



New South Wales

Legislative Assembly

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD)

**Fifty-Seventh Parliament
First Session**

Wednesday, 5 February 2020

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Announcements.....	1863
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.....	1863
Beyond Duty Exhibition	1863
Employee Assistance Program	1863
Notices	1863
Presentation.....	1863
Motions	1863
Bushfires	1863
Committees	1888
Committee on the Independent Commission Against Corruption	1888
Reports	1888
Public Accounts Committee	1890
Reports	1890
Visitors.....	1892
Visitors	1892
Members	1892
Representation of Ministers Absent During Questions	1892
Question Time.....	1892
Bushfires Inquiry	1892
Bushfire Recovery Assistance	1893
Bushfires Inquiry	1894
Bushfire Recovery Assistance	1895
Bushfires and Defence Force Assistance	1896
Bushfire Recovery Assistance	1897
Bushfires and Defence Force Assistance	1899
Bushfires	1900
Bushfires and Wildlife	1901
Bushfires and Schools.....	1902
Documents	1902
Inspector of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission	1902
Reports	1902
Petitions.....	1903
Petitions Received.....	1903
Motions	1903
Bushfires	1903
Community Recognition Statements	1967
Thanking Care One Care All Group	1967
Joseph George Khoury OAM	1967
Pisey Fischer	1967
Bronte Taylor	1967

TABLE OF CONTENTS—*continuing*

Superintendent Daniel Sullivan, APM.....	1968
Australia Day	1968
Australia Day, Camden.....	1968
Rajesh Venkataramaiah	1968
Kyogle Councillor Lindsay Passfield	1969
Order of Australia Recipients in Wollondilly.....	1969
101st Birthday Celebrations for Albert Le-Merton and Agnes Borg	1969
Bob Fitzgerald Volunteer of the Year 2019.....	1969
Jaimee-Lee Woolfe	1969
Pauline James OAM	1970
Environmental Project of the Year – Linda Sparrow, Bangalow Koalas	1970
Ian "trunky" Troy.....	1970
Dunns Road Fire Response.....	1970
The Men's Table.....	1971
Ryan Mcparland.....	1971
Bruce Kimberley.....	1971
Graduation Mass and Awards- St Joseph's Oatley	1971
Vca Bush Fire Appeal.....	1972
Australia Day 2020	1972
Eastlakes University of the Third Age Twentieth Birthday.....	1972
NSW Community Service Award Jack Abernethy.....	1972
Marie Ficarra OAM	1972
Sutherland Shire Environmental Citizen of the Year	1973
Dance @ Sj	1973
Local Country Legend Blake O'Connor Wins Gold Guitar.....	1973
Cowra Beach Party	1973
Cranbrook Senior School Masterplan Renewal Project – Sod Turning	1973
Newtown Sustainability Projects	1974
Cass Hua Xing Activity Group 15th Anniversary Celebration	1974

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 5 February 2020

The Speaker (The Hon. Jonathan Richard O'Dea) took the chair at 09:30.

The Speaker read the prayer and acknowledgement of country.

Announcements

CLERK OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The SPEAKER: The Clerk was away yesterday and is away again today due to a family illness. Thank you to those who were interested and were wondering. The Clerk is well and probably will be back tomorrow.

BEYOND DUTY EXHIBITION

The SPEAKER: There has been quite a bit of interest in the *Beyond Duty* exhibition in the Fountain Court at Parliament House, which was organised through the Jewish Board of Deputies. On Monday evening I attended its launch. For members who have not already had a chance to see it, the exhibition is thoroughly worthwhile. It acknowledges the remarkable contribution of diplomats who have been designated as Righteous Among the Nations for their roles in saving Jews during the Holocaust. I recommend it.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The SPEAKER: In the context of the bushfire condolence motion today, it is apt to remind members that the Parliament of New South Wales Employee Assistance Program is available for professional and confidential counselling and support to members, staff and their families. Today from 1.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. organisational psychologist Sharon Bent, who is known to many members, will be on site to provide potential personal assistance to members, or to discuss any support or strategies for members and their staff in helping their electorates. That is just one of a number of arrangements that are available not only freely but also flexibly in regional areas as needed. [*During the giving of notices of motions*]

Notices

PRESENTATION

The SPEAKER: The Clerk will stop the clock. I have foreshadowed the introduction of a standing order to impose a 30-second time limit on members when giving notice of a motion. That has not yet been introduced. However, I remind members to be concise. I ask the member for North Shore to not interject during the giving of notices of motion.

Motions

BUSHFIRES

Debate resumed from 4 February 2020.

Dr JOE MCGIRR (Wagga Wagga) (09:48:20): Tragedy, gratitude, recovery and healing—these are the themes I will speak about in support of the motion moved by the Premier. I express my sympathy to those who have lost family, friends and people they know in the bushfires; those who have sustained injuries; and those who have lost homes, beloved pets, stock, property, land and livelihoods. I acknowledge the contributions on this motion made by my parliamentary colleagues, particularly the member for Prospect and the member for Bega. I will focus mainly on the impact across the electorate I represent, within the Snowy Valleys Council and the Wagga Wagga City Council areas. The communities in my electorate include Laurel Hill, Green Hills, Yaven Creek, Wondalga, Adelong, Talbingo, Batlow, Oberne Creek, Kunama, Gilmore Valley, Tumut and surrounding areas. I offer my sympathies, my most humble prayers and my ongoing thoughts.

First I will speak of the tragedy and the devastation. My condolences go out to the families and friends of the 25 bushfire victims across New South Wales, including three NSW Rural Fire Service volunteers and in particular to the loved ones of David Harrison, who died in Batlow on Saturday 4 January. The 47-year-old was helping to defend his friend's Snowy Valleys property on that fateful day. Despite being urged to leave before the fire hit the small Snowy Valleys town Mr Harrison stayed, refusing to abandon his mate. When he failed to return from a water run, a search found him already unconscious. He had suffered a suspected heart attack and could not be revived. According to Mr Harrison's brothers, the Goulburn man was a favourite uncle to his nieces and nephews and would be missed by all who knew him. Words cannot express the sorrow of such a tragedy.

To the family, friends and especially the NSW Rural Fire Service colleagues of Samuel McPaul, Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer I also wish to share my heartfelt sorrow. I acknowledge the moving tribute given yesterday by the member for Prospect. My heart goes out to everyone affected by those losses. Every volunteer and member of an emergency service working on the front lines puts the lives and wellbeing of others before their own. We stand with you as you mourn the loss of your comrades. I also offer my sympathies to those who have lost their homes and property across the State and in particular across my electorate. As bricks and mortar go up in flames, so too burn years' worth of treasured memories, plans, hopes and dreams for the future; so too burn businesses, livelihoods and legacies. While they can never be replaced, it is critical that we help rebuild. While their lives may be forever altered, we must stand with them as they forge a fresh future.

I want to recap some of the statistics of the bushfires that affected my electorate. Today marks the twenty-ninth day of active firefighting across the Wagga Wagga electorate. As of Monday the Dunns Road fire, which began following a lightning strike on 28 December, burned through 333,940 hectares. This includes over 125,000 hectares of national park, more than 92,000 hectares of State forest and 113,000 hectares of private land. But I want to speak about the communities affected because those figures do not capture the trauma, particularly in the towns. If we look on a Rural Fire Service map of the electorate we will see a large area of black. That is the burnt area. In the middle of that we will see a couple of white spots. They represent the towns of Talbingo and Batlow.

As the blaze forged a path around Batlow on 4 January, I believe there was a deep scepticism that the town would survive. I was very grateful to receive a text of support from the Premier on that day. I remember a discussion that evening with the people in the operations centre, who believed that the town would not survive. But the work of the firefighters, the community members who chose to stay and the volunteers kept the flames from passing through the town. Although I am advised that close to 50 homes have been lost there, the town has survived. I was able to visit Batlow the very day after, with my upper House parliamentary colleague Wes Fang. The scene was extraordinary. We drove in through a smoke-filled horizon of burnt trees and of scorched, dying and dead stock. There was no noise, there were no birds; it was just smoke and ash.

When we arrived at the town, we saw that the service station and old hospital had been burnt. But people were there; people had stayed. They had defended the town and it was intact. People's emotions were pretty raw. The firefighters were absolutely dazed; they could hardly speak. And yet the people who lost houses, the people who survived the windows blowing in on them, the people who survived the fires coming up to their doors, who pushed the embers landing on their front verandas back into the garden to save the town, were still helping others. Despite the trauma there was a sense of hope. I will never forget the courage of the people I met nor my gratitude to them.

The next day I went to Talbingo, a town that was believed to be protected because there was a large property with relatively clear ground surrounding it. But something happened that the residents had never witnessed before. They told me that it was like a tornado of fire. It came down across the Jounama Pondage and consumed an entire hillside in minutes. One resident told me that the noise was like standing next to a jet airliner as it takes off, but 10 times worse. Through a miracle change of wind as well as the efforts of the residents, the fire reached parts of Talbingo but did not consume it. The town survived. The firefighters and residents saved it from the fire. Only six homes were lost that day. Remarkably, the Snowy Hydro Tumut 3 power station survived, despite the fact that that firestorm rolled down the hill and nearly consumed it.

Adelong also came under threat, losing power just as the flames cruelly licked within metres of the town, stopping just short of the cemetery. Thanks to the work of the NSW RFS and emergency service volunteers as well as the use of fire retardant, the flames were diverted around the town. When you drive into Adelong you will be gobsmacked that the town survived because the burnt area on either side of the road comes right up to the town. I acknowledge the community of Oberne, who were among the first to deal with the fire when it took a run on New Year's Eve and who have finally now received the disaster classification they need to rebuild. Within the week that followed the Dunns Road fire merged with the then East Ournie Creek blaze, which had earlier joined with the 233,000 hectare Green Valley fire. That is the mega fire that continues today.

On the worst days there were upwards of 400 service personnel on the ground battling those fires and supporting the firefighters. They were backed up by more than 100 pieces of heavy plant machinery and aviation teams. More than 182 houses across the Snowy Valleys Council area were destroyed by mid-January, along with 446 facilities and 570 outbuildings. On-farm losses and the heartbreaking deaths of thousands of farm animals, beloved pets and wildlife bring those figures into perspective. It is hard to quantify or describe the impact of the devastating economic, physical, social and emotional wounds that people are suffering from. On top of all of that, there is an impact on our forestry industry, which will take 20 to 30 years to recover. There will be an effort to salvage blackwood, which will result in an increased workload for the next 12 to 18 months but after that will come the challenge of finding jobs to allow those industries to continue.

