Regional Education	1924
Central Coast Oyster Industry	1925
Seven Hills Electorate Schools	1926
Community Recognition Statements	1927
Andrew Scott	1927
East Hills Bulldogs	1927
Buskuleles	1927
Tribute to Richard Orton	1927
Coffs Harbour Electorate Australia Day Awards	1927
Renga Rajan	1928
Ronald Ray, OAM	1928
Port Stephens Koalas	1928
Tribute to Darby Paxton	1928
Wyong SES Unit	1928
Tribute to Colin Gadd	1929
Yellow Diamond Foundation	1929

TABLE OF CONTENTS—*continuing*

Jack Corcoran.....	1929
Superintendent Viki Campbell.....	1929
World Cancer Day	1929
Tribute to Brian Egan.....	1930
Coolamon Shire	1930
Ron Stuart	1930
Rose Lewis.....	1930
South Eastern Sydney Local Health District	1930
St John Ambulance	1931
Maitland Electorate Citizenship Awards	1931
Coffs Harbour Electorate Bushfire Relief.....	1931
World Cancer Day	1931
Trans Tasman Challenge.....	1931
MacKillop Catholic College	1932
Jessica Skinner	1932
Superintendent Daniel Sullivan, APM.....	1932
Dorothy Vickery, OAM	1932
Senior Constable Paul Matts.....	1932
Luddenham Uniting Church	1933
Rahma Islamic Association of Australia.....	1933
Timorese United Association.....	1933
The Late Ray Reid of Woodenbong	1933
Glenmore Park Brumbies.....	1934
Paul Healy.....	1934
Bushfires	1934
Ingleburn View Club.....	1934
John Smith	1934
Close	1935
Barellan Clydesdales.....	1935
NSW Community Service Award for Norman Dixon	1935
Lost in Books Fairfield	1935
Michael Druce, PSM.....	1935
Terrace Novocastria Teddy Bear Toss.....	1936
2019 Bayside Business Awards	1936
Epping Public School Upgrade.....	1936
Farewell Dr Peter Lennox of Redlands.....	1936
Byron Shire Citizen of the Year 2020—Helen Hamilton	1937
Laurie Barber Awarded OAM	1937
Police Area Commander's Certificate of Commendation	1937
Hidden Treasures of Orange	1937
Extinction Rebellion Silent Vigil.....	1938

TABLE OF CONTENTS—*continuing*

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Tuesday, 4 February 2020

The Speaker (The Hon. Jonathan Richard O'Dea) took the chair at 12:00.

The Speaker read the prayer and acknowledgement of country.

Visitors

VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I extend a very warm welcome to members of the Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade, guests of the member for Prospect. I also welcome the partner and friends of Colin Harold Burns, who passed away on 31 December 2019 in Belowra. Colin was an RFS volunteer for 22 years. I welcome his partner, Estralita Cabacungan, long-time friend Max Hubbard and friend Elizabeth Opicas. We remember RFS volunteer Colin Harold Burns, who symbolises the many others who have made sacrifices. Thank you and welcome.

Members stood in their places and applauded.

I welcome Jake McCallum, a new reporter at the State Parliament and former journalist with the *Hills Shire Times*, who is here under the introduction of the member for Hawkesbury. I welcome to the Chamber everyone who is watching these important proceedings, both from the public gallery as well as online.

Business of the House

SUSPENSION OF STANDING AND SESSIONAL ORDERS: ROUTINE OF BUSINESS

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega—Minister for Transport and Roads) (12:01:16): I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended:

- (1) This week to provide for:
 - (a) the consideration of a motion of condolence for the victims of the bushfires to be moved forthwith, in place of and during the periods in the routine of business providing for general business and government business; and
 - (b) there to be no public interest debates.
- (2) To not call for the taking of general business notices of motions (general notices) at this sitting.

It is appropriate for the House to have discussion and debate this week to recognise what has occurred in the State of New South Wales. People right across the board, not just in regional communities but also city folk, have been affected. I look forward to the contributions from many members over the next three days on the unprecedented events that have affected every man, woman and child in this State.

Motion agreed to.

Announcements

PARLIAMENT LIVE STREAMING

The SPEAKER: I inform the House that selected proceedings of the condolence motion today will be live streamed on Facebook, including contributions from the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. Given that so many people across New South Wales are affected by the bushfires, I hope this live stream will give people the opportunity to easily access and see what is happening in the Chamber. The rest of the proceedings will be broadcast on the Parliament's website.

Motions

BUSHFIRES

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby—Premier) (12:03:13): I move:

That this House:

- (1) Expresses its deepest condolences to the families, communities and loved ones of the 25 men and women who have tragically lost their lives during the catastrophic and unprecedented 2019-2020 bushfire season.
- (2) Honours the extraordinary sacrifice of Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer and Samuel McPaul, Rural Fire Service volunteers who tragically lost their lives while protecting the lives and property of others.

- (3) Places on the record its gratitude for the courage of Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr of Coulson Aviation and the United States of America, who died in service to New South Wales.
- (4) Offers its sympathy to those who have been affected by the fires whether through injury or the loss of or damage to their homes or livelihoods.
- (5) Acknowledges the devastation caused by this season's bushfires, which has already seen 2,400 homes destroyed, over 11,000 buildings lost or damaged, 5.5 million hectares burnt, countless local businesses affected and hundreds of millions of animals killed.

This bushfire season New South Wales has experienced immeasurable loss. Since July there have been 11,000 bushfires and grassfires across the State. We have lost around 5½ million hectares. Around 2,400 homes have been completely destroyed and a further 945 have been damaged. In total, well over 11,000 buildings have been destroyed or damaged. In our rural communities, already ravaged by drought, 14,500 livestock have perished in the fires and more than 600,000 hectares of valuable pasture has been damaged, as have crops and horticulture. Around 2.7 million hectares of national park has been impacted by fire. Our wildlife has experienced untold loss, which is still being quantified. But nothing can compare to the human toll—nothing can compare to the lives lost, families broken and thousands without a home. Understandably, communities are traumatised and the impact of this loss is felt far and wide.

The scale of these bushfires is unprecedented. New South Wales is experiencing the most devastating natural disaster in living memory. Never before have we seen three states of emergency declared in the same season. Never before have bushfires burned so long across so many hectares with such ferocity. The fires have literally stretched from the Queensland border to the Victorian border and inland. On one day in November 17 fires reached emergency warning. In any other season just one fire at emergency alert would have caused major concern. We must remain vigilant, for the threat is still current and the bushfire season is not yet over. While we are working with communities as fast as we can with the recovery effort, the fire threat in many parts of the State remains real. We continue to commit significant resources to the firefighting efforts, and we have some of our brave volunteers here today.

On any given day there are up to 4,000 firefighters in the field, supported by around 70 to 100 aircraft and hundreds of other appliances. But, as I said, the most devastating impact has been the human toll. We remember today the 25 lives lost and extend our deepest condolences to their families, loved ones and communities. We remember each and every one of them. Three were RFS volunteers who tragically lost their lives protecting the lives and property of others. On the evening of Thursday 19 December Geoffrey Keaton, 32, and Andrew O'Dwyer, 36, were killed near Buxton in south-western Sydney. They were returning from a day of fighting the Green Wattle Creek fire when their truck was struck by a tree, which caused the vehicle to leave the road and overturn. Three other crew members were injured in the accident.

Geoffrey and Andrew were long-time RFS volunteers and members of the close-knit 70-strong Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade. I am proud that many members of that brigade are here with us today. I acknowledge the member for Prospect, who is also a member of that brigade. Geoffrey and Andrew trained together, they socialised together and they became first-time fathers only two days apart in May 2018. Geoffrey joined the RFS in 2006. He was the Deputy Captain of the Horsley Park brigade and had also served with the Plumpton brigade. He is survived by his partner, Jess, and their son, Harvey. Andrew was a 17-year veteran of the RFS, which his father said was like a second family to him. He is survived by his wife, Mel, and their daughter, Charlotte. It speaks volumes for the Horsley Park brigade that they were back fighting fires the day after they lost their mates Geoffrey and Andrew.

Tragically on the evening of Monday 30 December a third RFS volunteer, Samuel McPaul, 28, was killed at Jingellic while on duty at the Green Valley fireground, east of Albury. A member of the Morven Rural Fire Brigade, he went out with the Culcairn crew that day to give their team additional support. The crew's fire truck was flipped over by the extreme cyclone-like winds associated with the fire, killing Sam and injuring two crew members. Another two members at the same fireground took shelter in a creek as the fire tornado enveloped them. A recently qualified mechanic, Sam had just been married for 18 months. He had recently moved from Malvern to Holbrook so he and his wife, Megan, could live closer to her work. She is expecting their first child in just a few months' time. Our thoughts are also with Sam's mother, Chris, an extraordinary woman who has dedicated her life to raising Sam and contributing to her community.

All three RFS volunteers—Andrew, Geoff and Sam—have been awarded posthumous commendations: the Commissioner's Commendation for Service and the Commissioner's Commendation for Bravery. The RFS community has been further impacted by the death of off-duty volunteer firefighter Colin Burns, 72, at his property at Belowra near Cobargo on New Year's Eve. I acknowledge the presence of Colin's loved ones in the public gallery today as we acknowledge his contribution. Colin was a 22-year veteran with the Rural Fire Service. He is remembered as someone with a strong community spirit who was deeply devoted to the Belowra brigade.

He had a lifelong association with his Belowra property: his parents having bought it when he was just a teenager. Throughout his career as a surveyor and miner Colin had worked on major projects in Australia and overseas but he always came back to Belowra, where he was known as the quintessential Aussie bushie.

We extend our condolences to the families of these firefighters and the wider RFS community, which has borne this heavy loss. We are inspired daily by the efforts of our firefighters and first responders, who run towards the fires to steer their communities to safety. In addition to the RFS, I acknowledge Fire and Rescue NSW, the NSW Police Force and all our emergency personnel who have aided in these activities. Our emergency services personnel and volunteers face substantial risks. Hundreds of volunteers and emergency personnel are estimated to have been injured during the bushfire season. They have been treated for injuries ranging from heat stress to smoke inhalation and serious burns. They have also encountered sustained trauma and stress, which we cannot see but so many of them feel. Some have lost their friends and some have lost their homes but still they show up in their thousands every day. We thank them deeply for that.

We also acknowledge the support we have received from firefighting crews across Australia and the world. The loss of the three American crew members killed on 23 January when their C-130 large air tanker crashed in the Snowy Monaro region is keenly felt. Captain Ian McBeth, 44, from Great Falls, Montana, spent his entire career flying C-130s and many years fighting fires both in the military and with Coulson Aviation. He was married with three children. His father, Bill, and son, Calvin, both spoke at last week's memorial service. They were joined by his wife, Bowdie. They all travelled from the United States. His daughter, Abi, described him as a "supportive and fun-loving father". She is following her father's example by training to become a pilot.

First officer Paul Clyde Hudson, 42, from Buckeye, Arizona, served for 20 years in the United States Marine Corps in a number of positions, including as a C-130 pilot, and had received many decorations. He was married to Noreen; they were a devoted couple. Noreen also attended last week's memorial service. A former high school classmate said that Paul died as he had lived—helping others. Flight engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, 43, from Navarre, Florida, served in the United States Air Force. He had 18 years' experience as a flight engineer on the C-130. He had logged more than 4,000 hours as a flight engineer, with nearly 2,000 hours in a combat environment. He is survived by two children. These three men died far from their homes, defending New South Wales lives and properties. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten. The families of all three United States firefighters will attend the State memorial service on 23 February.

Today we also remember the further 18 people who died in the bushfires—eight in northern New South Wales and 10 in southern New South Wales and on the South Coast. Their loss weighs heavily on their families, their friends and their communities. Many of our colleagues in this place knew them personally and are also experiencing that sense of loss. We acknowledge their grief and extend our heartfelt sympathies. On 9 October Robert Lindsay, 77, and Gwenda Hyde, 68, died together while trying to save their rural property at Coongbar in northern New South Wales. Well known in their local community, the couple met later in life and married in Casino three years ago.

On 8 November the town of Wyaliba near Glen Innes in north-east New South Wales lost two residents in a fire that destroyed 60 homes. Vivian Chaplain and George Nole were described in the *Glen Innes Examiner* as "giants of the community". Vivian Chaplain, 69, died in hospital after suffering burns while trying to defend her home and animals. A former village director, she was described as "a strong woman" and "relentlessly wonderful." George Nole, 85, was found in a car at the Kangawalla fireground. George worked as an electrician on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration [NASA] Apollo program before moving to Wyaliba in the late 1980s. Local residents described him as a "true gentleman" and "the most honest man you could ever imagine".

Also on 8 November Julie Fletcher, 63, died in her home at St John's River near Taree after messaging a friend that she was packing her car and preparing to leave. An animal lover, she loved her Angus cattle so much that she could never sell them for slaughter. A neighbour described her as a quality person whose family had lived in the region for generations. Also on the mid North Coast on 8 November Barry Parsons, 58, died in bushland near his shed on a Willawarrin property 60 kilometres north-west of Kempsey. Members of his community said he was well known in Willawarrin, describing him as a kind and caring person who enjoyed his own company and liked to care for stray animals. On 9 November Chris Savva, 64, of South Arm near Nambucca Heads died when a bridge near his property was destroyed by fire, preventing him from leaving. A local resident said Chris was always ready to help his local community and to help save another neighbour's home.

On 29 December Russell Bratby, 59, died in Royal North Shore Hospital six weeks after sustaining severe burns defending a rural property at Yarrawitch, west of Port Macquarie. On 30 December Robert Salway, 63, and his son Patrick Salway, 29, died while trying to save their family property at Wandella near Cobargo. Robert was a well-known dairy farmer in the Bega region who was regarded as a gentleman with a heart of gold. Patrick also

worked in the dairy industry and ran a performance horse business with his wife, Renee, and he was also a rodeo rider. The community has been impacted by their loss.

On 31 December Laurie Andrew, 70, died outside his home in Yatte Yattah, near the community of Lake Conjola, where 89 homes were lost. Laurie was a former Shoalhaven Water site supervisor, a keen surfer and a founding member of the Mollymook Longboarders. The same fire claimed the life of John Butler, 75, who died on his property at Yatte Yattah. He was described by local residents as a "lovable bush larrikin" and a "beautiful bloke". John Smith, 71, died on New Year's Eve trying to save his property in the community of Nerrigundah, inland from Bodalla. John retired two years ago from the Moruya TAFE campus and was known for his compassion and his love of art, music and gardening.

On 31 December a 56-year-old man died outside a home that had been destroyed by fire at Coolagolite, near Cobargo. He has not yet been formally identified. On New Year's Day Michael Campbell, 62, was found in his car at Sussex Inlet on the State's South Coast. Tragically, again on 4 January, David Harrison, 47, died defending a friend's property in the southern New South Wales town of Batlow. He worked for a Canberra solar farm and travelled to Batlow most holidays to visit his friend. David's brother said he would do anything for anyone and was always the first to put up his hand when someone was in trouble. This was demonstrated in tragic circumstances.

On 18 January Ross Rixon, 84, died after he sustained critical burns defending his Cobargo property on New Year's Eve. Described by friends as a "true country boy", Ross had lived in Cobargo for almost 50 years and was still cutting firewood well into his eighties. On 23 January pecan farmer Michael Clarke, 59, died at his home at Bodalla, near Moruya. He had been on his phone to his brother when the connection was lost. Friends described Mick as a "stoic, salt-of-the-earth type" who loved the bush and would give you the shirt off his back. A neighbour said he was like "Australia epitomised". These 25 lives lost have touched so many more. In acknowledging these individuals we see how whole communities have been impacted by this tragedy.

People are traumatised, homes have been lost, livelihoods have been devastated and communities are looking at how they rebuild. We do not underestimate how long the recovery will take nor should anyone think this process is confined to physical rebuilding. The mental health impacts of those affected, including children in these communities, will likely take years to heal. We also extend our thoughts to members in this place whose communities have been so devastatingly impacted in a way that they or we could never have imagined. We know that communities are still grieving. A State memorial to be held on 23 February will give the public, volunteers and emergency services personnel an opportunity to recognise the lives lost and the sacrifices made and to think of those directly impacted by the fires. It has been a gruelling bushfire season, with more than 140 days of continuous major operations across the State.

While we focus on the tragic losses today—and I say this without taking away from the grief felt by so many—literally thousands of lives have been saved. While 2,400 homes have been lost, thousands and thousands have been spared. As Commissioner Fitzsimmons has repeatedly advised me, our losses would have been considerably worse had we not learned the lessons of past seasons or had the brave people and equipment on the ground to ensure that all resources were devoted to these fires. I also acknowledge the public who heeded the warnings given to them and followed instructions without hesitation.

The fact that our State has withstood this unprecedented bushfire season as well as it has is a testament to the thousands of volunteers and emergency services personnel who have worked tirelessly over this extended period. Particularly I acknowledge the outstanding leadership of NSW Rural Fire Service [RFS] Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons. Words cannot describe the gratitude that all of New South Wales feels towards him. He leads an outstanding team, including Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers, experts in the field and more than 70,000 volunteers, of whom we have with us today in the Chamber some of our bravest and finest. Commissioner Fitzsimmons has exemplified true expertise, selflessness and compassion and has provided strength to everyone fighting fires on the ground as well as to families and communities trying to make sense of the tremendous losses sustained.

Multiple agencies have been working alongside the RFS to deliver an integrated and effective response to the fire threat. I acknowledge Fire and Rescue NSW, the NSW Police Force, the Forestry Corporation of NSW, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW Ambulance, the New South Wales State Emergency Service and many more agencies. I also thank Fire and Rescue NSW Commissioner Paul Baxter and the NSW Police Force Commissioner Mick Fuller and Deputy Commissioner Gary Worboys for their leadership during these most difficult times. When the Minister for Emergency Services and I were at RFS headquarters on some of the darkest days, they were providing much support to all operations.

The bushfire season has left a huge scar on New South Wales. We can see the physical scars but we also know of the emotional scars that have been left. However, one thing I never underestimate is the spirit and

resilience of our people. In all my visits to fire-affected communities across the State I have seen people coming to help each other. They might be people who know each other but they are also strangers helping strangers. The outpouring of generosity is reflected in the volunteers at the evacuation centres and people opening their homes to neighbours and injured wildlife and in the millions of dollars donated to bushfire appeals. I know our State will come through this. We will support each other and we will rebuild. Today we again extend our deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones. Your loss is immeasurable and we want to acknowledge that today. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms JODI McKAY (Strathfield) (12:22:16): I support the motion and thank the Premier very much for bringing it to the House today. I offer the Opposition's deepest condolences to the victims of these devastating fires. Today New South Wales is grieving. There are families who have lost loved ones. There are households who have lost everything. Huge portions of our State are blackened and charred. Whole communities have been ravaged. So many will never forget what it was like to spend the end of 2019 convoying out of the South Coast or huddled and evacuated on a beach beneath a blood-orange sky. The people of New South Wales must now pick up the pieces. This was the summer that broke our hearts, the summer when the rains did not come, the summer that must force us to rethink our relationship with this parched land and changing climate.

After these fires, nothing can be the same. The events of the past few months have forever changed us, leaving a toll that has shocked not just this State and this nation but the entire world. Some 25 precious lives were lost right here in New South Wales, including six brave responders. Almost 2½ thousand homes were destroyed and 5.5 million hectares obliterated—exponentially more than the Californian wildfires and the Amazon blazes. More than one billion animals were destroyed. The economic cost, estimated so far at \$5 billion nationally, has seen businesses sent broke and restaurants, shops and accommodation providers hit by massive losses during what should have been their busiest time of year.

The fires have resulted in a tourism crisis and a severe hit to our global reputation. They have also caused damage to roads, rail lines, bridges, schools, health facilities, powerlines and communications. Our water supply has been contaminated with ash and the air we breathe has been poisoned. Bushfire smoke blanketed everywhere from Goulburn to Bathurst to Port Macquarie to Penrith to our beautiful Sydney Harbour, making it difficult for people to breathe. New South Wales has never seen a summer like it and we pray we never will again.

I visited communities who were reeling right across our State—from Bilpin to Balmoral and Buxton, Rappville and Drake to Quaama, Tumut to Taree to Tathra, Cobargo and Lake Conjola, to name just a few. Australians are a resilient and practical lot but people are shell-shocked, people are numb. They have been, and in some cases still are, in survival mode and the enormity of their loss is now becoming obvious. The physical effects of the bushfires are one thing but the psychological scars will take years to heal. I also know these fires have taken a toll on many inside this Chamber. I want to acknowledge the work of all MPs in being there for their communities, including those who have personally served on the front line. Politicians are human beings too and we must be here for each other during these difficult weeks and months.

Fires have always burned in New South Wales but, with tinder dry conditions and a warming climate, this year's season started earlier than usual. As the member for Lismore well knows, there were blazes in northern New South Wales and the mid North Coast through August and September. The Gospers Mountain megafire ignited from a single point in October to become Australia's largest forest fire. It would march all the way from the Central Coast to the Hawkesbury and Blue Mountains. By early November the mid North Coast had severely deteriorated and by December the fires had reached the Southern Highlands and the south-west of Sydney. The Currowan State Forest fire unleashed its fury near Batemans Bay. Just after Christmas, fires spread to the Bega Valley and eventually multiple fires would merge to form a terrifying front. Communities from the Shoalhaven to Eurobodalla shire, Queanbeyan, Palerang and the Snowy valleys are counting the cost—and some on the far South Coast are still at risk.

Today I too want to acknowledge the people who lost their lives. They all had family and friends who loved them. They held respected places in their communities. Their hopes and dreams were cut short in the most horrific way. Yet, in the end, they will be remembered not for how they died but for how they lived. The Coongbar community in northern New South Wales are grieving the loss of husband and wife Robert Lindsey and Gwenda Hyde. They perished in October in the Long Gully fire. Only a few hours earlier reports say that Gwenda phoned her friend Carol as she was getting spot fires in her orchard and wanted her advice on what to do.

In November the close-knit community of Wyaliba lost Vivian Chaplain, who was critically injured when she was encircled by flames. She will be remembered as a strong woman who died protecting the home and animals that she loved. George Nole was trapped in his car when the fires passed through the Kangawalla fireground. He moved to the village in the 1980s seeking solitude in nature. The locals called George a genius electrician, as he worked with circuits on the Apollo program of NASA. Often seen cycling around town, he was creative and eccentric but also a true gentleman who would teach the local youngsters about photography.

In Johns River near Port Macquarie the community mourn Julie Fletcher, who died when the Bills Crossing fire swept through her property in November. Julie's family lived in the area for several generations. Neighbours broke down in tears as they recalled what a good person she was, someone who would help anyone in need. Barry Parsons from Willawarrin died on 8 November, hours after he posted to social media expressing his fears. Described as a "kind and caring person" and a "lovely gentle guy", he would often take care of stray cats in his shed.

Chris Savva lived in South Arm near Nambucca Heads. He perished in November after trying to flee the fires in his SUV. The day before, Chris tirelessly fought to defend his home and those of his neighbours. He was a man who was humble and shy, yet always ready to chip in with some construction work or just lend a hand. In Wandella near Cobargo the community will miss Robert Salway and son Patrick, who died in December while attempting to defend their family property. Robert was a dairy farmer, well known in the Bega region. Patrick too worked in the dairy industry and was also a rodeo rider. Their friends described them as "one of the tightest, close-knit families you'll ever come across". Laurie Andrew was from the small town of Yatte Yattah, near Lake Conjola. He is remembered by his mates as a stylish surfer and an "all round great bloke".

David Harrison from Batlow passed away of a heart attack while fighting to defend his mate's home from the Dunns Road blaze. His brother Peter will always remember his infectious character. He said that when David walked into a room people would just smile. Colin Burns was a respected local of Belowra, a small community of only nine residents. A volunteer firefighter who was not on duty, he died while defending his property from the Badja Forest Road fire. John Smith from Nerrigundah perished on New Year's Eve in the same blaze. He was retired after working at Moruya TAFE and leaves behind wife, Josie, and daughter, Emerald. The people of Bodalla terribly miss Mick Clarke, who has been described as a "quintessential good guy". He perished when fire reached his property on 24 January.

In late December Russell Bratby died in Royal North Shore Hospital six weeks after sustaining severe burns defending his property at Yarrowitch, west of Port Macquarie. John Butler passed away outside his home on New Year's Eve in the Currowan bushfire. He is remembered by his friends as a loveable bush larrikin and just a really funny bloke. On New Year's Day Michael Campbell was found in his car at Sussex Inlet on the State's South Coast. Ross Rixon passed away after sustaining critical burns defending his Cobargo property on New Year's Eve. On that same day a 56-year-old man, whose name we do not know, died outside a home destroyed by fire at Coolagolite, near Cobargo. Each of those people mattered and each of their stories tears at our hearts and leaves a hole that can never be filled.

Our State owes a special debt to all agencies, businesses and community organisations involved in fighting the bushfires and getting people back on their feet. I especially express my gratitude to Fire and Rescue NSW, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Forestry NSW, the State Emergency Service, police, paramedics and other emergency services personnel, as well as the Australian Defence Force. From the bottom of their hearts the people of New South Wales thank the firefighters that have come here from interstate and as far afield as the United States of America, New Zealand, Singapore, Canada, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Fiji and Japan.

I solemnly acknowledge Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, who lost their lives in the tragic air tanker crash north-east of Cooma on 23 January. Australia and America are bonded by a century of fighting together on the battlefield as well as acts of great mateship in peace. There can be no greater sacrifice than giving your own life—not in the service of your nation but for our common humanity. Of course, everyone in New South Wales thanks their lucky stars for our Rural Fire Service, led by Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons. Words will never suffice to honour the thousands of ordinary men and women who put their lives on hold to protect our communities. They were long days that turned into long nights. They were weeks that stretched into months.

Many members on both sides of the House served, including Hugh McDermott, the member for Prospect and an integral member of the Horsley Park Brigade, members of whom are in the gallery today. Hugh, we are proud of your efforts. I also acknowledge the member for Blue Mountains, Trish Doyle, who has a son in Fire and Rescue NSW. Their story has been told by media today. When her son's truck was left stranded amid a raging bushfire near Nowra on New Year's Eve, she was one of eight family members to receive a distressing message by text. Her son said he would not make it out. It is a miracle that all eight crew members survived. Today our community has a great appreciation of how so much of the firefighting burden falls on volunteers. I quote the words of Darren Rodrigo, a member of the Katoomba RFS brigade, who reflected on Facebook:

I've seen things I've never seen before and I'll never see again.

At Rock Lily near Wentworth Falls, I saw a full firefront at night ... stretching from horizon to horizon ... with an orange glow so strong you would think a city of a million people lay just over the hill.

Backburning in the Megalong Valley, I was surrounded by hills glistening with fire ... that made it look like a thousand blazing stars had fallen on the earth all around me.

I've walked through kilometres of blackened silent earth. They've been times of the best qualities of courage, skill, determination and camaraderie that I think humans can muster, but all done in the most no-nonsense and nonchalant way.

These are very beautiful words that capture the Australian landscape and the Australian spirit. Our RFS is quite simply the best of the best, comprising men such as Geoffrey Keaton, the deputy captain of the Horsley Park Brigade who became a volunteer firefighter in 2006; and Andrew O'Dwyer, also of the same brigade. They were sent to fight the horrifying Green Wattle Creek blaze. When news broke of how Geoffrey's and Andrew's truck rolled that night on 19 December, every Australian felt the pain in their gut.

We felt it again when RFS volunteer Samuel McPaul died on 30 December after his fire truck flipped in freakish weather east of Albury. To Sam's wife, Megan, who is due to give birth to their first child in May; to Andrew's partner, Mel, and his daughter, Charlotte; and to Geoff's fiancée, Jess, and young son, Harvey: your tears are our tears. But they should also know that the men they mourn will go down in the pantheon of our nation's finest and they will feel that pride for the rest of their lives.

I believe all members have a constructive role to play as New South Wales seeks to learn the lessons from those bushfires. The Labor Opposition has sought to improve our State's response and recovery effort. Labor members have visited and spoken with people on the front lines so we can contribute to the picture of what went right, what went wrong and where our State can do better. In January I wrote to the Premier seeking her support to establish an independent, expert-led public inquiry into the bushfires. Today I make clear to the Premier that Labor strongly supports the inquiry announced by the Government.

I have no doubt in the impeccable credentials of Professor Mary O'Kane and former deputy commissioner Dave Owens and that they will lead a comprehensive effort. But this inquiry must not be a bureaucratic exercise based in Sydney. I believe it must travel to fire-affected communities and hold public hearings so people can tell their stories, because if you have lost everything, if you have been to hell and back, you have a story. Those voices need to be heard. Those are the voices that all of us in the Chamber have heard.

In Rappville, with the member for Lismore, Janelle Saffin, I visited people affected by fires as far back as October. Four months later people in Northern New South Wales are still living in tents. On the mid North Coast I visited Forster where senior citizens told me how frightened they were to be cut off from the nearest hospital. The Government has promised a new hospital at Forster, and we look forward to it. On the road up the North Coast holiday-makers have been haunted by the sight of black tree stumps and wizened branches emptied of leaves on both sides of the highway.

With Councillor Dr David Keegan, I saw the incredible work being done at the Taree Showground, which served as an evacuation centre for more than 1,200 people and survived entirely on community donations. I pay tribute to the show committee, volunteers and especially 20-year-old Gabby. Her selflessness was nothing short of incredible. In the Blue Mountains, whose hardy towns were buffeted by the Grose Valley fire on one side and the Gaspers Mountain fire on the other, I surveyed the damage in Blaxland, Shipley and Mount Tomah, and in Bilpin, famous for its apples, where the Fruit Bowl lost 6,000 trees. I acknowledge the fine work during the bushfires by the Mayor of Blue Mountains, Mark Greenhill, as well as Federal member Susan Templeman and our own member for Blue Mountains, Trish Doyle. They led meeting after meeting, ensuring that the community was as prepared as possible for the expected onslaught.

At the Lithgow Workers Club just before Christmas we met people seeking shelter and we visited the fire zone. It was clear some people were not prepared; some were. Some houses survived; some did not. Residents told us how they wished defence personnel had been present before the fire to clean out gutters, bring buckets of water and just generally go door to door. I thank Councillor Wayne McAndrew and all councillors for supporting their communities. In January in Balmoral I met Captain Brendan O'Connor. For over an hour in the local RFS shed, together with residents who lost their homes, he told us what he believed went wrong in tackling the Green Wattle Creek fire—the late evacuation order that left the community exposed and the fact that the town ran out of water. A big water truck was diverted out of town hours before the fires hit.

In Buxton I visited Our Community Pantry, run by Paula. Frustrated at the slow pace of the clean-up, she started arranging demolition companies to come in. From Ulladulla I visited Lake Conjola with the Federal member for Gilmore, Fiona Phillips. The minute you drove in you could see it was just scorched. The first half a dozen houses were burned to the ground and as we closed in on the town centre every second or third home was no longer there. It was summer holidays. There should have been happy families playing in the water but the place was eerie and deserted. I acknowledge Peter Dunn, who stepped in to run the relief centre. I watched as he deftly managed the defence personnel and volunteers.

Last week I was on the Far South Coast with Mike Kelly, the member for Eden-Monaro, and Labor's Leanne Atkinson. I also acknowledge the member for Bega, Andrew Constance. In Quaama I visited Nardy House, which cares for people with significant disability. I heard how the fire came right up to the front door and how residents had nowhere to go and were refused entry to Bega hospital. There are so many lessons for us to learn. As the member for Bega knows only too well, the South Coast is doing it very tough. The local visitor economy has collapsed. "Don't send us food, instead buy food from us" was the message I heard over and over again. Issues include uncleared debris, a growing threat from asbestos, the need for mental health services and just simply hundreds of people living in caravans and tents.

Next Tuesday I will take our shadow Cabinet to the Snowy Valleys where we will hear from communities including Tumut, Batlow and Tumbarumba. I also acknowledge the member for Wagga Wagga. We will honour the role played by the Forestry Corporation in these fires by fighting to keep this crucial organisation in public hands. Despite the heroism of so many, nobody in this Chamber can truly be happy with how the past six months have unfolded. I acknowledge every member and I acknowledge also the work of the Premier and the Deputy Premier.

While the volunteer ethos is integral, there must be humane and reasonable limits to what we can expect. Firefighters, emergency services and volunteers need our support. I am really pleased that last year Labor led the way in pushing for RFS staff to be at least partly compensated and not left out of pocket. We have highlighted the cuts to the National Parks and Wildlife Service staff. As far back as December we asked for defence personnel to be deployed. We believe there needs to be a comprehensive air quality emergency plan as well.

I also want to honour the memory of 19-year-old Courtney Partridge-McLennan, who died following an asthma attack at her parents' home in Glen Innes. Courtney's family have called for her to be included in the bushfires death toll. I mention also some of the other challenges, which the Premier also touched on: the enormous impact on our wildlife and the fact that our summers are getting hotter and starting earlier and that our fire season is likely to become more intense. This is the message coming to us not just from scientists but also farmers, fire chiefs and regional mayors. It is clear that public sentiment has shifted. I sincerely hope that these fires will be the catalyst that unites us as a parliament to seize the opportunities to tackle climate change in a way that brings the community with us.

We must do our best to prepare our State for the future, for the new reality, for the changing climate. We must do it to honour the memory of the people we have lost during this tragic fire season. I commend the motion to the House and again I thank the Premier for giving every member of the House an opportunity to have their say and to offer their condolences to those who have been lost in these fires.

Mr JOHN BARILARO (Monaro—Minister for Regional New South Wales, Industry and Trade, and Deputy Premier) (12:43:08): As a regionally based member and as the member for Monaro I speak in support of the condolence motion, which gives us the opportunity to recognise and to pause as a parliament to think through what is simply the summer from hell. Right across regional and rural New South Wales there is a scar that our regions will bear beyond the weeks, months and years ahead because of the impact that these fires have had on communities, on families and on our landscape.

Our landscape forever will be changed, the economy forever will be changed and, more importantly, our communities forever will be changed. It was a tough period over summer but it is a reminder that today and over the days ahead—and members of this House will bring their stories in recognition of their communities, which it is important for us to do—we continue to face fierce fires on the South Coast, in my electorate of Monaro and right across the State. The summer fire season has not finished. For the next eight weeks it will continue to be a threat to our communities. That is why it is important to remain vigilant as we work through the weeks ahead, but at the same time we begin the recovery because that is an important part of healing for our community.

My electorate of Monaro has seen significant fires—fire fronts in all corners, with not a corner spared. Perhaps through luck but more importantly through the efforts of our volunteers, the RFS, and the many emergency services personnel, life and communities have been protected. Close to 100 homes have been lost in the electorate and the extent of the impact on other assets and properties will only become clear over the weeks and months ahead. It is clear that the impact on my community will be long lasting. The small community of Nerriga, located just outside Braidwood, enjoys a regional setting with a wonderful surrounding backdrop of trees but it is a landscape that becomes a real threat, especially in the hot summer season. That community has a population of only 150 and lost about 20 homes. It only has a local pub, a community hall and a church, which are the centre of the town.

Stories are coming through from that community of our heroes who, of course, were the firefighters on the fire front. The fire was fierce; it ripped through the community and through farmland and, as I said, 20-plus homes were lost. But there are heroes. There are stories of individuals who rose to the occasion—people like Phil

and Sarah, the owners of the Nerriga pub. Nerriga Road was closed for three weeks. Residents who did not leave remained in that community not only during the fires but also after them. Phil and Sarah opened up their pub as a home to many displaced members of our community and their families. They fed the volunteers and the RFS personnel for three weeks. Phil and Sarah and their kids were exposed to the same risk but rather than leaving they decided to stay to support their community in a time of need. Phil and Sarah are heroes—we will hear further stories over the days ahead—and they are champions of my community. In times of crisis we see the best of our communities and the best of Australians. It is who we are. The generosity shown through our charities in support of our communities has been clear. We should be very proud of that.

Even though we talk about the statistics in relation to lives lost, homes lost, assets lost and the impact on the landscape—they are important and normally get the media attention—we should also focus on the lives saved, the homes saved and the communities saved. The stories I am hearing, not only in my electorate of Monaro but also right across the State as I travel and meet communities, are those near-miss stories about life or communities. When a home is lost, whether it is one home or a thousand homes, the impact on our communities is real. In our communities in regional and rural New South Wales we all know each other; there is a connection. Times of crisis bring us closer and when a life or a home is lost we all feel it.

Even though members on both sides of this House may feel distant when we hear and read the statistics or the names of those who have lost their lives defending our communities, sometimes there are moments when we meet someone at a local recovery meeting whom we have met previously in our journey as a local member and their story becomes more real. In the small community of Rockton—a locality rather than a town—six homes were lost. Peter and Vivienne lost their home. Peter was with Fire and Rescue NSW. While he was saving everybody else's homes and farms, his house was lost in the fire. At a community meeting Peter looked familiar to me and we spoke about what had occurred in Rockton. He told me the story of his daughter Michaela.

When they thought they might lose their home, Vivienne went back to the house to collect some personal belongings, something special. She asked her three kids what they wanted her to collect and pack, something small, in case something was to occur. Michaela said, "Would you please collect the Christmas card?" She was referring to the member for Monaro's Christmas card, the design for which she won an award two years earlier. I could not hold back my tears. I broke down when I heard that the one thing she asked for was the Christmas card she designed, which became the Christmas card that I distributed as a local member and for which she was recognised with a prize. Her father told me that the year she won the prize had been tough for her at school but winning that Christmas card competition made a real difference. That was a touching moment for me. I met a family where I thought there was distance but, actually, we were much closer. These are real stories from across my electorate. Importantly, when someone loses a home, the impact that has on a community touches others.

Our fires have not stopped. On the weekend, the fire that is raging in the Namadgi near Canberra turned on the people of the Monaro again, this time in Colinton, just outside Bredbo and up from Michelago. Again, another half a dozen homes were lost and 20 properties were impacted. In one way it was lucky it was not Bredbo, Michelago, Jerangle or Captains Flat, but that fire continues to be a threat today. Our fire season has not ended. The fire in Namadgi impacts my residents on Smiths Road. The fires that we are now dealing with continue to be a threat. Today I acknowledge Jim Durant, who is heading up the team at the incident control centre in Cooma. He has done a wonderful job and has borne the burden of protecting the community.