At Batlow the apple orchard growers face a combined loss of one-third of their produce, with almost 30 per cent of their 900 hectares lost. It will take seven to nine years for that land to recover. Then, of course, there is the impact on tourism and seasonal trade. January is often the month that makes the year for many businesses. Now that is gone, replaced by ashes. My condolences go out to those involved in seasonal trade industries and those who will continue to feel the effects of this catastrophe for years to come. When we visit those communities we barely have to scratch the surface to realise the impact on people. While walking through the streets of those towns the aftershock experienced by the residents is palpable and one word can bring people to tears.

Last week I was at the RSL club in Batlow having a discussion about an aspect of the recovery process when a lady came up to me, looked at me and burst into tears. She had not lost property but she is part of a group that lives with a constant sense of overwhelming anxiety, uncertainty and hopelessness, punctuated by episodes of terror. Those feelings are experienced by people in my electorate and, of course, all the other electorates that suffered the fires. For many, this trauma will trigger depression, guilt, shame and grief. I do not believe there is one person in New South Wales who has not been affected, but many in my electorate have been very badly affected. We need to put health and wellbeing first in our efforts.

From the ashes of tragedy comes camaraderie, heroism, and stories of courage and sacrifice. This was an unprecedented catastrophe that shocked the world. Some 5.4 million hectares have burnt, which is almost four times more than the previous worst season this century and the season is not finished yet. But it could have been much worse. In moments, firestorms created their own weather and engulfed entire hillsides. The land's red demon roared and terrorised even the most hardened, but our brave working heroes denied this fire monster more carnage, and I thank them. Firstly, I thank the volunteers who battled the blazes in this hell on earth. Many of the Rural Fire Service brigades and SES units across my electorate had been sending staff across the State months before. When they were called on to defend their own homes they were supported by firefighters from across the State. I particularly acknowledge the leaders of those brigades, Captain John Scott in Talbingo and Daryl Watkins in Batlow.

In addition to the exemplary work of the many thousands of New South Wales firefighters across the Riverina regions and the State, there were supporting members and staff. I acknowledge the interagency partners, including Fire and Rescue NSW, Forestry Corporation, National Parks and Wildlife Service and the emergency and fire services of Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Canada. Local agencies also supported the overall firefighting effort. I acknowledge the New South Wales police that organised the operation centres, particularly the efforts of Steve Radford and his team in Tumut and Bob Noble and the team in Wagga. The operation of those centres often goes unnoticed but it is absolutely critical to the coordination of all the emergency services. I acknowledge the very real contribution that they have made.

I acknowledge New South Wales Ambulance, NSW State Emergency Service, Hume Forests and the Australian Defence Force. In particular, I thank and acknowledge the role played by the Snowy Valleys Council including Mayor James Hayes, Deputy Mayor John Larter, general manager Matthew Hyde, councillors and staff who were under enormous pressure through the holiday period. They responded with courage and grace and kept the confidence of the community. The work that happens in the background is really important. The combined efforts during the Dunns Road fire meant that 774 houses, 286 facilities and more than 1,600 outbuildings were untouched. We have much to be grateful for. People responded and supported the evacuation centres and countless volunteers and members of charities supported those people who had to evacuate their homes.

I acknowledge the Red Cross, Anglicare, Salvation Army as well as chaplains and counsellors, disaster welfare officers and representatives from the Department of Communities and Justice, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Department of Primary Industries and Local Land Services. I acknowledge Charles Sturt University staff and volunteers who did an outstanding job looking after the pets and animals in the region, including horses. I acknowledge the role of health staff from the Murrumbidgee Local Health District and people from Sydney who came to assist. I acknowledge Karen Murray from Kildare Catholic College, her team of volunteers and those who supported other centres where donations were taken such as in Tumut and Batlow. I acknowledge the role played by local media, the ABC and emergency services.

I acknowledge the Wagga Wagga City Council for quickly and wholeheartedly responding to calls for help and assisting in the setup of the evacuation centre at the Wagga Equex Centre. It operated very effectively. Mayor James Hayes has spoken about the ongoing support Wagga Wagga City Council provided to Snowy Valleys Council. The evacuation centre assisted more than 1,200 residents and their pets who sought refuge. Almost everyone who arrived came with a pet. I must say, I know pets are important to people but I had not really appreciated how important until this time. When you take in your car all that may be left with you as well as your pet, it shows it is an important part of your life. Providing care for those animals was absolutely

critically important. I am pleased to say that the local animal services did an outstanding job, supported by Charles Sturt University and its team.

Family and Community Services representative Donna Argus described the numbness of families and individuals who came to the Wagga Equex Centre. I thank the staff who manned that centre. It was a place of comfort and respite for people who were suffering the dislocation of leaving their homes with limited possessions. On many days as I sat in that centre it was cool and people were patient and calm. It was a place where people could talk to others and work through some of their anxieties and issues. I think it was a really important service. Perhaps not all evacuation centres have worked well, but I acknowledge that while this one operated it seemed to provide an important place. I recognise the courage and strength of the men, women and children I met who came from all across the electorate as well as from Tumbarumba.

I also acknowledge the donations of goods, money and time that came from people across the electorate, particularly Wagga Wagga. I have simply been blown away by that generosity, compassion and kindness. Never before have I witnessed so many neighbours and strangers coming together to help each other. I know other members have talked about how important this has been in bringing community together. Throughout all of January a person could not walk into a store or down the street without someone saying the words "stay safe". I thank everyone for standing by each other and looking out for each other.

I thank Premier Gladys Berejiklian for her leadership and support, which I very much appreciated. I acknowledge and thank Deputy Premier John Barilaro, the Minister responsible for disaster recovery, who was also responsive and provided support. I acknowledge the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, David Elliott; and health Minister, Brad Hazzard, who contacted me early on and responded very quickly with sending support staff to the region. I also acknowledge the Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services, Gareth Ward; Parliamentary Secretary to the Deputy Premier, Steph Cooke; my upper House colleague Wes Fang; the Leader of the Opposition, Jodi McKay; as well as the shadow Minister for Industry and Trade, Mick Veitch; the member for Wollongong, Paul Scully; and the member for Albury, Justin Clancy.

I pay tribute to the member for Lakemba, Jihad Dib. In the middle of all this he organised, with a group of Islamic charities, two van-loads of supplies to go to Adelong. The mayor and I met him there at about nine o'clock on a Monday night. They had driven straight from Sydney through some horrific traffic. To me it was a wonderful illustration of the Australia that we live in. Those communities from the city are so different in cultural background to the communities of Adelong and those residents in the BlazeAid camp. I thank BlazeAid for what it is doing. In a way it was communities of the new Australia and the old Australia coming together to help each other. In the midst of Islamic prayers and eating old-fashioned Country Women's Association cakes and slices, we unloaded the vans. They then drove back to Sydney and I do not think they returned until the early hours of the morning. I recognise and thank them for that moment of outreach. I also thank those who checked in with me to offer their support during the worst of the catastrophe. [*Extension of time*]

I finally speak about healing and recovery. Communities can be repaired. They can rebuild and they can be stronger than before. It is important that this fervour that we have seen during this time is maintained throughout the tough months and years to come. As life moves on and media interest fades, our communities will still be struggling. They will be struggling economically because this has been a real deep cut. The communities I represent will feel the economic effects for decades. It will take years to rebuild tourism and agricultural industries. However, we have to think in terms of decades for the orchards of Batlow and the softwood industry.

People will be struggling psychologically because they know the time it will take for scars to heal, but I believe hope is the key. We must provide hope and that means early action, quick action and responsive action. I am pleased with the speed of the appointment of the Recovery Coordinator for Southern NSW, Dick Adams, and the early work and visits of his team. I also recognise and applaud the visits by the Premier, the Deputy Premier, Ministers and the Leader of the Opposition. In particular, I acknowledge the work of the Deputy Premier who has been active and responsive in addressing concerns after quickly grasping the issues we face. But there is much to do and I wish to speak briefly about some of the key issues.

Delays in the clearance and clean-up process will impact on people's wellbeing. I support the coordinated process that has been announced: It will remove the cost from owners and ensure the safest possible outcome. But let us not delay because delay will cause more grief. That is the message I have received loud and clear from the communities. They want to get on with it. We can give them all the counselling they like, but until that physical change is made and debris is cleared away to begin rebuilding, counselling will not work. However, counselling is important. There is a need for an on-the-ground coordinated effort to continue counselling from the ground up.

There seems to be a willingness among agencies and people to work together at the different levels of government. I acknowledge the efforts of the Murrumbidgee Local Health District in this regard and the health system and the counselling support they have received. As I have said, I acknowledge the quick action of the

Minister for Health and Medical Research, but I believe that this needs to be ongoing. I believe that communities will be better supported if there is an on-the-ground coordination of State agencies from the ground up. I have spoken to the recovery coordinator about this and I would like the Government to consider it. I must also say that we need to ensure that our schools have the support they need because they are the hubs of small communities. We will often see the effects on young people so the provision of ongoing support for children and their teachers is critical. I know a counsellor has been appointed to Batlow for four weeks full time. That is excellent. I would like to see that continue because it is important for the community.

Tourism has been spoken about and I add my voice to supporting this. A season has been lost and often that means the loss of revenue that businesses would have relied on for the year. We need to consider innovative ways of bringing visitors back to our region. Initiatives such as providing project offices to assist with local events will be a great help. I know that the Snowy Valleys Council is looking to do that with the Batlow Ciderfest. Encouragingly, when the Batlow Ciderfest organisers announced that the event would be going ahead this year, they got 41,000 hits in one day on their Facebook page. That is great support. Industry support will be vital in my electorate. It will be critical of course that the Government continues to support agriculture and develops and funds packages of support for the softwood and apple orchard industries. I want members to know that the Batlow apple is Australia's best-known apple brand. It is internationally recognised for its quality.

Ms Gabrielle Upton: And they taste good too.

Dr JOE McGIRR: They taste good; we cannot lose the Batlow apple. Despite that one-third of the orchards are gone we must develop a scheme to preserve and enhance that industry. Finally I will talk about the inquiry. I applaud the Government for the decision to have that inquiry, for the terms of reference and for the personnel. But it will be a difficult process. I think that all who want to be heard should be heard. There will be some good things to hear—and I have tried to talk about some of the good things that have happened—but there will also be painful lessons. It is clear that with our changing climate we now realise we have challenges to adapt to and mitigate. One-third of our softwood plantation has gone, towns have been overrun, farms have been destroyed, national parks have been alight and wildlife has been incinerated.

How close were we to losing significant parts of the Snowy Hydro scheme? We were perilously close to losing a great national achievement which is a key element of our renewable energy future. Everywhere I go people talk to me. They have been thinking about what happened and how we responded and they want to make this better. We owe it to those whose lives have been lost, to their families and loved ones, to those who have lost homes, livelihoods and memories, to those who have been traumatised and will continue to suffer to learn from what has happened as we rebuild even better communities for our future. I support the condolence motion.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): I thank the member for Wagga Wagga for his comprehensive speech.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast—Minister for Local Government) (10:14:00): Most people who know me know that I am very rarely lost for words, but for the past month words have escaped me. I have not been able to say much and, as the month has progressed, words have failed me more and more. I think that is the case with my community as well. As I talk to people, they do not know what to say; they are still in shock and disbelief. They are frozen and do not know what to do. In some cases, I have been the same: I do not know what to do or say. It has been really difficult finding words that never seem to be the right words at the right time. That has been the challenge for me and for my community.

How do you find the right words to speak to the widow of Laurie Andrew, who passed away in the fires, at his funeral? What do you say to her? "I'm sorry" does not seem to be enough for Michelle. It is not enough. However, the gathering at Laurie Andrew's funeral—which I will talk about later—was 600 strong; that is the kind of respect he had in the community. I guess that embrace was somehow more powerful for Michelle, with whom I have been in constant contact, than anything I could say to her. How do you find the right words to say to people who have lost everything and whose home is ash? What do you say—"I'm sorry", "I'm really sorry"? Words escape us, and sometimes just an embrace is more powerful than any words.

What do you say to the volunteers who risked their own lives and lost their own homes—"Thank you"? "Thank you" will never be enough for those Rural Fire Service volunteers who faced such terror. If you said it a thousand times it still would not be enough. I know that we will hold ticker tape parades and award medals but it will never be enough to express our thanks to those volunteers. They trained for this kind of event but I do not think they ever expected our communities in the south-east to be hit. When events like this occur in other States and regions we are sad and sympathetic, yet somehow we can be dispassionate and isolated from them. But when it is your own community affected, it is so different. I have represented my local community for more than 30 years as a local council representative and now as the member for South Coast. I am not immune to the sadness. I cannot be immune to that: I feel it.

Before I express condolences to a number of people—because this is a condolence motion—I thank all those who sent me text messages. The member for Oatley constantly sent me messages and I am sorry if my responses were curt: "I'm fine", "We're fine", "We'll be fine." Someone asked "How is it there?" I replied, "It's hell" and I did not say any more because, again, words were hard to find. But I thank them for doing that. I thank the Premier for her texts. My responses were: "It's hell but we're fine", "I'm fine", "We're alright." To all my colleagues who will make articulate contributions to this motion—and I am sorry if this is not the best speech that I will make in this place because I cannot find the words—I thank you.

I have known Laurie Andrew and John Butler, who lost their lives, for more than 30 years. Laurie Andrew was an employee with Shoalhaven City Council and Shoalhaven Water. He was instrumental in the expansion of Porters Creek Dam. Everyone knew him and loved him. He was a charming, intelligent, lovely man. He was a member of the Mollymook Longboarders club. He was loved, admired and respected. To lose any community member is a tragedy, especially one like him. More than 600 people spilled out onto the streets from Ulladulla High School to say goodbye to Laurie and to express their sorrow to his family and, of course, to Michelle. Michelle was invited to come to Parliament yesterday but she is not in any way capable of coming up here. I will send her yesterday's *Hansard* transcript. I thank the Premier for her words.

I will attend John Butler's funeral tomorrow. He was almost the opposite of Laurie Andrew. Laurie Andrew loved the environment, loved the bush and loved the beach; John Butler was a real bushie, a man of few words—dry and laconic. He was known by so many and related to so many. Tomorrow will be a different kind of funeral. It will be attended by a lot of the bushies in my electorate who knew him so well and thought he was just hilarious but so skilled with excavators and machinery, and in farm and cattle work. He was also well known in Araluen. We will say goodbye to John Butler tomorrow. Both men were lost tragically in the Yatte Yattah fire that hit Lake Conjola so badly. I offer my condolences to them and their families.

I offer my condolences to the community itself and to every village and town in the Shoalhaven local government area that was terrorised by the Currowan fire. I offer my condolences to all of those who felt terror for almost a month, until it reached a climax on New Year's Eve. I offer my condolences to everyone who felt like a part of a community that came together so well, even if their village was not burnt to the ground. I offer my condolences to everyone in every village and town, from Bawley Point to Kangaroo Valley in Gareth Ward's electorate, where the fire crossed the river. So many people in my community were terrorised, like I was. We have been through a lot but we will continue to rally around each other.

I acknowledge all of the ordinary people in my community who suddenly became extraordinary people. I thank the leaders in the evacuation centres and donation centres, including Grant Schultz, Sean Hendry and the teams of volunteers who unpacked the many trucks full of donated goods. They organised the Milton Showground into a centre where people would be warmly welcomed and where they could select from the goods that others had donated to them. Many people who had lost their houses did not go, or would not go. I think they had too much pride to turn up. I was there with Grant and saw the work that he and the other volunteers did. It was extraordinary. Grant will go back to his normal life now but he was an extraordinary leader in that instance.

Michelle Babington, who ran the Ulladulla evacuation centre, is an extraordinary person. She worked night and day until she exhausted herself and could do no more. It was frustrating for me because I live in Nowra and the highway was cut; I could not get to Ulladulla or Conjola because it was cut for so long. I thank all those ordinary people who stepped up. It is amazing how people can step up and become extraordinary. Now they will go back to their ordinary lives and disappear from public view, but I know who they are and I will remember them. I cannot name them all, but Grant Schultz stands out in my memory as one of them.

I do not think too many members have talked about the tourists. Usually at this time of year, during the summer holidays, our communities are cursing the lines of traffic coming down the Princes Highway to visit us. We love them and we love them spending in our businesses. We welcome them with open arms. Yes, we complain that the supermarkets are too full, that there are queues, that there is too much traffic on the highway and that there is gridlock through Milton. People say, "It is gridlock coming out of the Jervis Bay Road intersection. We have to get a new intersection." They say that we have to get a Milton-Ulladulla bypass because the roads are gridlocked. Why wouldn't they be? Why wouldn't people come to the most beautiful part of the State?

But what did we do to the tourists? We drove them away. We made them go for their own safety and so that our RFS resources could be concentrated on saving our towns and the lives of our locals. We drove them away in a mass evacuation the like of which I had never seen in my life before. Halfway through the evacuation, when there was gridlock from Batemans Bay right through to Wollongong, the highway closed again. People sat in that traffic for seven hours—including my daughter-in-law, who was trying to get my three little grandchildren up to Sydney and out of the hell that was Batemans Bay. For seven hours they sat. I do not know how people endured that, but we are sorry for what we did to the tourists for their own safety.

We want the tourists back. It was gratifying that, on Australia Day, they came back. I gave a speech at an Australia Day celebration where, again, I was a bit lost for words. But I was so happy that when I asked the crowd to put up their hands if they were visitors, hands went up everywhere. They had come back. Of course they would come back to Mollymook Beach—it was pristine, clean and untouched. I am sure they will continue coming back. But many tourists feared coming back; the perception was that everything was burnt. Of course, much of it is burnt, but so many tourist meccas like Huskisson and central Shoalhaven are open for business. We need to understand the situation in townships like Milton. The flames have not hit there but every business is down 70 per cent, if not more, on the income needed to take it through to the next tourist season—to next summer. Please, tourists, come back to us. Come back to Milton, its beautiful restaurants—Rick Stein at Bannisters and Cupitt's—and to its beautiful shops. Come back to Huskisson and to all the restaurants and shops. I know, Mr Temporary Speaker, that you are coming back to Cupitt's very soon—who wouldn't?

Again to the tourists, I say I am sorry we did that to you but, please, come back to us. I saw so many emergency personnel in the Emergency Operations Centre in Nowra. I could not get through on so many occasions because the highway was cut off. "Thank you" does not seem to be enough. I thank all of our RFS volunteers and every brigade in the Shoalhaven. Boy, you could prepare for a fire—and we have had bushfires before in the Shoalhaven, particularly in 2000 and 2001—but you could never have prepared for this. It was gratifying to see young people—young women—coming through the volunteer brigades, but you could have never prepared for this. It was terror at its worst. We saw the *Four Corners* program about the Fire and Rescue NSW trucks on Hames Road. What an awful episode for them. All the emergency services personnel were involved in this terror—not just the RFS but also the State Emergency Service, Marine Rescue, Surf Life Saving and the NSW Police Force. The police see things they never should have to see. All of them are incredible people. I could never have the kind of courage they have to do what they did—and did it without question. They were amazing.

I acknowledge the leadership of Mark Williams. What an extraordinary person he is—calm and cool. I remember one day I rang him and asked, "Should we evacuate our houses? Is it time to go? Is it time to get the grandchildren out?" He said, "You're all right, Shelley. Stay where you are. I don't think it is crossing over the ranges yet. It is not far from you but you will be fine." He took my calls. I could not get out. My access to the highway was also blocked on many occasions. What a wonderful leader Mark Williams has been to all the team at the RFS, whom I have known so well over a long time in my position as the State member of Parliament and a member of Shoalhaven City Council. They are fantastic people.

I also thank Shane Fitzsimmons. Somehow, his words about adequate resources have been doubted in this place. He is beyond belief. Wherever he went with me and the Premier, who came to my electorate so many times, he was treated like a god. People were wanting to take selfies with him; they were thanking him, hugging him and extolling his virtues. This humble man, whom I have known for a long time since he took up his position, came into the emergency operations centre and said, "Thank you. How are you?" He is not one for formalities necessarily—he grabbed an apple and munched it on his way through. He is a beautiful human being. Anybody who doubts him and what he says should—quite frankly—rethink what they are doing in this place, because he is so highly regarded throughout every community. I thank him.

I mention the Premier again. She will not like me doing it; she will tell me to be quiet. For once, I will not be lost for words. The Premier was everywhere. I do not know how she was actually everywhere seemingly at the same time. We just heard from the member for Wagga Wagga. She was in every electorate—down in Bega and up in my electorate two or three times. Once she could not get through; once I could not get through to her. But there she was, because she cares about this State and cares about its people. She knew she had to step up and be a leader—she was a leader before that but she is an extraordinary leader now. The reception she received and is continuing to receive, and the conversations I have had about Gladys Berejiklian have been remarkable.

I have to say that because those who doubt that is the reality might regret any unkind words they say about the Premier. She has been received remarkably throughout the community. All those leaders have really stepped up. Most people have talked about the number of hectares burnt, the number of houses lost and all of that. We know how big the Currowan fire became. When it was started at the end of November it was a smallish fire, started by a lightning strike. Nobody ever expected it would grow to the extent it did. We thought the RFS would control it and that we had plenty of resources. And then it grew. It went north, east, west and south. There was another fire to its north, called the Tianjara fire. Nobody ever expected that those two fires, such a distance apart, would join. But they did, and it became the Currowan fire.