Adaminaby was sure to be lost to the Adaminaby Complex fire but was protected through the efforts of volunteers. The small community of Shannons Flat has been cleared six times because of the real threat that it may be lost. That story continues throughout the region. Numeralla continues to be threatened by fires. Unfortunately, when the fires leave my electorate they go to Bega—or vice versa from Bega to Monaro. These fires are impacting the broader community, the whole south-east community, in a way that we will never forget. We lost over 40 homes up in Cabramurra.

Cabramurra is the village for the Snowy Hydro workers, who love to live and work there. We lost over 40 homes and we lost the local school up there. More importantly, the thing that really touched me when I visited recently was the impact on Kosciusko. The landscape has been burnt at an intensity and in a way that will change it forever and a day. The families and members of Cabramurra live in that landscape and that environment because they love the region. That scar will be a reminder of what has happened in Cabramurra. It does not matter where you are in my electorate, the impact is and has been real.

In my role as the Minister responsible for recovery, I have the opportunity to meet communities right across the State—as the Premier has done consistently since the fires began in the middle of last year, when the North Coast burned and fires continued down south. I credit the Premier of the State. She has not only stood tall in support of our communities through the summer from hell but has also visited every single region and fireground, along with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, lending support to our communities. I acknowledge her leadership of the State over summer. The Premier will be remembered for her efforts not

because of her duty but, more importantly, because she cares about our region. I acknowledge that. Our communities and our volunteers are reminded that they are not alone when they see the Premier, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and other members of Parliament turn up in support of our RFS brigades across the board.

As I have said, Jim Durant is still feeling the burden. I saw him on the weekend before and after the fires impacted Namadgi. He is wearing it. One home or one asset lost is one too many. I could stand here today and say, "Maybe we were lucky because it did not hit the townships of Michelago or Bredbo. We could have seen dozens more homes lost." But our volunteers work actively. Some of us live with guilt. As I said earlier, I have a 250 acre farm in Nerriga that is surrounded by pines, which, as we know, is an issue. The local brigade protected my property and the properties of my neighbours. We were the lucky ones. Yes, we have burnt country and we may have lost some fences but we did not lose our homes.

I acknowledge the efforts of the RFS, the volunteers and the many others who are protecting assets, communities and life. It is significant. As I travel the State I hear over and over again stories of near misses. I know Andrew Constance will talk about Bega. What has happened on the South Coast will not be forgotten by any member of this House or any member of that community or any community across the State. The scar is deep and long lasting. We have an opportunity as members of this House—not as members of the Government or of the Opposition or as members of Parliament but, more importantly, as leaders in our community—to lead the recovery and rebuild of those communities, which will bring about a level of normality. Those communities will never be the same but we have an opportunity to shape them to be bigger, better and brighter in the future. And that is important.

There will be stories of people who fall through the cracks. I have said that publicly and we must acknowledge that. With this crisis, this emergency, the response is significant. This is beyond what happened in 2009 in Victoria. This is beyond the impact that we have seen from other fires in this State and other States. In 2003 I was living in Queanbeyan and I remember the impact of the Canberra fires. That scar remains with me today, not only because of what I saw personally living in that community but also because I was in the building industry at the time. The journey to rebuild those communities took years.

Right across the State there is a sense of urgency to get on with it. We have made announcements about getting on with it. We want to rebuild these communities. We want to empower individuals. We want to make sure they know and feel confident that there is a future and there is hope. But it is going to take some time. I cannot pretend that it is going to be done overnight. This journey to rebuild our communities will take weeks, months and years, but we are committed. Together, as leaders of our community, we have an opportunity to shape those communities for the future, not just for today; to bring back a level of normality; to return jobs to local economies; to build the infrastructure that is so important for rural and regional communities to function; and, more importantly, to make sure that our kids have a future in the regions.

We are already under attack in regional and rural New South Wales from the drought. That impacts not just our farmers and the broader community but also, more importantly, the next generation. We want our families to stay in the regions. I know people will say we are resilient—drought, lack of water, bushfires. Yes, we are resilient but that resilience is running out. We need to come together as leaders, as a parliament, as Australians, as citizens, to make sure that our priority and our focus is making these communities feel that they are supported.

I am prepared to work with those opposite. I acknowledge Jihad Dib, who came to Braidwood with members of his community to support our community after the fires—in Araluen, Braidwood and Nerriga; up around Shannons Flat; in Colinton, Bredbo and Michelago; up in Adaminaby, with the Adaminaby Complex fire; and in Kosciuszko, where we were lucky to save both Thredbo and Perisher but lost the Selwyn Snow Resort. That loss will have a significant impact on the people of Adaminaby because Selwyn sees about 70,000 tourists during the winter. Without Selwyn, Adaminaby will struggle.

Right across the region we have seen generosity from all over, and that is something I am very proud of. It is something we should acknowledge in this House today as we remember those who lost their lives. They did not lose their lives in vain. They cared about their community and they protected their community. The plane that came down was also in my electorate, just outside Bredbo. Of course, it is hard when three men do not return to their country. Their families and their loved ones have also been impacted. That is another scar for the people of my community. They are already talking about how we can acknowledge and remember those three people. Locally we have also lost our own firefighters and, of course, family members. I have met with families who have lost loved ones or have lost their homes. But I am reminded how lucky we are in this country because we have the ability, the resources, the capacity and the strength to get on with the rebuild and support our communities. It is important that we do that together as a community.

I acknowledge all those members from all sides of politics who represent electorates that have been impacted by these fires for the leadership they have shown. I acknowledge Joe McGirr, whom I have been in contact with, and his electorate. I acknowledge the Leader of the Opposition, who also reached out. We have been speaking throughout the summer and the fire season. I acknowledge the leadership shown by all members. Andrew Constance has shown leadership, compassion and heart to the people of his electorate. He cares. Despite his own family's stress and almost losing his home, he stuck around and supported his community not only during the fires but also after them. I look forward to working with Minister Constance to work out how to rebuild his community for the future. I acknowledge also his family and wife, Jen, who is in the public gallery today.

This is a moment in time when we have an opportunity to come together to show leadership. This is a moment in time when we can shape the future of regional and rural communities. I thank the local government councillors, staff, general managers and mayors who have been on the ground, in some cases filling the void while we have been putting together the recovery plan. I acknowledge local government. Often there is argy-bargy between the three levels of government but there has been no argy-bargy in this crisis. I acknowledge and respect local government.

I thank also the Australian Defence Force [ADF] personnel. There is something about seeing ADF uniforms in your community that brings a sense of hope, safety and comfort. It also makes you feel like you are visiting a war zone. That is what the impact of the fires feels like in some of these communities. But the community—from our emergency service personnel to the ADF to local, State and Federal governments—is working together. As members of Parliament, we have an opportunity to lead the rebuild of our communities. It is not only during this week that we will talk about these fires. In the weeks and months ahead many members of this House will tell stories about different individuals. I do not know how we can acknowledge all the heroes, from the emergency responders to those who are supporting their communities today, but we must. We must acknowledge them because they are heroes and we are very, very proud of them.

I again acknowledge the Rural Fire Service. Last year when I went to California to meet with the Californian fire chief, the RFS stuck in his mind. He asked me to explain the RFS—the largest volunteer organisation in the world in which individuals put their own lives at risk to protect their communities and the lives of others. The rest of the world does not understand the Australian culture and way of life and our volunteers' preparedness to sacrifice their own lives to protect others. We should be very proud of that culture and way of life and never let it go. I hope that through this crisis the membership of the RFS grows and another generation of young people join RFS brigades. I acknowledge the members of this House on both sides who are members of the RFS and are supporting their communities.

As I said, what a summer! It was a summer from a hell, a tragedy and a crisis. I will live this for a long time. But we have an opportunity to rebuild and shape the future. I look forward to working with everybody in our community in my role as the Minister responsible for the recovery and rebuild of not just communities but also lives on behalf of regional and rural New South Wales. We can all do that together. I look forward to working with each and every member in the weeks ahead. Today we remember, acknowledge and pass on our condolences to those who lost loved ones. Today is an opportunity for members to come together, to pause and to remember.

Ms YASMIN CATLEY (Swansea) (13:02:35): I add my voice to those of my parliamentary colleagues in this motion of condolence for the people and communities who have been hit so hard by the bushfires of 2019 and 2020. However, it is critical that we acknowledge that the fire threat is not over. There are 80 incidents across the State, with the RFS and other emergency service agencies continuing to respond. Over the past weekend there were flare-ups in the Erskine Creek fire near Sydney and the Clear Range and Orroral Valley fires in and around the Australian Capital Territory. First of all we must acknowledge that whilst the threats to various communities across New South Wales have subsided, they have not passed and there remains another month of warm, dry weather ahead of us. Communities, many of whom have been fighting fires or have faced fire fronts head on, must remain vigilant.

There are still thousands of RFS staff and volunteers, professional firefighters with Fire and Rescue NSW and hardworking staff at agencies such as the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Forestry Corporation actively engaged in the firefighting effort. We thank our valiant and determined heroes for their immeasurable contribution keeping our people and communities safe. I acknowledge and pay tribute to the firefighters who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the course of their heroic work. Geoffrey Keaton, who was just 32 and deputy captain of the Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade, was killed alongside fellow brigade member Andrew O'Dwyer, who was just 36. They were killed fighting the Green Wattle Creek fire near Buxton when a tree fell down in front of their truck, causing their truck to swerve and roll. I acknowledge the Horsley Park brigade members in the gallery today, including our colleague the member for Prospect, who is also a member of that brigade. As Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons has said, if they had been only a second earlier or half a second later it could have been a much different outcome. Tragically, those two young men leave behind their young families.

In a similarly devastating occurrence, Samuel McPaul, a 28-year-old from Holbrook, was killed when his truck was struck by a fire-induced tornado down near the Murray River. Like the Keaton and O'Dwyer families, these devastating fires have left the McPaul family without a father. Samuel and his wife, Megan, are expecting their first child in May this year. It is important to note that all of the three firefighters were killed a long way from home. That is because the Rural Fire Service is made up of many hundreds of local brigades but their service to community goes far beyond their local area. The solidarity of our firefighting fraternity is such that these volunteers think nothing of packing up and hitting the road to travel to wherever the threat is. The bonds of that solidarity traverse State borders in Australia and they traverse the globe.

Not only must we thank and acknowledge the interstate volunteers from across Australia who have come to our aid but also we must acknowledge and extend our deepest gratitude to firefighters from the United States, Canada and New Zealand. Some 80 or 90 firefighters from both the United States and Canada have been here fighting fires alongside our local crews in addition to the professional aerial firefighters from Coulson Aviation who crew our water-bombing helicopters and Large Air Tankers. We extend our deepest condolences, our shared grief and immeasurable gratitude to the families, friends and colleagues of the three American pilots who were killed when a Coulson Aviation Large Air Tanker crashed near the Snowy Mountains.

Captain Ian McBeth from Great Falls in Montana was a highly qualified and experienced pilot. He was a member of the National Guard in both Montana and Wyoming. He has left behind his devoted family. Likewise, First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson of Arizona. Rick DeMorgan Jr from Florida served as a flight engineer on C-130 aircraft with the United States Air Force for 18 years and had more than 4,000 hours as a flight engineer, including 2,000 hours in combat duty. This was a professional, experienced, skilled and specialist crew. Their loss was felt by the firefighting fraternity around the world. The people of New South Wales will never forget the sacrifice made by these men and their families while protecting the lives and homes of people across our State.

Fire-affected communities also mourn the loss of loved ones, friends and colleagues who have tragically perished in the fires from the north to the south of the State. In October 2019 Gwen Hyde and Robert Lindsay, husband and wife from Coongbar in the State's north, were found to have perished while defending their home. They were overwhelmed by the fire front after noticing spot fires in their orchard. The House has heard how Gwen rang her friend Carol seeking advice about what to do and how to get in touch with the local rural fire brigade. Tragically, it was then probably already too late. This tragedy shows the ferocity and speed with which bushfires move and the destruction and tragedy they leave in their wake.

Vivian Chaplain from Wyaliba near Glen Innes was critically injured on 8 November while trying to defend her home and the animals on her property. She was a much-loved and respected pillar of the local community. Sadly, she passed away in hospital the next day. On the same day the Wyaliba community also lost long-time local George Nole. As we have heard today, George was an electrician who worked on the Apollo space program with NASA in his younger days. He had lived in the region since 1980. Tragically, he was found dead in his car near Glen Innes, having tried to escape the Kangawalla fire front.

These tragic stories go to show how unpredictable and unrelenting these fires were. These victims were often caught while fleeing or defending their homes, with conditions worsening so quickly it was impossible for them to survive. The same was probably true for Julie Fletcher from Johns River, south of Port Macquarie, who was found in a burnt-out building after the fire front had gone through, and Barry Parsons from Willawarrin, north-west of Port Macquarie. Both were described by members of their respective communities as quality people who will be deeply missed. So often we have heard the RFS make declarations that it is too late to leave a town or village somewhere in our State. After a while such announcements can sound routine but, of course, what they mean is that somewhere in our State a community is hunkering down or fleeing a ferocious fire front and there may be people sheltering or fleeing who might not make it out alive. That is the stark reality and the very real tragedy of those announcements.

Of course, it is not just the danger of the fire itself that can claim lives during a bushfire emergency. The heightened risk of vehicle accidents in these terrifying moments can see yet more tragedies unfold, such as the RFS truck that rolled while avoiding a fallen tree. The tight-knit rural community of South Arm near Nambucca Heads mourns the loss of Chris Savva, whose car rolled down an embankment when he tried to reverse from a burned-out bridge along a dirt road while fleeing the fire front. As fires flared up in the south of the State around the New Year's period, the rural community of Wandella near Cobargo lost father and son Robert and Patrick Salway. As members have heard in this Chamber today, the Salway family were well-known dairy farmers in the Bega region. Robert and Patrick were killed fighting the Badja Forest Road fire, which threatened their family property. These are the names and stories of the bushfire victims who have so far been identified. Sadly, there are those who have died across the State who have not been identified. In most cases we can deduce that they were killed defending either their home or the home of their neighbour.

We also mourn the loss of life in Victoria and South Australia, where the devastation of bushfires has been similarly horrific in regional and rural communities. Like us, those States face an emotional and trying time as they mourn their loved ones, assess the damage, pick up the pieces of their lives and try to rebuild. To this end, I acknowledge the fraternal bonds between the States as we share firefighting resources and expertise, cooperate across State and Territory borders and look to what we must do to prepare ourselves collectively for a future where bushfire seasons grow ever longer and larger and more ferocious fires burn concurrently across the country. Apart from the human tragedy and the loss of family homes, the devastation has also seen hundreds of millions of native animals killed and almost five million hectares of bush and farmland burned in New South Wales alone. This will cause monumental lasting impacts to our environment. We must now press ahead while facing the very real threat of water contamination and further environmental impacts due to toxic run-off when the rains do eventually come. To this end, the rebuild and recovery effort will be an immense undertaking.

Debate interrupted.

Business of the House

SUSPENSION OF STANDING AND SESSIONAL ORDERS: ROUTINE OF BUSINESS

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit the motion of condolence to continue past 1.15 p.m.

Motion agreed to.

Motions

BUSHFIRES

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Ms YASMIN CATLEY (Swansea) (13:13:40): I acknowledge the appointment of the Deputy Premier, John Barilaro, to the role of disaster recovery Minister. Likewise, I acknowledge the deployment of two recovery coordinators, Mr Euan Ferguson in the north of the State and Mr Dick Adams in the south. I have taken on the new role of shadow rebuilding and recovery Minister. Alongside our leader, Jodi McKay, and shadow Ministers such as Trish Doyle and local members such as Janelle Saffin in the electorate of Lismore and the Federal member for Gilmore, Fiona Phillips, I have visited fire-affected regions across New South Wales.

It is easy for people to be cynical about politicians but I know how hard it hits when local communities are under threat and I know the immense pressure members find themselves under as community leaders during times of crisis. I acknowledge the heartfelt and raw emotion of Andrew Constance, who fought the fires to defend his home in Malua Bay and who has been standing side by side his community throughout this period. He raised some very important points in recent days about the lasting and devastating mental health impacts of bushfire disaster which linger well beyond the rebuilding process.

Likewise I wish to highlight Janelle Saffin who, as the member for Lismore, has been dealing with this crisis since October last year, leading her community during the response, aftermath and rebuilding processes. She has been on the ground throughout this period, helping people in her electorate to rebuild their lives in a region which of course only recently faced catastrophic flooding. I also acknowledge the work of Trish Doyle, who has had to juggle the dual role of shadow Minister for Emergency Services alongside her work as the member for Blue Mountains. Her community has lost homes in the north of her electorate, while much of her electorate has lived with the deadly threat of emergency fires in very close proximity to townships like Katoomba, Wentworth Falls and Blackheath. I also note the very personal impact upon her from her son being among the crew of professional firefighters in a Fire and Rescue strike team that was overrun by fire near Nowra.

In the course of my work as the shadow Minister for Rebuilding and Recovery I have visited many affected towns all along the coast. Everywhere the stories I have heard have had the same common theme: Members of the community, whether formally through the RFS or not, banded together as best they could to fight these fires, defending one another's properties and livestock and in the aftermath are banding together to begin the rebuild and recovery effort. There is one particularly touching example from Cobargo where trade union members banded together to rebuild the home of Toby Rixon-Gosch, his partner, Nicola Bailey, and their five-year-old daughter, Layla. After the fire came through on New Year's Eve, destroying their home and much of the infrastructure on their farm, the family was forced to camp on their land in a campervan. However, over a period of just 10 days, carpenters, electricians, plumbers and other trades had built them a new house and they received the keys on 23 January.

I agree with the Deputy Premier: In the face of adversity we often see the best of people in our community—so much generosity, so much care and so much love. It is a monumental achievement and testament

to the solidarity and camaraderie of the union movement and the solidarity of community cooperation, which will be vital during the rebuilding process for every community that has been devastated by fires. Before I conclude my speech, I wish to place on the record my respect and gratitude to our public sector workers and the valiant volunteers of the Rural Fire Service and the SES who have been on the front lines of this disaster. I thank and acknowledge Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons at the Rural Fire Service, along with the nearly 900 professional staff in his employ and the many thousands of volunteer firefighters who have been working almost non-stop since September fighting these mammoth fires. I also acknowledge all our volunteer services in the emergency services area.

I acknowledge the highly crucial work of National Parks and Wildlife Service rangers and staff who perform hazard reduction burns and fight fires on the front line alongside the RFS, as well as the professional firefighters from Fire and Rescue NSW whose expertise and experience have been crucial. So too we should acknowledge the firefighting capacity of the Forestry Corporation and the work of local council staff across the State who have helped with coordination, resourcing and on-the-ground support for firefighting efforts in their jurisdictions. I will wrap up now but I reiterate my very deep and personal sorrow and the collective sorrow of Labor members in this place in the aftermath of the bushfire disaster. I put on the record our commitment to work alongside the community during the rebuilding and recovery phase of this disaster. As the Deputy Premier said, as members of this place we now have an opportunity to rebuild. I commend the motion to the House.

Dr HUGH McDERMOTT (Prospect) (13:19:30): Today it is an honour to speak both as an elected representative and a proud volunteer Rural Fire Service firefighter. The words being used to describe those who have lost their lives fighting the blazes are apt: courage, heroism, sacrifice. But as someone who had the privilege of fighting alongside two of those heroes, Geoff Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer, I want to illustrate those words and give the House a sense of what it is like to be on a fireground so we can fully appreciate what those words truly mean. I want to put into the official record of our State, the parliamentary *Hansard*, for the children and friends of Geoff and Andrew, an account of their courage, heroism and sacrifice so in future years they may read back over these archives and know that their dad's voice was heard, that their stories were told and that this State will never forget or be able to ever fully recognise their ultimate sacrifice.

On the morning of 19 December the crew of Horsley Park Brigade 1 Alpha was tasked as part of the Cumberland Zone Strike Team Echo 19 to assist fighting the Green Wattle Creek Fire at Balmoral and Buxton in Wollondilly. Horsley Park 1 Alpha consisted of five crew members: crew leader Sam Quattromani, driver Matt Cross and firefighters Robbie Gardener, Nadeen Yokhana and myself. We were a cross-section of our community but when we were working together it did not matter where we came from. It was what we were doing together that mattered. When we arrived that morning in Tahmoor, the townships of Balmoral and Buxton were surrounded by flame fronts, properties were under threat and many residents were defending their homes or simply unable to leave.

Over the next 16 hours the towns and outlying homes were attacked by the fire again and again. Each time crews of volunteers stood their ground and held back the flames. Over the next three days Balmoral would be hit on 10 different occasions by flame fronts, some up to 20 metres in height. It is hard to put into words the experience of confronting this and other bushfires. The footage shown on television does not quite capture it. The feeling as a fire approaches is emotionally intense but the surroundings are eerily quiet. There are no sounds of birds. You can hear the water bombers and choppers in the air, often right above your head, but it is so very still on the ground. You feel the intense, scorching heat, often before you see the flames. You are then hit by a wave of insects fleeing the fire. Small and larger animals scurry past you—all chasing clear air and trying to outrun the flames.

First the fire comes in the tree level above your head, energised by the eucalyptus and tea-trees that are so much a part of our Australian bush. As it rises, it crests and creates huge balls of flame above the trees, as if the sky is on fire. The embers attack, hitting your crew and the property you are defending and starting new fires behind you. By now the noise is deafening and the heat is intense. Then the fire comes along the ground level, looking for a way through and you push it back. Then it surges in a wall of flames. You cannot stop it. All you can do is divert it from the property and the lives that you are protecting. At this point the RFS training kicks in: You support your colleagues, you do not turn away, you face the flames as a crew. Fighting fires is a team effort built on individual courage and commitment of each and every volunteer. You are trained to expect the worst. Your truck is your haven. If you look like getting overrun you retreat to the crew cabin, cover yourself in blankets and hit the halo system, which covers the crew cabin with water, as the blaze—hopefully—passes over.

At about 8.00 p.m. on the night of 19 December my crew and the Cumberland Strike Team Echo 19 were withdrawn from the fireground back to the staging ground at Picton, where relief crews were to take over for the night shift. The strike team relief crew from Horsley Park 1 Alpha consisted of Horsley Park Brigade Deputy Captain Geoff Keaton, driver-firefighter Andrew O'Dwyer and our three colleagues, firefighters Carlos Quinteros,

Tim Penning and Ben Fraser. We met at Picton for the changeover. We talked about the job at hand, our concerns on the condition of the fireground and the dangers we were facing. We talked about our families and what was happening at home. Geoff's 20-month-old son, Harvey, was ill with a similar ailment that my daughter had a few years ago. We talked about him and parenting stress for a couple of minutes. In the future, when Harvey is old enough to read this *Hansard*, I want him to know that the last words Geoff spoke to me were about him. Harvey, your father loved you so very much. Sam threw the keys of 1 Alpha to Geoff and we said, "We'll see you in 12 hours at the changeover." An hour later, the lives of everyone in our brigade and our families were changed forever.

The Cumberland Strike Team was tasked with property and life protection to the south of Balmoral as there were homes and lives at risk. The five-vehicle convoy sped through Balmoral and drove on the same road that we had driven on only hours before. I will set the scene of what we saw those hours before on that same day. On one side of the dirt road, all the large trees were on fire. On the other side, the bases of all the telegraph poles were burning, leaning on an angle. All that was holding them up were the powerlines, which were still live. That night, as the crew of Horsley Park 1 Alpha came speeding down the road, a large, burning tree fell, hitting the truck's cabin. The truck flipped and rolled three times.

Andrew and Geoff, who were in the front of the cabin, which had borne the brunt of the impact, were killed instantly. Of the three volunteers in the back of the cabin, Carlos' legs were trapped and he was bleeding from a large gash behind his ear, Tim was unconscious and Ben, despite his injuries, climbed into the front of the cabin in an attempt to help Andrew and Geoff. He held Andrew's head in his lap. Other crews in the strike team responded to the burning truck to assist. The actions of these volunteer firefighters, some of whom are in the public gallery today, were both extraordinary and typical of our brigade and the members of the RFS. It is what thousands of citizens of New South Wales are doing every day of summer to support their community. These are the daily dangers they face.

The next morning my crew got the notice that there had been a major incident. Initially I was confident it would not have involved Andrew and Geoff's crew because they were so accomplished as firefighters and leaders. But tragedy has no regard for merit. When I got the terrible news I was stunned, shattered. Twenty minutes later Minister Elliott contacted me, as did the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition. I greatly appreciated their personal calls. At that time my only thought was to head to the brigade and to be with my colleagues and their families. Other volunteers had exactly the same idea; so did Geoff and Andrew's family, Mel and Charlotte, Jess and Harvey. Commissioner Fitzsimmons arrived, as did the Premier.

The presence of the Premier and the commissioner at the brigade on that Friday before Christmas meant a great deal to those of us there. It communicated how much they valued the commitment of these two firefighters and acknowledged the ultimate sacrifice they had made for our community. We spent the day in that state of shock we have all experienced when the worst happens, talking about what had occurred, looking after each other. The brigade members wanted to go back on the fire line and we had a long discussion with the commissioner about that. He agreed and we were redeployed the following day. At the time it was the only place where we felt we could honour the bravery of our friends.

There will be a time to talk about the causes of the bushfires—the policies of the national and State governments—but that time is not today. Today is an opportunity to reflect on the contribution ordinary citizens are making to this State each and every day. As I stand here today there are approximately 2,000 men and women putting their lives on the line to fight fires across New South Wales. I wonder to myself, will they all return home safely? At a time when many say our social institutions are declining and individualism is on the rise, their commitment reminds us that there is a civic mindedness embedded in our Australian DNA. We need to build on this so that being an active member of the community, of finding how to help our neighbour, is the norm and not the extraordinary.

I know that members of this Parliament will find bipartisan ways to recognise our volunteer firefighters and to thank them for their effort. But I also hope that summer provides a fresh impetus to not only recognising the importance of volunteering but also of making it easier for people who want to contribute to their State. On behalf of the members of the Horsley Park brigade and all volunteer firefighters who have stood on the fireground with us, I recognise the Premier's leadership across this summer—in turning up and giving of herself when people really needed her to be there. I thank my parliamentary colleagues across the Chamber for their support of me personally, of my brigade and of their local brigades. In particular, I thank the member for Wollondilly, in whose electorate Andrew and Geoff were killed, who has come to the funerals and to the brigade. He has reached out to me personally on a number of occasions.

I pay tribute to Commissioner Fitzsimmons, who continues to work tirelessly throughout the summer, leading the RFS with clarity and empathy. I also thank the New South Wales community, at every level, for its support through this long, hot, hard, heartbreaking summer. Our State is burning and our citizen firefighters have

stepped up. Not all of them have survived. Today we honour them for their courage, for their heroism and for their sacrifice.

Debate interrupted.

The SPEAKER: I will now leave the chair. The House will resume at 2.15 p.m.

Members

MEMBER FOR MYALL LAKES

MEMBER FOR MAITLAND

MEMBER FOR DUBBO

The SPEAKER: I hope the member for Myall Lakes, the member for Maitland and the member for Dubbo enjoyed their birthdays over the summer break.

Visitors

VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I extend a very warm welcome to Isole Eolie, the Mayor of Lipari in Italy, Marco Giorgianni, his wife, Maria-Lucrezia Zaia, and their son, Alfredo Giorgianni. I also welcome Giovanni and Flora Finocchiaro, and Eligio and Angela Perna. They are all guests of the member for Drummoyne. I welcome Parissa Zand and Emily Osborne, guests of the member for Balmain. I welcome them all to the Chamber.

Documents

LETTERS FROM THE PARLIAMENTS OF SCOTLAND AND WALES

The SPEAKER: I inform the House that during the recess I received two letters: the first dated 8 January 2020 from the Presiding Officer, Elin Jones, and Deputy Presiding Officer, Ann Jones, of the National Assembly for Wales; and the second dated 9 January 2020 from the Presiding Officer, the Rt Hon. Ken Macintosh, MSP, of the Scottish Parliament. Both letters express the sympathies and condolences of their respective parliaments to the people of New South Wales. I table the documents.

Announcements

DEATH OF ALFRED HUGH DENNIS, FORMER MEMBER FOR BLACKTOWN

The SPEAKER: It is with regret that I inform the House of the death on 15 December 2019 of Alfred Hugh Dennis, a former member of the Legislative Assembly, who served as the member for Blacktown from 21 March 1959 to 5 February 1962. On behalf of the House, I extend to the families the deep sympathy of the Legislative Assembly in the loss sustained.

Members and officers of the House stood in their places as a mark of respect.

DEATH OF PHILLIP JOSEPH O'NEILL, FORMER MEMBER FOR BURWOOD

The SPEAKER: It is with regret that I inform the House of the death on 7 January 2020 of Phillip Joseph O'Neill, a former member of the Legislative Assembly, who served as the member for Burwood from 7 October 1978 to 5 March 1984. On behalf of the House, I extend to the families the deep sympathy of the Legislative Assembly in the loss sustained.

Members and officers of the House stood in their places as a mark of respect.

DEATH OF DOUGLAS JAMES SHEDDEN, FORMER MEMBER FOR BANKSTOWN

The SPEAKER: It is with regret that I inform the House of the death on 13 January 2020 of Douglas James Shedden, a former member of the Legislative Assembly, who served as the member for Bankstown from 31 January 1987 to 5 March 1999. On behalf of the House, I extend to the families the deep sympathy of the Legislative Assembly in the loss sustained.

Members and officers of the House stood in their places as a mark of respect.

*Bills***FINES AMENDMENT BILL 2019****STATUTE LAW (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL 2019****RIGHT TO FARM BILL 2019****WATER SUPPLY (CRITICAL NEEDS) BILL 2019****MUSIC FESTIVALS BILL 2019****ELECTORAL FUNDING AMENDMENT (LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE CAPS) BILL 2019****TRANSPORT ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (RMS DISSOLUTION) BILL 2019****JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (NO 2) 2019****ROAD TRANSPORT AMENDMENT (MISCELLANEOUS) BILL 2019****ELECTORAL FUNDING AMENDMENT (CASH DONATIONS) BILL 2019****BETTER REGULATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2019****GAMBLING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (ONLINE AND OTHER BETTING) BILL 2019****CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN BILL 2019****Assent**

The SPEAKER: I report receipt of messages from the Governor notifying Her Excellency's assent to the bills.

*Governor***ADMINISTRATION OF THE GOVERNMENT**

The SPEAKER: I report receipt of messages regarding the administration of the Government.

*Question Time***BUSHFIRES INQUIRY**

Ms JODI McKAY (Strathfield) (14:20:28): I direct my question to the Deputy Premier. Across the many fire-affected communities I have visited, thousands of people want to tell their stories, as we saw on last night's emotional *Q+A*. Will the Deputy Premier agree to hold public hearings in fire-affected areas as part of the bushfire inquiry so that people in rural and regional New South Wales can have their say?

Mr JOHN BARILARO (Monaro—Minister for Regional New South Wales, Industry and Trade, and Deputy Premier) (14:20:51): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question in relation to the inquiry announced by the Premier, which I and all members on this side of the House support. I believe it has significant, broad terms of reference to deal with the issues that a lot of people have begun a conversation about. These are issues that our communities are feeling and we need to address them off the back of what has been a horrific summer. We have had a summer where we have lost lives and, of course, that has impacted on communities. As I said this morning, it will leave a scar on our regions for a long time. This is why an inquiry and a review on some level is important for our communities to have an opportunity to contribute.

It is also important to accept and to understand why hold an inquiry rather than public meetings. Firstly, we have to respect the RFS, which has been working day after day, night after night to protect our community. It is an opportunity for everyone in regional and rural New South Wales to contribute. Trust me, I want to see contributions to this inquiry from people who have lost their homes and who have been impacted by these fires. As I travel the State I am hearing a message and I want to make sure that that is part of this inquiry. They will all have an opportunity to make submissions to the inquiry.

It is important that we document these stories, these experiences as well as historic information and data. This can be done by making submissions to the inquiry. My understanding is that the inquiry panel will visit the regions in its own way. In my mind the inquiry will do exactly what we said we would do, that is, review what has occurred over the summer. Regional and rural communities will play a big part in contributing to an inquiry that I believe will change a lot of government policy, not just today but in the future.

BUSHFIRES

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY (Albury) (14:23:15): I address my question to the Premier. Will the Premier update the House on the scale of the impact and the actions taken as a result of the unprecedented bushfires?

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby—Premier) (14:23:27): I thank the member for Albury for his question. I appreciate the solidarity demonstrated by all members in this place in contributing to the condolence motion. Every member, whether directly impacted or not by the bushfires, will be able to express their deepest condolences and also their empathy towards those who are still suffering across our State. I acknowledge the suffering that the member for Albury's electorate is enduring. I had the opportunity to visit the Snowy Valleys fire control centre in Tumut a few times in the midst of them fighting the fires.

We also had the tragic death of Sam McPaul at Jingellic in the Albury electorate. I thank the member for Albury for facilitating Commissioner Fitzsimmons, Commissioner Baxter and me the opportunity to meet with the NSW Rural Fire Service volunteers who were alongside Sam on that fateful night in Jingellic. We express our deepest sympathies to them for what they and the whole community are going through. When something like that happens in a rural community it really impacts and the shockwaves are felt extensively.

I acknowledge also the communities of Culcairn and Holbrook, where I had the opportunity to meet with Sam's relatives, and I acknowledge the community of Tumbarumba, where we had a major civic reception last week. The Prime Minister and I attended, as did the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Commissioner Fitzsimmons and Commissioner Baxter, to talk to the community and to make sure that we are doing everything we can to support them during this difficult time.

Again I say that I appreciate the question from the member for Albury. I think most of us have an impression of the scale and extent of this unprecedented bushfire season. Today I again acknowledge the deep sense of loss but I also thank the citizens of our State who stood up and supported those most in need during these difficult times. We have mentioned, as we should, the firefighters in all of our agencies—the RFS, Fire and Rescue NSW, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and Forestry NSW. I am incredibly proud to say that at any given time 109,000 firefighters were on stand-by in New South Wales. On the worst days over 100 aircraft were deployed as well as 37,000 of what are called appliances—trucks and other vehicles—and, most proudly, 30 government agencies were working hand in hand with each other.

I want to stress this point. As I have spoken to community members, including in the Albury electorate, many people are carrying an enormous sense of guilt, and they should not. People who have not had their properties destroyed are feeling guilty because their neighbours have lost their properties and they have not. People who have been fighting fires and were not able to save the property of someone they know in their community are suffering with that guilt. I express on behalf of all of us in this place: Please do not have those feelings. Nobody could have prevented what has beset our State in the last few months and we know that for many communities the struggle and the fight continues in dealing with these bushfires.

I acknowledge all those citizens who, whether in a formal or an informal capacity, supported fellow citizens during the most horrific of times. Our Government ensured during the process that we had 88 evacuation centres operating throughout the State at any given time. Not all of those were needed for a long period but in any community where there was that distress, where people were asked to evacuate or were fleeing their homes, we opened and provided opportunities through 88 evacuation centres. These numbers are quite profound but they demonstrate the extent of what has gone on.

More than 26,000 people officially registered through those evacuation centres—that is 26,000 people needing immediate emergency support. It has been an absolute privilege to go to some of these centres and to see government agencies working together—Federal, State and local—as well as non-government organisations and just plain community volunteers. It has been heart warming. I acknowledge also that more than 7,500 people have been provided temporary accommodation. I appreciate that for many people where they will be living in the medium and long term is uncertain but please know you do not need to worry about the next few months. We will take care of you until you can get back up on your feet. I stress again the generosity demonstrated by agencies, non-government organisations and citizens who opened up their homes. *[Extension of time]*

On New Year's Day I travelled with Commissioner Fitzsimmons and Commissioner Baxter to Rosedale in the electorate of the member for Bega, where there was horrific loss. One family on holidays told us that a complete stranger had opened their home to 27 people, including children and all their pets. A complete stranger opened up their home to 27 people who had nowhere else to go. We know that the impact of the fires has been devastating. We know the fires have been unprecedented. On behalf of all of our colleagues and the people of New South Wales, I thank all those individuals who, in either a formal or an informal capacity, stood up to support fellow citizens in what have been some of the darkest hours our State has ever had to face. Today, in remembering

all those who are suffering and all those who have lost loved ones, we take courage in knowing what the citizens of this State are made of and what they have done to support others in their darkest hours.

BUSHFIRES INQUIRY

Ms YASMIN CATLEY (Swansea) (14:29:37): My question is directed to the Deputy Premier. There are a lot of people who have lost everything in the bushfires and many of them are living in tents and caravans and do not have access to computers. Given the Deputy Premier's refusal to hold public hearings, how does he honestly expect those affected to make written submissions?

The SPEAKER: I note the last two questions have been preceded by a statement. Members should ask a question, not make a statement followed by a question.

Mr JOHN BARILARO (Monaro—Minister for Regional New South Wales, Industry and Trade, and Deputy Premier) (14:30:22): That is not the question I thought I was going to be asked. Does the member for Swansea genuinely believe that the people who have lost everything are really concerned about an inquiry right now? These people have lost their homes; some have even lost family members. There is anxiety, fear and trauma in regional and rural communities. I have had the opportunity to spend some time with the member for Bega in his electorate. I have been there a handful of times and every time I have visited the impact has been so real. I feel it each and every time. The focus for this Government is clear: recovery and rebuild. The inquiry will happen and those who want to contribute will have an opportunity to do so. But the focus of a lot of our families, individuals and communities is rebuilding their lives.

That is why the Government has made the recovery our priority and focus. We have put urgency around the rebuild by signing a head contractor so that we can get on the ground as early as next week to start clearing blocks of land. Part of the healing process for individuals will involve having their land cleared and having a blank canvas on which to build so that they can dream again and hope for a better future. Country and regional people are private people and often do not want to turn up to a town hall meeting to express what they have been through. The idea that they can contribute through a written submission and a meeting with the panel is appropriate at a time when they are still healing and are still seeing the devastation around them. The trauma is still being felt.

We are now moving away from an emergency crisis. The adrenalin has got us to this point but as the adrenalin wears off we are faced with the reality. Many people in the regions cannot imagine a future. These people have chosen to live in these parts of our community—in the north, south or west—for a number of reasons. They may live in small villages and communities because they do not want to be part of the mainstream. Unfortunately, some do not have insurance, some do not have development applications and some may have been living in illegal dwellings. Their futures hold so much doubt and there is anxiety in the community.