I have called that fire many things over the past month, none of which I could repeat in this Chamber—"bitch" comes to mind. I know that it is probably politically incorrect to give a bushfire a female title, but that is what I called it, and worse. I have wished it away; I have sworn at it to go away and to leave us alone. What a monster of a fire it was when it reached Lake Conjola after licking so many towns and villages at Pointer Road and Little Forest Road and pelting down houses. It finally got to one of the most beautiful villages in my electorate,

Lake Conjola, which has been referred to as Conjola Park, which is a residential subdivision to the west of Lake Conjola. Nobody ever expected that fire would rampage through that area as it did—nobody.

It was so frustrating because I could not call any of the people I know in Conjola Park and Lake Conjola. We tried to call so many of our friends in Conjola, but they had lost communication very quickly as well as power. The roads were cut, they had no food and for some time they had no water. It was up to the community to come together and to help each other. Because we could not talk to anybody we did not know if people were dead or alive; we had to rely on the media reports. It was awful. Eighty-nine homes were lost in a very small village. Somebody said they were holiday homes. No, most of them were not holiday homes; most of them were the homes of permanent residents, who lost everything. Streets and streets and streets were ablaze. I could not drive down there for so long after that fire because it cut the damn highway.

When I first drove through there after the fires—and I have been back five or six times since—I just wept. I was with my husband; he could not find any words and I did not have any words. There are no words. I thank that community for coming together the way it has, for coordinating almost its own response under its own leadership—nobody could get in there to help. Ordinary people stepped up to become extraordinary. They will go back to their ordinary lives, but there is so much to do in Lake Conjola and Conjola Park that it will take years for them to recover, not just physically but also emotionally. We finally spoke to families who, during the New Year's Eve fire, could not drive to the water at Lake Conjola but had to run for their lives to jump into the water at Lake Conjola because the fire was burning to the edge of the lake. The fire was burning on Chinaman's Island. Nobody ever would have thought that that would happen in Lake Conjola. Water quality in Lake Conjola is creating a great number of challenges. I am working very hard with the council on that at the moment.

I say to everybody in Shoalhaven and to my colleague the member for Bega, Andrew Constance, who suffered so much, that we are with them as a government. Every day there is a new issue, a new problem, but we try to resolve all of them. It cannot all happen at once; it took some time to recover from the shock of this event. It was so huge and so extraordinary, covering so much of the State, that we were rushing to come up with a response to so many issues. Daily—even today—I will get a text saying, "Shelley, what about this?" or "What about that?" or that we need to do this or that. Rates notices are going out. What an absurd cruelty to inflict on people who do not have homes, but simply a pile of ash. Unfortunately, councils are required by legislation to send out rates notices. That is the reality.

I took that dilemma to the Deputy Premier and the Premier and asked them to find not a great deal of money to pay the rates for those people, and both of them said yes. We are spending extraordinary amounts of money, but we found the money for that. It is not just about the money; it is the symbolism of losing your home and then getting a rates notice for a property that has no services. I thank the Government for stepping up so quickly. I thank Service NSW for being at Conjola Park and Lake Conjola when it was finally opened. I thank the wonderful personnel at Service NSW for being there, for sitting and talking to people who just needed someone to talk to and to ask questions. I thank Service NSW for stepping up and continuing to be the disaster recovery response agency that we really need on the ground. I thank Minister Dominello for coming down. To the Ministers who will continue to come to my area: thank you so much. [*Extension of time*]

I thank the Ministers who have been to my electorate and seen it for themselves. When the Minister for Police and Emergency Services visited, my home was cut off from the highway and I could not get out to see him or the Premier. We defended two houses and a property. It is terrifying when access is cut, especially when you have three little grandchildren with you. We will continue to work together as a community. As I said earlier, words have failed me on so many occasions during the past month. They do not usually fail me. Sometimes I feel as if I have gone into a little shell. The member for Bega has been able to express his feelings much more openly than I have; I have simply gone into a shell. But that is okay—I will go back and continue to do what I do, which is talk to people on the ground and try to offer whatever sympathy I can.

As I have also said, it never seems enough to say, "I am sorry"—never. As members of Parliament we can only do our best to find those who are falling through the cracks, to make sure that we lift them up in spirit and that the Government offers not only a spiritual and mental health response, but also a monetary response because that is what they need. We know that people who have lost businesses will be helped. Business owners who have lost so much and suffered as a result of the mass evacuation of tourists, which I spoke about earlier, need our help as well. I encourage members of Parliament to come to the South Coast. The member for Keira spoke very genuinely yesterday. I appreciated his comments about the people he knew in Sussex Inlet, which was also threatened by the fires.

Many people holiday on the South Coast; it is a beautiful place to visit. I encourage members to not be frightened to come back. You will be confronted with what you see south of Island Point Road and driving around Conjola Park. If you drive as far as Milton, you will be confronted with the ruins of the house of the former mayor, Max Atkins—a beautiful man, a beautiful home, his prize rose gardens and everything simply gone, except the

chimney. That site will be confronting, but please keep driving. Stop in Milton, stop at the shops, and drive to Ulladulla and Mollymook. Stay a few nights and spend your money because, as a community, we are shattered.

The sight of visiting tourists on Australia Day, not that long ago, brought joy to my heart. It was remarkable that people had the courage to drive down to see us. I apologise if I have failed to thank someone. There are so many people to thank. I offer my condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives and to the tourists whom we drove away. In particular, I offer my condolences to the communities that felt such terror—and I mean terror—when they watched the sky turn from grey to red to black, not knowing where the fire was coming from. Parents and their children who had to run to the beaches, in many cases as the bushfires burnt to the beaches, may have nightmares about that forever.

We will have all sorts of conversations. I know there will be an inquiry about the cause of the bushfires and what we can do to mitigate against future bushfires. At the moment those communities are talking about recovery. They want to talk about how they can recover from this, how their businesses can recover. There will be conversations about better land management, fuel management, cool burning and our Aboriginal leaders stepping up to give us lessons in that. There will be many lessons we can learn and that we must learn, but it might take some time for those lessons to be learned, and to be either regulated or legislated. We must learn because we do not want this to occur again.

The South Coast is prone to bushfire, as are the North Coast and other parts of the State. We are surrounded by lush, green national parks and State forests in the Shoalhaven, but we love them—we love to see them and drive through them. We hate this as much as anybody. We want to find solutions for this because, at the moment, there are just blackened stumps, sticks and ash in some of these areas along the highway. We want to see our bush recover, though I do not know if our wildlife will ever recover. But at the moment we are in recovery. We will have conversations later about climate change, land management, national parks, State forests and individuals clearing their own blocks. We will have conversations about all of that. There will be lots of conversations. My inbox is full of emails from people who want to have conversations about land management. They come in daily. These are the lessons that the people of the South Coast electorate want us to learn, and we must learn them. For the electorate of Bega it is shocking.

The member for Wagga Wagga and I participated in teleconferences every week or two. We joined forces in that way with our recovery coordinator, Dick Adams. We could express what we needed and what we thought was missing on the ground. I thank the member for Wagga Wagga for the conversations that we had. Even though we were not together in person, we were together by phone. It was great that we came together in that way, along with the member for Bega and the member for Kiama, obviously. I do not forget my colleague the member for Kiama because that "Currowan bitch", as I called it, crossed the river when we never thought it would and went into his beautiful Kangaroo Valley, of all places. Then, after Kangaroo Valley, the villages of Cambewarra and Tapitallee were threatened. They are still at risk and still they have not burned.

We spare a thought for all of our colleagues whose communities have been shattered, especially my colleagues in neighbouring electorates whom I know so well. We did not communicate a great deal through the fire because we were all hunkered down in our own electorates, but we all came together. When I saw Andrew Constance for the first time in a couple of weeks, I had no words for him, we just embraced each other. That was all we could do. If you can, embrace or cuddle the people who are suffering. I am fine, I am strong. I have been through a lot in my life, but there are members in this place who are really suffering. We must support each other in this place and not be so unkind to each other. We are unkind to each other and I am the world's worst at times. I do not make any apologies for that, but I will try to be kinder because I have seen such unkindness bestowed on us by a fire. It was so unjust and unfair, but we will recover. We are a great community. We will recover.

Mrs MELINDA PAVEY (Oxley—Minister for Water, Property and Housing) (10:41:58): The community that I am so very proud to represent, the electorate of Oxley, was punished by fire last year. It started in September with the fires that spread through Bees Nest and then via the communities of Ebor, Tyringham and Dundurrabin. It was a shock, but it was a shock that we were expecting because we face a huge natural disaster in this State: it is called a drought. The unprecedented lack of rain in northern parts of New South Wales and on the South Coast has been the catalyst for the havoc, punishment, horror and terror wrought on our communities. The north faced it last year, the south faced it this year and the toll has been enormous.

This is a condolence motion, so I will talk first about the lives that were lost in the communities that I represent. On Friday 8 November 2019 Barry Parsons was in his very humble abode in Willawarrin. The last we heard of Barry Parsons was when he was on Facebook communicating to people that he could hear a noise and sense a danger. I did not know Barry, but the people of Willawarrin knew and loved him. His life has a story and he died alone in his very humble abode.

Then there was Chris Savva. Chris, relatively young, died before his parents, who live at Randwick. He too lived in a very humble abode at the back of South Arm. The Coroner will determine his cause of death but there is no doubt that fire was the catalyst. His car rolled—the bridge in front of him was burnt—and he was found dead by his friends. Friends had to go back to his very humble abode and find his blue suit to bury him in. That is something that friends should not have to do. They did. They loved him and they supported him. I give my very deepest condolences to his parents. There are people like Roy. Against all the odds he survived. I thank Mel Davis from the Nambucca *Guardian News* for an incredible story—she is a beautiful writer. Roy was on his bike to get away from the fire and he had to grab his sheep and the dog. Mel Davis wrote:

Roy said at that point the only visible smoke was about 20km away.

"But I probably underestimated the bushfire," he said. "We all did."

He'd only just arrived in the driveway to his property when a wall of flames travelling "like a freight train" came out of nowhere.

And it was not until he wanted to reach down and let his dog off the lead that he realised his hand was not working because he was inflicted with incredible damage. Roy Annesley, you are recovering well. You are a fabulous fella, you love your dog and you survived—and you were very lucky to survive. These are the people. These are the stories. Our beautiful neighbours took in one of the victims of the fire. I tell this story because it has to do with dogs and I love dogs. He has a little dog and all day on Friday 8 November the dog would not stop barking. It was being a real pain. It was not until maybe an hour before the fire hit that he realised, "That's why the dog was barking—this wall of fire." He was blessed. He got his musical instruments and his dogs in the car and he took refuge at our neighbours' place and survived. He was lucky to survive and he is grateful to his dog that he did survive.

Then there is the story of the Duffs, along the road between Willawarrin and Bellbrook. This gets me because the fire came so fast and so hard. I have been on their property and we have had conversations about hazard reduction, where the town survived because they did a hazard reduction near that town of Temagog. Their home survived but they lost their sheds. But the saddest part of all of it is the fire came so quickly they did not have time to react to get their dogs off their leads. Farmers love their dogs and that is a very traumatic thing for that family to live with as well as recovering their business and their assets. There are incredible people and incredible stories all over.

Let's not forget two amazing Fire and Rescue retained firefighters from the very proud Station 397 at Macksville, Irene Pachos and Darryl Aldridge. That is a really great retained fire crew, as is the one at Urunga and as are those all over my electorate. The retained fireys have done an incredible job through this, as has the RFS—no-one is going to miss out here on a thank you. Darryl is not only a retained firefighter at Macksville; he is also a volunteer at the Valla RFS brigade. In the midst of all these fires Irene and Darryl went out in their truck. As they were driving, there was an almighty bang and a tree fell on the truck. They have spent enormous amounts of time in hospital, particularly Irene. She has been in rehabilitation at Baringa. She is feisty and Darryl is decent and their whole crew loves them. But these are the types of things that happen during these events. They are some of the stories of people and pain and loss.

I also shed a tear for the enormous amount of wildlife that is no longer in my electorate. Up to 40 per cent of the Kempsey Shire Council boundary was burnt. While talking to people from the fires and hearing their stories, they told me that the worst sound was that of the animals. Everyone talks about the sound of the fire and how cruel, vicious, nasty and all-encompassing it was. But the noises of the animals dying were worse. The sounds of our native animals squealing as they perished were worse. There have been some remarkable stories of the survival of cattle.

I will spend some time talking about Gemma and Brett Porter, who live at the back of Yarras, and what they went through. They are the most incredible couple. Their cattle survived a fireball; somehow they knew what to do. They huddled together and got to a low point near a water source, and they managed to survive. There was a lot of smoke damage to their lungs, but they did survive. But over the following days the noise of the hungry cattle was incredibly damaging to Brett and Gemma's psyche, and added to the trauma of what they had experienced. But the best news was that after the fire at Yarras passed the Porters looked out to find that their horses had survived. They did not expect them to survive. They lost their timber mill, but their kids' horses survived.

As they were fighting those fires and the blaze was coming down, Gemma was on the phone to her kids' schools to tell them not to let the kids come home and keep them away. They have two children at high school in Tamworth and one son out working. Her greatest motivation was to keep the kids away. But she was determined to ensure her kids' horses survived. I got to see the smile on her face when she told me the story of how they did. They are the personal stories, and they go on. The first fireground I visited was in the electorate of the member for Clarence. There is about 300 or 400 metres between the Tyringham fire shed and my electorate—it is on the border. I got to meet the volunteers and the women helping. At every fire station there are volunteers cooking,

preparing food, worrying and making sure that the people out on the ground are looked after when they get back and can have a rest.

The Premier, Deputy Premier and Minister for Police and Emergency Services visited the Tyringham fire shed a few days later. It meant so much to them all. I thank the Premier, Deputy Premier and Minister for Police and Emergency Services for their amazing leadership throughout this period. We are so lucky to have John Barilaro to lead the recovery across the State. I am grateful for that. The Premier made a great decision. John Barilaro—along with his electorate of Monaro—knows the challenges that we face. These are the stories of the people affected, but there are also the numbers. The Deputy Speaker and I share a council boundary, and we have lost 23 homes, mostly out the back of Pappinbarra and Yarras. That is painful. We also lost an animal sanctuary. It has been challenging.

I thank Neil Coombes at the Wauchope Showground. The BlazeAiders are working out of the showground with the Australian Defence Force [ADF]. I spent a long afternoon with the ADF out on the grounds and at Gemma and Brett's place to learn about how they are going to get the fences up and support those communities. That is tremendous. The Wauchope Show Society was not going to leave while there was an animal left on the grounds. That caused some issues for the emergency management process, but I say good on the members of the Wauchope Show Society. They were feeding the people and making sure that the animals and horses were looked after. God bless them.

There were 67 homes lost in the Kempsey Shire Council area. I acknowledge the mayor of Kempsey, Liz Campbell, and the general manager, Craig Milburn, who have been superb. Liz Campbell has been a leader of the community and the same can be said for the mayor of Nambucca, Rhonda Hoban. These two mayors have been traumatised as they are great leaders of their communities. Their communities have been traumatised. They were at the emergency evacuation centres. I was on the phone to them on the day of the fires. It was traumatic.

They have felt the trauma of their communities, as has the general manager of Nambucca Council where 63 homes were lost. I have been proud of their response. At times it has been stressful. The phone calls have sometimes been curt. But that is okay because we are all fighting for the same thing: to ensure that no-one falls through the cracks. With this extra effort, the south with the north, no communities will be forgotten. They have not been forgotten. This trauma takes time to sort through. It is a difficult process. I acknowledge Craig Milburn in Kempsey for the very strong attitude the council has taken. Some properties do not have development applications, but we are just going to get it done. We have got Planning working now.

I thank Euan Ferguson, our recovery organiser from the north, for his phone calls with all the members and his access. Ronnie and his office were constantly on the phone, supporting people who sometimes did not want to be part of the process. That was tricky. South Arm is really traumatised by everything that has happened. For example, we were trying to find a caravan or something for a beautiful lady from South Arm because she wants to be with her animals on her property. A tent is not ideal in the middle of summer. Bec Beverly and everybody at the South Arm Community Centre have been incredible in providing food and support. I am very pleased that the Red Cross is out there more now. I acknowledge Andrew Constance and his fight. I supported him and encouraged him. It is important that the charities open up their chequebooks more openly and freely. It is really positive that Service NSW is now operating using a case file management process. We need to know what people need. We need to be able to support everybody and that is certainly what we are doing.

Incredible fundraisers have been held. It started in Dorriga a couple of weeks after the Bees Nest fire; there was a fundraiser for the local community. I acknowledge the volunteers at the Dorriga Showground for the food and effort people went to. David Griffin is a very well-respected Kempsey resident who employs lots of people at his mine equipment repair business. He had planned his sixtieth birthday in Bellbrook. He opened it up to the whole community. Thousands of people attended on the Saturday before Christmas. There was music, donations and a silent auction. There was lots of beer. There was a lot of coming together and support. The owners of the Bellbrook pub, Shirley and Barry Smart, have done an incredible job in creating a place—a centre—to go. They have been incredible.

The Bellbrook Rural Fire Service Captain, who everybody knows as "Chunk", has done a great job. I give a special call out to Gordon and Karen Anderson at the Willawarrin pub, some 20 kilometres down the road. It has been the hub. Gordon and Karen put everybody up in the hotel accommodation. They have been the central point of that community. I thank and bless them for what they did. They have been an absolute standout. We have also got Willawarrin BlazeAid operating from the showgrounds. Gordon and Karen have been just incredible and I thank them.

I also highlight another fabulous man whose story is so important: Terry Flynn. He is a former Special Air Service [SAS] soldier who served in Vietnam. He is a beautiful man. He and his wife, Judith, lost their house on 8 November. They grabbed what they could. I was talking to Judy the other day at the Willawarrin pub. I asked

whether she got their photos and she said, "We just didn't have time." She carries a big burden about that, because those were all her family's photos. I am sure they will be able to sort through that. However, Terry had also left behind his SAS service cap.

Team Rubicon Australia heard about that. Team Rubicon is an incredible group of retired servicemen and servicewomen. They arrived in Willawarrin and were just amazing. They provided so much support, help and guidance. They just got in there and did work without talk. Some of it was grubby work on behalf of residents, sorting through things. Team Rubicon was there to support one of its own, Terry. We had a great event recently at the Willawarrin pub where we celebrated that and celebrated them. It was just wonderful. I thank Team Rubicon. I know that our regional coordinator Euan Ferguson has also got very strong ties to Team Rubicon. We are hoping to continue that work and even collaborate with BlazeAid.

Macksville Showground is another amazing showground. The irony is—I probably should not say this—that in the Office of Emergency Management Kempsey and Nambucca showgrounds were not the official evacuation centres. Well, they soon became the official evacuation centres because that is where everybody went. I say that as the Minister responsible for Crown lands. Showgrounds are a central part of our country communities. Why did people want to go to the showgrounds? Because, one, there were facilities and, two, they could bring their animals.

I remember what it was like in the days after the fires: the number of people and the mayors and just trying to make sense of the chaos. Everyone managed to do that, but it has been a journey and it has been tough. There is so much I want to say. There are so many people I want to thank. I note that Andrew Constance has just arrived in the Chamber. He thanked someone yesterday, and I am so grateful he did, because I am going to do it again: I thank the contractors in the bulldozers who had to go out into the middle of the fires and the middle of the forests and put containment lines down. That is brave work. That is clever work. I thank them. [*Extension of time*]

I acknowledge them and their work, as well as their suggestions to me—they have given me some very good suggestions. Obviously, I thank the Rural Fire Service volunteers. I have been in dialogue with one of those volunteers from Hat Head. He has very openly shared his frustration with the amount of time and the pressure that was put on our volunteers. I acknowledge and thank the Federal Government for contributing financial support to those volunteers. It is absolutely appropriate given the size and the extent of the event across our State. I thank Fire and Rescue NSW. I thank the police. I also thank our State forest workers—they have been incredible under enormous pressure.

I thank our National Parks and Wildlife Service personnel on the ground. The locals told me there were none better. One of my dear friends is Barry Ramke at Collombatti. His property is really important because if the fire broke his property it could be on its way to Stuarts Point or Eungai or other parts. It was a really important containment line on the Kempsey firegrounds. He said, "Those national parks fellas were just fantastic." I thank Barry for his work with those volunteers in particular. My brother, who was catering at Dorrig, also said that the national parks fireys were just incredible. He said, "I saw volunteers flying in from Melbourne. I saw them at Kempsey. They were incredible." I thank those from the Country Fire Authority. Everyone has certainly gone above and beyond.

I also acknowledge and thank my electorate office team. The pressure that is now upon them has been enormous. I thank very much the Parliament for extra support. We need to have everybody functioning so that we do not have people falling through the cracks. I thank David Dawson, Jodie Griffiths, Susan Ramke—who is one of my greatest advisers; I lost her for quite a bit of time when she was helping others as a member of the founding committee of the evacuation emergency team and provided me with important feedback—and Alice Burnet, who helps with Facebook, through which the activation of information and support is incredible.