Right now my focus, with the support of the Premier and the Government, is getting on with the recovery and rebuild. I will not shy away from that. As I said earlier today, I want to work with every member of the Parliament, not just of the Government. All of us can help turn this recovery into something great. As I have said previously, there will be people who fall through the cracks. That burden sits on me. I face these communities knowing that there will be people who fall through the cracks. I own that responsibility. But every member of this place can be a community leader and work with the agencies, head contractors, local government, the NSW Rural Fire Service and all of our volunteers to rebuild these communities. That is my focus.

I do not shy away from the task of getting case managers on the ground to make sure that those who are living in temporary or emergency accommodation are looked after. As the Premier said, more than 7,500 people have required emergency accommodation and we are still dealing with 200 to 300 people. We have the capacity and ability to do that. I acknowledge the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and all the other Ministers for the way in which we have dealt with this emergency crisis. In a way we want to return to some level of normality. For example, on the South Coast some accommodation needs to be used for holiday letting so that people come back to the region but we have to balance that with the need for emergency housing. I want to make sure that case managers are on the ground not just to start the journey of recovery but to be with the people on their journey until we can say that their journey of recovery is complete.

Under this model, individuals will have an opportunity to work with the subcontractor on how their land is cleared and there will be flexibility around signing off on the scope of works and the completion of work. Making them a part of the journey is important for their healing. We are not going to forget this summer. It has been the summer from hell, and it is going to stay with us for a long time. I encourage everyone in this House to work with the Government and its committed agencies. I single out Service NSW staff, who have gone over and above. They have cancelled holidays and returned to work; they have stretched resources to make sure they were available to support those individuals, families and businesses. That is important. Government agencies are often criticised and at times not acknowledged but Service NSW is one of the success stories of this Government.

BUSHFIRE RECOVERY ASSISTANCE

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) (14:35:31): My question is addressed to the Deputy Premier. Will the Deputy Premier update the House on the bushfire recovery effort?

Mr JOHN BARILARO (Monaro—Minister for Regional New South Wales, Industry and Trade, and Deputy Premier) (14:35:50): I thank the member for Myall Lakes for his question. Unfortunately, the member's electorate and parts of his community felt the impact and brunt of the fires pre-Christmas. Recently I had the opportunity to go back to the electorate. Last year I, along with the Minister for Emergency Services and the Premier, met with volunteers at an evacuation centre at Club Taree. What a great club. Not only was the club the evacuation centre, it supplied food and even allowed pets and animals into the club, including a snake. The community rallied together at a time of crisis. We were also recently up in Bobin where one of the schools had been burnt, yet it was rebuilt in time for the school year this year. Congratulations to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning and the Department of Education. I also visited the school at Wyaliba and had the opportunity to see that investment.

The recovery journey is going to be different for each community. Some communities began their recovery journey pre-Christmas. In the south-east, their journey begins. At times it is difficult to plan and map the journey of recovery while fires are still threatening life and communities in regional and rural New South Wales but it is important to do so. The Government announced last week the head contractor, Laing O'Rourke. It will be on the ground this week and will start the clean-up next week. We believe that its network on the ground and engagement with subcontractors, local businesses and local suppliers will allow us to stimulate the local economy. Businesses that want to be part of the clean-up and recovery can register with NSW Procurement. We want you to be part of that journey. For me, there is nothing more special than local contractors and businesses being part of the journey to rebuild their community along with the head contractor. That is important.

As we progress with this recovery, Service NSW has been important in providing the customer care program, the case manager approach and the personal approach. I congratulate and acknowledge the Minister for Customer Service on his fantastic staff and the customer care program. Staff have rung individuals on weekends to make sure they understood clearly that they were registered, that they were acknowledged and that a case manager could be appointed. That service is important to make sure that no-one falls through the cracks. Primary producers can apply for a \$75,000 grant from the Government, with support from the Federal Government. That money—in excess of \$8 million or \$9 million—is rolling out to the hands of farmers who have been burnt out by the fires.

We know the significant impact on the dairy industry and farms—fences, sheds and in many cases even stock—and the impact that has had on the broader community. We were dealing with drought and now we are dealing with fires. It has been tough. Congratulations to the Rural Assistance Authority, which has simplified the process. If primary producers provide photos of the impact, their Property Identification Codes number and bank details, in most cases in 24 to 36 hours they will have \$75,000 in their bank. The Government is also supporting businesses in the recovery stage with \$50,000 grants to businesses that have been burnt out. Businesses directly impacted can register with Service NSW. As was announced today, we will assist small businesses that have been indirectly impacted. We know that cash flow is the problem for all of them and we want them to get through this period.

Many people have bought stock for the summer that is probably now spoilt or they are now getting bills from their suppliers for associated costs. We want to help them with cash flow. Those businesses indirectly affected can apply for a \$50,000 interest-free, no-repayment loan for two years. It can then be paid back over five years at the low government rate of 0.93 per cent. It is an opportunity for people to put cash flow back into their businesses to help them get through this period. Loans of up to \$500,000 are available with the same arrangements—two years, no repayments, no interest and then they will be repaid over eight years at the low government rate. That is important to note because it will help a lot of businesses get through this time.

No security is required for the \$50,000 loan, while some security is required for the \$500,000 loan. We are trying to be flexible wherever we can to support businesses. Yesterday we also announced rate relief. I congratulate the Minister for Local Government. We are picking up the cost of rates for those businesses, farmers and residents who have lost their homes. If they have paid their rates, they can visit Service NSW for a refund. We are trying to assist right across the board. Fees for development applications [DAs] have been in the press lately. I congratulate and acknowledge those councils that are a part of this journey and have done a wonderful job of waiving fees for DAs and construction certificates. [*Extension of time*]

The State Government and the planning Minister are waiving the statutory levies that are attached to DA fees. Again, we want to get people back on their land so they can start cleaning up. Our partnership with the Federal Government is a significant one. The Premier has announced \$1 billion to rebuild infrastructure. We are

working with the Public Works Advisory and local government to audit and identify where that infrastructure is needed. That \$1 billion is just a down payment. If members look at the increased investment in the emergency response, in the recovery and clean-up and identifying new areas where some of this waste will go—especially hazardous materials such as asbestos—I can inform the House that this State is already investing in excess of \$2 billion in the recovery and in rebuilding our regions. Along with the Commonwealth, we are supporting individuals through family support and Centrelink.

Industry is struggling on the ground. The timber industry is hurting in parts of our State. A lot of the State's plantations have been burnt out. That will have a ripple effect—maybe not today, as some of that blackwood can be recycled, but at some point in the future there will be a cliff edge for that industry, which is going to be tough. At the heart of all this is that five million hectares of our landscape has now been burnt. A billion animals have been lost. That is a conservative estimate. The number could be greater than that and most likely will be.

We will have to address the issue of how we rebuild our landscapes, support the wildlife and ensure that regional and rural New South Wales lives up to what it is: a place of natural beauty to visit. Even though our landscape has been burnt and we have been through drought, I encourage people to visit rural and regional New South Wales. We need those visitors now more than ever before. Come and stay in our hotels, spend money in our local cafes and support our local businesses. There are a number of holidays between now and the June long weekend. I look forward to seeing everybody in the regions.

SYDNEY METRO CITY & SOUTHWEST

Mr CHRIS MINNS (Kogarah) (14:43:06): My question is directed to the Treasurer. Given every dollar and cent will be precious in the monumental task of bushfire recovery in regional New South Wales, will the Treasurer today advise the taxpayers of this State whether the Sydney Metro City & Southwest has a multibillion-dollar blowout?

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET (Epping—Treasurer) (14:43:25): What I will advise the people of New South Wales today is that Labor should be disqualified when it comes to discussing infrastructure in this place. It left us with a \$30 billion infrastructure backlog. The only metro that I remember Labor talking about—and they were certainly talking about it—was the Rozelle metro. It was announced, announced and announced but not delivered. Everywhere we go across metropolitan Sydney and regional New South Wales we see more cranes in the sky than ever before. That is because, unlike Labor, this Government has turned the State's finances around and it is investing record amounts where it matters. The Sydney Metro Northwest was promised for decades and decades and decades by Labor. The people of the north-west were betrayed.

Mr Chris Minns: Point of order: I am reluctant to take a point of order but I asked a specific question about the blowout in the metro. It is not for us but for the people of New South Wales and the Treasurer should tell them what he has done with the money.

The SPEAKER: I have heard the point of order. The Treasurer will continue. He is talking about metros and making introductory comments.

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: As updated in the half-yearly review just before Christmas, now there is close to \$100 billion in infrastructure investment right across the State.

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

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: A golden century of infrastructure investment is happening right here in New South Wales.

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

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: It is the metros and roads like the WestConnex that are transforming western Sydney. Labor members opposed WestConnex but now they enjoy driving on it every day. It has become a tourist attraction in its own right in western Sydney.

Ms Yasmin Catley: Point of order: It is very clear. The answer is yes or no.

The SPEAKER: The member for Swansea will resume her seat. The Treasurer will continue.

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: As we know, the Sydney Metro Northwest and the Sydney Metro Southwest are projects that are not just being built for the sake of building. They will make a real difference to people's lives by enabling them to get home to their families faster. We have seen that happen in north-west Sydney and we will soon see that happen in south-west Sydney. This Government is not just sitting on its hands

saying, "It's all too tough", while putting out press releases, as Labor did. This Government has a vision for the future. We know that those projects will transform people's lives. In response to the member for Kogarah's question—

Ms Jodi McKay: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. The question is: Was the Treasurer advised of a \$4.3 billion blowout for the Sydney Metro? It is very specific—yes or no. Does the Treasurer know of a billion-dollar blowout at a time when rural and regional areas of New South Wales need that money?

The SPEAKER: I have heard enough from the Leader of the Opposition. The Treasurer is talking about infrastructure generally, including new infrastructure such as the metro. I cannot direct him to answer the specifics of the question, but he is being generally relevant.

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: In the context of the member for Kogarah speaking about regional investment, I am very proud to be part of a government that because of the State's strong financial position has been able to invest record amounts right across the State. All Labor does is oppose infrastructure projects. Take for example this Government's drought package. Despite close to 100 per cent of New South Wales being in drought, this Government has been able to invest record amounts because of its strong financial management of the State. That is something that other State jurisdictions cannot do.

The New South Wales Government has been making record investments that allow economic growth in regional areas to stay strong. More jobs have been created in regional areas of New South Wales than in any of the other States' regions combined—and that has occurred in the middle of a drought. That is testament to this Government's infrastructure projects. When a new hospital was opened in Dubbo, I remember being in the company of the Minister for Health and Medical Research and meeting local contractors who were engaged in work and were growing their business because of this Government's investment in public infrastructure.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Kogarah to order for the first time. I call the member for Swansea to order for the first time.

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: When it comes to investment in public infrastructure and economic growth, the New South Wales Berejiklian-Barilaro Government is not just a nation leader but a world leader.

BUSHFIRES

Ms MELANIE GIBBONS (Holsworthy) (14:48:32): My question is addressed to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Will the Minister update the House on the current bushfire threat and the Government's response?

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills—Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (14:48:46): I thank the Parliamentary Secretary for Families, Disability and Emergency Services, particularly for the way in which she supported the Premier, the Deputy Premier and me over the course of the recent fire season. I thank her for the many visits she has made and the support she has offered to our emergency services. What we have seen over the past six months is the longest and most devastating fire season in the history of this State. As of August last year, we announced an early start to the bushfire danger period due to prevailing dry winds, the drought and of course the early hot weather.

The figures that are being reported to me are astounding. We have faced more than 11,000 bush and grass fires, including up to 500 at any one time; on any given day up to 10,000 emergency services workers were deployed; tragically we lost 25 lives, including of course the six brave firefighters about whom we have already spoken in this Chamber today; we lost 5.5 million hectares, a land mass the size of Croatia; and more than 2,418 homes were destroyed and that is not including the 1,014 homes that were damaged.

There is scarcely a local government area in this State that has not been scorched or, indeed, touched by bushfire. It pains me to say that we are not at the end of it yet. It is a sober reminder for us all that as we sit in this Chamber today we still have 73 bush and grass fires burning across the State, 20 of which are uncontained; we have 1,600 personnel on the ground and over 500 vehicles on deployment; and at any one time we have had up to 110 aircraft providing very important aviation support. This event will probably go on until after Easter. If the people of New South Wales were asked to define this very dark summer in one word it will probably be "heartbreak". We have lost loved ones, homes, family pets, memories and livelihoods. We have had the most unbearable trauma and our love and compassion for one another has kept us going.

Australians have always been known for their community spirit and mateship, and over the past few weeks and months it has been the glue that keeps our communities together. Our tens of thousands of emergency services volunteers have not just exemplified community spirit but defined it. Our first responders are not only in the hearts of all those who call New South Wales home but are also admired and revered across the world. It is

the spirit of service that has been the foundation of the world-class response from more than 30 emergency services agencies, capably led by the Commissioner of the Rural Fire Service, Shane Fitzsimmons, AFSM. The response has been nothing short of inspirational.

The heroes we call our emergency services have saved 14,335 houses this season and have responded to 11,141 bush and grass fires, 20 of which this morning remain uncontained. At every critical juncture this Government has backed our emergency services and delivered. In addition to a record \$1.7 billion budget for our emergency services, an additional \$315.3 million has been committed to tackle the unprecedented bushfire season we are experiencing. This money is to cover things like the nearly 27 million litres of retardant that was dropped by firefighting aircraft; payments to contractors for dozers and bulk water tankers; the operation of firefighting aircraft, both civilian and RFS; and meals, accommodation and living expenses for our volunteers.

Fireys are a tough breed and I have had the privilege of meeting many over the course of the bushfire season. I pause to highlight to the House the absence in this Chamber of the member for Prospect, who is in my office with members of his Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade having lunch. If ever a man deserves a pair in this Chamber, it is the member for Prospect. I have had the opportunity to see heroism in action everywhere, from Albury to Armidale, Batlow to Batemans Bay and Wilberforce to Willawarrin. New South Wales owes a debt of gratitude to not just every salaried and volunteer firefighter who has held a hose but also every emergency services worker and first responder who has been present providing support. It has truly been a whole-of-government effort, which could not have been pulled off without the first-class leadership and coordination that we have seen, even in our darkest hour. *[Extension of time]*

I witnessed this effort firsthand when I visited the Glen Innes Fire Control Centre in December, where I saw tremendous unity and resilience among the RFS, Fire and Rescue NSW, National Parks and Wildlife, police, NSW Voluntary Rescue Association, State Emergency Service, Marine Rescue which provided communication support, and all the other agencies, including first responders from Canada and South Australia. The Glen Innes Fire Control Centre had just marked 100 days as a Fire Control Centre. We are forever indebted to the firefighting fraternity interstate and overseas, particularly those who came from North America and will not return. But there is no service without sacrifice.

To those who made the ultimate sacrifice, we say the two words that will never be enough: Thank you. Thank you to the loved ones of our fallen heroes. To their partners—Jess, Melissa, Megan, Bowdie and Noreen—thank you. To the children of the fallen—Harvey Keaton; Charlotte O'Dwyer; Abigail, Calvin and Ella McBeth; Lucas and Logan DeMorgan; and baby McPaul, who is due in May—you will carry on the legacy of service and sacrifice that your fathers so bravely left behind. To the mothers and fathers of not only the six deceased but also every emergency services worker who has risked their life in the line of duty, thank you for raising the kind of men and women who would willingly walk into the flames to protect our lives and our homes.

As a community we are in mourning, and we will be for some time, for the heroes we never knew and those who were there when we needed them the most. We are in mourning for the family and friends we loved and will never see again. Be in no doubt, this Government and this House stand with everybody who made a contribution. We will work to rebuild our communities and we will prepare for the fight to come.

SYDNEY METRO CITY & SOUTHWEST

Ms JODI McKAY (Strathfield) (14:55:38): My question is directed to the Premier. Did the Premier know before the last election that her Sydney Metro City & Southwest promise had blown out by billions of dollars?

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby—Premier) (14:55:55): I acknowledge the question from the Leader of the Opposition. I am incredibly proud of our State's record on infrastructure delivery. I am especially proud of the fact that notwithstanding the very big challenges facing our State at the moment, when our Government needed to respond with additional infrastructure spend, it found an additional \$1 billion to support our bushfire-affected communities. That is in addition to the clean-up costs that we have already provided and in addition to the evacuation costs and all the other expenses that a good government should meet. I say this because we know that once the clean-up happens and we have rebuilt, that is the best sign of hope that we can provide to our communities in the future. My Government is committed to doing that. Not only will we rebuild communities, but also we will ensure—

Ms Jodi McKay: Point of order: Perhaps the Premier did not hear the question.

The SPEAKER: I am aware of the question. What is the member's point of order?

Ms Jodi McKay: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. The question is about the metro and what the Premier knew in the lead-up to the election. It has nothing to do with the fires.

The SPEAKER: The Premier is making introductory comments that are in context. There is no point of order.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: As I said, we have already done initial assessments of the impact on schools, hospitals, roads and bridges, in particular. For isolated communities that are without power and telecommunications, when the local road is blocked by trees, we know what that means in terms of the recovery and rebuilding process. As the Deputy Premier appropriately acknowledged—and the question was about infrastructure—

Ms Jodi McKay: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: I will not hear another point of order.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: Given the tone of the House today and because Opposition members are taking lots of points of order, I will go back to talk about the metro today—even though I am not in the mood for it, frankly.

Ms Yasmin Catley: It's only a question.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I am just being honest.

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

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: If you are going to talk about infrastructure investment, the Government has not only invested record amounts but also delivered against its commitments. The Sydney Metro Northwest project, the second harbour rail crossing and the metro to Bankstown and Sydenham will transform our city and State forever. We are proud of all those projects and the way in which we have delivered them. Do major projects have challenges? Of course they do. Are major projects complex? Of course they are. As we go through the process of each of those projects, of course we will provide information to the community at appropriate points, when and at which time we have that information. I have answered sufficiently on the question of the metro rail project.

The SPEAKER: I call the Leader of the Opposition to order for the first time.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: As I was stating, when it comes to our major infrastructure projects we always keep the community advised every step of the way. If there is any information to come to light, unlike those opposite we do not rely—

Mr Greg Warren: Point of order: It is under Standing Order 73. I am delighted to hear that the Premier wants to keep the community informed—

The SPEAKER: What is the member's point of order?

Mr Greg Warren: It goes right to the heart of this question: Did the Premier know before the election about the cost blowout?

The SPEAKER: That is a frivolous point of order. I call the member for Campbelltown to order for the first time.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: As I said, I am incredibly proud of every single infrastructure project that our State has embarked on. I am proud of the way in which we have conducted ourselves.

Ms Jodi McKay: Point of order: There are 30 seconds remaining. My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. Did the Premier know before the last election that this project had blown out by billions of dollars and did not tell anyone? Did the Premier know?

The SPEAKER: The Premier will continue.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I am happy to entertain questions of this nature. The fact of the matter is, hand on heart, every single issue we discussed before the election was with honesty and integrity. [*Time expired.*]

BUSHFIRE RECOVERY ASSISTANCE

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH (Wollondilly) (15:01:11): My question is addressed to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on the Government's financial support for those affected by the recent bushfires?

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET (Epping—Treasurer) (15:01:22): I thank the member for Wollondilly for his question and for the work and support that he has been providing to his community over the past few months, particularly to those who have been affected by the fires. He knows that we have been supporting

emergency services workers and volunteers and making sure that every State government agency has been put to work in the service of those who are facing this crisis. I note that that is not unique to the member for Wollondilly. Many members on both sides of this House have been representing and supporting their local communities at this time.

As we know, the fires have been devastating. Lives have been lost, homes have been destroyed and communities have been devastated. The reality is that we cannot put a dollar figure on that loss. What we can do is provide significant support and make sure that that support is available to communities and to families who need it to help them recover and get back on their feet as quickly as possible. We know that this task and this challenge will not be easy; many issues will occur along the way. As a government, when gaps are identified we will seek to fill them as quickly as possible. That also provides a very important role for local members in their communities to hear those concerns and represent them to the relevant Minister.

As the Premier has said in answer to questions raised by the Opposition about concerns for investment that is required at this time, I am proud to say that, as the Premier and I announced earlier in the year, the New South Wales Government is investing \$1 billion in infrastructure for fire-affected communities. This package will prioritise the repair and rebuilding of those facilities that all communities rely on—our State-owned road network, railway lines, signalling, hospitals, ambulance stations and other health facilities, our State-owned bridges, public schools and communications facilities. This is a significant task, particularly as there are fires still burning right across our State.

From what we know already from assessments that have been done to date in respect of damage to public assets, around 800 kilometres of State roads have been damaged, including in the Hunter, northern New South Wales, western New South Wales, the Blue Mountains and the south and south-west of the State. Rail infrastructure has been damaged on the Western Line and Broken Hill corridor. Minor damage has been done to around 170 hospitals, ambulance stations and health facilities. Major damage has been done to national parks, Crown lands and the Zig Zag Railway.

As the Deputy Premier pointed out, over 180 schools were fire affected. Of those, two schools needed to be rebuilt—in Wyalaliba and Bobin. Like the Deputy Premier, I congratulate and commend the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning in the other place, who ensured that those schools that needed to be rebuilt were open for day one of the school term this year. Some schools have had minor damage and over 170 schools need some work and repair. Repairing those assets will take a significant period. We will take advice from the commission and the Rural Fire Service on the capacity for that to occur to ensure that it is done in a safe and responsible way.

The following roads have reopened after major repairs: the Pacific Highway, the Putty Road, the Oxley Highway, the Bells Line of Road, the Castlereagh Highway, the Darling Causeway and the Princes Highway to the Victorian border. This is the public asset infrastructure support that we are investing in. Any residual amount above that support will go into further infrastructure investment in communities to expedite projects—new projects that will help stimulate and drive economic growth in those communities to help them get back on track as quickly as possible. In addition to the \$1 billion investment in infrastructure, further support has been provided during this period. As the Minister for Police and Emergency Services knows—and I commend him for the work that he has done—we have provided an additional \$166 million to date on top of the record budget that we provided last year. [*Extension of time*]

We have provided more than \$35 million for the NSW Bushfires Economic Recovery and Community Resilience Grants Program; \$15 million in additional mental health services for individuals, community groups and emergency services personnel; the bushfire recovery small business grant, which went online yesterday, providing grants up to \$50,000 for affected businesses; and financial assistance delivered through Service NSW. In particular, I commend all agencies for the work they have done in going beyond the call of duty. We have had to transfer significant resources and, obviously, we will provide more resources where needed, whether it is housing for the many people who have lost their homes or whether it is the proactive work that Service NSW has done in providing caseworkers to ensure families who need care and support receive it as quickly as possible.

At this stage we expect that the total cost of recovery to the State will be in excess of \$2 billion. I thank the Federal Treasurer, Josh Frydenberg, for the agreement on clean-up costs that was reached recently. The Federal and State governments will each contribute 50 per cent of those costs, which I expect will be in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Importantly, I thank the Insurance Council of Australia for its advice and also for its commitment that any amount that would have been spent on clean-up will be transferred to policyholders not only to enable them to rebuild as quickly as possible but also to provide them with additional finance so they can do it in the way that they wish. There is no doubt that the rebuilding of these communities will be significant. On behalf of the Government, I say to affected communities, individuals and families that the New South Wales Government stands with you, not only now but also into the future as the rebuilding process progresses.

ERARING POWER STATION

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) (15:08:39): My question is directed to the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces. Given that the Independent Planning Commission recently approved the expansion of the Eraring Power Station ash dam with a condition for Origin Energy to re-use 80 per cent of all coal ash generated at the site by 2021, what will the Government do to ensure Origin Energy can meet that target?

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater—Minister for Planning and Public Spaces) (15:09:10): I thank the member for Lake Macquarie for his question. He is an indefatigable advocate for his community and is very vigilant to look at these sorts of applications to ensure that they meet the expectations of his community. As members of this House will well know, Lake Macquarie is a beautiful electorate that displays quite graphically both the benefits and the challenges associated with industrial development. It has a strong manufacturing base and great manufacturing and industrial heritage but it also has some challenges. For example, some of the challenges are perhaps most poignantly illustrated by the Pasminco smelter site, where the consequences of development were not thought about at the time. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to work with the member for Lake Macquarie and with my office in relation to his vigilance in these sorts of matters.

As members of this House would be aware, the Eraring Power Station is one of the largest, if not the largest, in the country. It was expanded less than 10 years ago and has a rate of capacity of almost 3,000 megawatts. There was a modification to the power station made by the operator and proponent, Origin Energy, which made an application in August 2018 to expand its ash dam so that it could continue to produce energy at the power station. The department completed its assessment of the merits of the proposal in early October last year and referred the application to the Independent Planning Commission [IPC] for determination. During its assessment, the IPC carefully balanced the environmental factors with the economic and social considerations associated with the application. Ultimately it approved the project subject to conditions.

The IPC made a swift but carefully considered decision, providing its approval just before Christmas. In under three months the IPC came to a view that the modification application put forward by the applicant was acceptable and approved it. Importantly, in making its decision, the IPC took an existing condition of consent referred to by the member for Lake Macquarie and strengthened it. An existing condition of consent required the preparation and implementation of a long-term ash management strategy with the goal of 80 per cent re-use of ash by December 2021. In its approval, the Independent Planning Commission has strengthened this target to make it a mandatory goal for Origin to reach that 80 per cent re-use or recycling of ash target from the power station by 31 December 2021. It has also required Origin to begin planning for rehabilitation of the land and the ash dam following its scheduled closure in 2032.

As members would be aware, the New South Wales Government recently commissioned the Productivity Commission to undertake a review of the IPC to ensure that its processes are as efficient as possible. This is a great example of how the IPC can make a quick decision that balances positive environmental outcomes with economic and social benefits of development. With regard to implementing the IPC's strengthened condition, it is my expectation that Origin Energy, in agreeing that the 80 per cent target is achievable, will implement this target and exceed it where possible. There are plenty of ways to re-use coal ash and the IPC identifies these in its statement of reasons. For instance, there are innovative new products and technological opportunities under investigation, such as for road base, pavements and precast building materials as well as geopolymers.

In response to the member's question, in the first instance the department will review the applicant's long-term ash management strategy to ensure that its proposed program for reaching the 80 per cent recycling goal is feasible and achievable. Origin Energy must provide annual reports to the department on its progress in achieving this goal, so there will be opportunities to monitor it along the way. These reports must demonstrate progress in re-use and recycling of ash to the satisfaction of the planning secretary. Should the department not be satisfied or have concerns about the progress of recycling coal ash, the department will work with Origin Energy and the community to help achieve the 80 per cent goal within the time frame indicated in the condition. Origin Energy has agreed to this 80 per cent mandatory goal and, in receiving its approval, it is my expectation that Origin will reach it as swiftly as possible. The Government is committed to encouraging greater re-use of resources, which is a great source of manufacturing jobs and is a big part of our plan to facilitate economic transition to more sustainable forms of development and human progress. The IPC's condition is consistent with this objective and it is our expectation that it is met.

BUSHFIRES AND SERVICE NSW

Mr CHRISTOPHER GULAPTIS (Clarence) (15:14:12): My question is addressed to the Minister for Customer Service. Will the Minister update the House on the role of Service NSW in assisting with the bushfire recovery?

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO (Ryde—Minister for Customer Service) (15:14:25): I thank the member for Clarence for his question and again commend him for his efforts in supporting his community, which has gone through a lot of trauma over the past few months, with the loss of hundreds of homes devastating his community. I thank him for his leadership and service in his community. As the Minister for Police and Emergency Services has already noted, the bushfires continue to burn and continue to have a devastating impact on individuals, businesses, communities and wildlife in our great State. As the Deputy Premier so graciously said, Service NSW is doing outstanding work in delivering on the New South Wales Government's commitment of bushfire recovery assistance to help people and businesses impacted by the bushfires.

Red tape in our day-to-day world is beyond frustrating, but red tape following a disaster is just plain cruel. When you are trying to rebuild your life, filling out multiple forms many times over and having the same conversations with different agencies across local, State and Federal governments about your issues are, quite frankly, disheartening. That is why the New South Wales Government has created a dedicated Service NSW bushfire customer care program to connect affected people with a customer care specialist who can check their eligibility for assistance across all tiers of government and help them access it every step of the way. Customer care specialists operate like case managers. If you have been affected by bushfires, we can put you in touch with the services you need, including accommodation, mental health and wellbeing services, clean-up services, financial assistance, insurance and legal support, and replacement of lost or damaged ID documents free of charge.

As recently announced by Minister Hancock, affected residents will also be able to take their council rates notice to a Service NSW centre and the Government will cover six months of council rates. I recently visited the communities of Ulladulla and Lake Conjola with Minister Hancock where we saw firsthand the excellent work being done by Service NSW as well as by the local volunteers manning the recovery centres, such as retired army general Peter Dunn, who was appointed by the community to coordinate the recovery effort in the Lake Conjola community. And it is not just government services that we are assisting with. As members know, Australians and indeed people globally have been exceptionally generous during the bushfire crisis. The bushfire customer care program is also meeting another emerging need with our Service NSW charity register, which matches people with charities to assist them with their specific needs.

We are also doing our bit to help business owners who have been hit hard. Particularly in rural and regional New South Wales, small businesses are the lifeblood of local communities. Businesses affected by bushfire can register for the Service NSW business concierge service. A business concierge can help businesses with regulation requirements, identify licences and permits their business needs, deal with councils and agencies on their behalf and connect businesses to support and advice. Small businesses and not-for-profits directly impacted by the bushfires can also apply for the small business grant, which includes financial support of up to \$50,000, through Service NSW. The grant is to help pay for costs associated with the clean-up and reinstatement of a small business or not-for-profit organisation's operations.

Lastly, we are forever indebted to the tireless, selfless support of our RFS volunteers and more generally our emergency services such as police, Fire and Rescue, and NSW Ambulance. Our department worked around the clock to set up a compensation platform for RFS volunteers. When this initiative was announced in late December we indicated that payments would be available by the end of January. As of yesterday 1,088 volunteer firefighter payments have been made at a total of close to \$4 million, with an average payment of over \$3,500 per volunteer. Service NSW is processing payments within 72 hours of an application being submitted. These compensation payments have recently been extended to SES volunteers too. In conclusion, it is important to note that Service NSW was never designed to be a frontline agency. However, the past few months have shown that providing service to those in need as soon as possible is a critical part of the recovery process. [*Extension of time*]

It is a critical part of the recovery process and, as the Deputy Premier has said time and again, recovery is absolutely key. I have no doubt that Service NSW will play its role in this. I have no doubt that Service NSW has developed not only the Australian standard of service delivery but also a world-class reputation. Its service-centred culture continues to grow year on year. The magic of Service NSW is not so much the digital and data infrastructure on the back end but the emotional intelligence on the front end. I remember being with our outstanding Minister for Local Government, Shelley Hancock, down at Lake Conjola with a mobile service bus. I will be honest, when I went down there my primary focus was figuring how to ensure that Service NSW turned around identity documents as quickly as possible.

When people leave an emergency centre the first thing they need to do is get their identity documents sorted so they can establish a means to access payments and the like. The way in which I saw Service NSW staff deal with people blew my mind. They processed and turned around the forms quickly but there was also one particular moment when I saw a lady from Service NSW who was helping someone out, reach over and give that

person a hug. I thought, "This is truly the magic of Service NSW." They do the work but the way in which they make emotional connections and give emotional support is where the real magic lies.

Documents

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN

Reports

The SPEAKER: In accordance with section 99 of the Electoral Act 2017, I announce receipt of the report of the Children's Guardian on an investigation into child protection declarations made by elected members of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, received out of session in November 2019. I order that the report be printed.

INSPECTOR OF THE LAW ENFORCEMENT CONDUCT COMMISSION

Reports

The SPEAKER: In accordance with section 142 of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission Act 2016, I announce receipt of the report of the Inspector of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission entitled *Annual Report 2018-2019 Law Enforcement (Controlled Operations) Act 1997*, dated November 2019, received out of session on 25 November 2019. I order that the report be printed.

NSW OMBUDSMAN

Reports

The SPEAKER: In accordance with section 31AA of the Ombudsman Act 1974, I announce receipt of the report of the NSW Ombudsman entitled *Oversight of the Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994, Annual Report 2018-2019*, dated 19 December 2019, received out of session on 19 December 2019. I order that the report be printed.

AGEING AND DISABILITY COMMISSIONER

Reports

The SPEAKER: In accordance with section 26 of the Ageing and Disability Commissioner Act 2019, I announce receipt of the report of the NSW Ageing and Disability Commissioner entitled *Review into Disability Advocacy in NSW*, dated 19 December 2019, received out of session on 19 December 2019. I order that the report be printed.

INSPECTOR OF THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION

Reports

The SPEAKER: In accordance with section 78 of the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988, I announce receipt of the report of the Inspector of the Independent Commission Against Corruption entitled *Report pursuant to sections 57B(5) and 77A of the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988 concerning an audit under section 57B(1)(d) thereof into the Independent Commission Against Corruption's procedures for dealing with counsel assisting in investigations and inquiries under Part 4 of the Act (Special Report 20/02)*, dated 19 December 2019, received out of session on 19 December 2019. I order that the report be printed.

DEPARTMENT OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Reports

The SPEAKER: I table the Erratum to the Report of the Department of the Legislative Assembly for the year ended 30 June 2019. I order that the report be printed.

Committees

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Reports

The CLERK: In accordance with section 63C of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, I announce receipt of the report of the Public Accounts Committee entitled *Examination of the Auditor-General's Performance Audit Reports May 2017-December 2017, Report 3/57*, dated November 2019, received out of session on 22 November 2019 and authorised to be printed.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON SYDNEY'S NIGHT TIME ECONOMY**Government Response**

The CLERK: I announce receipt of the Government response to report 1/57 of the Joint Select Committee on Sydney's Night Time Economy entitled *Sydney's Night Time Economy*, received out of session on 28 November 2018 and authorised to be printed.

*Documents***AUDITOR-GENERAL****Reports**

The CLERK: In accordance with section 63C of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, I announce receipt of the following reports of the Auditor-General:

- (1) Financial Audit Report entitled *Transport 2019*, dated 28 November 2019, received out of session on 28 November 2019 and authorised to be printed.
- (2) Financial Audit Report entitled *Stronger Communities*, dated 5 December 2019, received out of session on 5 December 2019 and authorised to be printed.
- (3) Financial Audit Report entitled *Education 2019*, dated 10 December 2019, received out of session on 10 December 2019 and authorised to be printed.
- (4) Financial Audit Report entitled *Planning, Industry and Environment 2019*, dated 11 December 2019, received out of session on 11 December 2019 and authorised to be printed.
- (5) Financial Audit Report entitled *Central Agencies 2019*, dated 12 December 2019, received out of session on 12 December 2019 and authorised to be printed.
- (6) Special Report entitled *Members' additional entitlements 2019*, dated 12 December 2019, received out of session on 12 December 2019 and authorised to be printed.
- (7) Performance Audit Report entitled *Supporting the District Criminal Court*, dated 18 December 2019, received out of session on 18 December 2019 and authorised to be printed.

OFFICE OF TRANSPORT SAFETY INVESTIGATIONS**Reports**

The CLERK: In accordance with section 46D of the Passenger Transport Act 1990, I announce receipt of the Office of Transport Safety Investigations reports entitled *Rail Safety Investigation Report, Partial volume deflagration in traction inverter module on carriage N5508 Waratah A set, Burwood, 20 March 2017*; *Rail Safety Investigation Report, Train services operated through bushfire affected section of track, Locality of Holsworthy, NSW, 14 April 2018*; and *Bus Safety Investigation Report, Driver Trainer Fatality Prairiewood, NSW, 07 June 2018*, received out of session on 3 December 2019 and authorised to be printed.

INDEPENDENT PRICING AND REGULATORY TRIBUNAL**Reports**

The CLERK: In accordance with section 234C of the National Energy Retail Law, I announce receipt of the reports of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal entitled:

- (1) *Review of the performance and competitiveness of the NSW retail electricity market 2018-19, Final Report*, dated November 2019, received out of session on 20 December 2019 and authorised to be printed.
- (2) *Review of the performance and competitiveness of the NSW retail gas market 2018-19, Final Report*, dated November 2019, received out of session on 20 December 2019 and authorised to be printed.

In accordance with section 33 of the Sydney Water Act 1994, I announce receipt of the report of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal entitled *Sydney Water Operational Audit 2019, Report to the Minister, Water—Compliance Report*, dated December 2019, received out of session on 17 January 2020 and authorised to be printed.

In accordance with section 111 of the Water NSW Act 2014, I announce receipt of the report of the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal entitled *WaterNSW Operation Audit 2019 Report to the Minister, Water—Compliance Report*, dated December 2019, received out of session on 17 January 2020 and authorised to be printed.

BALRANALD SHIRE COUNCIL**Reports**

The CLERK: In accordance with section 438U of the Local Government Act 1993, I announce receipt of the report of the investigation of Balranald Shire Council conducted under section 438U of the Local Government Act 1993, dated 25 November 2019, received out of session on 29 January 2019 and authorised to be printed.

*Petitions***PETITIONS RECEIVED**

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

Solitary Islands Way Traffic

Petition calling on the Government to address the health, safety and wellbeing of residents affected by traffic on Solitary Islands Way, received from **Mr Gurmesh Singh**.

Waterloo Estate

Petition calling on the Government to cancel its plans to evict residents in the Waterloo Estate, to reject the sale of public land to property developers and to make a commitment not to privatise Waterloo Estate housing, received from **Mr Ron Hoenig**.

RESPONSES TO PETITIONS

The CLERK: I announce that the following Ministers have lodged responses to petitions signed by more than 500 persons:

The Hon. Brad Hazzard—Grafton Base Hospital and Maclean District Hospital—lodged 10 December 2019 (Mr Christopher Gulaptis)

The Hon. Brad Hazzard—Parkes Hospital and Forbes District Hospital—lodged 10 December 2019 (Mr Philip Donato)

The Hon. Andrew Constance—School Crossing Supervisor—lodged 11 December 2019 (Ms Sonia Hornery)

The Hon. Andrew Constance—Inner West Light Rail—lodged 11 December 2019 (Ms Jo Haylen)

The Hon. Shelley Hancock—Kempsey Shire Council—lodged 19 December 2019 (Mrs Melinda Pavey)

*Business of the House***BUSINESS LAPSED**

The SPEAKER: I advise the House that in accordance with Standing Order 105 (3) general business notices of motion (general notices) Nos 42, 43, 48 to 78, 81 to 136, 138 to 191, 193 to 253, 255 to 273 and 380 to 735 have lapsed.