Last night the Minister for Transport and Roads, Andrew Constance, asked me to acknowledge his electorate officer, who is also a friend of mine, Shannon Whitford. Shannon is in the Bega electorate office and she is an incredible woman. Some of the stories I have heard about her included Shannon helping people during the fires when she was not sure where her son was and that, with Andrew, she went through the Tathra fires. Shannon, you are a marvel and we thank you. We are all in this together and we are only going to get out of this together. It is great people like Shannon who should be acknowledged and supported.

I also acknowledge the fear and concern, particularly in the Bellingen area, during the past few months. People were particularly fearful of the fire spreading into the Gondwana forests, parts of which have never burnt. There was a very big volunteering effort up at Carrai to ensure that the fire did not come down into that part of the world and I am very grateful that it did not. I thank Maria Buckley of Eungai, who is a great community advocate and spokesperson, and her husband, Keith, who has been out on the firegrounds. Maria has given me some very important ideas and ways forward. When determining a way forward, there will be suggestions. I have

given a commitment to members of my community who have been very frank with me that I will have their stories recorded by submission or interview. Some of them do not want to make suggestions in a public space. Country people are very private but their stories need to be part of our thinking going forward.

I have been very vocal locally and I will say this: There are parts of my electorate where explorers like John Oxley, whose 200th anniversary we have just celebrated, were the first white people to take in the view from Mount Seaview at Port Macquarie. I note that the member for Port Macquarie and Madam Deputy Speaker is in the chair. There is a very good argument that John Oxley would not have been able to have got down the mountain with the current land management processes. He brought a bullock dray, horses and a team. It was relatively easy. John Oxley talked about the meadows and the pastures on the way down to the Hastings River. We need to keep that in mind.

John Oxley did not appropriately record his interactions with our Indigenous people; there were many. We need to focus on that to ensure that we better plan for the future and it needs to be a respectful conversation. As the Minister for Transport and Roads mentioned yesterday, the best thing—if there is a best out of this trauma and drama—is the respectful way in which people from either side who have different points of view can come together to be better and to be more respectful as a community. It would be good if that is an outcome from these fires.

In preparation for this speech I looked at the Fires Near Me NSW app. It showed only two fires in my patch—the one at Carrai is out and the one at Ebor Falls, which is not in my patch but it can spread to it, is a hazard reduction. There is also a fire on Crescent Head Road but I do not think that is a significant fire. The rains have started and there have been some beautiful drenching rains on the mid North Coast. I note that the member for Tweed is in the Chamber. I have been doing what I can to blow the winds west and south but the rain front that is on its way will make a difference.

I thank everybody who has worked selflessly and tirelessly. It is mostly locals at Maxwell working through BlazeAid and its coordination to help put up fences on local properties. In fact, BlazeAid at the Maxwell showground had the highest ratio of locals who have ever been on site. My commitment is that we will continue to listen, to support and to see my community through this event, and as a government we will see the whole State through this catastrophe. I thank everybody who has worked on the bushfires. I offer my condolences to the families in my community who have experienced such loss. I want them to know that we will continue to support and work through this event. There will be a brighter day with lots of rain.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland) (11:11:08): I begin my contribution to this condolence motion by naming the 25 people known to have perished in the New South Wales fires: Geoffrey Keaton, 32; Andrew O'Dwyer, 36; Samuel McPaul, 28; Colin Burns, 72; Captain Ian McBeth, 44; First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson, 42; Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, 43; Robert Lindsay, 77; Gwenda Hyde, 68; Vivian Chaplain, 69; George Nole, 85; Julie Fletcher, 63; Barry Parsons, 58; Chris Savva, 64; Russell Bratby, 59; Patrick Salway, 29; Laurie Andrew, 70; John Butler, 75; John Smith, 71; Michael Campbell, 62; David Harrison, 47; Ross Rixon, 84; Michael Clarke, 59; and an unknown man aged 56.

It is also important to list the communities they have left behind: Buxton, Jingellic, Albury, Belowra, Cobargo, Wyaliba, Glen Innes, Kangawalla, Johns River, Taree, Willawarrin, South Arm, Nambucca Heads, Yarrowitch, Port Macquarie, Wandella, Yatte Yattah, Milton, Nerrigundah, Coolagolite, Sussex Inlet, Batlow, Bodalla, and Montana, Arizona and Florida in the United States of America. Thousands of people in those communities are grieving the loss of those 25 people. Broader than those communities, we all know someone who has died or someone who has lost someone they loved. We all feel connected at some deep and disturbing level to this tragedy, which has unfolded around our State now for seven long months.

It is testament to the strength of our democracy that here in this place, we have people who have fought those fires to save their homes or who have volunteered to save the homes of others, and whose children, siblings, parents and friends have fought them. People who have lost friends, loved ones, animals—their fur babies—or who have lost their homes. Our leaders, our Ministers and shadow Ministers have visited communities to listen, to comfort and to offer hope. On behalf of my electorate of Maitland, I express my deepest and most sincere condolences to everyone who has been impacted by the fires. Through media and social media, through our own donations and efforts, we have all come close and witnessed the terrible loss at close range.

This disaster is just loss after loss. People have lost not just their fur babies but also working dogs—loyal partners in agriculture. People have lost farm animals. To this day 600 animals are being accommodated because there is nowhere for them to go. We have lost up to a billion native animals and other wildlife. We have lost homes—not just houses—and memories of and connections with people who are no longer with us. We have lost farm buildings, workplaces, sheds, fences, bridges and roads.

Some of us were safe, sending desperate messages to friends and families and waiting for answers that took so long to come. For some of us, tragically, they never came at all. It has been a hard time. We have all been close. The week before last I was driving from Cooma to Batlow. When I left at 7.30 a.m. a hot wind was already blowing. As I went up the highway I could see dust coming towards the car. Then a warning came from the Fires Near Me NSW app of a fire at Old Adaminaby Complex. I stopped my car a little way down the road to try to get phone service. The internet was a bit patchy so I called my family, my husband and my office to try to get more information about whether I should proceed. I got out of the car because I just wanted to feel what was happening. I could hardly open the car door because the wind was so strong. I realised I could go further but I had to go immediately.

A little way up the hill I saw a bright shining plane in the skies ahead. It was a clear day, aside from the dust, which was going over the planes. The plane was fighting the fires, dumping load after load. The fires were less than five kilometres—probably two to three kilometres—from the road. I could see the white smoke. But I felt hope. I thought the planes would help us and would stop the fire. But when I arrived in Batlow they had gone. That was the American air crew. We all have a connection with the fires; we all have stories to tell. Our communities have stories that they want to tell so badly. That is part of the grief and healing process. Kübler-Ross talks about that grieving process. We are in different stages—some are in denial, some are in the pit of despair, some are trying to rebuild and hope for something better. We all must share our stories because they are inspirational to others.

In this motion of condolence today we must remember not just those 25 in New South Wales and the 33 across Australia whom we have lost but also those who are not written as victims of the fires, such as Courtney Partridge-McLennan, 19, who on 28 November died from an asthma attack caused by the bushfire smoke in Glen Innes. Just last Friday in Port Macquarie John, a small business owner, told me about his wife's brother who had died from a heart attack after the fires. The week before that a friend of mine grasped my hand in near desperation at her husband's funeral and said, "You must tell them, Jenny, you must make sure that people know. There are a lot of people dying from these fires who never saw a flame or inhaled smoke but who just lost all hope and found it too much to bear." It is probably one of the most important things I am going to say today: We must remember those who are in that space now of having lost someone.

The fireground that I first went through on my journey around the State was Buxton and Balmoral. I saw firsthand the devastation of that fire. I acknowledge the member for Wollondilly, who is in the Chamber. I went down to see Michelle Legg and Tina Mey from the Wollondilly's Women in Business Group, whom I had met a couple of years ago as shadow Minister. I had noticed on Facebook that Michelle seemed to be struggling and I wanted to see if she was okay. It was days after the fire but I still smelt that acrid smell of burnt bush. I saw the handmade signs that people had put outside their homes, written on sheets or on pieces of cardboard, anything, leaning against half-burnt fences next to houses where the fires had come up to the hedges and stopped—or sometimes not—thanking everyone who had fought those fires for their efforts. It was impossible not to recognise how intense the battle had been. You could imagine the towering inferno that would have been over the brave fireys fighting the fires.

Over the past two weeks I have travelled more than 3,000 kilometres around the State. I have been from Kangaroo Valley down the coast to Kiah and then to the Victorian border, up to Tumbarumba and Batlow and across to Gundagai and Queanbeyan. Then I went north to Port Macquarie and the mid North Coast and visited a lot of areas. I spoke to people I knew and others whom NSW Farmers suggested I speak to and I also spoke to tourism operators. I thank each and every one of those people who helped me understand the impact of this fire—not just the impact on their businesses, their farms and their family but also the impact on them. Late one night I went to a hotel in Cobargo where they were holding a trivia night as a bit of a fundraiser. I met Dave Allen, the publican. I ordered dinner and a Coke—I did not want to have a drink that night; it was all too much—and I said to Dave, "Are you the publican? Do you own this hotel?" and he said, "Yes." I said, "I would like to have a chat with you, if I can." We sat and chatted. He said he was writing a submission to the Government to get some assistance to hold a funeral for the two fellows who died in Cobargo. He told me his story and his plans.

In a town with a population of 600, people in the business community and farmers step up as the leaders. Normally they run their own lives but at times like this they step up and become leaders of the community. They were trying to get assistance. I acknowledge the Hon. Brad Hazzard for helping me to help Dave. Like so much of the damage that has occurred, the pain, the heartache and the loss, that funeral was not fitting into a box to tick to access some money to make it happen. Security guards, transport and portaloos had to be provided because at least 1,500 people were going to attend the funeral in a tiny town of 600 people. The town needed help providing for all those people and I thank the Minister for Health for his assistance.

Among the 100 people or so I spoke to were many small businesspeople and tourism operators. Matt Stroud from Merimbula evacuated the apartments that he leases out and then looked after the 57 evacuees,

who had nowhere else to go. They brought cats, dogs, birds, fish and whatever else they could rescue from their homes with them. Deb Delgrosso from Boydtown Beach Holiday Park, south of Eden, evacuated the whole park and then people from Kiah. Nine hundred people were evacuated. She said to me, "Jenny, I don't know how I did it. I don't know how I told 900 people what to do and they all listened and did it. We didn't lose anyone." I want to mention so many people I spoke to. It was quick visits because I wanted to see them and let them know that I was there for them and I have been talking regularly with some of them since my visits.