*Announcements***PARLIAMENT LIVE STREAMING**

The SPEAKER: Further to the advice I gave earlier about Facebook and live streaming, I advise that consistent with the consent of the members involved that the contributions of the member for Prospect was live streamed, as will be the forthcoming contributions by the member for Bega, and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

*Visitors***VISITORS**

The SPEAKER: I warmly welcome to the Chamber the wife of the member for Bega, Jennifer Constance, as well as his parents, Sue and James Constance, who can be very proud of their husband and son.

*Motions***BUSHFIRES**

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega—Minister for Transport and Roads) (15:28:20): Today I speak with a blackened heart. What has happened to all of us throughout New South Wales is indescribable. It is beyond politics. It is beyond each of us as individuals. It is traumatic. It is hard. It hurts. Loved ones have been lost. No community has been lost because of the people who make up those communities but it has been tough to live under fire threats like regional New South Wales has for months—not weeks, months. For those men and women who have given their all—be it as a serving member of the Rural Fire Service or our emergency services to members of the community—these are really testing days. They are black days.

There is no doubt the fire activity that we have seen has been nothing short of horrendous, traumatic, frightening and unpredictable. We have had a number of fires that, quite frankly, turned into bombs when they hit. What has given me the most hope over the last month is the strength of community and the strength of people drawing together in a bond that will unify them for life. It would not matter if you had lost a home or, in the case of some of my mates in the farming community at Cobargo, a loved one, to people who are living in the bush just wanting to have a quiet life this has been an incredible test. It is not about government and it is not about politics. It is about each of us and who we are. There is a challenge. There is no doubt that the unity in survival that I saw when one of these firebombs exploded in my local community through to the unity of recovery and rebuild and the opportunity that this State now has is something very profound. We should never lose sight of that. This House should never lose sight of that.

New Year's Eve changed me forever. It is traumatic to speak about, which is why I have said to everyone to go and get help, to see a counsellor. It is not that easy when you live in the bush and are miles from services. At 2.00 a.m. the fire took a run. There was zero humidity. Jen woke up at 3.30 a.m. and said to me, "Mum and Dad's at Nelligen is in trouble." I thought, this is just not right—and it was not. The fire did not come to Nelligen at that point but it took off through to the coast. Your immediate thought is to get the family out, which we did. We sprayed about 5,000 litres of water on the house before what I thought would be just a spotting bushfire came. I took a late-minute decision to leave the house because I felt the radiant heat off the fire—I thought I was going to melt. At that point I thought, holy hell, we are going to lose hundreds of people. It was bad enough to lose the people that we did. In advance of that there were incredible calls made by the Premier, the fire commissioner and the Minister to get tens of thousands of people out of that dangerous position.

When I tore off, Glad rang me to tell me about Robert and Patrick Salway. Having known the Salway family as I did through the show circuit I just thought, bloody hell, this is just not right. I had to hang up on Glad. The reason I did that was that I was driving straight into the front to get down to the beach. When I got there I saw people everywhere. There were cars, horses, dogs, cats and kids. I saw my local surf club full of hundreds of people. I knew the front was up the hill in the valley and that it was coming. I knew our place was gone. Everyone looked in disbelief. A couple of the surf club guys made some big calls, and they were the right calls: to get everyone out of the club and onto the sand. The front tore through. It did not stop. My mate Anthony Bellett is 28 years of age. He and a number of others—Peter and all of them—made the right call. If they had not, it is very likely that the club and the hundreds of cars around it could have gone up.

Everyone sheltered in that sand as the front hit Malua Bay in such a nasty and aggressive way from the north-west and then from the southern end. The trauma of that for everyone was exacerbated by there being no communications. We had with us an amazing Highway Patrol officer, Angus Duncombe, a couple of off-duty police officers, the fireys and the club members. Thank God our local fire service, the RFS, arrived. At that point I took the opportunity to go back to my house. I had a chainsaw. I poked around back there to find that the house was alight at the front and I put the fire out. I spent many hours just putting out flames. My story is one of thousands.

Jen and the kids were on another beach, but I had no mobile phone reception. At one point I got one bar and—God love the ABC—it was a journalist who rang. I expressed my views but I could not reach Jen. Later that afternoon I knew that next door, Steven's and Mandy's place, had gone. They have three beautiful daughters. At that stage I was between a fire pump and raking fire down into a riparian zone on our lot. I saw Steven arrive home at five o'clock. He is a Rural Fire Service volunteer who, for 24 hours up to that point, had been out protecting the lives and homes of others. He came home to a miracle: his two sheep, his three pigs and his chickens were still alive. I walked up to him and said, "Mate, I'm just so sorry." I will not repeat what he said. We decided that we would throw the chook in the front of the ute, have a beer and then go and tell Mandy about the house. We did that.

I was so angry about the garden going up that I decided to just throw the beer bottle in the garden. That was not wise because the next day, when Shane Fitzsimons and the Premier turned up, they were looking at this beer bottle and saying, "Do you want to admit something?" I just said, "I was drinking on the job, that's all." The reason I am saying this is because of what struck me about Steven: The next day he went back out on the truck. We have brigades in our region that suffered incredible trauma at places like Tinpot and Nerrigundah. The story

about Nerrigundah is horrendous. Twelve local members of the Rural Fire Service huddled in a shed holding the door up while the firestorm ripped through the valley. The communities there lost 24 homes. Ironically, the Telstra phone box is still standing. It does not work. If it had not been for the decision to put that community fire shed into that valley with a small sprinkler system around the roof, I would be saying something very different.

When you lose more than 905 homes in the community, with 400 structurally damaged to the point at which no-one can live in them—homes that are in a suburban setting in Malua Bay, in an Aboriginal community in Mogo, in rural subdivisions and on farms—it is very hard. Today in the gallery is a mate who lost everything that day, John Haslem. Losing a home is not just about losing the bricks, mortar and timber walls. It is the memories. It is everything so special to you. This is where trauma really comes into this. That is why I have pleaded with everybody—and I will continue to do this in the months and years ahead—to get support. That is why yesterday I said through the media to all Australians who want to help with the impact of the bushfires to please consider donating to Lifeline because it provides a 24-hour service—a service that is there at 2.00 a.m. and 3.00 a.m. I have had incredible feedback from people at Lifeline about what they have experienced as a result of the bushfire crisis.

This is a real test of our humanity. It is a test of where we are going to go. We spend so much time arguing, particularly in this Chamber. That day changed me because of what I saw—the bravery of our surf lifesavers and those in the Rural Fire Service—and the incredible stories I have heard since of people drawing strength from each other. People are having beers in the laneway at 5 o'clock. They are hugging each other and breaking down. Recovery can mean so much for so many people in different ways. I am determined not to see anyone on their knees fall through the cracks. I could not be more proud of what Glad and Bara are doing in trying to lift everybody up at this time. It is not easy. They are running processes to try to get as many people through.

Last week by chance I drove around with a fire captain at a place called Kiah. There has not been a spotlight on Kiah but it suffered a loss of 45 homes of good, hardworking local people who had moved to the valley for the peace and tranquillity of the Kiah River. It was heartbreaking to hear a 68-year-old gentleman say to me, "What the hell do I do now?" He had been on his block for 20 years. I do not believe in calling something an illegal dwelling when it is the home of a pensioner who could not afford insurance or to go through the processes.

I do not have a rich electorate but in terms of the big questions they need to be asked. It is very hard. I have heard of people not coming forward because they did not lodge a development application or did not have insurance. We have to show forgiveness and heart to everyone in these circumstances. In the wonderful Aboriginal community at Mogo I have seen men and women just pop out of nowhere and set up relief centres. They are not government funded or government run but they have been able to distribute food and clothing thanks to the generosity of other Australians. As I said, they have a local relief centre and in some circumstances they have been able to transport goods out to people who are so traumatised they cannot even leave their blocks of land.

As I said, we have a humanitarian crisis in our own backyard but, given what the Government is doing, I am determined that we will make the best recovery the world has ever seen. There will be hard days and frustrations—someone's block has to be the first to be cleaned up and someone else's the last. The scale of this impact cannot be displayed by a picture or media story. My entire electorate has been burnt out. A couple of coastal communities were lucky to have the right winds and did not get burnt through but at some point in the past two months every single person in my electorate was evacuated. The fires affected not only us but also burnt to the coast. On 26 November I watched the fire start and affect the electorate and communities of the member for South Coast. They were hard days—and lucky days—at that point.

I know there has been a lot of soul-searching in the community, with people wanting to cite reasons for all this happening. I have been reluctant to engage in it because we have to focus on the individual and where they are at, the pain they are in and the lack of housing. People are choosing to live in caravans and, in some cases, tents because they want to be close to their block of land. We have to decentralise the recovery process to give that outreach. In seeking answers, I say that the bushfires are a combination of factors. I was pleased to see that everything will be explored in the inquiry. The bush was so stressed because of the lack of rain that hills were dying months before the fires took hold. The trees were dead; the water table was not there. We can argue about climate change and fuel loads till the cows come home but are you really going to expend that degree of energy when we now need to come together and move forward?

I am a big believer in listening to our Aboriginal people about cultural burning. My dad is in the public gallery. We were talking about this the other night. My grandfather had a cattle lease in the Snowy Mountains in the Perisher Valley system. Back in the 1930s and 1940s they actually burnt the bush. They did not learn that themselves; they learnt it from the Aboriginal people who used to do it. Last night I appeared on *Q+A* and listened to that important message from an Aboriginal leader. I think we should all reflect on it. I do not want to see finger-pointing. I want to see us build, move forward and maintain that strength of community. Nothing is more

impactful than seeing people from different walks of life, different philosophical views and political views embracing each other and supporting each other through a crisis.

I have a mate Tony Allen, a dairy farmer. Some members in the Chamber know him. He was involved with people who I know that he never saw eye to eye with originally, but they have become friends for life because of what they did at the Cobargo Showground. We all should learn from that experience. There is no doubt that the strength of character that has been shown gives me enormous hope about this recovery. However, it is going to be long and it is not going to be simple. It must have been two weeks now—I forget when; the month has been a blur—but I thank people for the generosity with which they have given to charities. I thank the volunteers on the ground who have done an incredible job through our time of absolute need. I issued a challenge to the heads of Red Cross, Salvos and St Vincent de Paul to spend the day in the car with me. And, guess what, they did. *[Extension of time]*

What was telling was that the charities had not talked to each other about how they were coordinating those funds. Pleasingly, the Red Cross has now announced further reforms, including assisting burns victims and looking at those who have had structural damage to their properties—those who might have lost a pump or a septic system or a water tank that melted. That has been a lesson. They are big brands; they will survive this. Ultimately, all I wanted to see was some cash in the pockets of those who needed it the most so that they could spend it in the small business community and keep our economy, as fragile as it is right now, ticking over.

Our great industries have been absolutely belted and there are a lot of jobs that hang off them—our oyster industry, our timber industry, our tourism industry. I am absolutely scared beyond belief about the impact on casual employees—they are the first to lose their jobs when those businesses are stretched. We have a very highly casualised workforce. There is no doubt that the Federal Government will need to watch very closely the impact of this, particularly on those businesses affected by the seasonal loss. I believe that ultimately in this type of tragedy good does come, and we have seen that already. All of us have got to draw strength from that moving forward. There are no politics to be played here over the next six to 12 months. The community does not want that. They just want to get on and rebuild their lives and they obviously want to see that connection.

In closing, I again pay tribute to our emergency services. I witnessed decisions made throughout the course of the last couple of months where the right calls were made by the right people at the right time: the leadership of Shane Fitzsimmons, the incident controllers on all these firegrounds, the men and women who were working in various RFS headquarters—and they still are right now—our RFS brigades and Fire and Rescue NSW. I was horrified to learn that during the middle of a fire event there were instances where the fire was so nasty that even Fire and Rescue NSW had to rescue people on the back of a truck and get out of there. That is what happened. Their bravery is unbelievable. Police men and women were dragging people out of their homes to get them to safety.

Obviously we have a long road ahead in learning from this. I lay witness to the National Parks and Wildlife Service putting out a fire at my neighbour's house—the parkies. You can never criticise those frontline staff for what they were doing—they were putting out fires at people's homes. I also acknowledge the Forestry Corporation and the contractors—those people who fly those machines in those conditions. We saw the tragedy that occurred involving those chopper pilots. I do not know how those contractors do it. There were contractors on graders in the middle of forests with burning fire around them. There are so many people to be thanked and acknowledged.

I believe that the issues around land management practices will come to the fore at the right time, but any debate that we have in that space needs to be productive and constructive. I believe that as we rebuild—and I am going to keep banging on about this—we have to take every single person who has been affected with us. We have got to look after each other. I will be very passionate about mental health in particular right through this process because what I am seeing is absolutely traumatic. I support the motion before the House. I thank everybody who has been involved in keeping us safe. We have a long way to go and we have to draw strength from each other. It is great that Jenny and mum and dad are here. It is not easy on the kids, it is not easy on Jen. My days off at the moment are spent chopping up trees with a chainsaw. It is quite relaxing really. In response to an interjection, no, the trees are not in any environmental-zoned lands. I thank my wife, Jen, for allowing me to do what I do. It is a bit crazy sometimes but to know that those beautiful kids are safe really matters.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills—Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (15:55:21):

The words "devastating" and "destructive" do not begin to describe what we have seen in New South Wales over the past six months. New South Wales has been in a state of emergency an unprecedented three times since November and now the State is in mourning. One of the hardest conversations I have ever had to have with a parliamentary colleague took place on 20 December 2019. With a very heavy heart I was forced to call the member for Prospect only hours after two heroes from his own NSW Rural Fire Service [RFS] brigade, the Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade, perished in a crushed fire truck near Buxton while fighting the Green Wattle Creek blaze. It

took the member some time to return my phone call. I thought he was still carrying a grudge but he was not; to his credit he was out fighting the blazes on the front line when I called him. He displayed exemplary service to his community, as have other members in this place, including the member for Myall Lakes.

I acknowledge and thank the Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade, whose members are visiting Parliament today. They are probably still up in my office. Not only have they risked their lives and sacrificed their own time but also they have lost two friends, two brothers, Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer. Geoffrey and Andrew were 32 and 36 respectively—far too young. Geoff leaves behind his fiancée, Jess, and their 19-month-old son, Harvey. Andrew leaves behind his wife, Melissa, and their 19-month-old daughter, Charlotte. Their two children were born only two days apart—something that brought Geoffrey and Andrew together as friends in addition to their service with the Horsley Park brigade. They were both posthumously awarded the Commissioner's Commendation for Bravery and Service, which is appropriate.

The firefighting fraternity was already grieving when our hearts were broken again on 30 December with the death of firefighter Samuel McPaul. Samuel's truck was involved in a rollover caused by an extreme bushfire weather event, which, as the Premier has explained, is quite a frightening experience. Samuel was only 28 years old. He was a member of the Morven Rural Fire Brigade and he leaves behind his wife, Megan. Samuel and Megan were married only last year and Megan is expecting their first child in May. Samuel was a mechanic and a keen basketball player in Wagga Wagga. He was coaching the local team in his hometown of Holbrook. He was also posthumously awarded the Commissioner's Commendation for Service and Bravery.

Last Thursday at the RAAF base in Richmond I joined Commissioner Fitzsimmons and the owners of Coulson Aviation for a memorial service for our three American brothers who perished in the C-130 Hercules crash near Peak View, north-east of Cooma. Captain Ian McBeth, Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr and First Officer Paul Hudson all served their country in the United States military, including on overseas deployments, before discharging, as soldiers often do, at the end of their 20 years to join a similar fraternity—in their case, the civilian firefighting fraternity. Ian McBeth was a father of three from Great Falls, Montana. He served with both the Wyoming and Montana National Guards, having flown C-130 planes for his entire career. He is survived by his wife, Bowdie, and their three children, Abigail, Calvin and Ella, as well as his parents, William and Anneliese, and his siblings Rick, Eleanor and Aislinn.

Paul Hudson from Buckeye, Arizona, served in the United States Marine Corps for two decades before retiring as a lieutenant colonel. Paul graduated from the Naval Academy in 1999 and subsequently earned master's degrees in both Business Administration and Information Technology Management from the Naval Postgraduate School. Paul is survived by his wife, Noreen. Rick DeMorgan from Navarre, Florida, served in the US Air Force for 18 years as a flight engineer on C-130 Hercules planes. Rick spent more than 4,000 hours in that role, including 3,000 hours in a combat environment. Members who have served in the military know that somebody surviving that many hours in a combat environment and then losing their life as a civilian aviator is quite extraordinary. He is survived by his two children, Lucas and Logan, his parents, Rick Sr and Linda, and his sister, Virginia.

Those three US civilian aviators were also posthumously awarded the NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner's Commendation for Service. The memorial that the Premier and I attended last week was the fifth funeral I had been to in less than seven weeks. All of them were for men who served in the police, military or fire services or, in many cases, a combination of them. When I lament the sacrifice of the six men who laid down their lives battling the blazes on the front line, I am reminded of something G. K. Chesterton once said. It was:

The true soldier fights not because he hates what is front of him, but because he loves what is behind him.

Those men were soldiers not just because they fought with a grit and fortitude that any general would be proud of but because they did so out of love for the community that stood behind them. Outside the firefighting family, the community has been devastated by further loss of life—mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers, all of whom were just trying to save their homes. On 9 October last year New South Wales lost newlyweds Bob Lindsay and Gwen Hyde. They perished side by side trying to save their isolated property on Deadman Creek Road in Coongbar, which backed on to Keybarbin State Forest in northern New South Wales. They had married just three years earlier, having fallen in love later in life.

On 8 November 2019 we lost Vivian Chaplain from Diehard, near the Northern Tablelands community of Wyaliba. The 69-year-old had stayed behind to protect her home and animals. She was found on her property unconscious with severe burns and passed away overnight after being flown to Concord hospital. The community of Wyaliba lost George Nole on the same day. The 85-year old was born in Greece and once worked on NASA's Apollo missions—as we heard in the Chamber earlier today—before moving to the isolated Wyaliba region for some peace and quiet. On 8 November we lost Julie Fletcher of Johns River, which is between Port Macquarie and Taree. She was 63. Barry Parsons from Willawarrin also lost his life on that terrible day. He was 58. Just a day later, we lost Chris Savva, 64, at South Arm near Bowraville.

On 30 December we lost a father and son who were just trying to save their home and farming equipment: Robert Salway, 63, and Patrick Salway, 29, died in Wandella, about 20 kilometres north-west of Cobargo in the Bega Valley. Patrick leaves behind a young son, Harley, and his pregnant wife, Renee. On New Year's Eve—another day of monstrous fire conditions—Laurie Andrews, 70, of Yatte Yattah near Conjola succumbed to the Currowan bushfire. Off-duty volunteer firefighter Col Burns, 72, died while protecting his Belowra property. On 4 January we lost David Harrison of Batlow, who was just 47. On 6 January we lost John Smith of Nerrigundah. Several other much-loved civilians also perished in the fires. This has resulted in a devastating death toll of 25 in New South Wales alone, including the aforementioned US pilots and the three Australian firefighters.

The State is in grief. We grieve for the heroes we never knew but who were there when we needed them most and for the family and friends who were loved. It is very hard for us all to contemplate how things could possibly get any worse but we should remind ourselves that without the courage and perseverance of our thousands of emergency services volunteers we might be facing a tragedy of an even greater magnitude. This cannot be forgotten. Over the course of the bushfire season we have seen tens of thousands of volunteers complete 280,000 deployments and save 14,000 homes.

We have seen one of the longest, most devastating fire seasons in history, if not the longest and most devastating fire season in history. It may well go on until March or April. I remind members of the House that both the Ash Wednesday and Black Friday bushfires occurred in the month of February. The RFS has a prayer for firefighters. It is appropriate that we join together in prayer for the fallen and for every man and woman who will risk their life on the front line today and over the next few months. The prayer is said at many formal events for firefighters, such as at funerals, St Florian's Day and other times of commemoration. They say:

Almighty God, and protector of all,
Your strength, power, and wisdom are a beacon of light to all.

Give special guidance to the men and women of the NSW Rural Fire Service, so that they may be protected from harm while performing their duties. Help us with your loving care while we work to save the lives and property of all people, young and old.

We thank you for the mateship we enjoy, and for the families and loved ones who support us as we go about those tasks of protecting our communities.

Give us the courage, the alertness to protect our neighbours, and all others whom we are pledged to aid when involved in fire, accident and natural disaster. Grant that there may never be a shortage of men and women of courage, character and integrity who will volunteer to train and serve in the course of fire and emergency protection within the NSW Rural Fire Service.

We thank you, God, for hearing our prayer.

Amen.

Ms TRISH DOYLE (Blue Mountains) (16:06:50): I acknowledge stress and trauma, not just outside these walls in the burnt areas of our State, not just in the people who have been directly impacted, not just in our firefighters but in each and every one of us. This includes the kids going back to school and their mums and dads who had to cancel holiday plans, whose summer break was a smoky haze and who struggled with the air quality. This includes everyone who witnessed the crisis unfold on their televisions and everyone in this room who was out in their communities, who heard of the pain, the trauma and the harrowing stories from those who were impacted. Wherever you were, whoever you are, whether it is the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition or the mum of a firefighter, you were impacted. It hurt and it stills hurts. It is okay to not be okay, even if you were nowhere near a fire front. The scale of the heartbreak is unprecedented and unbelievable.

A very knowledgeable woman, in a conversation on the need for firefighter recovery, spoke broadly about trauma and how vital it is to acknowledge it amongst our whole community. I think it is important that we acknowledge it today because, whether we realise it or not, it could be impacting you or a loved one as a result of the recent bushfires. Trauma can manifest in a few different ways: as vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress or post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD]. I have no doubt that members who are present here today have in some way been impacted and feel that. It is important to acknowledge this so that we can heal. It was difficult to learn from a woman who I admire for her work as a trauma-informed counsellor that I sit smack bang in the middle of vicarious trauma land and have to accept it.

The unprecedented nature of the fires has caused unprecedented loss. The bushfire season has claimed the lives of 33 people, including eight firefighters. New South Wales has been the worst affected State with 25 fatalities. Three of the firefighters who lost their lives were NSW RFS firefighters. They are firefighters Samuel McPaul, Deputy Captain Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer. Details of their lives and who they are have already been noted in this place, so I thank Samuel, Geoffrey and Andrew for their service. Our hearts go out to the families, friends and brigades of those firefighters and our thoughts are with the entirety of the RFS family who have felt the pain and the weight of this loss very heavily. Our whole State is grieving with them.

Throughout this crisis we also received extensive support from across the globe in the firefighting effort. But in that we also lost three United States aviators who operated one of the Large Air Tankers. They are Captain Ian H. McBeth, First Officer Paul C. Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick A. DeMorgan Jr. The role played by this crew was integral to saving countless lives and properties. As a Parliament, as a State and as a nation we are eternally grateful. I thank them for helping our country in this extreme time of need. Our deepest condolences go to all the families, friends and colleagues of the firefighters who lost their lives.

Our thoughts are also with those who have suffered injuries and those who came uncomfortably close to death. Many are still hurting. The danger of the front line is very real. While we take this time to honour people who worked at the front line, we must also ensure we do everything in our power to make sure this does not happen again. This should serve as a stark reminder of the danger firefighters are in when they are on the front line. It is dangerous work, especially with conditions and fire behaviour becoming more and more erratic and unpredictable. We must equip our firefighters with the training and resources they need to be as safe as possible.

Those people in New South Wales who lost their lives during the fires and should be forever remembered are: Robert Lindsey, 77; Gwenda Hyde, 68; Vivian Chaplain, 69; George Nole, 85; Julie Fletcher, 63; Barry Parsons, 58; Chris Savva, 64; Robert Salway, 63; Patrick Salway, 29; Russell Bratby, 59; Laurie Andrew, 70; John Smith, 71; Michael Campbell, 62; David Harrison, 47; Ross Nixon, 84; Michael Clarke, 59; and John Butler, 71. Sadly, other people lost their lives in New South Wales but are yet to be identified. The loss unfortunately does not stop there. Nearly 2,500 homes have been lost. Many of those homes were those of our emergency services personnel. They lost everything while they were defending the homes, properties and lives of others. This certainly was the case in Clarence, Bell and Dargan that are very close to home for me.

Over five million hectares of land in New South Wales and over seven million hectares across the country has burnt. More than one billion animals have been killed. The facts do not often mention what was saved, such as the houses where fire burnt right up to the back deck or even to the walls but our incredible emergency services stopped it somehow; the people who are still with us today because our emergency services personnel worked through the night to keep them safe—above and beyond the call of duty. Nights became days then turned back into nights and on it went. I thank our Fire and Rescue NSW crews, our State Emergency Service crews, our National Parks and Wildlife Service and our forestry crews. They did not just aid the firefighting effort, they were an integral component—a raft of other agencies pulled in around them and we thank those people, alongside the NSW Rural Fire Service.

Many of our crews from Fire and Rescue, SES, National Parks and Wildlife Service and Forestry Corporation need us to thank them. Understandably, and rightly so, people have expressed an outpouring of love and gratitude to the Rural Fire Service, but there were many other firefighters on the ground and they also deserve our deepest thanks. The Gaspers Mountain mega blaze was near my home in the Blue Mountains and it took homes in our community. The loss was devastating. I attended many briefings and we were bracing and preparing for much worse. The Erskine Creek fire was closing in from the south as recently as the weekend, but it did not get us—or it has not got us yet.

Like many other communities, we have had burnt leaves falling in our yards, smoky clothes hanging on the line out the back for months and the car is constantly packed, unpacked and packed again. But we were relatively lucky, as were many other communities. I thank the men and women of the RFS, under the leadership of Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons and Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers. I thank the men and women of Fire and Rescue NSW, under the leadership of Commissioner Paul Baxter and Deputy Commissioner Jeremy Fewtrell. I thank the SES and National Parks and Wildlife Service staff, volunteers and leadership teams who supported the firefighting effort in unparalleled and extraordinary ways. Those people are deeply committed to their work and their country and we owe them words that go beyond mere gratitude. I thank our friends across State borders, across the ditch and all across the world who joined forces with our own emergency services.

I promised to say thanks to the boots on the ground so I give a nod to Steve from the Capertee RFS brigade, who was one of the firefighters I met during my time travelling around New South Wales. As the member for Bathurst knows, Steve has a personality bigger than Ben Hur. There you go, Steve, I thank the boots on the ground. I also thank the families and loved ones of our firefighters. I see you, this Parliament sees you and we thank you. We know that they too have suffered the consequences of these fires. They have had to forgo plans and holidays and have held households together as their loved ones have gone to the front line.

I thank the unions who represent our firefighters and pay tribute to the Fire Brigade Employees Union and the Public Service Association. It has been tough and will continue to be tough throughout the recovery. It will take time—much longer than we imagine. My community in the Blue Mountains is still recovering from the 2013 fires. The recent fires have been a trigger that has set many people back. I also thank the police and paramedics. They have been an incredible part of the effort to care for communities. Over the past months I have

travelled through many areas and met with countless emergency services personnel across the State. My eldest son reminded me that I have worked 72 days straight without a break. On Christmas Day he tried to be cranky with me because I took a couple of calls from firefighters. But I figured that if they were working I should answer the phone.

I sat and listened to people's stories in Newcastle, Taree, Wingham, Bobin, Tinonee, Drake, Lismore, Kyogle, Casino, Tenterfield, Nimbin, Lithgow, Dargan, Clarence, Capertee, Nowra, Batemans Bay, Malua Bay, Mogo, Moruya, the Hawkesbury and in my own impacted community of the Blue Mountains. That is what we all must continue to do. The incredible spirit of people is striking. I would use the word "resilient" but people tell me it is overused—we need to find another word. Unfortunately, the bushfire season is not over yet. Communities, including my own, are still on high alert. They are highly anxious and vigilant. They are living on edge. Firefighters are still patrolling, battling blazes, putting in back burns, planning and responding. They are still going; they are always going.

I acknowledge also former RFS Commissioner Phil Koperberg, who has been a wealth of information, knowledge and calm. He has been a good old strategic head to many in my community and has checked in with the new crew and headquarters throughout this time. Secondly, I thank Greg Mullins for his commitment to ensure the discourse around the fires was not just about fuel management, hazard reduction or adapting to climate change, but about addressing the root cause of drought and fire: climate change. Again, I acknowledge pain because we keep coming back to that. I thank Hugh McDermott who was on the front line with his brigade. The member for Bega has left the Chamber, but I acknowledge and thank him for speaking his truth at a time of crisis. I thank his family, friends, neighbours and community, of which my 94-year-old nanna is a member.

I took a call from her on New Year's Eve, when she was evacuated. At 94 years old, she sat on the beach with all those people for eight hours under a blackened sky, feeling worried. She is traumatised too. When I visited her recently she said, "Don't forget the bottle of riesling, Trisha. I have survived but I wouldn't mind just having a quiet drink with you." She told me of the time on the beach, what it smelt like and what it looked like. That image horrified me. I lost contact with her for a couple of days and I spent hours on the phone to my local police superintendent. Power was down on the South Coast and communication could not be made by phone, but he managed to find her using the Police Force radio system and let me know that she was alive.

I also acknowledge the people we often do not see on the television. I thank the incident management teams of each one of our Fire Control Centres for their work. It was hard and relentless talking to people who were weary but absolutely determined to look after their communities day after night after week after month. I thank my team: Greg Wardle of the Rural Fire Service; David Crust of the National Parks and Wildlife Service; and Matt Walden, a superintendent with Fire and Rescue NSW. I thank Mayor Mark Greenhill and my Federal colleague Susan Templeman, who lost her home only a handful of years ago but was offering support to those who lost theirs this time. I thank all the Blue Mountains City councillors, many of whom are firefighters, and my staff who also sit in the land of vicarious trauma after listening to a lot of stories.

I will finish on a personal note. In this place there is the professional, the political and the personal, and the personal is always political. The past few months have been heartbreaking, terrifying and everything in between in my role not only as the shadow Minister for Emergency Services and as the member for Blue Mountains but also as a mum to a firefighter. No-one ever wants to be sitting on the couch and receiving a text message from your child that reads, "I don't think we are going to make it. I love you, mum." I waited for 2½ hours to see if he made it.

I acknowledge Fire and Rescue NSW members of Strike Team Golf for their skill, teamwork, expertise, training, calm and courage and for the dose of miracle that enabled them to get out of the trucks that eventually burnt to the ground. They were able to walk to safety to find their crew members who had escaped waiting with stretchers. They were expecting to go in to recover bodies. We are all reeling in pain and looking to hope, but wherever we sit on the political spectrum, as a Parliament, let us pause, reflect, remember and take care of one another.

Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst—Minister for Regional Transport and Roads) (16:24:42): I sincerely thank the Premier and Deputy Premier for bringing this condolence motion to the House. It is very fitting this week that after seeing months of fires burning in the north, in the inland areas and also in the south of the State we actually forget about politics and pointscoring and think about the communities that are trying to get back on their feet. This is about caring for people. This is about understanding that people are, in some instances, going to have a very tough time getting back to where they were before the fires hit. In many cases, people will never get back to that position.

As I travel around different communities, including my own, I can see the raw emotion. It is there right now. It is on the faces of those people in the areas in which we live. Many communities have spent weeks staring

down the threat of bushfires. Others have seen that threat up close and have lost everything. People are not just exhausted; they are emotionally drained. Collectively, we mourn the loss of life, of loved ones and of brave volunteers without whose efforts those losses could have been much greater. Our hearts go out to those families and business owners facing the enormous task of rebuilding. I know that all members in this Chamber are united in their desire to support them in this task.

I acknowledge the incredible work the Premier has done in turning up to all parts of this State, keeping communities informed at all times. I also acknowledge the Deputy Premier, who has been travelling around this State tirelessly and talking to different communities. The road to recovery is very different for each and every community. The needs of one area are very different from those of another. In my local area a community that has lost houses is very different from a rural farmland that has lost outbuildings, stock and fences. This week the Deputy Premier toured the Clarence-Dargan area, which is on the eastern side of my electorate. The Gospers Mountain fire probably hit these communities the hardest on 21 December—this fire actually started back in October. Homes were lost and lives will be changed forever.

As recently as last week, local brigades were dealing with reignitions from debris still burning beneath the ground. Just because a fire looks like it is out—the area is blackened and the flames contained—fires may still be burning in the trunks of trees. We are still seeing ignition points on coalfields. We know that this fire season still has a long way to go. We are hearing incredible stories of bravery, mateship, incredible community spirit and generosity. I was told a story by the Clarence-Dargan brigade. They faced conditions they had never experienced before. I have had firefighters tell me that in 30 years or 50 years of firefighting they have seen nothing like it. You can learn everything from the textbook, but in this situation you threw the textbook out because it did not help. Firefighters have had to try new practices and deal with new conditions and new ways of doing things.

The blaze in this area became so wild that at one point Fire and Rescue NSW and the RFS formed a "huddle" on the side of the Bells Line of Road. It was literally like circling the wagons, only it was not wagons but fire trucks. The fire trucks formed a circle and the residents and their vehicles were in the middle of the huddle. The trucks then turned on their hoses and sprinklers and they waited for the inferno to pass over. They got through that because of the incredible preparation work they had done with back-burning. Miraculously, in that area no lives were lost. We continually hear stories about the bravery and commitment of amazing volunteers who have been out there doing unimaginable things.

In that area 37 homes were lost, including the homes of a number of brigade members who were on the front line protecting their communities in the Clarence-Dargan area. I know that some of those who were impacted have not yet been able to return to their properties, knowing the destruction is there. They are not quite ready to see it with their own eyes. Everyone's healing process will be different. The recovery process will take time, and that is why it is important we continue to support people who have had this devastating experience when they are prepared to receive support.

The fire also hit the much-loved Zig Zag Railway, destroying some carriages, signalling equipment, some sleepers and a communications hut. This is a shattering setback for the many volunteers who have been working tirelessly to bring the Zig Zag back to life by the end of this year. I have reached out to them and they have indicated to me that they are still very determined to fight their way back and ensure that the railway is operational as quickly as possible. That is important for the community because the project will drive economic growth and tourism.

Lithgow was also hit hard by the fires. Homes on the outskirts of the city were lost just days before Christmas. On 21 December, which was the worst day, the winds had incredible speed and fires were popping up everywhere. Embers were flying through the air so spot fires were occurring right across the community. Firefighting strike teams from Sydney, further to the Central West and from the north of the State were all in the Lithgow community, but because of the conditions and what they were facing it would not have mattered how many strike teams were there. There would not have been enough firefighting trucks to put one on every street and in every community to save homes.

I give a shout-out to Lithgow City Council, which is probably being hit hard at the moment. The council is leading many of the recovery meetings. I know the council is very focused on supporting the community where it can. Oberon Council is also in my electorate. The Green Wattle Creek fire in the Oberon local government area impacted many rural landholders. We lost the Jenolan Caves rural fire shed but, thanks to the efforts of the Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the heritage-listed Jenolan Caves House was saved. Both the Minister for Energy and Environment and I are relieved that, among the tales of tragedy and destruction caused by the fires, one of the world's most spectacular cave formations was not severely impacted. I am pleased to say that the caves reopened last weekend.

Further north in my electorate the communities around Capertee, Wolgan Valley, Glen Alice, Glen Davis, Running Stream, Ilford, Olinda, Bogee, Kandos, Rylstone, Upper Turon and Palmers Oaky were on alert for weeks as they knew the fire was coming and were making preparations. They knew that the fire on the Gaspers Mountain was moving towards them. It was an awful waiting game for them; the communities were on constant watch for smoke and embers. The fire impacted hundreds of rural landholders, who lost thousands of kilometres of fencing and stock. It was an awful blow to those who are still in the grip of drought.

While the losses have continued to mount across my electorate, assessment teams continue to work through the task. We must also remember that for every home that was lost many more were saved, thanks to the heroic efforts of our combined firefighting forces. I know that many are grateful that the toll of these monster fires was not worse, with loss of life in our area. But we share in the grief of other communities. While the fires have scarred my electorate, they have not dampened our spirit. I know many members have reflected that in the worst times we see the best of humanity.

I am always blown away by the generosity and the acts of kindness that I have seen each day. I have witnessed the dedication of members of the community who want to help. The Rotary Club of Kandos-Rylstone at the north end of my electorate served thousands of meals for 22 days straight. The community kitchen was open at the crack of dawn for breakfast. They fed the fireys, the air crew, the police and the ambulance officers well into the night. I also give a shout-out to our charitable organisations. We have heard criticism of the Red Cross but my local Red Cross group has been amazing. The Salvation Army has been incredible and St Vincent de Paul and Lifeline have been amazing.

Those charities have turned up to every community recovery meeting that has been held. They have had a strong presence throughout the fires. They were present at the opening of the evacuation centre. Locals were supporting locals, which is critical at this time. I have also seen the generosity of Australians from other States. Forty-four farmers in Western Australia wanted to donate 2,000 bales of hay and fodder to help farmers on the other side of the country whom they have never met. Some volunteers drove for four nights, crossed three States, and travelled thousands of kilometres to get to the communities where assistance was needed most. They sent hay and fodder to places like Cooma, where it was unloaded and distributed into smaller loads and taken to farmers who were impacted by fires.

Stories like this remind us of the kindness and generosity shown by people in this nation. I know that all members acknowledge the efforts of our firefighting forces whether they are from the Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW, national parks, Forestry Corporation or Transport's rail and emergency response unit, which has worked tirelessly during these fires right across the State. I also give a shout-out to my transport teams who have worked tirelessly over recent months, especially to restore connectivity to bushfire-affected communities to ensure that people can leave high-impacted areas and allow much-needed supplies to get to communities. We want to see supplies flow back into local areas. It has been a big task—clearing trees, replacing guard rails and stabilising slopes. Those tasks must be undertaken, but there is more work to be done.