I acknowledge Jenny and Arthur Robb from kayak and camping tours in Kiah; Phil Ryan, a dairy farmer from Toothdale; Daniel Cochrane from Nowra; and Rob Miller from Milton. I acknowledge also Kevin McAsh, an oyster farmer from Bateman's Bay; Hayley Abbott, a fisher from Narooma; Carolyn and David Duff, cattle farmers near Kempsey at Willawarrin; Mark Bulley from NSW Farmers on the mid North Coast, whom I thank for taking me to a lot of these properties; Colleen Carmody from the Country Women's Association in Port Macquarie; Chad from Mogo Zoo; Phil and Gayle, the lovely couple from Mogo Nursery; Carmel Perks, a former tour operator and now a motivated retiree from Pappinbarra; Leanne Atkinson from Bega; Gemma Porter from Forbes River, whom the water Minister spoke of earlier today; Robyn and James Flanagan, travel agents and cattle farmers from Wauchope; a group of farmers at Taylors Arm; Greg and Karen Mouat from Batlow; and Mark from Broulee's The Bower, which is being rebuilt.

I acknowledge Neil Bingley from Sutton, Gregg Manns from Tumbalong and Sven from John River, all beekeepers who are horrified about what they will be able to salvage and how they will maintain their industry, which is a fundamental stepping stone and virtual ark for the recovery of crops and flora lost in the fires. I also acknowledge Mia Maze from the Bega Valley Innovation Hub; Leo and Sue Cleary from Brombin; David Waite from Timbertown; and Billabong Koala Park. So many people have been affected.

Leanne Atkinson, the former Labor candidate for Bega, wrote to me before Christmas asking, "Can you buy some stuff from Kay and Gregg Saarinen because they have to evacuate their property?" Kay has a beautiful herb farm in a lovely hot place in a hollow. She has a pristine lab onsite where she makes skin creams. Kay and Gregg had to evacuate the mudbrick house they built with their own hands, the lab, the animals and the farm. As I was travelling near Wyndham I rang Kay and said, "Can I come and talk to you, touch base and see what I can do?" She said, "Yes, fine, come in. I have a working bee."

An amazing young woman called Sasha had brought her parents and friends 13.5 hours by car from Melbourne. They could not take the usual route through Merimbula because the road was cut. They met Kay at the markets after she had sold her small amount of stock. The previous afternoon Kay and Gregg had been lying out on their property, staring at the stars and wondering, "How do we go on from here? What happens next?" Their property was still under threat. Kay said to me that she had never seen Gregg cry during their time together but he was crying that day. She took the few things they could put together to the markets. Sasha said, "Could we come out and help you?" She brought 10 people from their accommodation and they cleared the farm. They removed the Hakea bushes around the house and spent the day listening to Kay and Gregg.

The hope and inspiration of that action has had untold consequences in helping them get through. Kay and Gregg have been evacuated seven times. They returned to their house last night. Miraculously the house and the lab were saved. Gregg said that was partly because the tank burst, which probably kept things wet. They also credit Sasha, her family and friends for clearing out the Hakeas. These usually fire-resistant plants had died in the drought. Kay and Greg were dealing with a confluence of many issues and problems. In this time of disruption, polarising tribalism and disconnectedness, perhaps the only gift we have from this time is the breaking down of the barriers between us. The offer of help from people like Sasha is really important.

We know that money is not getting out there quick enough. I note the comment from the Minister, but it is up to the Government as well. Not one person on the South Coast has received any State Government funding. Not one person on the mid North Coast, which had fires three months ago, has received funding. This is a right-now situation. We all have to get better at this. The huge outpouring of donations demonstrates there is community will to help each other. People are volunteering for BlazeAid or cleaning up a property for a farmer they have only met once at a market while on holiday. We all want to help. My role on those visits was to try to instil some of the lessons that those people have learned and communicate them to other people. I was lucky because I had not met those people before so I did not have an immediate knowledge of them. I could take a step back. *[Extension of time]*

We have to acknowledge right now that everyone has survivor guilt. Every person I spoke to said, "No, I don't really need help," when they really did. I could see it. But everyone is thinking about someone else. That is really part of the Kübler-Ross model of being in denial. Part of my role is to say to people, "Don't think of this as help that you are getting for yourself. This help makes sure that your kids get to school in a couple of weeks", or, "that your employees can maintain their job and that your community is not economically disadvantaged more

than it already is." As a former travel agent and tour operator, I know the very first thing that flight attendants say is that we must adjust our oxygen masks before helping others.

A lot of people on the South Coast, the mid North Coast, the North Coast, the Central Tablelands and elsewhere around this State are trying to help others with their mask when they have not got theirs on properly. They are precious and they have all stepped up to serve their communities. I thank the RFS, Fire and Rescue NSW, police, NSW Ambulance and the SES in all of those communities. I thank the Local Land Services staff, Soil Conservation Service and army personnel, who are burying dead animals. Some jobs are so horrific that I wonder where to even start. New South Wales farmers are providing enormous pastoral care to their community. I thank Destination NSW representatives including Juliet Barr, who has done amazing work to rally people on the South Coast.

Federal members Mike Kelly and Fiona Gilmore have provided advocacy. I remember going with Fiona to visit people in Kangaroo Valley. We need to keep talking to the Government. Sometimes politics gets in the way, but it is important to be there and say, "This is what my community needs." This message has to keep getting out there. The MPs who represent the electorates of Tweed, Lismore and Bega, including Kevin Anderson in Tamworth, and Adam Marshall are living through this. Six days after I was elected to this place there was a flood. The weight that an elected member feels when their community is suffering is indescribable. It is important to remember that we have to talk about the things that are not working.

It is not because we are the Opposition. All those people we talk to have the resources to pick up the phone to talk to their industry association, farmers, their local politician, or they can find a Service NSW bus or evacuation centre. But there are a lot of people who are sitting at home—whatever is left of it—or maybe somewhere else who just cannot face it. We need to know what they need. A brick on the road for those who are coping is a little barrier but it may be a brick wall for someone else. We have to take all of those concerns seriously and realise we are only seeing the very top of the problem. A lot of people are still down the rabbit hole.

We need to make sure we help everyone in whatever way we can, with dignity. The tourism industry and primary industries are integral to all of those communities. Many of the people I spoke to had worked in both industries. They have been devastated. We need to be booking holidays rather than making cancellation calls and we should be ordering products online from a cottage industry. If a business does not have a website, pick up the phone. Drink some local wine, milk or fresh fruit juice or eat some local seafood, pork, beef, lamb or poultry, or pick some apples from local orchards.

Someone said to me, "Jenny I never thought that I would be in a situation where in four months I would have lost animals on my property to fire, flood, drought and wild dogs." He said, "It's like the plagues. What's coming next? Weeds?" I thought about it and it is like a Pandora's box has been opened. That is how we are all feeling. There is all this terrible stuff coming. But we have to remember what happens. Look inside that box again because there is hope. That is what we have to cling to but we have to actively help to get there. Some people will be doing nothing for a long time because they are suffering from such deep grief. They have lost family members, animals, houses and jobs. Some people are limping; they have lost some things but they are getting through it. Some people are going pretty normally and maybe need just a little bit of help. But they are all part of the recovery effort; they all need our help and support. We have to pull together to get through this.

Kay was talking to me about one of the many times over the past six weeks she has thought, "Can I keep going?" I said to her, "Whatever happens next, you and Gregg are going to get through this together and you are going to succeed with whatever you do next. It's not about where you are now. You are going to succeed wherever you go because your success and joy in life, the things that are important to you in life are you. They are not a place or a memory. They are the here and now." She posted a comment on Facebook last night after returning to her property. I messaged her this morning and she said she was happy for me to share this. I think it is important to hear stories such as theirs. She wrote:

So here it is, the news i know you are all needing to hear.

To our permaculture farm we went this morning, the drive through our once lush furred forrest was black and charcoal, so hot it burnt nothing was left, i wasn't prepared for that.

Saturday night we knew would come, our fire chief warned us well. We packed and moved and raked and cleared and watered and prepared all month, 7 evacuations, 2 near misses and than the one that got us.

Our product, ingredients and house hold treasures, our 50 some animals, all in 5 days, to safety so far away, we were helped by friends so dear to my heart.

It came with force, so dangerous and fast, poor gregg wasn't allowed to stay and fight for his own farm.

A volunteer fire fighter he is, all week he has fought along side his fellow volunteers, other peoples places he defended and saved while he knew our was left to burn.

a police road block, no one was left to defend their farm up our mountain it was far too dangerous to stay. Too dangerous to go to our farm until the wee hours of the night he saw from the truck, through thick smoke and flames, the headlights and ash, with tears in his eyes he could not even breathe "how the hell is that still there" he said to his mates. There in thick smoke our dear house standing proud, made out of straw and clay with our bear hands. For the fate of the rest of our farm we did not know as trees were down, then finally we were allowed to go see.

With a very heavy heart I must say first my beloved garden now is burnt beyond repair, our fruit trees and herbs some burnt to the ground.

Though what a relief as we turned the corner, my lab standing there so tall and so proud, all our builds I cannot believe are still there, a little battle scared here and there, but there they are, we can't believe our eyes.

Our neighbours aren't as lucky as us, all is lost all up the hill, only 2 stand still, all the rest are gone, so hot it burnt not a shrub in sight. So many homes and farms are lost all around us, so much loss and sadness, I neighbour in hospital, so much to heal.

What a month it's been, 7 evacuations, 2 near misses and one that got us, exhausted we are, now we must heal, so much work to be done, our lives are upside down, we don't know where to start, but I do know we will.

I thank Kay and Gregg for sharing those words. A lot of people do not know what they are going to do next. Together—with you—they will.

Ms KATE WASHINGTON (Port Stephens) (11:41:14): I support the Premier's motion and express my deepest and sincerest condolences to all those who have lost loved ones in the New South Wales bushfire crisis. Port Stephens, the beautiful region that I represent, is no stranger to bushfires. We know all too well the fear, anguish and ongoing impact fires have on people's lives and on communities. Since the bushfires started up north in August we have watched in horror at their ferocity, frequency and intensity as they lit up almost the entire east coast of New South Wales. So far this season Port Stephens has been spared the worst, and for that we feel very fortunate and continue to hope that our good fortune holds. We are grateful that when fires have kicked up our local firefighters, RFS and Fire and Rescue NSW have been able to stop their progression. As we have seen in the past and will no doubt see again, our volunteer and professional firefighters have literally put out the flames, saving lives and homes.

But during this long bushfire season our local fireys activity at home has not been where most of their effort has gone. Our RFS crews have joined teams fighting fires to the north, west and south. Many of our volunteers have protected not only our community but they have also voluntarily worked around the clock, supporting crews across the State that were protecting communities that are not their own. What those men and women have experienced is harrowing. Long-serving members of the RFS told me that they had to throw everything they knew about fire behaviour out the window because what they experienced was nothing like they had seen before. I continue to be amazed by all that they do, and yet they are humble and dismissive of praise. According to them they are "just doing their job".