The fires left a trail of destruction along the main western line between Mount Victoria and Lithgow. That 25-kilometre line has been destroyed. It will be months before regular trains are back operating the way they did previously. Luckily, some diesel trains have moved some freight and passengers through that area. But we need a window to allow the teams to go in there each day to replace thousands of kilometres of cabling, signalling boxes and communication devices, and remove trees and put in new power poles. Those things have been wiped out completely; we are building that infrastructure from scratch.

The most worrying thing is that the fire threat is not over yet. Every time one of those fires has been contained, one can almost hear the cheers across that region. I thank the brigades across my electorate because for months many brigades have been sending members to assist in the fires on the north of the coast before they had to return to protect their home turf. Now many members are being sent down south to assist. Our RFS volunteers are special individuals, from those on the front line to the huge support teams who keep them fuelled and upright.

I give a shout-out to people such as 81-year-old Doreen Peters, whom I caught up with this week with the Deputy Premier. Doreen epitomises what the volunteers are all about. She has been a member of the Rural Fire Service for over 55 years. She has two sons and four grandsons out on the fire front. Doreen worked for 80 days straight through the bushfire season. She is the face of a lot of tired and hungry volunteers. She is the face that you want to see when you come off the front line after fighting a fire. Doreen runs the canteen at the fire control centre in Lithgow. Over recent months she and her team have made thousands of sandwiches. She even shared the Christmas puddings that she made for her own family with the troops.

Like many, I have struggled to find the words to express my gratitude and admiration for the volunteers who have faced these fires to fight for their communities. Over time, we can have a discussion about what we must do better and what we must change, but I say to everyone: not right now. Right now is about supporting

those communities to get back on their feet. That is what we should focus on. I thank Lithgow City Council, Oberon Council and Mid-Western Regional Council, which will continue to be the driving force behind supporting their communities. I also congratulate RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, who did an amazing job and continues to do so. It is tough to front up day after day. I thank him for his work in coordinating the firefighting effort across the State.

I also thank Minister for Police and Emergency Services David Elliott for the work that he has done for our communities and for being there in this difficult time. I conclude by sharing a few comments from my community members, who summed it up so well. They said, "That little red fire truck and the commitment of people in it means a lot." They said, "These are the best kinds of humans." They said, "This is a level of commitment that goes beyond any dictionary definition." They said, "They are modern-day superheroes." Indeed, they are.

Ms JANELLE SAFFIN (Lismore) (16:44:17): I support the motion moved by the Premier and I thank her for moving it. I acknowledge all the contributions of the previous speakers—each contribution was heartfelt in its own particular way—and I acknowledge the trauma that some of our colleagues in this place have experienced through the bushfires. Recently I wrote something at home about a roadmap to recovery. I will speak about that in detail at another time, but I began by making some observations. I started off by saying that the State member for Bega, Andrew Constance, called our bushfire crisis "humanitarian". I then went on to say that in a royal message we received the word "ecocide" was used. I said that it is both: It is humanitarian and ecological, and it requires the requisite responses. We all want the best recovery and rebuild possible. When we are responding we will be very mindful that what we are facing and what we are responding to is humanitarian first and foremost, but also ecological.

I will go through some of the facts, because they are quite telling. Twenty-five lives have been lost, including six of those fighting the fires—three of our local RFS firefighters and three firefighter aviators from the United States of America—and nearly 2,500 houses are gone. People have lost their lives and people have lost their homes. I hope that when people go out to help clean up they will be very mindful that they are not going to a demolition site, but to what I call a bereavement site for people who have lost their homes, which is where their memories are—their whole lives were packed into those homes.

I was asked a question on the radio recently: Should we have a discussion about whether people should go back to places where they have lost their homes? I said that is not the question. Everybody wants to be in their home; most people want to return to their home. We have deep roots in our homes and in our land. We know that our Indigenous people have their deep roots in the land, and so do we—that is our land, that is our home. The question is "How do we help people rebuild?" if that is where they want to be, and "How do we make their homes as resilient as possible to the weather extremes and to the bushfires in a way they can afford?" We should be mindful that some of our stricter bushfire building codes come at a cost, and that is where we need to help people.

Over 1,000 homes have been damaged as well as numerous outbuildings. Many landholders have been affected. I do not know the length of all the fences that have gone—I do not think we have an exact figure on it. It would be good to know that—I can see the Minister nodding—because I keep hearing from local farmers that the length of the fences they have to replace is unbelievable and it will be very costly. Our water and our soil have been affected and our wildlife has been decimated in many areas, particularly koalas, which are our wildlife icons. I acknowledge two women local to my electorate, Jessica and Lauren, who grew up in Lismore and who have lived overseas for years, one in London and one in Scotland. Jessica reached out to me and said that Lauren, from her school in Aberdeenshire in Scotland, wanted to do something for the koalas. Last week the Friends of Koalas in Lismore held a raffle fundraiser. All the kids got involved in raising money. My conversation with them is still a work in progress. I am sure that all members have had people from all over Australia and from different places in the world reach out to them.

The other figure is 5.5 million hectares burnt, which is hard to imagine. Earlier today the Minister for Police and Emergency Services compared it to the size of Croatia. It is quite unbelievable, as is the figure of 10,000 fires. As I speak, I am mindful that the State is still on fire, and that is predicted to continue. All this has impacted across our State, with massive dislocation everywhere, particularly in rural and regional areas. Our local communities have been impacted by the drought, the water scarcity and the fires in my electorate that began a year ago. I am standing in solidarity, supporting people who are still dislocated from the fires back then.

In the Tenterfield local government area 53 homes have been destroyed and 22 have been damaged; five facilities have been destroyed, including the caravan park kitchen; 114 outbuildings have been destroyed and 57 have been damaged; and 805 rural landholders have been impacted. Those figures from my electorate are moving, as they are in many electorates. In Torrington, a little place in Tenterfield shire, 19 homes were lost. Drake, another small place, lost 14 homes and Tabulam lost 11 homes. In the Kyogle Council area four homes were destroyed and two were damaged. In Paddys Flat outbuildings were destroyed and damaged, and 105 rural

landholders were impacted. In the Lismore City Council area two homes and two outbuildings were destroyed, three buildings were damaged and 14 rural landholders were impacted. That gives members an idea of some of the figures in my electorate alone.

When I visited some of those communities, I was struck by—and other members have spoken about it—the resilience of people and their resoluteness to recover and carry on. But they need a lot of support. That is where we all come in and work together. We will look at ways to do things better and to respond better. However, we must do that in a cooperative and collaborative way because that is how our constituents expect us to do our job. I am doing my best to provide support. Sometimes that means standing in solidarity with my community as well as the communities either side of me. The electorate of Clarence, represented by Mr Chris Gulaptis, and the electorate of Northern Tablelands, represented by Mr Adam Marshall, have both been tragically impacted as well. In Coongbar, within the Clarence electorate, Gwen Hyde and Bob Lindsey tragically lost their lives. In Wyaliba, Vivian Chaplin and George Nole lost their lives.

One life lost is too many. Twenty-five lives lost in New South Wales is just too tragic to bear, none more so than for the families of our community members whose lives have been taken too soon by these devastating bushfires. To all families, friends and communities, I am sorry and I extend my sincere sympathies. I acknowledge that three of our brave RFS firefighters gave their lives in their voluntary service, defending lives, property and land to help keep us safe. The firefighters were Samuel McPaul from the Morven Rural Fire Brigade, Andrew O'Dwyer from the Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade, and firefighter and deputy captain Geoffrey Keating, who was also from the Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade. I acknowledge the presence of members of the Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade here today. It must have been very difficult for them to be here but it was very honourable of them to do so.

I acknowledge the three United States aviators, Captain Ian H. McBeth, First Officer Paul C. Hudson and First Engineer Rick A. DeMorgan Jr. To the families of the fallen US firefighter aviators, I am so sorry. These men lost their lives far from home but they are forever part of us now; they are part of Australia and they are in our hearts forever. Communities are hurting, communities are fearful and communities are resilient, but communities need lots of support. We talk a lot about mental health—it is really important. We need to provide that when people need it. They need practical help. I call it "tools and tea". We turn up to help in any way we can, with whatever tools we have at hand, we have tea and we say, "Come on, let's have a cup of tea." Sit with people and just be there for them. I refer to a letter to the editor in *The Land* on Thursday 9 January 2020. I will read some of the letter, which is from Stuart Austin, the Wilmot Cattle Company manager from Hernani—quite a few members will know where Hernani is. This really struck a chord when I read it out at one of the community recovery meetings at Bonalbo. He said:

Accept some help—acknowledge that it will take many hands. Think about the additional hands you'll need and whose most readily willing and able to contribute.

Our community is that much stronger for having this disaster. Lift each other up. Remember, everyone has done as much as they thought they could to this point.

Get some rest—these experiences make us stronger, but there is no denying they take a toll, physically and mentally.

Just stop. If you're thinking about getting that one more thing done, before going home to your family, think about if it will matter if it's done tonight, or can it wait until the morning. Most of the time, it's the latter. The love and support of your family is what you need most right now, and so do they from you.

Keep an eye out for your mates, now more than ever. Keep talking. Stop for a yarn whenever you see them. Check in on them.

My sincerest condolences to all those who have endured such huge losses recently. I hope this helps, in some small way. That letter struck a chord with me, as I know it did with many people in the community. It was published in *The Land* and was written, in particular, to the farming community, but it applies to everyone. Our much-loved Rural Fire Service and firefighters are exhausted but they are still out fighting fires. Our emergency services and all of our other services are stretched to the limit. Our volunteers are worn out but they are still out there giving. Our farmers' resources are depleted but they carry on because they see a future in farming. We have to support them to show that there is a future in farming. The farmers with their fences destroyed have BlazeAid and a whole lot of other people out helping them as well.

Our businesses, the lifeblood of our regional and rural towns—and that goes for the coastal towns as well—are hanging in and hanging on but they are running on empty. We have to make sure that they have all the support that can be garnered around them. We also have to give lots of support to tourism. I thank everybody who has been involved in helping—there are so many and I know I will not cover everybody today, but there will be other opportunities to do so in this place so I will start with some today. It goes without saying that I thank the Rural Fire Service volunteers—they are really our local heroes and are much loved by all of us. I thank our SES, our police, our Forestry Corporation and our National Parks and Wildlife Service who were out there on the front

line too. I thank the Australian Defence Force [ADF]. It was pleasing to see the ADF join with us for the relief and the recovery.

I thank Lifeline, which saves lives. I also thank our cultural burners. I have had an ongoing conversation with the Minister about mosaic burning and cultural burning for many months since last year because a lot of my farmers ask for it—they call it mosaic burning—and Indigenous people talk about their traditional practice of cultural burning. I particularly acknowledge the organisation Firesticks, Ollie Costello and Sean Cooper, who is a practitioner of cultural burning and also one of our Rural Fire Service members. I thank members of the Country Women's Association who have been out there giving and giving and giving. I thank surf lifesavers, the Salvation Army, Anglicare and Red Cross in my local area and everywhere else. I thank the people of the Shed of Hope, also in my local area, who have put up sheds for people to live in or work in back on their land and are doing it for free. They are just a couple of blokes and some tools and they go out there giving hope. I have seen some of their sheds. They give people a structure and a shelter.

I thank Two Hands in my local area. I also thank the member for Lakemba, my colleague Jihad Dib, who rang me wanting to provide help in my electorate. That ended up being in Clarence and in Rappville and that was fine—it was needed there. People are giving where they can. I thank our local government people and people who have come from overseas to help. I thank Fire and Rescue NSW and so many others who have been on that front line. I have sent a letter to my local Rural Fire Service members to thank them all. It will go out to a lot of our services as well but we are starting with the Rural Fire Service members. I was trying to count up how many brigades are in my electorate and I lost count at about 52—there is quite a significant number of fire brigades in my electorate of Lismore alone. I wrote:

I am writing to you through your ... captains to sincerely thank all Rural Fire Service volunteers for your tireless efforts in combating the catastrophic bushfires which ravaged parts of the Lismore Electorate for much of last year.

I thanked them for the lives, the homes, the properties and the farmlands they protected. I said:

I am full of admiration for the way in which you put your lives on the line to keep others safe and secure by doing everything possible ...

I salute all of you for going way beyond the call of duty. I also thank your families ...

An inquiry has been mentioned. The terms of reference for the inquiry are solid and sound, as are the people leading the inquiry. People in local communities want to have their say. I am sure we can find a way for them to have their say—I can think of many ways. We will continue to have that discussion so people from across New South Wales get to have their say, starting in my electorate of Lismore.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON (Vaucluse) (17:04:19): I add my condolences to others in this House today, and recognise that there will be further contributions tomorrow. When I thought about what I should say today I recalled the opening lines of Charles Dickens' classic *A Tale of Two Cities*. Many members would be familiar with the story. The opening lines of the story capture what I want to talk about. The novel begins, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times ... it was the season of light; it was the season of darkness ...". Those lines are used often—I am sure they have been used in this House before—but to me they speak to the opposites we have experienced as a State throughout the bushfire season. The experience has been without any "in between", which is often what a lot of life is made up of—neither the best nor the worst. Along with many other members, I acknowledge the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, who is present in the Chamber.

During the bushfires 29,000 people were evacuated, townships were lost and 5.6 million hectares of land were burnt, which is an area twice the size of Israel—that image gives me a sense of the size of the impact. Unique flora and fauna have been destroyed. Lives have been lost, with tremendous despair for those left behind. People as far removed from the front line of the fires as those in my electorate have struggled with their health as a result of the lower air quality. Children—our children—have nightmares. Those whose lives and homes were spared feel guilt. Those whose homes were destroyed are in despair. Our home is our sanctuary, and I cannot imagine the deep sadness and loss of identity that comes with the loss of a home and all possessions.

This morning the member for Prospect graphically recounted his Rural Fire Service experience in the field, minute by minute. His recollection was frightening, stark and traumatising. It was the first description I had heard of the frontline fight against the fires. The whole New South Wales community feels vanquished, tired and sad. The people of my electorate—which was not, and probably will not be, at risk during the bushfire season—and I struggled with how to help. We wanted to do more than donate to a charity. During the emergency period my constituents wrote me many emails to share their distress. Like me, they felt lost watching the media coverage, which seemed to focus more on the carnage than the extraordinary humanity, generosity and heroism that was also present.

But, yes, it was also the "best of times". The volunteers of all kinds are our heroes. They are both good and great—a rare combination. There was unbounded generosity where we did not expect to find it. There were sacrifices made by people who did not need to make them. There was our Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, who was, as always, focused on the right things. She was empathic and present, offering practical help. There is the \$1 billion infrastructure rebuild fund, which makes sure the professionals are in the right place at the right time. There is the enduring wave of community support here and all over the world. Anyone who knew you were an Australian reached out to express their support and ask how they could help. That all put paid to the idea that we sometimes have that we are selfish, small minded and fragmented as a community—we are not.

On Australia Day the Cottage Point RFS brigade unexpectedly visited Bondi Beach in my electorate—as if they had not already done enough! They spent their whole Australia Day out under the strong sun on Bondi Beach amongst about 100,000 people. That gave my community a chance to say thank you for their efforts and to the Rural Fire Service more broadly, and to feel connected to them and what had gone on. I call out Noel Kessel, who is an amazing photographer. People often see him around on the beat for *The Australian Jewish News*. He is a volunteer member of the Rural Fire Service and his broader family, including his beautiful young son Avishai, gave up that day to visit with us at Bondi Beach.

We are not done yet: The bushfire season is not over. I welcome the review by Professor Mary O'Kane and Dave Owens, which has been commissioned by the New South Wales Government. It will focus on the causes, the preparation and the responses to the 2019-20 bushfires. I know Mary O'Kane very well. I am confident that both Dave and Mary will bring professionalism, intellect and perspective to that important review. We need to look to the future and at what planning we can do now. I want us to focus on the role that innovation and research and development—passions of mine—can play to help us prepare for the inevitable next cycle of drought and fire. We need long-term and short-term projects to begin now. We need to invest in them now for the next cycle. We also need to focus on the drought. We cannot let the drought be lost in our deliberations. Finally, we have seen the best in the New South Wales community. I have seen the best from my constituents and from my colleagues in this Parliament. At the beginning of 2020 I am inspired, reinvigorated and proud.

Ms ANNA WATSON (Shellharbour) (17:11:42): It is with a heavy heart that I pay my respects today to the victims of our country's ongoing bushfire disaster and offer my deepest condolences to their friends, families and communities. So far across Australia the bushfire season has claimed 33 lives but New South Wales has been the hardest hit. Over the past few months we have lost 25 of our State's fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters. We are mourning with 25 families and communities across our State. I will now spend a moment to pay my respects to each individual who has lost their life in this ongoing disaster. I start with Mr Geoffrey Keaton and Mr Andrew O'Dwyer. These two volunteer firefighters, from the Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade, lost their lives in the line of duty on Thursday 19 December 2019—six days before Christmas. Geoffrey and Andrew were in the front seat of their firetruck in a convoy whilst fighting the Green Wattle Creek fire. A tree fell onto their vehicle, which caused their truck to roll off the road. Three other firefighters were also injured in the accident.

Geoffrey Keaton, aged 32, was engaged to Ms Jess Hayes and had a 19-month-old son, Harvey. Earlier today the member for Prospect spoke about Geoffrey and his son. At his funeral service a mug with the words "Daddy, I love you to the moon and back" sat atop his coffin and Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons pinned the commendations for his extraordinary bravery and service to Harvey's shirt. Mr Andrew O'Dwyer, aged 36, just like Geoffrey had a 19-month—a daughter, Charlotte. At his funeral, Andrew's dad called him a free spirit who lived in the present and on his terms. His brigade captain described him as a "rare and beautiful person". His wife, Melissa, and Charlotte were also presented with posthumous commendations for his bravery and service to his community. The images of those two young children being presented with their fathers' commendations are heartbreaking. Indeed, the photos of little Charlotte wearing her father's helmet beside his casket and young Harvey having his father's medals pinned to his shirt have become the symbols of the immeasurable loss being suffered as a result of these fires.

On 30 December 2019—less than two weeks later—volunteer firefighter Mr Samuel McPaul lost his life while fighting the Green Valley blaze in Jingellic near the New South Wales-Victoria border. Samuel was just 28 years old. He died on the front line of these fires when a sudden tornado event lifted the back of the fire truck he was in. It flipped the truck—an eight-tonne vehicle—onto its roof, trapping three crew members on board and resulting in Samuel's death. A young man in the prime of his life, he had been married for just 18 months prior to his death. He leaves behind a young wife, Megan, who is pregnant with their first child. He is remembered as a creative spirit who was always looking for a better way to do things, as well as a generous and honest person whose kindness was infectious. He was another brave and selfless individual who paid the ultimate price defending his community. I cannot imagine the pain and the loss his family feels, particularly his young wife. I pass on my deepest condolences to these families and my thoughts are with them at this time.

Just over three weeks later our State yet again experienced a tragedy when three members of the United States aerial firefighting crew were killed in the line of duty. Whilst fighting a blaze west of Cooma, the C-130 air tanker that they were aboard crashed. First Officer Paul Hudson, 43, from Buckeye, Arizona, served in the United States Marine Corps for 20 years in a number of positions, including as a C-130 pilot. He is described as a hero who dedicated his life to service, first as a marine and then as a firefighter. He is survived by his wife. Also on board was Rick DeMorgan, a father of two from Navarre, Florida. Mr DeMorgan served in the United States Air Force for 18 years as a flight engineer on a C-130. He is remembered as a passionate man who loved flying and loved his children.

The third man killed was Captain Ian McBeth from Great Falls in Montana. He was a highly qualified and respected C-130 pilot, with many years in firefighting. He is survived by his wife, Bowdie, and three children Abigail, Calvin and Ella. These three men left their families and homes and travelled across the globe to Australia to help us in our time of need. I offer my sincere condolences to their families. All Australians are truly grateful for the bravery and sacrifice of these men. I know that these words have been spoken many times in this place today and will continue to be spoken, but it is so true. All members here are feeling that today.

Over the past four months of the current fire season, which will continue as the summer continues, we have lost residents from communities right across the State. On 8 October 2019 Bob Lindsey, 77, and his wife, Gwen Hyde, 68, died while defending their rural property from a bushfire 50 kilometres south-west of Byron Bay. They had been married for three years and have both left behind children from previous marriages. One month later Vivian Chaplain, a 69-year-old woman described as relentlessly wonderful by her local community, died in hospital from injuries she sustained defending her home in northern New South Wales. She was remembered by her two children, six grandchildren and the rest of her family as a "strong woman who died protecting the home and animals she loved".

On 8 November Mr George Nole, 85, died in his car in the Kangawalla fire. He was described by those who knew him as creative, eccentric and a "true gentleman". He was a well-known figure in the Glen Innes community and could often be seen cycling around town. Mr Barry Parsons, 58, is assumed to have also died in the 8 November fires, 60 kilometres north-west of Port Macquarie. His body was found on 13 November. He is remembered as "a lovely gentle guy" who lived a simple life in a shed with his two cats. One day later Ms Julie Fletcher, aged 63, was found deceased in a burnt-out building at Johns River in New South Wales. She is described as a "quality person" with deep roots in the region. Her family had been in the area for generations.

Just days later Mr Chris Savva, aged 64, passed away attempting to escape the fire zone by car when his route was blocked by a burnt-out bridge and his sports utility vehicle rolled down an embankment near Nambucca Heads. He had been a long-term resident of the area and had managed to save his house from the threat of bushfire the week before. On 30 December, the day before New Year's Eve, Mr Robert Salway aged 63, and his son Patrick, aged 29, lost their lives while defending their family property at Wandella. They were described by friends as "one of the tightest, close-knit families you'll ever come across". Both father and son worked in the dairy industry and Renee, Patrick's wife of five years, is expecting their second child.

Ten other people died this fire season but have not been identified publicly. Ten of our State's fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters—10 people from all different backgrounds and from right across our State—and 10 more families and 10 more communities are coping with the unbearable loss of a loved one. On top of all these losses in New South Wales, five other people died in Victoria's bushfire season and three others died in South Australian blazes. I pass on my thoughts and deep respect to every firefighter across this State who has suffered injuries and trauma on the front line of the blazes.

The past few months have been absolutely devastating. Almost 19 million hectares of our country have been burnt, 6,000 buildings have been destroyed and 33 people have lost their lives. Not only is our country hurting but also its people are in mourning. Grey skies and the smell of smoke have become an almost daily reminder of the horrors unfolding in our bush and across our country. The heartbreaking images of children wearing their father's firefighting helmet or kissing their father's casket goodbye will stay with me forever. Medals have been pinned on children who are too young to understand the scale of the loss they have suffered. New wives, expectant mothers and lifelong partners are weeping for the loss of their greatest loves. These images are heart breaking for me and for my community, as well as for the rest of Australia.

I cannot imagine the pain these families are suffering in this moment. I think it will stay with them forever. I stand with the rest of New South Wales and pay my respects to the incredible heroes and brave community members who have left us all too soon. It is our duty as members of this House to put all other matters aside in this moment, reflect on the unimaginable sacrifice of these individuals and pledge to offer our support in whatever capacity we can to help families and our communities heal. My thoughts are with the great men and women we have lost in this fire season.

Thank you for your selflessness, for your sacrifice and for your bravery. My thoughts are also with their families, their friends and their communities. I am so sorry for your loss. Your community and the community of Australia stand with you—you are certainly not standing alone. In the face of so much heartbreaking news and immeasurable pain, I am proud to see communities coming together, starting to pick up the pieces and supporting those in need. Our country has lost so much but we also have so much to be proud of. I pay my deepest respects and offer my condolences to the victims of this bushfire crisis—may they rest in peace—and their families.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH (Wollondilly) (17:23:16): I draw to the attention of the House the impact of the bushfires on my community of the Wollondilly shire in the Southern Highlands and on the State. At the end of last year when Parliament rose the battle for Wollondilly was just about to begin. On 28 November in Burratorang Valley a spot fire started the Green Wattle Creek fire that threatened many villages—Orangeville, Werombi, Theresa Park, Nattai, Oakdale, The Oaks, Silverdale and Warragamba. In the northern end of my electorate we lost a small number of homes but many outbuildings and plant equipment were destroyed. The ongoing fire was a constant threat to other areas of my electorate. Each day in December I woke up wondering which town or village would be next in the path of the ever-growing fire front.

On 19 December 2019 I was in the southern part of the electorate to attend a number of meetings. I first became aware of the threat to some of the villages in the central part of my electorate when I received several texts from NSW Rural Fire Service volunteers. As the afternoon unfolded the devastation became apparent in the villages of Buxton, Balmoral and Bargo, which were then ablaze. This was a result of the rapid expansion of the Green Wattle Creek fire burning in the Burratorang Valley. I watched this catastrophe unfold on the television. I received a briefing from local Hume Police District Assistant Commander Inspector John Klepczarek. Roads were being closed and evacuation centres established at Mittagong RSL and Picton Bowling Club. I was in constant contact with the emergency services to get the latest updates and I was anxious to get to the evacuation centres to see firsthand the impact of these fires on my community.

I was stranded in the southern end of my electorate due to road closures. The Hume Highway was finally opened in the evening and I was able to get to the Picton Bowling Club to assess the confronting situation. There were so many people who were impacted just walking around wondering what the future held for them. The emergency services, Office of Emergency Management, and Department of Community and Family Services staff were there. The Red Cross, Anglicare, the Salvos and St Vincent de Paul were also there. Trauma counsellors, the RFS chaplain and even the local vet were there. Central to that scene was the sense of caring and compassion that was displayed by everyone. I spoke with many of those who had lost everything but the clothes they had on. Most were still in shock but others were just grateful to be alive.

The donations were already starting to come in at the club, with a constant stream of people offering whatever they could: groceries, beds and blankets, gift cards, toys, clothes. But perhaps the most touching of all the donations was when a lady came to the club with two bottles of water and said, "This is all that I can donate. Is that okay?" It was typical of the strong community spirit that was evident and would grow in the coming days. There were no boundaries to the generosity of spirit that existed then and is now continuing in my community. I am reminded of the opening lines of the Charles Dickens novel *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times ... it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair".

The night of 19 December was tragic. As the RFS volunteers fought ferocious fires in the villages of Buxton and Balmoral, news came through that two brave and dedicated men from the Horsley Park brigade, Andrew Joel O'Dwyer and Geoffrey Wesley Keaton, had been killed in an RFS vehicle rollover when the vehicle was struck by a fallen tree. I can assure members that on the night of 19 December there was less space in heaven for heroes as Andrew and Geoff joined those who had given their lives in the service of others. Also on that night, on a lighter note, I received a text from Hugh McDermott, the member for Prospect, saying that I should buy him a beer at the Tahmoor Inn. Hugh was in my electorate fighting the Balmoral, Bargo and Buxton fires and was having a short break from the front line. There are so many others like Hugh for whom I would have loved to have bought a beer. Thank you, Hugh, for your commitment and service to the RFS and for being part of the team that saved so much of my community.

I have spoken to many people who have lost property and businesses and had their lives impacted by the fires but when you know them personally it makes the loss even more real. My dear friend and member in the other place the Hon. Lou Amato, MLC, lost his sheds and his wife, Naomi, lost her wonderful collection of exotic breeds of chickens. Lou lost his beloved Harley and his Mustang but, most of all, he lost so much family history and memorabilia. The Harley and the Mustang can be replaced but those cherished family memories cannot. Also, the brother of my electorate office staffer Chloe Brown—Tucker, who is a member of the Buxton RFS brigade—was out fighting the fires in Buxton defending other people's homes but was unable to save his own house. This

is service above self. In my electorate around 40 houses and many hundreds of outbuildings have been destroyed by the fires. So many people's lives were changed forever.

We talk about what we have lost in the bushfires but we should also mention the things that we have saved. The skill and bravery of the officers, staff and volunteers of the RFS, Fire and Rescue NSW, the NSW Police Force and the National Parks and Wildlife Service ensured that loss of property, life and wildlife was minimised. Today a drive down Wilson Drive, Balmoral, provides stark evidence of that. Both sides of the road are littered with charred trees and are a barren and scarred landscape. But in the midst of all that devastation to the landscape, houses and outer buildings are still standing—a testament to the skill and courage of those firefighters who saved them. In the midst of all the destruction to the vegetation, houses are still standing.

The historic Balmoral Village Community Hall was saved by the local brigade and other brigades, who stared down the gates of hell and defeated 50-metre high flames coming from all sides of the building. The hall has been the centre of activity for those in the area and has been a safe haven and recovery centre for many of the bushfire victims. It is managed by Kerry O'Grady from Picton Country Women's Association, which has provided great support and assistance to my local community. The donations received at the centre have been amazing, with the hall and several shipping containers full of donations. We should also not lose sight of the devastation to the environment and the habitats of native wildlife. Many dedicated volunteers are caring for the native animals who have been injured and displaced. Recently at Thirlmere Rural Fire Service I, together with the Federal environment Minister and local member, Angus Taylor, attended a briefing on the recovery program for many of the native animals who have been impacted, especially wombats and sugar gliders.

Another wonderful example of the things we have saved occurred on Friday 24 January at Buxton Public School when the visiting team from Direct Relief in California, United States of America, came to the school to assist with the reconstruction of the playground, which was destroyed by the fires. On the school grounds the team was greeted by a kangaroo that was feeding on some green shoots that were showing after the recent rains. The Americans were amazed. How symbolic of life regenerating after the tragedy. I had the honour of attending the funerals of the two brave RFS volunteers. Those were emotional and gut-wrenching experiences for me. I share the RFS prayer that was read at both services:

Almighty God, and protector of all, your strength, power, and wisdom are a beacon of light to all.

Give special guidance to the men and women of the NSW Rural Fire Service, so that they may be protected from harm while performing their duties.

...

Help us with your loving care as we work to save the lives and property of all people, young and old, without discrimination ...

...

Give us the courage, the alertness to protect our neighbours, and all others whom we are pledged to aid ...

At the service there were also some words from 2 Corinthians:

We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

These men are the embodiment of all that is good in humanity and we owe them an ongoing debt of gratitude. There are so many others I thank who have given so much in this time of tragedy and despair. To the many RFS brigades and their members in my electorate and to those from all parts of the State who came to my community, I say thank you. The ultimate measure of a person is not where they stand in moments of comfort and convenience but where they stand at times of challenge and adversity. Those volunteers have stood tall and resolute in the face of unimaginably ferocious fires.

I have spent time with many of my RFS brigades and spoken individually to many of the volunteers. I say a very special thank you to all of them. I also thank staff at the fire control centre at Picton. In my visits to the centre I have been amazed by the calmness, professionalism and attention to detail shown, analysing the data and reports and directing resources accordingly. There were over 70 staff at the centre from many agencies. Their actions assisted the on-ground actions of the RFS, police and emergency services. I say thank you. To all the emergency services and the families of community service arms of government and their dedicated staff, who managed the crisis with skill, dignity and compassion, I say thank you. Minister Elliott should be justifiably proud of his staff in my electorate. The professionalism was evident from the moment the crisis came and it was maintained throughout.

The Picton Bowling Club and the Mittagong RSL generously gave up their premises, staff and resources as emergency evacuation centres. At times at Mittagong RSL it was like watching a scene from Noah's ark. The clubs were providing up to 400 hot meals a day to our volunteers. To them, I say a special thank you. To the many volunteer organisations and individuals who have given freely of their time in the service of others and for the

comfort and joy they have brought to those who have been impacted by the fires, I say thank you. To the Premier for her outstanding leadership in this crisis and for her visits to my electorate, I say a special thank you. My community certainly appreciated those visits and it helped lift their spirits. To Deputy Premier John Barilaro, Attorney General Mark Speakman, Minister Ayres and the Governor of New South Wales, Her Excellency Margaret Beasley, AO, QC, who visited my electorate to see firsthand the devastation caused and to speak with locals about the way ahead, I say thank you.

To Wollondilly and Wingecarribee shire councils and their staff, who have managed the crisis so well and who have worked tirelessly to ensure that the residents of their communities who have been impacted by the fires were given strong support, I say thank you. To those many generous donors to the many appeals that have been launched to support the victims, I say thank you. To those who have suffered loss of property, business, crops and stock, I offer my support and assistance wherever I can do so to help them rebuild their lives. To the families of Andrew and Geoff, I offer my sincere thanks and condolences. Words cannot adequately convey the sorrow that I have at your loss. Their legacy will not be forgotten and as a permanent reminder there are plans to construct an RFS fire truck playground at Telopea Park, Buxton, in their honour. The local community is driving this project as they recognise the selfless and heroic nature of their sacrifice.

The Balmoral, Buxton and Bargo communities and those areas in the north of my electorate that have been most impacted by the bushfires are already looking to the future with hope and optimism. There is a strong belief that things can, and will, get better. To boost the morale of the community, it is essential that projects be fast-tracked to provide them with some surety that the Government is listening and acting not only on the immediate recovery but also on planning for the future. This is a time for us all to focus on those things that unite us and to ensure that we take advice from those on the ground and learn lessons from this event so that if such a catastrophic event should happen in the future we are better prepared. The resilience of my local community has to be seen and experienced. I am heartened on a daily basis to see just how the community is coping with the crisis and how people are getting on with their lives.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the mental trauma that many people have suffered. It is easy to see damage to buildings but it is not so easy to see the mental anguish that this crisis has caused. Many people are stoic and resilient but we must not let anyone who has been impacted slip through the cracks in the recovery process. That applies not only to victims of the fires but also to the many volunteers and agency workers who are seeing the impacts on a daily basis. We must also support the mental health of our first responders. They need our support just as much as the victims of the bushfires. This event has brought out the very best in people and I am proud, humbled and honoured to have the privilege to be the member of Parliament representing such a wonderful community. We must always remember the selfless service of others and remember in our own lives that even the smallest act of service or the simplest act of kindness is a way to honour those we lost and those who continue to serve.

Mr RYAN PARK (Keira) (17:38:51): I thank my colleague to the west, the member for Wollondilly. We share a lot. My colleague the member for Wollongong and I share an escarpment that adjoins his electorate and we watched with great concern the fires that ravaged that part of the world. The bushfire crisis has shocked not only Australians but also people right across the world. My sister is an expat in Hong Kong. I miss her dearly. She told me the bushfire crisis was leading news right across the country. Given what is happening in Hong Kong at the moment, the news coverage shows the extent of the damage that was being done. I speak mostly as the shadow Minister for the Illawarra and South Coast. The South Coast is one of the natural holiday areas for residents of the Illawarra and it has been hit extremely hard. It probably has the second-best beaches in the world, after the beaches in our electorates. It is a beautiful place. The member for Shellharbour, the member for Wollongong and I know many constituents who have a little shack or a little weekender there because it used to be affordable. It is a place visited by many people from electorates in the Illawarra.

I will share a story from the South Coast fires. The 10-year-old son of a close friend who lives in my street was staying with friends at Sussex Inlet, which was in a world of distress. It is an event my friend will never forget. We were struggling to communicate with his son because telecommunications were down. We were using all of my available media contacts and friends in the area to understand the extent of what was happening. It was frightening. I thank the RFS for what it did to protect people's lives in that area alone. I know firsthand the pressure and the risks those people were experiencing. I say to the member for South Coast and the member for Bega, whose electorates include those parts of the far South Coast that have been impacted the most, that we can only imagine the difficulties you are experiencing in your electorates.

During the crisis I had an opportunity to be briefed daily by local RFS personnel. Their briefings were accurate and factual but always ended with, "This is what we hope happens." Despite the expertise that many of those people have, they never could have predicted this fire. It was beyond anyone's expectations, particularly at Currowan on the South Coast. I acknowledge the Federal member for Gilmore, Fiona Phillips. She is an

outstanding local member who worked tirelessly to support her community at a very difficult time, as did the Federal member for Eden-Monaro, Mike Kelly. I also pay respects to the member for Bega, Andrew Constance; the member for South Coast, Shelley Hancock; and, of course, the member for Kiama, Gareth Ward. I had contact with them all on a number of occasions during this time.

I visited the South Coast with Fiona Phillips and we had an opportunity to see what was happening on the ground. It was devastating to say the least. Many of us love the South Coast and remember having family trips down there. I said to someone, "You could put yourself here and, as well as you know it, you would not recognise parts of the South Coast," particularly Lake Conjola. It was absolutely devastating. In particular, I thank Currowan fire incident controller Superintendent Mark Williams. The team he led did an absolutely sterling job. When he briefed us he was able to explain a very complex fire situation eloquently and accurately. I express my deepest gratitude to him and his entire team. That homes and lives were lost is an absolute tragedy beyond anything we could imagine, but without talented people like Mark Williams I am very certain that the tragedy would have been much greater.

I give my heartfelt thanks to every RFS volunteer, Fire and Rescue NSW, police and other emergency personnel. In my electorate, I thank the RFS crews from Austinmer, Bulli and Mount Keira. We have a large escarpment area in the Illawarra. The member for Wollongong and I have residents who live right up in the escarpment, which was on fire in the 1968-69 fires. It was one of the worst fires in New South Wales at that time. We have great concerns about making sure that people living in that area are prepared for future fire seasons. I spoke with many RFS captains. I thank very much their crews and the people on the ground who were clearing fire trails through that escarpment and those who were working on other fire fronts. In particular, we now must ensure that the clean-up, recovery and rebuild is done as best as possible.

As shadow Minister for the Illawarra and South Coast, I confirm that the Opposition stands ready to work with the Government to make sure this happens. But the Government also needs to understand when there are problems. Now is not the time to put those problems aside; it is the time to fix them. The community expects and deserves that. It is important to have advocates on both sides of the House, regardless of political persuasions. I support the appointment of the Deputy Premier and the appointment of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. The people of the South Coast should get to know and have access to those two senior members from both sides of the House. I have also called for a number of other things that I think are very important. We have had a briefing with the RFS and other personnel, including Marg Prendergast, who is a lady I have known for a long time. She assured me that local contractors and suppliers will be given priority in relation to procurement. That is absolutely critical.

The South Coast is a region full of villages and small towns, and many businesses rely on seasonal trade. That is the way they earn an income and that is the way families survive. As part of rebuilding those villages and small towns I want to ensure that people from the South Coast have an opportunity to win contracts not only so that we keep the money coming in locally but also to keep men and women employed so their families can remain in the area. Those places are not large cities with populations that enjoy yearlong trade. They have seasonal trade. Many people will say that those places rely on the November, December, January, February and, to some extent, March period to survive—certainly pre-Easter. We must ensure that we make smart procurement decisions so that local contractors, suppliers, tradespeople and businesses get an opportunity to help rebuild their towns. I make it clear to the Government that I will monitor procurement decisions and will keep across it going forward.

Now is the time for Destination NSW and the Government to create a very strong advertising campaign for the South Coast, declaring, "We are open for business". It needs to get people back there. My family is going to spend some time at the fantastic Mogo Zoo very soon. A miniseries could be made of the story of how Mogo Zoo was saved. It is an amazing story and shows firsthand what preparation can do in such times. I thank Commissioner Fitzsimmons. His steady hand has never wavered and his leadership during this crisis was simply superb. I acknowledge my political colleagues on both sides of this Chamber who have worked with their communities under very difficult circumstances. Well done on showing that leadership and support. I am sure your communities are very grateful.

Through the Government, we on this side of the House support the people of the South Coast and the far South Coast. We will advocate for them and assist them in any way we can so that they can rebuild their lives. I say to the Government that now is the time to ensure it is sharing information that will help the Opposition to support it. I commend the Deputy Premier for tonight's briefing, for instance. That is the sort of cooperation that I hope will continue. I agree with his comments today that we as a Parliament—not we as a government or an opposition—have an opportunity to help people in their darkest days. It is what they expect of us as leaders in the community. It is what I think each of us expects of ourselves and of each other. I hope that that spirit of cooperation and transparency will continue into the future. We stand ready to work with all those communities in fire-affected areas so they can rebuild their lives.

Debate adjourned.*Private Members' Statements***THE ALBURY PROJECT**

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY (Albury) (17:51:57): The bushfires besetting our State have brought on a vast wave of evacuations, triggering an outpouring of community support and government action. This is homelessness on a scale and of an urgency that most of us rarely see or experience. In contrast, there is much homelessness that sits uneasily and quietly within our communities day by day. The circumstances that lead to homelessness might be sudden—through an act of domestic violence, for example—but might also develop over the course of weeks or even years. Can we in our communities see the bones of what might become homelessness for an individual emerge and identify them in time to take some measure of valuable intervention? The Albury Project is "a new way for schools and services to work together to provide support and assistance for students to achieve their goals and thrive in school, home and life".

Inspired by and based upon a successful project running in Geelong, it "supports young people to respond to factors in their life that could increase their chances of one day becoming homeless or leaving school early without a plan for what's next". This is a truly collaborative initiative with its origins firmly in the community. It is based upon finding partners such as schools and emergency accommodation providers who recognise the value of shared early intervention. The partners contribute resources and work closely together on solutions for each individual identified as being at risk. At its core, The Albury Project is not about crisis management for young people who have become homeless but about the development of a system for positive change to prevent homelessness. It is an evidence-based approach, collecting and analysing data. The system brings together multiple agencies and their wealth of experience, energy, contacts and resources for a solution that fits the individual in their circumstances.

We know that the signs of a potential future disconnect with school and home often manifest well in advance of a crisis. We are learning much about how to read those signs and how those factors interact in a young person's life, setting a direction. We have much to contribute that is already available in our communities and that can be brought to bear to support a young person to significantly reduce the chances of an adverse outcome in their life, such as homelessness. A student's interaction with The Albury Project begins with a voluntary survey that asks key questions about their life and relationships at home, school and outside of school. There are questions about their living situation, family, cultural background, and physical and mental health that aim to identify risk factors for homelessness and disconnection, such as family conflict or mental health issues.

Within Albury, the approach is for universal screening of students within the three local high schools. The pilot program commenced in Albury last year and the initial screening took place in August, with around 1,830 students from years 7 to 11 taking part. Initial results indicate that approximately 6 per cent of students surveyed have a risk of homelessness and disengagement with school. Across the three schools an average of 7.8 per cent of students indicated a medium to high risk of becoming homeless. Students identified as being at risk were contacted by members of the program for follow up and wraparound support tailored to their individual needs.

Many people have worked hard to get The Albury Project to where it is today. I thank the key partners based in Albury, including Di Glover, Rebecca Glen and Jon Park of YES Unlimited; Albury City Council; the three Albury State high schools and their principals, Darryl Ward, Jenny Parrett and Norm Meader; Albury Wodonga Health; headspace Albury-Wodonga; Upstream Australia; the NSW Department of Communities and Justice; Brad Russell and the NSW Department of Education; and Associate Professor David Mackenzie, whose input and experience were invaluable.

I also thank Minister Gareth Ward, who kindly visited Albury last week to promote The Albury Project, meet with school students and personally thank many of the partners. The Albury Project is important due to its focus on the individual, the prevention of harm and the development of a holistic system involving agencies and private organisations in a coordinated way. This is a moment of light and the project is a positive endeavour to tackle youth homelessness. I encourage all members to look into The Albury Project.

SOCIAL HOUSING

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (17:56:51): It is interesting that the first two private members' statements today are about very similar matters. The issue is very topical and on all of our minds. The Albury Project sounds very interesting, along with its impact on children, education and homelessness. I speak to a report by Compass Housing entitled, *Estimating Current and Future Demand for Housing Assistance*, which shows the extent of the demand for social housing and how it will grow in coming years as technological developments displace low-income workers. In other words, it is harder for working-class people to get a job these days. If a

constituent matter is brought to the attention of my office it is highly likely that the issue will relate to public housing. It feels as though there is a hotline directly between my office and housing providers as we work together to try to resolve issues such as maintenance and transfers.

Wallsend has a significant number of public houses. The issue is of great importance to me—I have brought up social housing in the area many times over the past 12 years—as I was raised in social housing. Not a day goes by without a vulnerable person in social or public housing reporting an issue to our office. I am sure it is the same for all members of this place. Sometimes the problems are resolved quickly, but sometimes they drag on for months or even years, with complaints getting lost in the system or some being sacrificed in the face of budget shortfalls. As I said earlier, I am sure all members of this place will agree that finding housing for our constituents—whilst it takes a lot of time—is a priority. Staff of the different housing providers are excellent. They work hard to address the concerns we bring to them. But there are simply not enough resources to fix every maintenance issue and there is not enough social and public housing stock to meet the existing demand.

If the system cannot support the people who are already reliant on public housing, how can it hope to manage the growth in demand predicted by this report? It is something for us to look at and really consider. Across Australia, 144,800 applicants are on the waiting list for public housing. More than 48,000 households are on the waiting list in New South Wales—the highest number in Australia—which is equivalent to more than 30 per cent of the total social housing stock. The list is long, with 1,190 people on the list in Newcastle and 960 in Lake Macquarie. The waiting time seems endless. The average waiting time in the Hunter is between five and 10 years and is about 10 years in Wallsend also. The report from Compass Housing reveals that this is only the tip of the iceberg. Research from income and asset census data found that 175,904 households in New South Wales are eligible for public housing. This means that 127,000 households are eligible for public housing but have not yet chosen to apply—thank heavens. In the *Newcastle Herald*, Martin Kennedy said:

If every household in NSW who met the eligibility criteria for social housing decided to apply, waiting lists across the country would increase by more than 261 per cent ... The number of households eligible for social housing but not currently living in it, is equivalent to approximately 21 per cent of all renting households in NSW ... and in regional NSW areas such as the Hunter it is 34 per cent.

Unfortunately, the Government's Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW policy has only proposed enough dwellings for less than half of the current waiting list over the next decade. I am approaching the Government to ask that we make public housing a priority. Let us reduce homelessness. Let us look at The Albury Project, which I have just been informed of and which sounds very interesting. I call on the Government to make sure that we all work together to reduce homelessness and the need for social housing in our State.

DROUGHT AND REGIONAL BUSINESSES

Ms STEPH COOKE (Cootamundra) (18:02:00): With so much of the State still in drought and the decimation of many communities in the recent bushfires, it is fair to say that many people and businesses in regional areas are feeling the financial pinch. Our small communities need cashflow and, while we often hear about farmers struggling to buy feed, we do not often hear about the impact of drought and disaster on clothes boutiques, caravan parks, the pub, the grocer or—my personal favourite—the local florist. It is a given that regional businesses need to innovate; if they do not, they cannot survive. They face challenges that many metropolitan retailers do not—longer supply chains, smaller customer bases and a dependence on the success of other industries such as agriculture for disposable income in the community.

I was a business owner myself until recently and I can attest to the difficulties of operating in a rural and regional area. The Buy Regional and Go Regional campaigns are fantastic Government initiatives to get people looking inland for gifts and getaways, and have meant the difference between bankruptcy and success. I look forward to the Go Regional map, which will help holiday-makers plan their next adventure in regional New South Wales. I am excited for people to rediscover the amazing experiences that our State has to offer. Since October last year the Buy from the Bush campaign has been regularly featuring the products of regional businesses. The brainchild of small business owner Grace Brennan, this movement began as an Instagram account encouraging city dwellers to see the offerings of country shops and producers. It now has over 200,000 followers, estimates it has increased rural postage by 40 per cent, and is actively bridging the gap of understanding and experience between city and country people.

In recent weeks the Empty Esky campaign has sprung up, encouraging fire-affected small businesses to register online and foodies and adventurers to take an empty esky to a bushfire-affected community and fill it with produce and wares from those retailers and producers. The campaign has grown to encourage people to take trips to these regional towns, book accommodation and see what the area has to offer. Already the Empty Esky map of registered businesses mirrors the map of devastation from these fires, but it speaks volumes about hope and rebuilding. I am so pleased that these campaigns are helping people discover what lies in their own backyard and

that they do not have to look to other countries for amazing experiences or to huge multinational retailers for quality products.

These movements are not just about moving money; they are helping to spread goodwill between our regional areas and our cities and break down the preconceived ideas we have about each other. More than anything, these campaigns emphasise the fact that many regional businesses and people do not want a handout, they want a hand up. From personal experience, I can say that small regional and rural business owners know they are good at what they do; they just need assistance when the cards are stacked against them. I urge everyone to not let this tide of goodwill be stemmed. Get out to our regional areas and help us rebuild from drought or bushfires, or both. Let your money do the talking and enjoy the amazing things we have to offer you in return.

OATLANDS MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENT

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills—Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (18:06:18):

I convey my thoughts and prayers and those of all members of this House and offer our grief to the community of Oatlands following the tragic accident on Bettington Road on Saturday night. In fact, I believe the entire State is grieving along with the two families of the four innocent angels who lost their lives on the weekend in this most terrible of tragedies. The harrowing incident has shattered the hearts of the entire community in the electorates of Baulkham Hills and Parramatta: the loss of three children from the Abdallah family—Antony, 13, who went to school locally at The King's School, and his little sisters Angelina, 12, and Sienna, 9—alongside their cousin Veronique Sakr, who was only 11 years old.

Our community continues to pray for the sister of the Abdallah children and her two cousins from the Kassiss family who remain in hospital. I know that all members of this House join me in sending our sincere condolences to the family and friends of those children who are left devastated by this shocking event. I acknowledge the selflessness shown by Danny Abdallah during a period of significant adversity. He used his own family tragedy to remind motorists that they have to be careful when driving before he searched for the words to describe his family's despair in what is every parent's worst nightmare.

Danny's eldest son, Antony, had just begun year 11 at The King's School in North Parramatta. He was a basketball devotee and had dedicated his morning game that day to Kobe Bryant, the National Basketball Association legend who members will be aware passed away a little over a week ago in a helicopter accident. Danny described Angelina as his "little helper" and Sienna his "little diva". Both Angelina and Sienna attended Tara, another local private school in the north-west. Their cousin Veronique attended Santa Sabina College in Strathfield and was described by her family as being full of love, full of life and with maturity well beyond her years. I have the deepest respect for Mrs Abdallah, who has shown faith that continues to inspire and strengthen everybody. On her back she is bringing the entire community to a place of forgiveness and respect.

I hope that the support from the loved ones of the Abdallah and Sakr families and the community at large, particularly those involved in Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Harris Park, brings peace to the family at this difficult time. These things are never easy to say and they are never easy to write. It is with a heavy heart I extend my own condolences and the deep condolences of this Chamber to the families at this dark time. I acknowledge the work done by the Local Area Command Castle Hill. Many of those officers, who are local dads and mums as well, had to face a horrific scene. My thoughts and prayers are also with other emergency services personnel—Fire and Rescue NSW and the NSW Ambulance—who probably will take a significant amount of time to deal with the loss that has befallen our local community.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Gurmesh Singh): I thank the member for Baulkham Hills for his contribution on this incredibly touching topic.

ENERGY PRICES

Mr DAVID MEHAN (The Entrance) (18:10:00): In 2014 the current Liberal-Nationals Government deregulated electricity prices, promising at the time that energy bills would fall as a result of price competition and the superior operation of the market. In 2017 gas prices were also deregulated and the benefits of price competition on energy prices was once again emphasised. Come forward a few years, and in January this year the energy retailer serving most people in my electorate, EnergyAustralia, wrote to me and many of my constituents advising us that our energy prices were about to increase. The letter states:

For an average household in your area, we estimate your electricity cost maybe around \$2096 (incl GST) over the year. This means you could pay an extra \$35.04 per year.

The reason given for the increase in electricity charges is:

After two years of holding prices flat while supply costs have increased significantly, we've made the difficult decision to adjust our prices with inflation.

The very same applies to gas prices through this energy retailer. The letter states:

For an average household in your area, we estimate your gas cost may be around \$906 (incl. GST) over the year. This means you could pay an extra \$15.15 per year.

But not everything is going up. The price received by those who have solar power and who feed that into the grid will decrease. No reason is provided in the letter from EnergyAustralia. People are simply told that they will be paid less for feeding electricity into the grid. The cost of energy is one of the most significant concerns my regional community has, and the cost of energy is one of the biggest threats to economic development and security for my community. The difficulties of navigating and the cost burden of the National Electricity Market is a source of regular complaint to my office. Energy cost is a burden to business in my electorate and has been nominated as the single biggest threat to business viability by each of the three biggest manufacturing businesses located in my electorate—Sara Lee, Sanitarium and MasterFoods. Leaving energy supply up to the market to sort out has been a comprehensive failure. As the *State of the Energy Market 2018* report, produced by the Australian Energy Regulator, noted on supply:

While 2200 MW of new generation investment was added to the NEM over the five years to June 2017, almost 4000 MW of capacity was withdrawn over the same period ...

On price, the report states:

Electricity prices rose by 56 per cent in real terms over the 10 years to 2017–18.

Australian electricity prices, traditionally low by global standards, are now around 10 per cent above the European average.

I acknowledge that some members on the Opposition side of the House have supported privatisation from time to time. It is a matter of public record that State privatisation was commenced by the Greiner Government, with the corporatisation of the State electricity providers. With this in mind, the report of research by Professor Andrew Blakers, who is the Director of the Australian National University's Centre for Sustainable Energy Systems, is very heartening. His research has shown that solar and wind power, supported by pumped hydro and high-voltage interconnectors "could reach 100 per cent renewable electricity with high reliability and at zero net cost within a decade". We should pursue that option and should not let the market sort it out for us. The State Government should take control of the energy market and deliver a plan that will direct us towards cheaper prices through renewable energy. The Government should take energy retailing out of the hands of the market, and ensure that the people and businesses of New South Wales get the affordable energy they deserve.

CUDGEN SURF LIFE SAVING CLUB

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) (18:14:53): I am elated to share with the House today that Cudgen Surf Life Saving Club [SLSC] is the Surf Life Saving NSW Envirobank Country Champion for the fourth year in a row following the surf lifesaving championship held at Cudgen on the weekend. I attended the event with my colleague Ben Franklin, MLC, where we cheered on 1,300 competitors. The top 10 pointscore positions were: first, Cudgen Headland SLSC; second, Warilla-Barrack Point SLSC; third, Byron Bay SLSC; fourth, Lennox Head-Alstonville SLSC; fifth, Sawtell SLSC; sixth, Port Macquarie SLSC; seventh, Tacking Point SLSC; eighth, Ballina Lighthouse and Lismore SLSC; ninth, Yamba SLSC; and, tenth, Coffs Harbour SLSC.

The total point score for Cudgen Headland was 1,037, exceeding the second place score of 826. It should be proud of this amazing result. The Envirobank Country Championships is open to clubs outside the Newcastle-to-Illawarra corridor. As one of the biggest events on the surf sports calendar, the NSW Envirobank Country Championships is the only event on the surf sport calendar to feature a full range of events, including surfboats as well as all age groups from under eights through to masters, during a two-day surf carnival. With magnificent Kingscliff weather and the host club's 200-plus contingent of competitors, it proved too strong for the rest of the field and took out another country title. With wins in the under-15 male beach flags, the under-19 ironman and the 30 to 39 male single ski, to name only just a few, the club has become one successful group.

Throughout New South Wales over 20,000 volunteer lifesavers patrol our beaches during the season. To be suitable for a patrol you must obtain your bronze medallion. The bronze medallion course provides participants with the skills and knowledge of patrolling and surf awareness, which enables them to participate in lifesaving operations. This is the core award to be a surf lifesaver in Australia. Patrolling is a wonderful way to create new friendships and to live a healthy lifestyle. Also in attendance was George Shales, the President of Surf Life Saving New South Wales, and our good friend Steven Pearce, the Chief Executive Officer of Surf Life Saving New South Wales.

I noted a contingent of surf lifesavers from overseas observing, and they seemed very impressed. A lot of our clubs send volunteers to Thailand and Indonesia et cetera to educate them. Some surf clubs from the South Coast also participated in the tournament. We were told that they turned over their surf clubs to be evacuation centres during the bushfires. We have seen footage of people huddling on a beach under an orange sky. The surf

lifesavers are volunteer first responders and do an excellent job. I am sure all the salties—that is, members who have saltwater beaches in their electorates—appreciate what these volunteers do from a very early age.

I watched the under-8 championships and they were like fish. They have no fear, they are fit and they can swim one kilometre in the surf followed by running two kilometres on the beach—and they want to do more. The nippers have beach awareness. Unfortunately, a high number of people drown at our beaches. I think educating children on beach safety should be a compulsory subject in our school curriculum, especially for schools along the coast. They should know about rips and where to swim. But most importantly, I encourage all people, including those in my electorate, to swim between the flags. Over the past five years I have lost three people in my area, mainly tourists, who were swimming where they should not have been. I note that over the weekend in Byron Bay another tourist lost their life while swimming on an unpatrolled beach. Take heed and follow lifesavers. God bless our lifesavers.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON (Vaucluse) (18:19:48): I add my support and commendations to the contribution of our surf lifesavers. Every summer and during other periods of the year they put their bodies on the line, as the member for Tweed said. I feel that keenly in my electorate, which has Bondi Beach, the most recognisable beach in the world. It has the most visitations by international visitors, some of whom do not have swimming skills. The lifesavers do extra heavy lifting for non-swimmers from around the world who come to try their luck at the beach. I congratulate Cudgen. Well done. It will be good to see it compete head-to-head against two of my surf lifesaving clubs, North Bondi Surf Life Saving Club and Bondi Surf Bathers Life Saving Club. But let that not take away from the joint contribution of all our surf lifesavers up and down the coast of New South Wales.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Gurmesh Singh): I remind the member for Tweed that Sawtell is also in the Coffs Harbour electorate. I was very pleased that the member mentioned its sixth-place finish.

CAMDEN ELECTORATE AUSTRALIA DAY AWARDS

Mr PETER SIDGREAVES (Camden) (18:20:59): I pay tribute to Camden's Australia Day award recipients. I have had the privilege of attending the Australia Day awards and citizenship ceremony, both as mayor last year and as the member for Camden this year. I commend Camden Council for hosting such a warm and welcoming event. Camden Council Mayor, Councillor Theresa Fedeli, did a wonderful job in presenting the Australia Day awards and citizenship certificates. I offer my thanks and acknowledgment to our Australia Day ambassador, Josephine Peter from Broken Hill, who has been volunteering for over seven decades. I also thank the 2019 Citizen of the Year, Steve Cooper; our 2019 Young Citizen of the Year, Joanna Kolevri; and emcee for the event, Sarah Ryan, OAM. Having the support of our ambassador, our past award recipients and our favourite Olympic medallist is a great testament to the support our community enjoys.

In Camden we are blessed to have so many community-minded, dedicated and high-achieving groups and individuals living amongst us. Every nominee for an Australia Day award is well and truly deserving of that nomination. I congratulate all our nominees whose efforts, sacrifices and achievements are highly commendable. All our nominees are worthy of such recognition. The nominees for the Arts and Cultural Award were Emmy Gelardi-Bunyi and Joeann Tanginoa. The nominees for the Sports Achievement Award were Mia Hotson and Yardley Polsen, while those for the Young Citizen of the Year Award were Cameron Constance and Hamani Tanginoa.

The nominees for Community Group of the Year were Argyle Street Business Collective, Camden Meals on Wheels, Cohesive Communities Advisory Group, Macarthur Storm Chasers, Mother Hubbard's Cupboard and the Camden Show Society Inc. The nominees for Citizen of the Year were Glenn Austin, Anne Bell, Eileen Brogan, Leonard Carter, Robin Davies, Lyn Fawcett, Tenille Gamage, Vicki Katon, Genesa Lane, Robert McCaughan, David Milton, Shane Reeves, Davina Smith, Val Stewart and Pamela Templeton. I congratulate our winners: Macarthur Lions Club and Turning Point on Community Group of the Year, Gaylene Feld on the Arts and Cultural Award, Lily Hreszczuk on the Sports Achievement Award, Rebecca Halcomb on the Young Citizen of the Year award, and Brett Atkins on the Citizen of the Year award. Well done to all our award winners.

We also welcomed and celebrated 50 new citizens from 16 nations, who took part in the Australian citizenship pledge in our presence. We are a proud and resilient nation. We band together and overcome hardships, most evident in bushfire tragedies, when our communities pull together and examples of true heroism abound. Our new citizens have chosen to become part of this great Australian spirit. I welcome and wish all our new citizens all the best as they settle into their lives as the newest members of our Australian family.

GUILDFORD WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) (18:24:56): Today I commend and congratulate the hardworking faculty at Guildford West Public School, who continually strive not only to provide the best-quality education to

its students but also to build upon and enhance the infrastructure and services offered to the entire school community. Since being elected as the State member for Fairfield, I have had the wonderful opportunity to work alongside so many dedicated individuals who have poured their hearts and souls into making Guildford West Public School a better place for all.

I feel compelled to give a very special mention to the school principal, Ms Kerry Weston, who since joining Guildford West Public School has done so much to improve the school to make it a safer and all-inclusive learning space for students from all different backgrounds and for those with diverse needs. Ms Weston has been a tremendous benefit to the local school community and has implemented a vast number of new initiatives and policies, while successfully securing a number of infrastructure and service upgrades for the school.

Over the years I have witnessed the school's initiative in raising awareness and promoting the importance of reinforcing the message to parents and motorists in the vicinity of the school to obey safe practices while using the roads, especially while driving and parking around the school. These safety initiatives have been followed up through the provision of additional safety and security measures surrounding the car park and entries to the school with new fencing and pedestrian routing to further enhance the safety precautions for students and their families when attending the school.

Levels of student participation have also significantly increased in recent years, with more students than ever before getting involved in the various programs and opportunities available to them. It is always a great pleasure to witness so many earnest students receiving recognition at the various awards ceremonies that commend and acknowledge the students' hard work and dedication throughout the course of the year. I too have had the wonderful opportunity to present many students from Guildford West Public School with annual Encouragement Award certificates for trying their hardest to improve and better themselves throughout the entire school year.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the recent crowning jewel, which was officially launched on 11 December 2019: the school's new purpose-built multi-sensory playground. This new special facility provides a wide variety of best-practice equipment and tools to support students with additional needs and diagnosed disabilities. For many years Guildford West Public School has been developing the special needs support services and programs available to students. That being said, however, this new multi-sensory playground is the first of its kind in the electorate and will be of tremendous benefit to students with additional needs and diagnosed disabilities for many years to come. This space encourages socialisation between students and promotes cognitive development while remaining inclusive to the broad needs of students.

Construction of this space was made possible through the joint funding collaborative between the Alame Foundation, Guildford West Public School's P&C Committee, Holroyd Rotary Club, the Community Building Partnership program for the Fairfield electorate and the Department of Education. At the end of the day, none of this would have been possible without the backbone of the school community—the staff and the volunteers. We thank sincerely everyone whose contributions and commitment have helped shape the Guildford West Public School we all know and love today. Without their hard work, dedication and passion for improving the school and the surrounding community, none of this would have been possible.

As the State member for Fairfield, I am incredibly thankful for the improved quality and services available to families being serviced by Guildford West Public School. It is clear that we have the exemplary efforts of the school faculty to thank for the tremendous improvements to the school over the years. I look forward to continuing to work with Guildford West Public School in the years ahead, and once again I thank all the hardworking staff for their continued dedication to improving the quality of education and services available to our local community.

PORT HACKING PUTTERS REGATTA

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Attorney General, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence) (18:29:52): The Port Hacking Putters Regatta was held again this year on 2 February. It celebrates our beautiful marine environment, the local boating lifestyle and the history of boating on Port Hacking. It helps raise awareness about boating safety and it also raises funds for the local volunteer Marine Rescue NSW unit. A flotilla of around 51 putt-putt, classic and wooden vessels navigated from Hungry Point to Lilli Pilli Point, passing a number of public viewing sites, including the Royal Motor Yacht Club Port Hacking, Lugarno Avenue, Burraneer Bay Marina, Wally's Wharf and Lilli Pilli Reserve.

Raising awareness about boating safety is more important than ever before, with almost one in five New South Wales households now owning a boat or watercraft. An estimated two million people go boating each year on the State's waterways. Transport for NSW reports that in 2017-18 there were nine confirmed recreational and commercial boating fatalities. Safety messages were a key part of the event. Over the past

10 years, according to the Transport for NSW *Boating incidents in NSW* statistical report, nearly 60 per cent of all recreational boating fatalities could have been prevented had all presumed drowning victims been wearing a lifejacket. Wearing a lifejacket was a principal safety message on the day.

A second safety message was for boaters to log on and log off with Marine Rescue Botany Port Hacking via the MarineRescue smartphone app. Logging on and off is simple, with boaters being able to tell the Marine Rescue unit where they are heading, how many people are on board and when they are planning to return. If they have not logged off and the Marine Rescue unit cannot get in touch with anyone, a search will be activated. Boaters can also use a very high frequency marine radio to log on and off. That way, if they get into trouble nearby vessels will also hear their call and may be able to provide assistance.

Our local Marine Rescue NSW unit, the Botany Port Hacking unit, provides a 24/7 rescue service to the local boating community on Port Hacking, Georges River, Botany Bay and offshore waters. Last year Marine Rescue NSW marked a decade of volunteer service to the boating community in greater Sydney. Around 3,000 volunteers are based in 44 rescue units along the New South Wales coastline and on two inland waterways. The Botany Port Hacking unit has 144 volunteers. It was great for this regatta to be able to raise funds for that unit. I congratulate the following winners on the day: Josh Mogridge, the skipper of *Little Miss Chatterbox*, won the Pride of the Port trophy; Anthony Jack, with vessel *Little Prince*, won the Heritage Award; Michelle Louise won Best Putter; Glenn Brooking, with vessel *Vasco Da Gama*, won the Best Dressed trophy; Neil Presant, with vessel *Swanee*, won the Commanders Commendation for boating safety; and Andrew Blake, with vessel *Narrabeen*, won the Commodore's Call.

I thank the sponsors of the Port Hacking Putters Regatta, including Colortile Miranda, Cronulla Real Estate, Cronulla Ferries, Water Sports Central, Burraneer Bay Marina and the Royal Motor Yacht Club Port Hacking. I also congratulate Mark Niall and NGD Waterworks on their beautiful trophy work. Finally, I congratulate the Commodore of the Port Hacking Putters Brad Whittaker and his wife, Fiona Bell-Whittaker, who organised this outstanding community event—a great event that celebrated our beautiful natural environment, our boating lifestyle and our boating history, promoted boating safety and raised important funds for volunteer Marine Rescue NSW.

WOLLONGONG ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE

Mr PAUL SCULLY (Wollongong) (18:33:41): Some say the grass is always greener on the other side, but I am sure that is not what people said after they saw the front page of today's *Illawarra Mercury*, which revealed grass growing on the rooftop of the Wollongong Entertainment Centre. This is certainly not an innovative new green roof made to reduce heating and cooling expenses at the centre; nor is it a creative way of advertising an upcoming garden show. No, this is a function of a government not taking seriously the premier entertainment venue it owns in the third largest city in the State—Wollongong. It is a function of spending a paltry \$1.86 million on a multimillion-dollar entertainment venue over the past 3½ years.

This maintenance record led to a leaking roof that ended a televised National Basketball League game on Sunday night. This maintenance record led to national embarrassment for the Illawarra Hawks players, administrators and the City of Wollongong—and it was not even our fault. This maintenance record led to anger from loyal fans, who had already been through a tough season, and this incident simply added insult to injury. This maintenance record led to four Liberal councillors voting with Labor, The Greens and Independent councillors to support my calls to upgrade the Wollongong Entertainment Centre. One Liberal councillor went so far as to suggest that we rename the WEC—as it is affectionately known—the "WRECK". I do not blame the local staff of the WEC in any way, shape or form for the centre's current situation because they do not write the cheques or allocate the funds. But let me be clear: The game had to be abandoned because the Berejiklian Government has abandoned investment not only in the entertainment centre but also in Wollongong altogether.

Since my election, I have regularly raised the need to upgrade this 22-year-old facility. The previous Labor Government built the WEC, and the current Liberal Government is letting it fall apart. It is tired and it is looking every day of its 22 years. Despite the Wollongong Entertainment Centre having hosted thousands of major events over the years, the current Government seems intent on letting it fall down around our ears. Well, I am not going to cop that. Wollongong is not going to cop that. Our city—the third largest in the State, I again remind the House—deserves much better. Today I have formally written to the acting sport Minister and extended to him an invitation to visit the entertainment centre with me and assess the situation for himself. His predecessor did so and understood the need for an upgrade. I hope the acting Minister will accept my invitation in the spirit that it was given and that he will arrive at the same obvious conclusion that an upgrade is needed.

It is not just me saying this. The need for an upgrade has broad community support in Wollongong. Organisations including the Illawarra Business Chamber, Regional Development Australia—Illawarra, Wollongong City Council, the University of Wollongong, Destination Wollongong, the Property Council of

Australia Illawarra Chapter Committee and i3net are all on public record in support of an upgrade to the centre. No doubt thousands more Hawks fans have rallied to the cause over the past few days. Sunday night's incident has been a long time coming, and the Government knows it. In late 2018 the Government commissioned a master plan for the centre site. It received this plan from KPMG nearly a year ago, yet it has not seen the light of day. Instead, the Government is keeping it secret, hoping that Wollongong will forget about it and the issue will quietly go away.

Well, the roar from Wollongong to get this upgrade will be as loud as the rain that fell on the centre's steel roof last Sunday night and exposed the Government's neglect. My community and I put the acting Minister on notice that we will fight for this like we fought to secure funds for lifts at Unanderra station, like we fought to keep the Gong Shuttle free and like we fought to upgrade Bulli hospital. The acting Minister might think he can hide from this issue. If he thinks that, he should hope for a reshuffle because that is the only way he will get away from it. In September 2022 Wollongong will host the UCI Road World Championships. This cycling event will attract global attention to Wollongong. Hundreds of thousands of people are expected to attend, with millions more to watch on television. The Wollongong Entertainment Centre is expected to be a hub of operations for the event. It will be the equivalent of a mini Olympics held in the City of Wollongong, so let us not underestimate what it means.

The acting Minister, who was in Wollongong last week spruiking the event, knows about it and so he has no excuse for ignoring it. If the Premier and acting Minister think the Wollongong Entertainment Centre will be okay on the day in 2022 without any serious investment, they had better hope that it does not rain. The longer the Government neglects the WEC, the higher the risk of more embarrassments like Sunday night—and the Government knows it. Wollongong will not be copping the embarrassment or criticism; that will be reserved for the Premier and her acting Minister. But Wollongong stands ready to work with the Government on this project to get it done. The Government has a chance to act now and it should get on with it before Wollongong suffers not only national but also international embarrassment as a result of substandard investment in a globally significant facility.

DAVIDSON ELECTORATE AUSTRALIA DAY AWARDS

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) (18:38:50): I acknowledge all the wonderful and well-deserving award recipients on this year's Australia Day Honours list. A number of recipients in various categories were from the electorate of Davidson. I congratulate Professor Robert Simes of East Lindfield, who was made an Officer of the Order of Australia for distinguished service to education and to medicine in the field of cancer research; Rabbi Zalman Kastel, AM, of St Ives, who was honoured for his significant service to interfaith and intercultural understanding and acceptance; Mrs Karen Carey of Belrose, who was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for her many years of distinguished service in the field of secondary education; Warren Cree of Belrose, a recipient of the Order of Australia Medal for his service to youth and to his community; Dr Zeny Edwards of Lindfield, who was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for her service to the community and to heritage preservation; and Commander Richard Singleton of Lindfield, who was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in the Military Division for his meritorious service to the Australian Defence Force.

I also acknowledge and congratulate two recipients of awards who are not Davidson residents. First, I congratulate Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley, AO, QC, Governor of New South Wales, now a Companion in the General Division of the Order of Australia. Secondly, I congratulate the Hon. Barry O'Farrell, who has been recognised as an Officer in the General Division for his many years of service to the people and Parliament of New South Wales. Like many members, on Australia Day I attended award ceremonies held by some of my local councils, including Northern Beaches, Ku-ring-gai and Willoughby councils. At the Northern Beaches Council I was honoured to personally congratulate two award recipients who live in my electorate: Christopher Lew of Belrose, the founder and active member of Northern Beaches Rotaract Club; and Warren Risbey, the founding member of Belrose & Terrey Hills Computer Pals Club.

Other award winners included Citizen of the Year Ben Tory from Seaforth, Senior Citizen of the Year Helen Hendry from Manly, Young Citizen of the Year Dia MacNamara from Terrey Hills and Sportsperson of the Year Chloe Trisic from Collaroy. The Community Event of the Year award went to Arts for Wellness and was presented by Community of Calm. Outstanding community service award winners were Jack Berne of Wheeler Heights, Roberta Conroy of Bayview, Phillip Donald of Frenchs Forest, Jackson Dowling of North Narrabeen, Rosalind Gooding of Newport, Samantha King of Brookvale, Dana Lanceman of North Curl Curl, Rex Langthorne, AM, of Beacon Hill, Louanne Mitchell of Manly, Matthew Molinia of Dee Why, Shannon Nevin of Frenchs Forest, Ken and Pam Oxborrow of Bilgola, and Graeme Paul of Forestville.

At the Ku-ring-gai Council event I had great pleasure in witnessing awards being presented to joint Senior Citizens of the Year Noella and Malcolm Allarding of Gordon, who were recognised for their wonderful voluntary service to the local Lindara Markets and for raising funds for the homeless, for families in crisis and for domestic

violence victims on the North Shore. Whilst I will not divulge Noella and Malcolm's ages, it is fair to say that they have the energy of people half their age. They are wonderful ambassadors for their community and for volunteering across Australia. Other award winners included the financial counselling team from Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury for outstanding service to the Ku-ring-gai community. Lucy Dahill was awarded Ku-ring-gai Citizen of the Year and Katherine Bowditch was awarded Ku-ring-gai Young Citizen of the Year.

In the Willoughby Council area—the third local government area that I am fortunate to represent in part—the main award winners were Citizen of the Year Tanya Taylor, Young Citizen of the Year Lora Chen and Cultural and Community Building Award winner Penny Lye. The Environmental Citizen of the Year award—one which Minister Kean would pay particular attention to—went to Don Wilson. I congratulate all our Australia Day award recipients and thank them for their service to our community, to our State and to our country.

Mr MATT KEAN (Hornsby—Minister for Energy and Environment) (18:43:49): I join the member for Davidson in congratulating those members of his electorate who have been recognised for their service to our community. It is fitting recognition for all they have done in Davidson and in our broader community across New South Wales. I acknowledge Don Wilson for his amazing work over many years supporting our beautiful natural environment. Ku-ring-gai is known for its wonderful natural environment and people like Don have helped to make it so. I also acknowledge an incredible local community member, Lucy Dahill. Lucy is one of the drivers behind our local radio station, 2HHH. She is also a keen advocate for young people, particularly disadvantaged youth, through her work in StreetWork. To Lucy and all the other recipients of Australia Day recognition, I say a huge thank you for all you have done for our community and indeed for our country.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Hornery): I congratulate Minister Kean on his new family member. I am going to give a gold star to the Minister, and member for Northern Tablelands for his lovely nod when he walked into the Chamber. I thank everyone in the Chamber for being so respectful tonight and for listening so carefully.

WARNERVALE AIRPORT

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang) (18:45:13): I welcome the review of the Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Act that Minister Rob Stokes has put in place, but I want to correct some of the stories circulating in the community that are not quite correct. The Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Act was put in place to ensure that any growth at the airport—which is actually an airfield, not an airport—had independent scrutiny by the State Government. Why? Quite frankly, it is because the council could not be trusted to do very much at all—in retrospect, local member Paul Crittenden proved to be quite insightful. Wyong council has acted inappropriately in the past when it comes to the airport.

The former Wyong council, without permission—it did not follow the Act—increased the length of the runway. This inadvertently caught up the local aero club and the current users of the airport, which then had to comply with an "88 movements per day" restriction, which was part of the Act. This was wholly because Wyong council acted without going through the proper processes. It was not the fault of the aero club but the club was trapped by the legislation being enacted. We on this side support this review and removing those restrictions. This can be done quite easily by stipulating the size of the aircraft that should be restricted because the Act was originally put in place to stop larger aircraft in an area that is experiencing huge population growth. The whole area was pre-planned. There is a lot of commercial development—there is a town centre—and a huge amount of residential development in that particular area. That is why the Act was put in place.

Some people say that the Act needs to be repealed altogether. On behalf of my community, I want to make sure that there are restrictions on what the council can do because it is currently the owner and the operator of the airport. If the Act goes, the council would also be the regulator. How can it be the owner, the operator and the regulator? Of course many in our community are worried about that. They are not worried about the aero club; I live in the area and I get very few complaints about it. But they are worried about the fact that, even now, some council staff have a plan in their bottom drawer to massively expand the airport.

All we are asking is that the Act be amended to allow members of the aero club to continue their current training, maintenance and joy flights—leave them alone. But the Act needs to stay to protect residents from larger-scale redevelopment of the site. The Act in itself does not stop that redevelopment. All it says is that the Minister must appoint an independent person to look at whatever is being proposed. Surely that is a fair thing to do—the government of the day is the independent regulator that looks at what the council is proposing. The Act certainly does not say, "You can't do anything at the airport." It set in train a process in which the community could be assured there would be independent scrutiny of whatever was proposed at the airport. That is fair and reasonable.

Some people say that the Act is redundant and should be in a local environmental plan, but it is the council that looks after the LEPs. The council would be the owner, the operator and the regulator without the

independent scrutiny that exists under the current Act. As the local member, I will fight not to stop development at the airport but to ensure that my community is protected from whatever happens there and that there is a proper process to analyse what the council wants to do. The council has circulated to all local members its latest economic plan. Once again, the expansion of the airport has been included. Council staff wanted the Act gone because they did not want the scrutiny. In the past they have acted improperly and they have acted illegally. They have spent millions of dollars of ratepayers' money without proper scrutiny and now they want the Act gone. I say that the Minister should keep the Act, amend it to allow the aero club to do what it needs to do and make sure that there is some independent protection for residents.

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal) (18:50:24): I welcome the comments of the member for Wyong, as well as the independent inquiry into the Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Act by the very honourable Abigail Goldberg, which has already commenced. We encourage all people across the Central Coast to engage with that inquiry because the airport is an incredibly valuable asset to the region, as the member for Wyong rightly said. The State Government wanted an independent review of the Act to work out what is best for our region going forward. I hope the council will take on board the decisions and results of that independent inquiry. It lays out a very good framework for where the Act should sit and what part it should play in the management of the airport itself. I highlight the great work being done by the Central Coast Aero Club. Andrew Smith and the rest of his team are part of an incredible enterprise that teaches young pilots. Again, the Warnervale Airport (Restrictions) Act review is very important to the region.

BERNIE SHAKESHAFT

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands—Minister for Agriculture and Western New South Wales) (18:51:32): Over the past six months the tireless efforts of firefighters to protect our communities from much worse devastation have provided many of us with an opportunity to reflect on the question of what a hero is. Along with all our fireys, to me a hero is a person who identifies an issue and goes about creating a change or solution without seeking praise or recognition. Their work ultimately improves the lives of those around them and their local community. Tonight I am incredibly proud and privileged to say one of those quiet achievers from Armidale in my electorate has recently been publicly recognised as a national hero.

On Australia Day Bernie Shakeshaft, the founder and CEO of BackTrack Youth Works, was announced as the national recipient of the Local Hero Award for 2020 as part of the annual Australia Day Awards. Bernie is an incredibly humble human being whose achievements in tackling youth disadvantage, mental health and suicide deserve to be shouted from the rooftops across this country. In his own words, Bernie founded BackTrack in 2006 to "keep kids alive, to keep them out of gaol and to help them chase their dreams." The premise of the program is centred on the skills he developed growing up as jackaroo in the Northern Territory and learnt from the Aboriginal trackers he worked with.

BackTrack focuses on animal-assisted learning. The youngsters who participate are given a dog for which they are responsible. They form a bond with them, look after them, train them and take them to shows for the famous dog-jumping activities in which BackTrack excels. At the organisation's base in Armidale metal fabrication and agricultural skills are taught alongside regular school classes. There is a classroom at the facility with a qualified teacher. The program provides wraparound education and skills development for disengaged young people who struggle in the regular education system or whom society has simply left behind and are at risk of being, or have already been, in the juvenile or mainstream justice system. Bernie has an extraordinary team of people around him, and collectively they have helped approximately 1,000 young people reconnect with their education and with their families and community, offering them love and support to live out their hopes and dreams and showing them that there is another way.

Bernie was nominated for the Local Hero Award by a group of young people who were detained in Acmena Juvenile Justice Centre at Grafton and saw the 2019 documentary about BackTrack, entitled *BackTrack Boys*. They immediately recognised this program as a way of giving them a future post incarceration and nominated Bernie for this award. This program has been credited with reducing youth crime in Armidale city by 60 per cent, saving the community and the justice system hundreds of thousands of dollars in judicial costs and overall improving the social wellbeing of the city and the individuals involved.

There is no surprise that BackTrack has the backing of police, magistrates and local councils. It is a real blueprint for tackling youth-related issues in other communities. In fact, efforts are well underway to develop and expand similar programs in Moree, which is also in my electorate, and Lake Cargelligo in the far west of the State. To give an example of the type of work BackTrack undertakes, during the bushfire emergency the BackTrack boys were involved in firefighting efforts, helping to refuel the aircrafts that were dropping retardant and water on the fire fronts. They have also been involved post the fires in helping farmers rebuild their boundary fences, using material that has been provided by organisations like BlazeAid or using their own funds to purchase materials and going out and helping farmers to do the work. They are absolutely magnificent.

While this Local Hero Award only recognises one man, Bernie is the first to say that it is a team effort. He is always saying that it takes a village to raise a child. Bernie Shakeshaft is an incredibly deserving recipient of this award. On his behalf, I thank his partner, Francesca, for all the support she gives him. I congratulate Bernie and the whole team from BackTrack. They are indeed true local heroes.

EAST HILLS ELECTORATE AUSTRALIA DAY EVENTS

Ms WENDY LINDSAY (East Hills) (18:56:47): I was very happy to start Australia Day this year at the Bryan Brown Theatre attending a citizenship and volunteer award ceremony. Australia Day Ambassadors Kandiah "Kamahl" Kamalesvaran and Maria Venuti welcomed the new citizens in our area, along with local volunteers recognised on the day for all the great work they do in our community. Kamahl gave an interesting recount of his arrival in Australia. He told the story of how his singing career was assisted and encouraged by Rupert Murdoch and how Australia had given him and his family many opportunities throughout his life since immigrating here. Talent Advancement Program singers Courtney Emmas and Helena Cazouris gave a beautiful performance of *I Am Australian* and also proudly sang the national anthem.

George Poon was named Citizen of the Year for the outstanding work he has done with the Chinese community and Lewis Tran was named Young Citizen of the Year for his leadership and commitment to St John's Ambulance. Terry Semlitzky was awarded Volunteer of the Year for his 50-plus years of working with numerous local sporting organisations and his latest endeavour of entertaining residents in local nursing homes with singalongs whilst playing his guitar. From there I went to a local Italian restaurant in Georges Hall, Gasparo. The owner, Sal Gasparo, and his awesome team held an all-day fundraising event for the families of the firefighters who lost their lives in the bushfires. Many local entertainers donated their time and talents on the day, to the delight of the locals who attended. Their efforts through ticket sales and donations by the restaurant raised \$9,000.

After watching The Jestas play a couple of songs, and the fact that it was an absolutely stinking hot day, a trip to the Max Parker Leisure and Aquatics Centre, where the council was holding its Australia Day pool party, was in order. The pool party was well attended by local families. I ran into Emma Hogg and her twin sisters, Sarah and Laura, who were having a great time eating fairy floss and snow cones. Whilst listening to some great tunes being played by the DJ, Councillor George Zakhia and I attempted to make snow cones for the swimmers but they were melting faster than we could make and serve them. With our snow cone making career over, we headed off to the East Hills Hotel for the Australia Day mud crab races.

The annual mud crab race is strictly a "bring your own crab" event run by the East Hills Asphalt Divers Club, with the proceeds going to bushfire relief. Over \$1,000 was raised on the day by those fast-moving crustaceans, with the winning crab owners being true locals Jodie and Shane Garvey. Unfortunately for the crabs that were not so quick, they ended up plated and served with some very tasty vegetables and rice. An excellent finish to this very busy day was the Premier's Australia Day community reception at the Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, where volunteers from western Sydney were recognised for all their efforts throughout the year.

I was very proud to nominate Brian Barrett, President of the East Hills Men's Shed, for all the work he has done for that organisation this year, as well as the Georges River Light the Night team—Katrina Larsen, Joanne Tonks, Collette Ide and Natalee Barnett—who in the past four years have raised \$100,000 for the Leukaemia Foundation. The Premier's event was well attended and I was so happy to see many familiar faces from the many outstanding organisations not only in my electorate of East Hills but also throughout western Sydney being recognised for all the great things they do. Happy Australia Day.

TRIBUTE TO GEOFF DINGLE

Ms KATE WASHINGTON (Port Stephens) (19:00:22): Just before the sun rose on the last day of 2019 we lost a good man. Geoff Dingle was dedicated to his family, his community and the environment. Geoff lived in my town of Medowie for 40 years with his wife, Libby, raising their family. For nearly the entire 14 years I have lived there Geoff was on Port Stephens Council. He lost his battle with pancreatic cancer at just 69 years of age. Geoff knew right from wrong and he was prepared to fight for what was right, even when there was a lot of wrong going on. Geoff was a man of principle who knew the importance of proper process and good governance, even when many around him did not know or did not care.

Geoff was willing to take up the cause of those who needed help, even when the chances of success were slim. And when Geoff knew something was not right he was persistent in his pursuit of the truth. He could smell a rat—and goodness knows there were a few to smell—and he relied on a strategy that was pretty simple: It is called telling the truth. There were more than a few people who did not like him for doing that. Because they did not like it and because Geoff was sometimes the only opposing voice on council, Geoff was targeted—sometimes in ways that were not only unfair but also grubby, nasty and offensive. To date, council has never apologised for its wrongdoing, as found by the Office of Local Government. That is to its discredit and total shame. Despite the

efforts of those around him to shut him down, Geoff continued to work hard for his community, shining a light on practices that were not in the community's interests. I had enormous respect for Geoff, as I know many people did. That was evidenced by the hundreds of people who attended his recent memorial service. I respected him not only because he was a man of principle but also because he backed it up with hands-on hard work.

Everywhere around Medowie I am reminded of his contribution. There is hardly anything we see in Medowie today that he did not have a hand in—either establishing it, running it, improving it or making it work—from Medowie Community Preschool to the community hall. He was a longstanding member of the Medowie Public School P&C. Alongside his wife, Libby, he was a main player in Medowie Tidy Towns and the Medowie Progress Association and chaired Neighbourhood Watch. Geoff also ran Medowie Scouts for nearly 30 years and was awarded one of the highest awards in scouting for his service to the movement. He also sat on Medowie's sports council and the koala plan of management committee, where he fought to protect koalas in a developer-friendly council.

Personally, Geoff set an example that will never leave me. He demonstrated to me what public office ought to be about: always keeping community at heart, being open and honest and working hard. On behalf of the people of Port Stephens, I formally extend our condolences to Libby; Geoff's mother, Gwen; his sons, Robert, Nicholas and Christopher; daughters-in-law Jessica, Kimberley and Bianca; his six grandchildren; and his beloved dog, Harry. On behalf of the people of Port Stephens, I thank Geoff for his enormous contribution to our community, its people and our environment. True to form, at his memorial service Geoff made sure he had a say, with a written note read by a friend, some of which I wish to share today:

My one regret is that my generation has not been kind to the planet and has left a terrible legacy for my grandchildren to try and clean up, and for that I apologise to them.

For every tree and shrub Libby and I planted, others were destroying thousands. I have great faith in the next generation to get it right. My final words to them and those present—if you want to make a difference, get engaged. Whingers deliver negative vibes and never make a difference so ignore them, and don't be afraid to tell them to shut it, unless they have something to contribute.

The blue planet is under so much pressure to support the human population, and humans have devastated the environment in so many ways.

It's over to my children and grandchildren to take up the challenge. I'd love to have been around when electric cars are the norm and petrol-guzzling polluters are frowned upon; when planting trees is the norm rather than knocking them down, and digging stuff up is frowned upon.

It's all going to happen because there are no options. I hope my generation gets out of the way for future generations.

A champion is defined as a person who forcefully supports, defends or fights for a personal belief, right or principle. Geoff Dingle was a true champion of our community and our environment. He will be missed. Vale, Geoff Dingle. Rest in peace.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Hornery): I certainly agree with the member for Port Stephens that Geoff Dingle was a man of principle.

CENTRAL COAST ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal) (19:04:11): The Central Coast is a region that is almost as large as the Australian Capital Territory and has a population the size of that of the Northern Territory. It covers 566.4 square kilometres and 336,600 people live across this space. We know that between 2016 and 2041 the Central Coast's population will increase by 95,000 people, to a total of 430,850. These numbers are important because they help us to understand the challenge of extra infrastructure that all levels of government need to deliver on the Central Coast. When it comes to road infrastructure, I am pleased that our strong New South Wales budget has enabled the State Government to commit hundreds of millions of dollars to this need. All four electorates on the Central Coast—Gosford, Terrigal, The Entrance and Wyong—are benefiting.

Last month I had the pleasure of hosting the Minister for Regional Roads and Transport, Paul Toole, on the Central Coast. We visited three important projects that have a significant impact on the entire region. Cars are the major form of transport across our region and so we want to improve the roads to make them safer but also allow people to get around quicker and more efficiently. The first announcement the Minister and I made is that early planning work on Central Coast Highway is well underway. The project focuses on a 3.8 kilometre stretch of road between Tumby Road and Bateau Bay Road. That 3.8 kilometres may sound small but it will certainly be a big problem if left without upgrading. I note the former roads Minister is present in the Chamber. She was with me when I made the announcement prior to the State election.

By duplicating this road we will ensure that Central Coast Highway is a dual carriageway from Kariong in the west through to Gosford, Erina and Wamberal and up to Bateau Bay. This is one of our election promises, and we will deliver on it. It is a \$387 million commitment, which I was delighted to make back in 2019 with Minister Pavey. It is the single biggest road project by dollar value in the Central Coast's history. As a result of

this early investment of the first \$4 million, planning is now taking place, with geotechnical work being undertaken, including borehole drilling to test the ground conditions.

The results will help to prepare the detailed design for the proposed highway upgrade. After these investigations the project will start work on the preliminary environmental assessments, traffic modelling along the corridor, flood investigations and more field investigations. As the Minister said, it will be a challenging project. But the Government is not shying away from the challenge because we know what a difference it will make to locals in Wamberal, Forrester's Beach, Bateau Bay and further afield. Another project is the upgrade of Pacific Highway, which stretches between the electorates of Gosford and The Entrance.

Mrs Melinda Pavey: Huge!

Mr ADAM CROUCH: The scale of this project is massive. The part of the highway we inspected was the stage 3B upgrade, which is a highly complex section involving the main northern railway line. A total of \$178 million has been invested to widen the highway to two lanes in each direction. We often throw around the term "game changer" but upgrading the Pacific Highway truly will be for the 30,000 motorists who travel along this section of road each day. The piling machine itself is 30 metres tall. Recently there have been 95 piles completed, which help with the construction of retaining walls next to the road. Ground improvement work for the future alignment of the highway between The Ridgeway and Parsons Road is complete and earthwork to widen The Ridgeway is now underway. While we would all love a bit more rain, the recent dry conditions mean that work is continuing quickly.

The final project I want to bring to the House's attention is the roundabout upgrade at Empire Bay Drive in Kincumber in my electorate of Terrigal. Over the past five years I have spoken about this project countless times. Minister Pavey also visited that particular roundabout with me. There is a significant volume of traffic each day, with 25,000 motorists, and it is also a complex project. On 21 January, with the flick of a switch, work to relocate all utilities at this intersection was completed. This means all underground work is completed, including moving services for electricity, water, sewer, gas and telecommunications. As locals know, along Empire Bay Drive we have seen traffic build up as far as five kilometres during morning and afternoon peak hours.

Since the upgrade commenced there has been a significant reduction in queuing, and I know our community is looking forward to this final stage of the project beginning. Remaining work will include building a new lane, laying a new road surface, stormwater drains, footpaths, and kerb and guttering. This project is about this Government's strong budget delivering on its massive multimillion-dollar road projects from one end of the Central Coast to the other. I am so proud to be part of a government that is delivering those road projects to the Central Coast region, which has been forgotten for so long.

OXLEY ELECTORATE AUSTRALIA DAY AWARDS

Mrs MELINDA PAVEY (Oxley—Minister for Water, Property and Housing) (19:10:14): I congratulate all those incredible people across the four shires of the Oxley electorate who were recognised at local council award ceremonies on Australia Day. It was a magnificent day that was genuine and profound, given the devastation of the bushfires. I will talk more about the bushfires tomorrow. The way our local communities celebrated Australia Day recognised the authenticity and demonstrated the strong sense of community in our shires. It was a beautiful morning at Urunga when I woke up but I had to leave it to go to Kempsey. I missed the incredible presentation by the Urunga community, led by the amazing Peter and Jo Brotherton of the Chamber of Commerce. It was an Indigenous Australia Day, led by our Indigenous community, bringing together some really great community leaders to ensure that Australia Day was recognised in the spirit in which it has been created to ensure that people from all walks of life are celebrated.

I acknowledge the Order of Australia medal winners. John Mills is a long-serving volunteer at various organisations in Nambucca Valley, including Meals on Wheels, Red Cross and many more. He has had a long history and a reputation of supporting people. Mark Morrison is principal of Macleay Vocational College. Members may have seen him in a recent episode of *Australian Story*. He is a beautiful soul, supported incredibly by his wife, Lisa. I congratulate him. I attended the Kempsey Shire Council presentations. The Medal of the Order of Australia awarded in June earlier in the year to the beautiful Margaret Grill was recognised. She is one of those beautiful people who contribute and keep community organisations alive. The Kempsey Swimming Club would be nothing without her. She is very respected and is a former employee and a senior manager of Telecom when the headquarters were in Kempsey. She is a very special member of the community, like Mark and John. They are the types of people whom the Order of Australia medal should recognise.

At the Kempsey-Macleay celebration a magnificent young hero of the valley, a local born and bred young man from Hat Head who is very famous, was our Australia Day ambassador. The incredible Aiden Tolman is a fabulous young rugby league player. He is incredibly handsome, with an even more gorgeous wife who is a

primary school teacher who also hails from the Macleay Valley. He gave a beautiful address, a magnificent speech, which lifted everybody. I am so proud of him. His mum and dad, who still live at Hat Head, are also huge contributors to the valley. It was a very special day. I also acknowledge our citizens of the year at Bellingen: Jo Brotherton, my friend and fellow resident, from the Urunga Chamber of Commerce and Barbara Moore who has served for a long time on the hospital auxiliary and the State Emergency Service. The Young Citizen of the Year was awarded to Stella Rees.

Community Service Citizen of the Year was awarded to Marie Rowe. Sportsperson of the Year was awarded to Lily-Rose Meredith Powell. Junior Sportsperson of the Year was awarded to Modena Schofield-Foster and Zara Leigh McLeish. We have had some great sportspeople through the Bellingen Shire this year. Sports Team of the Year was awarded to the Open Girls Football Team. Tomorrow I will talk more about the fireys from Fire and Rescue NSW in Nambucca Heads. Irene Pachos and Darryl Aldridge received awards, having been injured in a significant incident during the fires. Junior Sportswoman Arrin Stirrat-Black and Senior Sports Team the Nambucca Strikers accepted their awards, with Blake Howie gracing the stage with his double award act of Junior Sportsman and Young Citizen of the Year.

Mark and Scott Best accepted the posthumous Senior Citizen Award for their father, Mel Best, and said they were stunned and deeply touched by the accolades for their father. I also congratulate Nambucca Shire's Citizen of the Year, Matt Roberts. In addition, at Kempsey Shire Council, Citizen of the Year was awarded to Tania Powick. She has been celebrated and recognised as Woman of the Year from the Oxley electorate. She is a magnificent girl—I call her a girl but she is probably a woman. She is a beautiful person and gives everything to the community and her family.

The Young Citizen of the Year award was shared by Serenity Clancy, a gorgeous young girl, and Elizabeth Jackson. I have attended both the fundraisers that Elizabeth has organised through the showgirl association. Evelyn Jacobs and Ted and Winsome Walmsley were awarded Volunteer of the Year. Ted and Winsome grow the best orchids in the world. The Community Group of the Year was awarded to Kempsey Cancerians. I love them so much. The Wauchope Rotary Club took out the Community Group of the Year award for Port Macquarie-Hastings Council. I represent the most incredible electorate. Congratulations to all of those who have received awards.

REGIONAL EDUCATION

Mrs HELEN DALTON (Murray) (19:15:30): Today I will address the shocking neglect of our schools, teachers and children across rural New South Wales. On the first day of school this year Premier Gladys Berejiklian tweeted:

Every child, no matter where they live or what their circumstance, deserves the best education possible.

Is she even aware that human life exists beyond the Blue Mountains? If she spent just one day touring schools in the Murray region, she would learn that where a child lives determines how well they learn and their future job opportunities. The first place I would like her to visit is Yanco Agricultural High School, a fantastic boarding school that takes in students, both boys and girls, across rural New South Wales. When I visited the girls' dorm in November, I thought I had mistakenly landed in a detention camp on Nauru. In 1993 when the school became co-ed, the New South Wales Government relocated temporary, second-hand, demountable accommodation for the girls. It promised it would build a permanent structure very soon. Some 27 years later, the daughters of those first female students are still waiting for their accommodation. Currently they sleep in cramped, hazardous dorms, where the temperatures reach 48 degrees in summer.

When I asked the education Minister when the proper dorms would be built, she said there are no plans to build any. She said the current third-world conditions "meet the needs" of the female students. She does not care that the girls have much worse accommodation than the boys, or that the conditions are clearly unsafe. Adrian Piccoli's super school in Griffith is another place where students struggle to focus on their studies. As the town swelters through 45-degree days, the school does not have adequate cooling. Last Friday the temperature in one block was clocked at 38.7 degrees—and that was inside the classroom. Teachers are too stressed to teach because they are worried that students suffering from health conditions such as epilepsy might have a seizure.

Of course, that is if the students are lucky enough to have a teacher. Due to a chronic teacher shortage, students missed an extraordinary 767 lessons in the first five months of 2019 alone. When there is no teacher students assemble outside, where there is hardly any shade and minimal supervision. Griffith's problems started with Adrian Piccoli, the former education Minister and Griffith's local member. Anyone would think having a State education Minister in your town would be good for your town's schools. Think again. During his 18-year reign of neglect, Piccoli did nothing about chronic teacher shortages or the lack of facilities crippling Griffith schools. With student outcomes falling further and further behind those of Sydney, he came up with a bizarre idea

in his final year in office. He decided to merge the only two public high schools in Griffith, which are some five kilometres apart. He called it the "super school".

Piccoli's underfunded and poorly planned super school has been a super disaster. While teachers are trying their best, a chronic shortage persists. But Adrian did not stick around to see it. Before his merger came into effect he ditched Parliament for a plush job at the University of New South Wales and a fat lifetime pension. Giving Griffith schools the same incentive point structure as other schools in the region would address the teacher shortage problem. It is something I have been fighting for since my election in March. It is also something the education Minister and her department refuse to do.

What the department has done, however, is commission a survey to evaluate Piccoli's school merger. Guess who is doing it? It is Piccoli's University of New South Wales, of course. No doubt it will conclude everything is absolutely fabulous. But everything is not fabulous, of course. What is wrong with this world when wealthy Sydney golf clubs get lavished with our taxpayer dollars while Griffith students have to bring their own toilet paper to school? A postcode should not determine a child's life outcomes. It is time for the Premier, the Minister and the Department of Education to walk the walk when it comes to giving every child in New South Wales the best possible education.

Mr Mark Coure: I bet you haven't written to the education Minister, have you?

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Horner): The member for Oatley will come to order.

Mrs HELEN DALTON: Perhaps she should come to the electorate of Murray.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Horner): Government members will come to order.

CENTRAL COAST OYSTER INDUSTRY

Ms LIESL TESCH (Gosford) (19:20:47): I acknowledge the Darkinjung and the Guringai people, who participated in an amazing oyster industry in the Brisbane Water estuary long before the arrival of white fellas in this country. The mobs left middens along our waterfronts that are easy to see when we paddle the Brisbane Water. They lived in harmony with the natural environment. They had a fantastic and sustainable industry that left an opportunity for the settlers when they arrived on the Brisbane Water. They set up an innovative industry harvesting the oysters and harvesting the middens for the lime that was needed for industry in the early days of the Sydney colony, and it changed the face of an environment that had existed for millennia. Oyster farmers caught on when they saw the Aboriginal people harvesting the oysters and they set up commercial oyster growing back in the 1890s. That production continued until the twentieth century, but with population increase we saw the introduction of QX disease.

In 2013 the Pacific Oyster Mortality Syndrome was wiping out our local oysters in the Hawkesbury and having an impact in the Brisbane Water. Unfortunately, the Government has not provided enough support to local growers so they can pick up the pieces of their crumbling business. We see the costly devastation felt by the local farmers, with our waterways littered with all sorts of oyster paraphernalia that possibly will sit there until we take the initiative to remove it. I thank OceanWatch, which has sourced some funding. Unfortunately, it employed a non-local person to do the clean-up, but it is the start of cleaning up our waterways and of the Government starting to take notice of the amazing natural resource that we have in our community. Beyond disease, there are land claims, threatened species, urbanisation, catchment water quality issues, private ownership, lack of available Crown land and other significant constraints that now stand as challenges for oyster growers.

I challenge the Government to work together with our local council, which is now looking at real business investment from Regional Development Australia, and to resource our local growers, who have amazing capacity and who see an absolute need for a depuration plant that has road access on the edge of our waterways. There was a development that was going to be a depuration plant, but it has been taken over by a marina and a restaurant. The growers need to filter their oysters before they are allowed into the Sydney market. Currently this happens across the Brisbane Water, but the growers have to pick up their oysters and take them to land-based depuration plants or completely water-based depuration plants, ship them to boat ramps and then ship these oysters to the amazing market in Sydney.

It is horrible that there is not leadership in our community to help this industry. This is a multimillion-dollar industry in Australia and around the world and yet our oyster farmers, who are doing a great job, have not got the leadership they need to help drive this forward. The South Coast oyster industry has had a \$20 million investment, led by the New South Wales Government, to expand and go international. But, as we know from previous experience with disease and, as of last week, fires, it is not advisable to have all your oysters in one basket. The Government needs to invest beyond the Liberal-based and Nationals-based electorates to support oyster growers across the State.

We are seeing and hearing about the impact of fires on the oysters down there. I see what we saw in our community: a tourism and food industry, which is worth so much money, absolutely devastated. But because we have not invested and diversified up and down the coast, we are going to see the industry affected. It will be great for the Port Stephens growers, but the Government should provide funding support and show some leadership. Rather than cutting down orange trees in our electorate and thinking we are going to grow beans for soybean markets in China, let us have a look at an industry that is already there.

We have Broken Bay Pearls and "Welcome to our Community" harvesting pearls and also looking at oysters as a food source. Let us see the Government support those efforts with amazing leadership by sourcing land on the edge of the beautiful Brisbane Water where these people can take their oysters and easily put them through depurification so close to the Sydney market. It is worth so much money and would provide so many jobs. Let this industry, which has probably been there for 50,000 years, continue to thrive and grow and give back to our beautiful community on the Central Coast.

SEVEN HILLS ELECTORATE SCHOOLS

Mr MARK TAYLOR (Seven Hills) (19:25:40): I acknowledge all the great achievements, both individual and collective, that are occurring at schools in my electorate of Seven Hills. After the Parliament rose at the end of last year I visited The Hills School at Northmead for its annual Christmas carols event. The Hills School does an outstanding job catering for students with moderate to severe intellectual challenges, tailoring its individual education programs and individual transition programs to each of its 113 students from kindergarten through to year 12. The Hills School is fortunate to be led by its principal, Mr Mark Gosbell, and president of the school's Parents & Community Association Mrs Monique Fenech. The Hills School should be incredibly proud of its Christmas carols performances. On behalf of the whole community, I wish the school all the best for 2020.

I also had the opportunity to do something quite unique and interesting at St Paul the Apostle Primary School in Winston Hills. When I visited the year 4 students, they pitched to me their ideas and plans for a new school playground. I was impressed by the standard of their presentations and the students' understanding and application of Newton's laws of motion. I wish the school all the best in its unenviable task of selecting the winning proposal for the new school playground. Last Christmas I ran my fifth annual Christmas card competition. Students from The Meadows Public School in Seven Hills competed for the prize of having their "Christmas in Australia" design on the front of the 2019 Christmas card. I congratulate Melisa Cetin on her winning design, which featured Santa stuck in a chimney made of sand on an Australian beach. I congratulate the runners-up in the competition—Aleyna Akar, Ella Champion and Ana-Leah Ngaronao—on their efforts.

Also I was fortunate to attend a number of awards ceremonies for public schools in my electorate, including Seven Hills High School, Vardys Road Public School, Kings Langley Public School and The Hills Sports High School. I mention Seven Hills High School, in particular, which celebrated its diamond jubilee in 2019. Importantly, students at Seven Hills High School are now able to take year 11 courses from term one 2020 and year 12 courses from term four 2021. Students will have the choice of continuing their studies at Wyndham College or staying at their current school to complete their senior subjects. That is incredibly exciting news for the entire school community but especially, I am sure, for the students at Seven Hills High School who commenced year 10 last week. Those students will be the first to study at the school from year 7 and complete their Higher School Certificate there.

I was also fortunate to speak at the 2019 Kings Langley community Christmas carols run, in part, by the Kings Langley Public School and its P&C. The event continues to be a huge hit with local families due to the work done by members of the Kings Langley Public School community. I thank them for their efforts. I also recognise the principal of Seven Hills Public School, Ms Renai Diamond, who has done so much for the lives of hundreds of children across the local community of Seven Hills. Ms Diamond was nominated as the Seven Hills electorate's Local Woman of the Year.

Renai is a Winston Hills local. She has had a great impact on schoolchildren right across Seven Hills, particularly at Seven Hills North Public School and at Seven Hills Public School, where she did an outstanding job as principal. Renai has achieved almost celebrity status in my community, known as someone who devotes a great deal of her time and effort to turning her pupils into civic-minded and dedicated young people. She takes the time to get to know each child and each member of her staff and then works collaboratively to meet their needs and help them achieve their goals. Congratulations and best wishes to Renai Diamond during her tenure at Seven Hills North Public School and for her nomination as Seven Hills woman of the year.

*Community Recognition Statements***ANDREW SCOTT**

Mr STEPHEN BALI (Blacktown) (19:30:09): I congratulate Mr Andrew Scott on being awarded the Blacktown City Citizen of the Year, an incredibly prestigious award given that the population of the City of Blacktown is approaching 400,000 residents. Andrew is a Marayong resident and CEO of Carevan Blacktown. Andrew helped to establish Carevan in 2011. The charity aims to help the most disadvantaged people in our community. Carevan provides nutritious meals in a warm, welcoming and non-judgemental setting for those in need. Carevan offers an opportunity for people experiencing homelessness, poverty, unemployment or loneliness to connect and build new friendships and support networks. Andrew Scott is CEO in a voluntary capacity and plays an active and crucial part in the weekly functioning of the charity, despite having a full-time job and family commitments. Without him, the service would grind to a halt. I thank Andrew for his motivation and service to the community. He is a well-deserved Blacktown City Citizen of the Year.

EAST HILLS BULLDOGS

Ms WENDY LINDSAY (East Hills) (19:31:08): It is fantastic when attending a local event to have the first person you see be the boy who lived across the road from you growing up. Steven Dinsdale, no longer a boy but vice president of the East Hills Junior Rugby League Club, was manning the barbecue—a very hot job on a very hot afternoon. The East Hills Bulldogs were holding a fundraiser for the Rural Fire Service at their home ground, Smith Park in East Hills. Despite the heat, the event was well supported by our local community as well as by players and their families. Also present were Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs first-grade player and local Panania boy Jayden Okunbor, Australian Schoolboys rugby representative and local East Hills Bulldog Ryan Gray, and absolute legend of the game Steve Mortimer, who played in four Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs premiership sides—two of those as captain. Live music was provided by local band MRS. Congratulations to all the volunteers. The event was a great success and raised over \$2,500 for the RFS.

BUSKULELES

Ms LIESL TESCH (Gosford) (19:32:12): The sensational Buskuleles is a group of formidable women who busk around the Central Coast, bringing musical ambience and joy during festivals and at significant landmarks. Not only this, the Buskuleles donate the money they receive while they are dazzling passers-by to a number of admirable community groups and charities on the coast. The Buskuleles were established in April 2016 by a group of ukulele-playing women looking to contribute more to the area they live in. A recent charitable donation made by the group comprised a number of family items conferred on We Care Uniting through money raised from their busking. The group have also made donations to Coast Shelter, Ettalong Beach Arts & Crafts Centre and a struggling family with a member battling cancer. I commend and thank the Buskuleles and their six members: Kerrie Pochroj, Bron Maurer, Deb Selby, Heather Rickard, Marilyn Gavin and Vickie Dean. Well done, ladies!

TRIBUTE TO RICHARD ORTON

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley) (19:33:05): It is with a heavy heart that I inform the House of the passing of a much-loved member of my local community, Richard Orton. Richard was a stalwart of the St George Australian Football Club, holding many positions over a number of years. More importantly, he is remembered as a great friend of many. My memory of Richard is that of a selfless man who gave tirelessly to others. I recall Richard nominating members of the community to receive awards at the St George Community Awards, but insisting that the award recipient not know that it was Richard who had nominated them. He did not nominate them for recognition or praise; he simply did it because it helped someone else. In many respects, this was true of Richard's life. Richard set an example for all of us to follow, and his legacy lives on. On 7 February a mass will be held in Richard's honour. I extend my deepest condolences to June, Peter, Jen and their families.

COFFS HARBOUR ELECTORATE AUSTRALIA DAY AWARDS

Mr GURMESH SINGH (Coffs Harbour) (19:34:00): We are one, but we are many—a message that came through loud and clear at Coffs Harbour Australia Day 2020. Big crowds gathered at the North Coast Regional Botanic Garden on 26 January to celebrate our Australia Day award winners and the 60 new Aussies from 19 countries proudly receiving their Australian citizenship. I congratulate our Citizen of the Year, Jean Vickery; our Young Citizen of the Year, Emma Millie Serisier; Sportsperson of the Year Olissa Onley; and Event of the Year Sawtell Fun Day. I also congratulate others who were nominated for awards—namely, Barbara Haigh, Dean Evers, Michael Bourne, Nora Brooks, Teo Ross, Kaleb Darbin, Nathan Stary-Wynn and Heather Orme.

RENGA RAJAN

Ms LYNDIA VOLTZ (Auburn) (19:34:46): I speak in recognition of Renga Rajan, who this year was awarded the Cumberland Local Citizen of the Year. Renga and his inspiring wife, Bharathi, have both thrown themselves into the already hardworking and committed Rotary Club of Granville. This year I was pleased to join them as part of Graffiti Removal Day, which added so much to the local Auburn community, making a better environment and helping out struggling local businesses. They organised a number of teams, involved local youth and rolled up their sleeves to get the job done. They are the embodiment of the work of Rotary clubs across New South Wales. Together, Renga and Bharathi are fundamental to ensuring our diverse community and the Rotary Club of Granville are working hand in hand. Renga Rajan is a deserving recipient of this award that recognises his hard work and community achievement.

RONALD RAY, OAM

Mr MARK TAYLOR (Seven Hills) (19:35:35): I am proud to acknowledge the diligent and community-centred nature of a local Seven Hills electorate constituent who was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in the General Division on the Australia Day 2020 Honours List. Mr Ronald Ray, OAM, of Kings Langley was recognised for his passionate involvement in Australian military history, the many community organisations he has founded and volunteered in, and his service to the State as a justice of the peace. Mr Ray has been a volunteer guide at the Australian National Maritime Museum, the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust and the Royal Australian Artillery Historical Company for many years. Mr Ray is also an active member of the Castle Hill and District RSL Sub-Branch. I know I am joined by many other constituents of the Seven Hills electorate in congratulating Mr Ray on receiving this prestigious award and on serving his community so passionately over many years.

PORT STEPHENS KOALAS

Ms KATE WASHINGTON (Port Stephens) (19:36:27): The recent bushfires and their devastating impact on our native wildlife has touched everyone I speak to. With awful, heartbreaking images of burnt koalas, our ecological crisis has also touched people around the world. In Port Stephens we feel very fortunate not to have had major bushfires affect our region so far this season and we are very proud of our volunteers at Port Stephens Koalas for putting up their hand to help affected areas. Port Stephens Koalas have taken overflow survivors from the Port Macquarie Koala Hospital and other areas across New South Wales. They currently have 16 koalas in care at the sanctuary and an additional eight koalas are being cared for at volunteers' homes. Yes, koalas are very cute creatures, but this is nothing short of hard, tiring work, which is also too often heartbreaking. You have to have a heart of solid gold to withstand the highs and lows of wildlife care. So today I recognise the volunteers, from the leaf pickers to the enclosure keepers, koala carers and vets. Thank you for doing all you can to ensure that Australia's future includes koalas in the wild.

TRIBUTE TO DARBY PAXTON

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS (Dubbo) (19:37:31): I would like to share my love, thoughts and sympathy with the family of Darby Paxton, who sadly died recently at the age of just 18 after a tragic accident. I was lucky enough to know Darby for most of his life. He started kindergarten at the same school on the same day and rode on the same school bus as my eldest daughter. He was always a fun-loving, generous and caring boy and young man. I last spoke to Darbs on the night of his graduation ball after finishing year 12 last year along with my daughter and all their friends. He told me that, to be honest, he was pretty happy to see the end of school and he was really looking forward to this year.

The funeral for Darby was held yesterday. It was really nice but really tough. Although the heartbreak of an event like this will never be forgotten, hopefully with time some of the pain will ease for the family. The Paxton family is well loved across the Geurie district. I know my family is just one of many to be sending all our love and support to KP, Ross, Laura and the extended family. Darby was a great young bloke whom I will always remember with a big smile on his face. Vale, Darby Paxton.

WYONG SES UNIT

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang) (19:38:35): Congratulations to the members of the Wyong SES unit on being awarded the long service medal at the Central Coast SES Awards Night. Wyong SES is a volunteer-based organisation that works with communities to prepare and respond to severe weather events. The Wyong members who received a medal at Avoca Hotel on 9 December were Sue Robson, Reece Robson, Brian Gates, Robert Field, Ian Johnson, Phil Murphy, Stephen Stewart, Janette Taylor, John Buchtmann, Ben Falconer, Andrew Warnest and Terry Henry. These members have been serving their community for between 25 years and five years. Wyong SES is one of the busiest units in New South Wales, with an excellent track record of serving its community. Well done to the members of the Wyong SES unit who have volunteered to keep our community safe.

TRIBUTE TO COLIN GADD

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands—Minister for Agriculture and Western New South Wales) (19:39:25): I was deeply saddened to learn of the passing just before Christmas of Armidale treasure Colin "Col" Gadd following a determined and stoic battle with illness. Col passed away at the age of 74, surrounded by his family and friends. Our local communities are built on the efforts of people such as Col Gadd, who was well known around Armidale as being a selfless individual who was involved in all aspects of the community. For more than 40 years Col served in volunteer organisations and sports groups as a player, an official and, later in life, an administrator. Whether it was in community radio, cricket, soccer—or football, as he always called it—the Armidale Regional Sports Council or his beloved Lions Club, for more than four decades Col was always the first to stick up his hand and ask, "How can I help out?" I feel honoured to have worked with and known Colin Gadd, and to have been able to call him a friend. His loss will be felt by many in the community. Rest in peace, Col.

YELLOW DIAMOND FOUNDATION

Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland) (19:40:30): On World Cancer Day I acknowledge the work of the Yellow Diamond Foundation founders, Vince Agostino and Sam Campione, and the foundation team. These everyday Australians recognised a major gap between the needs of those suffering from brain cancer, and the research and support available. They decided to join forces and create a group where people could volunteer their time to help make a difference. Yellow Diamond is committed to finding a cure. The team strives towards this mission through fundraising, research, the provision of technology and volunteering. They also support individuals and families affected by brain cancer, and raise awareness about this terrible disease. Few people are aware that brain cancer kills more people under the age of 40 than any other cancer. Last year I attended the Yellow Diamond Foundation's huge fundraiser in the electorate of Drummoyne. I thank all the attendees and volunteers for their time and efforts to raise funds for this important cause.

JACK CORCORAN

Mrs TANYA DAVIES (Mulgoa) (19:41:31): I congratulate Glenmore Park resident Jack Corcoran on his nomination for the First National Real Estate Leadership Award in the 2020 7NEWS Young Achiever Awards. Jack, 19, has displayed outstanding leadership qualities throughout his short life by giving back to his community in any way he can. Jack has a younger brother with Down syndrome and is a dedicated worker at the Rainbow Club, where he helps children with disabilities learn to swim. He has also become a Justice of the Peace to expand the numerous ways he gives back to his community. Winning the award would be a highly significant achievement, with category winners each receiving a trophy and more than \$2,000 worth of prizes. The category winner will be named the 2020 NSW/ACT young achiever of the year and receive an additional \$2,500, along with a magnificent trophy. Jack is a quietly spoken, respectful, generous and selfless young man who is very much deserving of this award. I wish him all the best as the gala presentation dinner approaches in March 2020. Well done, Jack.

SUPERINTENDENT VIKI CAMPBELL

Ms JODIE HARRISON (Charlestown) (19:42:35): Superintendent Viki Campbell is responsible for the overall coordination of the RFS firefighting capability and bushfire risk management across the two local government areas that form the Central Coast district and that include my electorate of Charlestown. Within the district, Viki oversees 57 firefighting brigades made up of 2,300 volunteer firefighters. Amazingly, as a strong advocate for volunteering, she also finds the time to volunteer with the NSW Cave Rescue Squad, where she holds the position of president. Superintendent Viki Campbell's extraordinary leadership skills absolutely inspire me. She has been the incident controller for the 2019-20 bushfire emergency on the Central Coast. It is particularly appropriate on this day, when both sides of the House have joined together to support the bushfire motion, that I pay tribute to her on behalf of the people of my electorate. I thank her and all the other RFS volunteers from the Central Coast district and their families.

WORLD CANCER DAY

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal) (19:43:41): Today, Tuesday 4 February, is World Cancer Day, which seeks to empower communities all over the world to make progress in the fight against cancer. Many members of this place—including me—have either had cancer or have had loved ones affected by cancer. This insidious disease knows no boundaries, age groups or demographics. On World Cancer Day I am proud to acknowledge the incredible clinicians on the Central Coast who are working to fight this disease at both Gosford and Wyong hospitals. The radiation and cancer units at Gosford Hospital are some of the best in the country. I acknowledge the outstanding work of Dr Apsara Windsor, the head of the radiation oncology unit at Gosford Hospital. Every day Dr Windsor and her team work with patients of all ages across the Central Coast who are dealing with, living

with and fighting cancer. I acknowledge the outstanding work of Dr Windsor and all other clinicians on the Central Coast on World Cancer Day.

TRIBUTE TO BRIAN EGAN

Mr ROY BUTLER (Barwon) (19:44:52): Tonight I honour the co-founder of Aussie Helpers, Brian Egan, who sadly passed away in January. Brian, with his wife, Nerida, founded Aussie Helpers in 2002 and together they worked tirelessly to help regional communities. Brian was widely respected and admired throughout the Australian farming community. Brian was the person I would call when I had run out of options to get assistance for people. He always came through in some way. A military veteran, a true gentleman and a selfless individual who was committed to helping others, that was Brian Egan and that is his legacy. I know many who were personally touched by his generosity and kindness. His is a huge loss to regional Australia. Brian is survived by his wife, Nerida, and daughters Natasha, Samantha, Kelly and Victoria.

COOLAMON SHIRE

Ms STEPH COOKE (Cootamundra) (19:45:35): Coolamon Shire Council has officially launched an exciting new exhibition, *Our Shire, Our Stories; A Celebration of Heritage in the Coolamon Shire*. The histories of the six towns and villages that make up the Coolamon shire are told through vintage radio sets and a special edition of the *Coolamon-Ganmain Farmers Review*. A team of eight volunteers conducted 32 interviews, capturing the events of the past through the people who lived them. Like many rural communities, Coolamon shire is shaped by its residents and their stories. Reflecting on the region's history allows us to understand and celebrate the past, and the experiences and memories that helped create the community. I encourage all locals and visitors to stop at Coolamon at the Up-to-Date Store to see this wonderful exhibition.

RON STUART

Ms FELICITY WILSON (North Shore) (19:46:38): I congratulate and acknowledge Mr Ron Stuart of Mosman, the North Shore grandparent of the year, who was acknowledged at the end of last year alongside Grandparents Day—a day that celebrates the role grandparents and older people play in our society for both the things they have done and the things they continue to do. Ron is an exceptional member of our local community. He has been successfully running competitively in national and international competitions for decades. He is also an active member of the Northside Running Group and he was a foundational member of the club in the nineties. Ron is best known for his tireless efforts to fundraise to beat breast cancer in memory of his wife, Ruth, who passed away from breast cancer in 1991. Even at 87 years young, Ron can still be seen running on our local streets and is currently preparing for, and hoping to run in, the Mother's Day Classic breast cancer run in May. It is important for us to acknowledge this every day, but particularly today on World Cancer Day. I congratulate Ron and thank him for everything he does for our community.

ROSE LEWIS

Mr STEPHEN BALI (Blacktown) (19:47:40): I congratulate Rose Lewis on being awarded the Blacktown Young Citizen of the Year, an incredibly prestigious award given the youth population of 122,000 in Blacktown City who are eligible for this award. Rose lives in Marayong and is a student of Western Sydney University. Rose was nominated as Unsung Hero at the ZEST Awards 2019, the undergraduate representative on the university board and named Outstanding Young Woman of the Year 2019 by Western Sydney Women. Whilst at Marayong Heights Primary School, Rose served as an SRC representative as well as being part of the school choir. At Quakers Hill High School Rose was part of a winning Tournament of Minds team, performed in school musicals and hosted the first teacher versus student great debate in 2013. Rose has packed many activities and achievements into her young life. Rose has been wonderfully nurtured by her family and is the pride of our community. I congratulate Rose Lewis on becoming Blacktown Young Citizen of the Year.

SOUTH EASTERN SYDNEY LOCAL HEALTH DISTRICT

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley) (19:48:39): The House has heard me boast many times about the Government's investment into St George Hospital. However, even amongst the hundreds of millions of dollars in upgrades, my favourite part of St George remains its people. That is why, on 23 January, I was delighted to welcome 71 new medical interns to the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District. All of these interns have worked extremely hard to reach this point in their medical career and deserve to be commended as such. I was delighted to hear that 45 of the 71 interns have been assigned to St George Hospital, with 24 assigned to Sutherland Hospital and two to Calvary Health Care Sydney. These interns join a team of immensely dedicated staff who have the greatest care and compassion for their patients. My office is often inundated with letters commending the standard of care at our local hospital. I thank Acting General Manager Vicki Weeden, Director of Medical Services Dr Heidi Boss and the whole team at St George for everything they have done. Good luck to all the medical interns.

ST JOHN AMBULANCE

Ms LYNDA VOLTZ (Auburn) (19:49:37): I congratulate the Granville division of the St John Ambulance on its fantastic work to support bushfire-impacted communities over the summer. On 5 January a team of six St John Ambulance members from the Granville division drove down to the Batemans Bay evacuation centre in their two ambulances to assist the local teams who had been working so hard to look after bushfire victims. They also had division members staffing the public information inquiry centre to ensure the local community had the best up-to-date information. This is a perfect illustration of how volunteers across New South Wales were able to band together to support the people in our State who were in need. Congratulations to Granville division Superintendent Isabelle Moutia and her team on their great support of bushfire victims.

MAITLAND ELECTORATE CITIZENSHIP AWARDS

Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland) (19:50:22): I congratulate Maitland Young Citizen of the Year Haley Johns and Citizen of the Year Wilma Lilley on receiving well-earned accolades for their continuing dedication to the Maitland community. Wilma Lilley has volunteered with a range of groups, working with children, vulnerable people living with a disability, the terminally ill and the elderly. Ms Lilley is humbled by the award, but explained it is not the reason she does what she does. For her, volunteering is a healing process. She has volunteered with Lower Hunter Temporary Care and Lower Hunter Peer Support while also serving as a board member of Volunteers for Palliative Care. In addition to this, she is a foundation member of the Rutherford-Telarah Lions Club.

Twenty-one-year old Haley Johns grew up in Gloucester and has been an ambassador for Regional Youth and an Agricultural Societies Council of NSW Next Generation delegate. Ms Johns was also chosen to participate in UNICEF Australia's New South Wales drought summit as well as currently serving as the ambassador for the Young Endeavour Youth Scheme. I met her at the regional zone finals of the Sydney showgirls last week in Tocal. I congratulate both these women on representing the very best of Maitland spirit.

COFFS HARBOUR ELECTORATE BUSHFIRE RELIEF

Mr GURMESH SINGH (Coffs Harbour) (19:51:30): The Coffs Harbour electorate is providing outstanding examples of how support for our bushfire-ravaged communities brings hope. To help the emergency and relief efforts on the Coffs coast, local Coffs Harbour business Nik and She raised \$5,000 in 24 hours by selling 250 raffle tickets online. The store presented \$2,500 to the NSW Rural Fire Service to assist our local brigades and \$2,500 to the Australian Red Cross for local disaster recovery relief. It was a special moment that I was pleased to be a part of. There too were Woolgoolga Red Cross branch secretary and team leader Annette Dodsworth, Woolgoolga Red Cross acting branch president David Dodsworth, cheque presenter Sienna O'Brien, Nik & She owner Pam Williams, Nik and She manager Shelley O'Brien, RFS team manager mid North Coast Superintendent Sean McArdle and zone representative of the Australian Red Cross Judy Jackson.

WORLD CANCER DAY

Ms LIESL TESCH (Gosford) (19:52:34): On World Cancer Day I send love to all the people across New South Wales who have been impacted by cancer. I thank the Cancer Council NSW Central Coast branch, its employees and its amazing volunteers for their work in educating people across the coast and also for its ambassador program. I also thank Gosford and Wyong hospitals, as did the member for Terrigal, for their incredible work in our community, which unfortunately suffers a higher incidence of cancer than other places across the coast. I also thank my predecessor, Kathy Smith, for her work to get the great cancer clinic at Gosford Hospital in place to service the coasties, rather than forcing them down the road to Royal North Shore Hospital. I also thank the McGrath Foundation for its amazing work and commend the work of the Southern Stars women's cricket team, which had a fantastic fundraiser for the foundation wearing pink Hawaiian shirts. The team raised \$5,900, but unfortunately was penalised for its creativity. I wish them all the very best at their tribunal tonight in a bureaucracy that should not exist.

TRANS TASMAN CHALLENGE

Mr MARK TAYLOR (Seven Hills) (19:53:37): The final Trans Tasman Challenge for junior athletics stars was held earlier this year in Auckland, New Zealand, from 9 to 21 January. It was terrific to see so many champions from the North West Metropolitan Zone Athletics teams participate across a variety of categories. Well done to Claire from Kings Langley Little Athletics Centre, Alex and Liam from Hills District Little Athletics and Caitlyn from Winston Hills Little Athletics Centre for competing overseas. The Trans Tasman Challenge has been a fantastic event for Australia and New Zealand's talented future Olympians. The Trans Tasman Challenge allows under-11s and under-12s to compete against each other in sprints, high jump, long jump, discus and shot-put. Thank you to the Little Athletics NSW and the 2020 Trans Tasman Tour committee for facilitating this great sporting event and to local parents Daniel and Nicole for supervising our great local athletes abroad.

MACKILLOP CATHOLIC COLLEGE

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong) (19:54:41): Year 12 student from the Mackillop Catholic College Inaya Beencke and staff member Heidi McCallum raised more than \$5,000 for cancer research for the Cancer Council and Children's Hospital Foundation. The two inspiring and brave women decided to involve their college community by having their heads shaved at the school assembly on 12 December 2019. Together they raised just shy of \$5,500, with Inaya raising \$2,386 on the Everyday Hero website and Heidi raising \$3,127 on the Do It For Cancer website. Both of you have done a fantastic job raising funds for cancer research.

JESSICA SKINNER

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS (Dubbo) (19:55:13): For years, Trangie Central School teacher Jessica Skinner watched teenage boys getting all the chances to play rugby league at the highest level while the girls missed out so she decided to do something about it. Jess started the Western Ram's women's academy, coaching the league tag side for five years before helping the women transition to tackle. In 2018 she received the Country Rugby League and NRL Women in League Achievement Award. Jess's skills were further recognised when she was chosen for an elite coach development program, which culminated in her travelling to Fiji last October as assistant coach of the Australian women's Prime Minister's XIII. Jess has faced many challenges to get where she is today. Sadly, in 2017 her husband, Ryan Selway, died in a car accident, leaving behind Jess and their two children, Tawhiao and Naia. But with the support of Trangie—and a lot of hard work—Jess is now one of Australia's best rugby league coaches and is paving the way for country women to play the sport they love at the highest level. Jess, thank you.

SUPERINTENDENT DANIEL SULLIVAN, APM

Ms JODIE HARRISON (Charlestown) (19:56:13): I am delighted that Superintendent Daniel "Danny" Sullivan, the Police District Commander of the Lake Macquarie Local Area Command, was awarded the Australian Police Medal on Australia Day. The member for Wallsend and I share Superintendent Daniel Sullivan. He came from the Central Coast. He joined the force in 1989 and came to work in the Hunter Region for the first time in the year 2000. He went on to serve in Tuggerah, Sydney and Brisbane Water, after which in 2017 we were extremely fortunate to welcome him to the Lake Macquarie Police District as commander. Superintendent Daniel Sullivan is an accomplished and dedicated police officer with a distinguished career and the people of my electorate are extremely proud of him. He is a man of integrity with a great moral compass who I know enjoys a good run when he is off duty. My staff and I appreciate his close attention to the needs of local people who come to my office for assistance, particularly in relation to youth and domestic violence. I am delighted to recognise him and thank him today.

DOROTHY VICKERY, OAM

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands—Minister for Agriculture and Western New South Wales) (19:57:14): Among the hundreds of Australians recognised on Australia Day in the Australia Day honours list was Guyra legend and community leader Dorothy "Dot" Vickery. She was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia for decades of selfless voluntary service to her local community. There is hardly an event that goes on in Guyra that Dot is not either organising or heavily involved with and attending. She has been a community stalwart in serving multiple terms on the former Guyra Shire Council, her work more recently with The Hub in Guyra and for championing the development of the new age care facility in the community, Kolora, and for serving on its board over many years. One of her greatest achievements, and something of which she is very proud, was participating in the official opening ceremony of that new multimillion-dollar aged-care facility. Dot Vickery is an absolute champion of the Guyra community and is thoroughly deserving of this recognition.

SENIOR CONSTABLE PAUL MATTS

Mr ROY BUTLER (Barwon) (19:58:20): I recognise in the House Senior Constable Paul Matts of Burren Junction. When Paul Matts moved to Burren Junction to become the local policeman he was blown away by the kindness and generosity of the community. From invitations to dinner, helpful removalists and big waves from the local kids, Burren welcomed him warmly to the community. To repay Burren for being so welcoming, Paul in December organised a family fun day for the town. The purpose of the event was twofold: to say thank you and to help people take people's minds off the drought. Paul moved heaven and earth to put on an afternoon and evening of entertainment—from slip'n'slides, to movies, a visit from Santa and a raffle for a family holiday. Burren had it all, thanks to Paul. For that afternoon, the town put the drought to the back of their minds, came together and had a good time. I went along and saw all the smiling faces on the kids who were having a great time. I was a really good afternoon. On behalf of Burren Junction, I say, "Thank you, Senior Constable Paul Matts."

LUDDENHAM UNITING CHURCH

Mrs TANYA DAVIES (Mulgoa) (19:59:19): Last year Luddenham Uniting Church celebrated its 133rd anniversary, with the cemetery also on the church property dating back even earlier. One aspect of the church's cemetery, which has concerned some members, is the number of burial plots known to be unmarked graves. These graves are mainly from the 1800s. The church council and community have always had a desire to preserve the local area's heritage and to foster community development. Due to this commitment to the local area, the church decided to place a memorial in the cemetery that acknowledges past Luddenham people who have been buried there but whose graves are not now marked and there is no documentary record to identify the occupants. The style of the memorial was carefully considered and researched, and a large but simple, rough and undecorated piece of sandstone was used. The monument was dedicated in late November and was attended by many community members. Congratulations to the Luddenham Uniting Church and the Luddenham community for their beautiful act of remembrance.

RAHMA ISLAMIC ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown)—It was an honour and privilege to attend the Rahma Islamic Association of Australia's annual Celebration of Mercy Dinner at Parliament House on 27th November 2019, held to commemorate and celebrate the birth of the Prophet Muhammed (Peace Be Upon Him). I acknowledge the many distinguished guests and dignitaries in attendance, including His Eminence Sheikh Azzam Mesto, Sheikh Youssef El Rich and Sheikh Yahya Safi, as well as Rahma Association President Mr Shady Elriche, and a number of my parliamentary colleagues from across the political divide.

The Rahma Islamic Association is a not-for-profit group that aims to strengthen relations between Muslims and the wider community, building harmony irrespective of religion, ethnicity or gender, and the Celebration of Mercy Dinner is a fantastic demonstration of the strong bonds the association has built in the community over many years. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Rahma Islamic Association of Australia for their kind invitation and their warm hospitality on the night, and I commend the association on its valuable contribution to social harmony and cohesion throughout Australia.

TIMORESE UNITED ASSOCIATION

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool)—I recognise the Timorese United Association Inc, known as TUA. I had the pleasure of attending the inauguration and swearing in of the TUA's new Office Bearers and Management Committee on Sunday December 22 at the Hinchinbrook Community Centre. Also present at the event as invited guests were the Consul General of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste Luciano Valentim Da Conceicao and Councillor Nathan Hagarty representing the Mayor of the City of Liverpool. The Timorese community are a significant component of Liverpool's multicultural fabric. The East Timorese community first arrived in significant numbers in Liverpool after the Indonesian invasion in November 1975. Over time, Liverpool has been home not just to many Timorese, but also to significant Timorese community leaders.

For example, both Jose Ramos Horta and Estanislau da Silva, both at various times senior politician figures in East Timor, made their home in Liverpool. Jose was a Prime Minister and President of Timor Leste. Estanislau was a Minister in the first post-independence and many subsequent governments and for a time was Prime Minister. I should especially acknowledge the outgoing President of TUA, Andre Monteiro and recognise his contribution to the Association and community. I also acknowledge the incoming President, Carlos Pereira whom I've also known for many years and who I wish well.

THE LATE RAY REID OF WOODENBONG

Ms JANELLE SAFFIN (Lismore)—Woodenbong lost one of its most respected citizens, the late Ray Reid, who passed away aged 94 just before Christmas. I offer my sincere condolences to his wife Ivy and their family. Ray Reid was a born community leader, a strong advocate for Woodenbong, a successful farmer, and a true country gentleman. On June 4 last year, Ray and Ivy celebrated their 70th or platinum wedding anniversary. Ivy and her twin sister Marj McMillan opted for a double wedding on June 4, 1949 with Marj marrying George Pethers. Unbelievably, sleet fell on the bridal party when they entered the church as it was snowing on Mount Lindesay. Having known the Reids since the 1990s, there were few community committees which they didn't volunteer to serve on. They have a deep connection with the rural sector including the Royal Easter Show and the EKKA. Ray and Ivy were both awarded Kyogle Citizen of the Year. Ray received the Prime Minister's Medal for service to communities of the Upper Richmond and Upper Clarence areas. Ray's community spirit was still very evident when he and Ivy attended my community consultation at Woodenbong Police Station late last year.

GLENMORE PARK BRUMBIES

Mrs TANYA DAVIES (Mulgoa)—I would like to acknowledge the Glenmore Park Brumbies Junior Rugby League team and their recent trip to the island nation of Samoa for a cultural tour. The Glenmore Park Under 13's Division 1 team travelled to Samoa late last year for nine days exploring the beautiful South Pacific island, mingling with village communities and playing rugby league. The club were able to participate in many activities such as playing two games of rugby league against Samoan schools, visiting a church, helping out local villages and immersing themselves in the local sights.

These activities helped the boys understand how little the Samoan community live with, down to the children playing Rugby League without shoes. Thankfully the team had come prepared as prior to the trip, the group had done a large boot and clothing collection that they then gifted to the local children. The Brumbies have a significant connection with Samoa as many players over the years come from a Samoan heritage. Through this experience, the team learnt valuable lessons of culture and friendship, strengthening their bond and team spirit. Well done Glenmore Park Brumbies!

PAUL HEALY

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes)—I rise to inform the house of the wonderful work that local Paul Healy has contributed towards our local community with basketball. Mr Healy has been part of the Taree Community. Paul has been a part of Basketball in Taree since the booms of the late 80's and early 90's and post his playing career, Paul became heavily involved in the refereeing and the Administration side of Basketball in the area. Early in December 2019 Paul was recognised for his long service at Basketball NSW at Homebush. I thank Paul for this service for our area and for Basketball NSW.

BUSHFIRES

Mr GREG WARREN (Campbelltown)—The bushfires throughout our state have devastated many communities. Both lives and properties have been lost in the blazes that have wreaked havoc throughout NSW. I have visited many of the areas including in Wollondilly and Wingecarribee, up in the state's far North Coast, The Hunter region, The Snowy Valleys and along the south coast. What I saw was traumatic and tragic. There were: homes in a smouldering, crumbled heap; locals left pondering 'what next'; businesses destroyed; and wildlife decimated. The sight is something you have to see with your own eyes to truly believe. However, in the face of adversity, I also saw the best of human nature. There were volunteers who banded together to fight the fires; aided in recovery; and gave grief-stricken locals a much-needed shoulder to lean and cry on. Returning to 'normality' will be a long and arduous process for many, while some may never actually get there. The scale of devastation caused by the fires will never be forgotten, but neither will the selfless acts of those brave and dedicated volunteers.

INGLEBURN VIEW CLUB

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG (Macquarie Fields)—Across Australia there are approximately 300 View Clubs with over 17,000 members. VIEW was established in 1960 and stands for Voice, Interests and Entertainment of Women. VIEW raises much-needed money to support the education of disadvantaged children by helping to fund the Smith Family's education programs. VIEW also sponsors more than 1350 Learning for Life students. In 2017-2018, VIEW members raised over \$1 million to support the Smith Family. Recently I visited my local Ingleburn VIEW Club. They are a tremendous group of ladies who have a lot of fun together and share much laughter. The Ingleburn Club also support the Learning for Life program by sponsoring two students. At the meeting I addressed the VIEW members on '7 Lessons My Mother Taught Me'. After I spoke I gave the floor to the VIEW members for them to share their wisdom and experiences with me. Suffice to say I came away from the lunch a lot wiser and with a lot to think about. I commend the Ingleburn VIEW club for its tremendous work and wish them every success in the future.

JOHN SMITH

Mrs HELEN DALTON (Murray)—Mr Speaker, Today I would like to recognise and congratulate John Smith of Coleambally. John joined the Coleambally Rural Fire Service in 1976 after being drawn to the vintage 1926 Dennis Fire Engine which he saw sitting in front of the brigade shed. In 1977 John became captain then group captain in 1992. He is gradually taking steps back from the brigade and now holds the position of Deputy Captain. John has travelled to help fight a large number of bushfires including the Black Saturday bushfires and the fires in the Blue Mountains. John has also been at the forefront of promoting services to the younger members of our community, ensuring the brigade always had young members by overseeing the cadet program at the Coleambally Central School. His dedication to engage 14, 15 and 16 year olds in the cadetship has been enormous with many of those he taught going on to help services across the State. John's tremendous dedication and hard work was recognised by the Coleambally Rural Fire Service when he was awarded life membership.

CLOSE

Mr ALEX GREENWICH (Sydney)—On behalf of the Sydney Electorate, I'd like to recognise the successful campaign for a new inner city high school by CLOSE - Community for Local Options for Secondary Education. This year saw the first students at this new school in Cleveland Street, on the site that CLOSE identified. More students will join as the building advances and new classes are added. After my election to Parliament, I worked with CLOSE to raise community concerns about the lack of places for inner city students at public high schools. CLOSE showed the increasing need, built community support and advocated for government investment in a new school.

The campaign met with and informed decision makers, contributed to the Inner City Schools Working Party, made sure that families contributed to the consultation, and energised families to look ahead, get involved and push for action. I acknowledge in particular key people in CLOSE like Skye Molyneux, Maggie Wojciechowska, Licia Heath and Isabel McIntosh. Thanks also to Lord Mayor Clover Moore and the City of Sydney for supporting the community's need for schools and education. CLOSE members should be very proud of this success and I commend this outstanding campaign.

BARELLAN CLYDESDALES

Ms STEPH COOKE (Cootamundra)—Mr Speaker, I am delighted to hear that the mighty Barellan Clydesdale team and wool wagon will be filmed as a promotional tool for the upcoming Sydney Royal Easter Show. Following the success of the 2019 Barellan Good Old Days Festival, which I had the honour of officially opening, the Barellan Working Clydesdales have been invited to the 2020 Sydney Royal Easter Show. Each morning and afternoon these magnificent working heavy horses will do a lap of the showground promoting Australia's pioneering heritage. Congratulations to Bruce Bandy, chairman of the Barellan Working Clydesdales committee for taking up the opportunity to promote Barellan.

NSW COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD FOR NORMAN DIXON

Mr LEE EVANS (Heathcote)—I was honoured to present Woronora Valley resident Mr Norman Dixon with a NSW Community Service Award, with his beautiful wife Betty and children joining for the special occasion. For many decades Mr Dixon has been an extremely active member of the community. He is passionate about serving his community and protecting the natural environment. He has been a voice advocating for issues at the heart of his community and worked closely with residents, Sutherland Shire Council and State Government. He has achieved positive outcomes and united the community which was recognised when he received an OAM.

He has been involved with many community groups including the Woronora Valley Association which he continues to chair and manage as he has done for the last 40 years, Woronora Bush Fire Brigade, Sutherland Shire Environment Centre and orchestrated many successful campaigns. He is widely respected by the community for his tremendous contribution and service over the years and is truly deserving of this award. Special mention and thank you to his daughter Marelle for her assistance with nominating him for this award!

LOST IN BOOKS FAIRFIELD

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield)—It's always a delight to attend Lost in Books Fairfield whose ongoing contributions and dedication to providing frontline support is second to none. I had the great opportunity to have attended Lost in Book's end of year 'Sundowner Thank You Drinks' where participants, volunteers, staff and community members joined together in celebration of everything Lost in Books has achieved in recent years. The passionate and committed staff and volunteers at Lost in Books give their all while providing ongoing support to vulnerable individuals within our community while offering members of the community a safe space to learn, grow and express themselves.

The commitment Lost in Books shows for our multicultural community was exemplified by a traditional mouth-watering Fairfield feast, which not only catered to individuals with dietary requirements, but the food was so culturally diverse, you could get a taste for food from just about every corner of the globe. To everyone at Lost in Books, thank you so much for everything you do for our community. Your contributions to our region are invaluable and we all look forward to seeing what this year has in store for Lost in Books.

MICHAEL DRUCE, PSM

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Attorney General, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence)—I congratulate Michael Druce for receiving the Public Service Medal (PSM) on Australia Day. This award acknowledges outstanding service by employees of Australian governments. He was recognised for his 40 years commitment to nuclear medicine production. Mr Druce is Principal Technical Consultant at the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) and has led critical improvements to the large-scale production of radioisotopes for medical imaging. In 2006, Mr Druce oversaw the development and

installation of the nuclear medicine processing plant which coincided with the operation of the new OPAL reactor, doubling its capacity. Mr Druce also played a crucial role in Australia's development of the advanced manufacturing of molybdenum-99, the precursor to the technetium-99m, which is used widely to diagnose cancers, heart disease and other conditions.

TERRACE NOVOCASTRIA TEDDY BEAR TOSS

Ms SONIA HORNER (WallSEND)—Congratulations to Terrace Novocastria for organising the "Teddy Bear Toss" before the Newcastle Jets vs Melbourne City game on 15 December 2019. It was organised in just five days, inspired by a similar event held in the Netherlands by Feyenoord Football Club. Terrace Novocastria thought that if it could work in Rotterdam, why not in Newcastle? The Jets got involved, and before long even Santa was in on it, doing a fly-by in the Westpac Rescue Helicopter.

More than 1200 teddy bears and other stuffed toys were donated and were tossed onto the field before the game. The toys were collected and then distributed to local hospitals and charities to help out ahead of Christmas, including Nova for Women and Children Refuge, Hunter White Ribbon Committee, Zara's House, Ronald McDonald House and John Hunter Children's Hospital. After such a difficult year for so many, it was great to see. My congratulations and thanks to Paul Turner, Adam Martin, Matt Vandenberg, Andy Haydon, Hayden Brien, Lawrie McKenna, Joel Griffiths, Mark Scoles and Jackson Fulmer for organising the wonderful event. And thanks also to Westpac Rescue Helicopter CEO Richard Jones.

2019 BAYSIDE BUSINESS AWARDS

Mr CHRIS MINNS (Kogarah)—In the Kogarah electorate we are lucky to have some fantastic local businesses that create a vibrant commercial environment and provide employment for thousands of local people. That's why I am pleased to support the local business in the Kogarah electorate that received an Award at the most recent Bayside Business Awards last month. There were a number of award categories to be won on the evening and there was a strong amount of competition between the nominees, with some wonderful local businesses on display.

It was a great opportunity to recognise businesses that have excelled in their field and made a positive contribution to the Bayside area. Our community is better because of the success and commitment of the people own these businesses together with the hard working people they employ. The winners from the Kogarah electorate were IT Super Store, who won Excellence in Retail; and Guardian Funerals who won Excellence in Service and Trade. I congratulate all the businesses and individuals nominated, especially the successful recipients of the 2019 Bayside Business Awards.

EPPIING PUBLIC SCHOOL UPGRADE

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET (Epping—Treasurer)—Last week, I attended the official opening of the Stage 1 Upgrade to Epping Public School with the Premier and the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning. I was pleased to be able to showcase one of the great schools in the Epping electorate. A highlight for me was meeting school captains Yeri Lee and Nicholas Hanich, and hearing about what the upgrade will mean for them and their friends.

The upgrade includes 22 new permanent teaching spaces, a new library, an upgrade to core facilities and special education rooms, and a conversion of existing teaching space to new administration space. Construction began in 2018 and was opened in time for Day 1 of Term 1, 2020. This project takes the initiative in alleviating unprecedented pressure arising from the significant growth of the local population. This project also supports the great teaching, support and administrative staff under Principal John Ford's leadership, and Stage 2 will come with significant improvements to staff facilities. The school community have been with us every step of the way with this project. I thank them for their patience and with them, I look forward to Stage 2.

FAREWELL DR PETER LENNOX OF REDLANDS

Ms FELICITY WILSON (North Shore)—At the end of 2019, Redlands farewellled Principal Dr Peter Lennox after twelve years. During his time at Redlands, Dr Lennox has seen both Junior and Senior Campuses undergo major redevelopments, and can be incredibly proud of the learning and development program which has allowed Redlands students to excel academically. After 46 years of teaching and being a school leader, I would like to wish the very best for Dr Lennox in his retirement where I am sure he will spend his time with family and friends.

Dr Lennox has now handed over management of the school to Stephen Webber who is joining the school from Perth, where he has been Headmaster of Guildford Grammar School for the past nine years. Throughout his career Stephen has fostered a culture of academic rigour and continuous improvement to curriculum programs,

while supporting teaching excellence to meet the learning needs of students. I know that Stephen will build upon the legacy that Dr Lennox has built during his time at Redlands, and wish him all the best in his new position.

BYRON SHIRE CITIZEN OF THE YEAR 2020—HELEN HAMILTON

Ms TAMARA SMITH (Ballina)—I congratulate Helen Hamilton on winning the Byron Shire's 2020 Citizen of the Year Award for her service to the community. Helen was President of Liberation Larder for nine years, building an 80-strong team of volunteers and working alongside them to provide hot meals and food for people in need.

She organised and raised money for the not-for-profit organisation that operates from the Byron Community Centre, including enlisting tradespeople and businesses to provide in-kind labour and fittings to upgrade the kitchen. In 2018/19 Liberation Larder served 23,405 meals and delivered 1200 food boxes to homes, showing an extraordinary level of service to those people in the community who are finding the going tough. Helen developed a support base of local businesses who donate unused produce including supermarkets, restaurants and the weekly Farmers Market, who together contributed more than 20,000 food donations last financial year.

LAURIE BARBER AWARDED OAM

Mrs LESLIE WILLIAMS (Port Macquarie)—I rise to recognise proud Rotarian and former Port News editor Laurie Barber for being awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM). Acknowledged for his inspirational service and commitment to a number of service organisations in Port Macquarie, Laurie has dedicated much of his life helping others including volunteering at Meals on Wheels, serving as a Board Member of Australian Rotary Health supporting health research, humanitarian projects in Tanna repairing schools and the list goes on.

Laurie was the past president of the Rotary Club of Port Macquarie and Past District Governor of Rotary District 9650, guiding the cluster of clubs in delivering outcomes for their respective communities and was inducted as a Paul Harris Fellow. During his 23 year career as a journalist for the Port News, Laurie worked in various roles for the paper and in 1995 continued his love for writing by publishing a weekly newspaper column called My Word, to encourage a greater appreciation of language. As a fellow Rotarian I am proud to recognise Laurie Barber for his instrumental contribution to our community, someone that truly represents Rotary's example of 'Service above Self'.

POLICE AREA COMMANDER'S CERTIFICATE OF COMMENDATION

Ms ELENi PETINOS (Miranda)—I acknowledge two extraordinary civilians from the Miranda electorate who recently received a Certificate of Commendation from the Sutherland Shire Police Area Commander, Superintendent Jason Box. William Sadler and Hayden Garn were recognised for performing CPR on a heart attack victim at Jannali in August 2018. The pair alternated in performing CPR until ambulance officers arrived at the scene and were able to restart the victim's heart. Whilst the man sadly never regained consciousness and passed away 10 days later, William and Hayden's commendable efforts allowed his family members the opportunity to say goodbye.

Neither recipient is a stranger to serving our community with William recently celebrating 50 years of service as a Justice of the Peace, and Hayden serving as the President of the Como Jannali Junior Rugby League Football Club. With both men consistently dedicating their own time to serving our community, it is no surprise that they applied such a tremendous effort to save a life. I commend both William and Hayden for their brave efforts and thank them for their continued contribution to our community.

HIDDEN TREASURES OF ORANGE

Mr PHILIP DONATO (Orange)—Speaker, I wish to recognise the seven outstanding women of the Orange electorate nominated for the 2019 Hidden Treasures Honour Roll. These ladies are the backbone of our rural communities and have volunteered themselves and their time over many years to benefit others, neither seeking credit nor wanting any accolade. They're all humble individuals who have a love of their community and genuinely wish to help others. Thank you to our Hidden Treasures; Pamela Bell of Peak Hill, Terese Gunn of Forbes, Betty Newstead of Molong, Cassandra Tyack of Wirrinya, Rhonda Watt of Cumnock, Karryn Keed of Peak Hill and Helen Karrasch of Orange. These 2019 Hidden Treasures of the Orange electorate whose names will now be inscribed on the honour roll, along with 71 other ladies recognised from across NSW. It was an honour and a privilege to recognise these outstanding ladies in a presentation ceremony I hosted on 17th January 2020 at Forbes. It was fitting to hold this event at the local Country Women's Association hall, a highly respected and valued organisation founded on women contributing to their rural communities.

EXTINCTION REBELLION SILENT VIGIL

Ms JENNY LEONG (Newtown)—I draw the attention of this parliament to the Extinction Rebellion silent vigil being held outside the gates of the NSW Parliament this morning and every morning this week. The silent vigil aims to remind all MPs entering and exiting that the people we represent want climate action now. The vigil is being organised by Extinction Rebellion Sydney which are the local branch of the international movement that is growing rapidly and uses nonviolent civil disobedience to attempt to halt the mass extinction which is occurring as a result of climate change.

I had the chance to meet and talk to the attendees of the vigil this morning and see their signs which point out that climate change is a top concern for people in our community and that climate inaction will result in environmental and economic disaster. This vigil and other nonviolent direct actions by Extinction Rebellion are crucial actions to ensure that those in charge cannot ignore the climate crisis and the urgent need to act. I commend the activists outside for their courage and determination – and the hundreds of thousands of other rebels in NSW and across the globe for their leadership.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to standing and sessional orders, at 20:04
until Wednesday 5 February 2020 at 09:30.**