My friend and colleague the member for Prospect, Hugh McDermott, expressed it best yesterday when he described the actions of his brigade on the night they lost two crew members in the fires. He said their actions were both "extraordinary and typical". The world has been watching not only the fires but also the way in which we are responding. They cannot believe that we have an army of volunteer firefighters who step up to protect their neighbours and strangers alike. We are so very grateful to each and every one of them. When the young men amongst that army of volunteers lost their lives, the impacts were enormous—the loss was felt by our entire State.

Just before the New Year I drove from Melbourne to Albury. The car was showing 42 degrees, dry weeds were blowing across the highway and there was smoke on the horizon. This was not an unusual thing for anyone in New South Wales to see during this bushfire season. That same afternoon RFS volunteer Sam McPaul from Holbrook lost his life in the Jingellic fire just east of Albury when his truck was overturned by a cyclonic fire-generated tornado. Sam's wife, Megan, is expecting their first baby in May. Two other volunteer Rural Fire Service firefighters Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer lost their lives on duty. They were both from the Horsley Park brigade and fought fires alongside my friend and colleague Hugh McDermott.

Hugh's descriptions of that day, which we heard yesterday, were harrowing. More young men were lost and more loved ones, friends and colleagues were devastated. More recently I left home with the car showing it was 43 degrees and I arrived in Canberra to lightning and storms. On the way I listened to the unfolding tragedy that a water-bombing plane had gone down outside Cooma. I ultimately learnt that three American firefighters had lost their lives. It is a sacrifice that will never be forgotten by our State. The RFS also lost Colin Burns, another long-serving colleague, whilst he was off duty defending his own property. Firefighters have lost their lives protecting others and the State will never forget their service.

The losses could have been enormous without the dedication and commitment of RFS volunteers, professional Fire and Rescue firefighters, the police, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service fireys, forestry fireys, SES, ambulance and other first responders. Despite the enormous effort in the face of these ferocious fires, not all lives could be saved. Another 18 people across the State lost their lives and many more suffered burns and

injuries. The toll on families, loved ones and communities across the State is immeasurable. Another direct victim of these fires was young Courtney Partridge-McLennan, whose town of Glen Innes had been shrouded in heavy smoke for months. Courtney was only 19 and an asthmatic. She was found early on the morning of 29 November. Courtney's family suffered what many must fear for their loved ones with asthma and other respiratory conditions as air pollution continues to pollute our State.

As well as the tragic loss of lives, many people have suffered the loss of their homes and livelihoods. To date, 2,432 homes and 5,360 outbuildings have been destroyed. The losses are immense, the suffering is great, and the recovery will be hard and long. More immeasurable losses are evident around us. We cannot travel anywhere on the east coast without seeing the harm to our environment. So far, 5.46 million hectares of New South Wales has burnt. That is 6.8 per cent of the State, including 2.7 million hectares within national parks. That is 37 per cent of our national park estate. More than 80 per cent of the World Heritage listed Greater Blue Mountains Area and 54 per cent of the Gondwana Rainforests have been affected by fires. Over 100 national parks have had at least 75 per cent of their area impacted by bushfires, including 50 parks where 99 per cent of the park is impacted.

Over a billion animals have perished, a quarter of all koala habitat in eastern New South Wales has been affected by fire and 14,500 livestock have been lost. I have seen the extent of some of that loss, having flown over Kosciuszko National Park in a chopper recently. I will not forget seeing the intensely burnt landscape to the horizon—I do not think anyone ever would. For many, the loss of the habitat, wildlife and animals strikes them deeply and personally. I wish also to extend condolences to the voiceless victims of the bushfires: livestock, pets, working animals, unique native wildlife, ancient rainforests, sensitive habitats and precious old-growth forests. New South Wales mourns those losses as well.

I have not seen the fires firsthand this time but I feel like my life has changed this summer. The fires were not at my back door and I have not lost a loved one. I have not lost a house. I have not had a wall of flames bearing down on me, my house or my farm. I have not had to work out whether to defend or leave. I have not been fighting fires day in, day out for months. I have not been picking up the charred remains of koalas or giving pain relief to those who made it out alive only to watch them perish later.

I have not had my morning turn orange and then black in seconds or feared for the whereabouts of my family. But, like many in New South Wales, I still feel like my life has changed. For those who have directly or indirectly experienced the impact of fires, I cannot imagine how you are feeling and what you are thinking. Perhaps you have not yet had a chance to think—and when you do, it is going to hit hard. Personally, I no longer know what my children's future looks like, and it shakes me to my core. These fires are unprecedented in New South Wales. They are unprecedented anywhere in the world. I acknowledge the personal experience of the member for Bega and that of so many members in this place. I know how tough it has been for them. I acknowledge the member's call for all members to work together. We all want to do that, because we all have the same commitment to and care for the communities across this beautiful State that we live in.

However, we will not stay silent when communities are misled as to the causes of the bushfires or when Government members blame others to divert attention from their own Government's decisions. These are discussions for another day, but we will ensure that the truth is told as we travel this recovery path together. For now it is about recovery. We owe it to everyone who is grieving—from losing a loved one, a house or their livelihood—to support them in this recovery. We also owe it to them to do everything we can to prevent this horror happening again and again. To do that, we must act urgently on climate change. We cannot fail in this challenge. We cannot allow this to be the new normal.

On behalf of the people of Port Stephens, I extend my deepest condolences to everyone who has lost a loved one, to everyone whose lives have changed forever. As a parliamentarian, as the New South Wales shadow environment Minister, as the member for Port Stephens, as a Labor Party member and as a mother, I give my steadfast commitment to do everything I can to ensure that there is action on climate change. Our children's futures depend on it.

Dr GEOFF LEE (Parramatta—Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education) (11:52:04): I support this condolence motion. As we have already heard in contributions from other members, the recent bushfires across New South Wales have had a devastating impact on our State, our communities, families and individuals. I do not think there are any members in this place who do not have a family member, friend or colleague affected by this tragedy. I extend my deepest sympathy to all of those who have been impacted. I offer my condolences to the victims of the bushfires. To date, some 25 people have lost their lives and many more have been injured.

I acknowledge particularly everyone who has been on the front line, from the Rural Fire Service led by Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons and all of its incredibly selfless volunteers, to Fire and Rescue NSW, the State Emergency Service, NSW Police Force, our defence forces and other service organisations. Through the strong

leadership of the Premier and Deputy Premier, the New South Wales Government is determined to do everything it can to respond to the bushfires that continue to ravage our State.

As the member for Parramatta, I also acknowledge those in my community who have stepped up to serve the people of New South Wales in response to the bushfires. Parramatta SES has 180 volunteers and had an incredible intake of 45 new volunteers this summer—a wonderful reflection of the selfless community spirit of the area. Parramatta SES sent two deployments down to the South Coast during the bushfire crisis. The first unit was sent down as part of a chainsaw strike force to help clear the main freeway to open the road for people to evacuate. The second unit was deployed to clear roads further down to Batemans Bay and Moruya, and also for the general clean-up of the bushfires. It also worked with NSW Health to check on residents in hard-hit areas. I thank the Parramatta SES and volunteers who stepped up to meet the needs of our communities in the fire-affected areas.

I also acknowledge the work done by our firefighters. The Parramatta Fire Station, Unit 027 of Fire and Rescue NSW, has been fighting fires for many months now during this bushfire season. This season Pumper 027 has travelled several thousand kilometres across regional New South Wales to assist during the current devastating fire season. Areas include the Blue Mountains, South Coast, Southern Highlands, Central Coast and the Hunter region. Parramatta crews have also been sent to other stations throughout Sydney to help in their areas while those stations went to bushfire areas. I thank the Parramatta Fire Station and staff for all their service.

In this crisis, we have seen the best of people shine through. We have all seen the work of our heroes on the front line. Our Rural Fire Service and emergency services officials have worked tirelessly in tough conditions to protect lives and homes. They have been putting their own lives on the line, and some made the ultimate sacrifice to protect the people of New South Wales. I want to acknowledge and thank them for what they have done for our State and our community. I also want to thank everyone in the community for assisting in supporting our heroes to do the work they do and for coming together in response to these challenging times.

I have heard endless stories of people going above and beyond during the crisis. People opened up their homes to friends and colleagues to provide them with a place to stay while they work to get back on their feet. Countless people are making generous donations to help those in need. I thank them for their support and generosity. While the threat of fire remains, for many communities it is now time to recover and rebuild. The impact of the fires has also been seen across my portfolios, and I am proud that the State Government is providing support to communities as part of this recovery. I also acknowledge the staff who have been impacted by the fires, and that includes the loss of homes, property, businesses and livestock.

As I noted last year, we tragically lost a TAFE employee in the North Coast fires and I again offer my condolences to their family and colleagues. I know that TAFE NSW is doing everything it can to support staff and students in bushfire zones, including providing in-person counselling services at affected campuses. Both TAFE NSW staff and immediate family members can access counselling support. TAFE NSW has also amended leave provisions for affected employees to take account of personal circumstances during the bushfire period. I am advised that TAFE NSW employees who are prevented from attending work or remain at home to protect their family and/or property may be granted family and community service leave to cover the period of the emergency.

I must also acknowledge the many staff who volunteer in the Rural Fire Service, the State Emergency Service and other volunteer organisations involved in emergency response and relief efforts. Throughout this situation, the Department of Education and TAFE NSW have played a role in disseminating information to the communities in which they operate. Many TAFE campuses across the State, on the North Coast, in the Blue Mountains and on the South Coast, have been closed at various times due to the fires. The safety of students and staff has remained our number one priority. I thank all the staff who have handled those closures and evacuations and all those who have spent their summer holidays assisting their communities during unimaginably difficult circumstances.

I am proud that there have been so many instances of TAFE NSW staff members rallying around their affected colleagues to provide support. Training Services NSW has contacted all impacted apprentices, trainees, and employers in affected areas, and will continue to provide ongoing support. I also encourage any apprentices, trainees, employers and training providers to get in contact with their local Training Services office, or me, if they have issues during these difficult times. Training Services NSW is also taking an active role in the business, tourism and industry subcommittee of the New South Wales State Recovery Committee, working across government to deliver a thorough and coordinated response.

We know that upskilling and reskilling the impacted communities will play a hugely important role in long-term recovery. While it is still early days, work is well underway. Training Services NSW delivered a drought holiday program for students looking to pick up some new skills. From shearing and wool handling, to robotics

and coding, quad bike operations, lifesaving and drone mapping, our partner training providers were working hard in many regional towns across the Central West, Far West and New England.

As Acting Minister for Sport I recognise that the Office of Sport has provided invaluable assistance to many communities impacted by the bushfire crisis across New South Wales. Many of its sport and recreation centres were made available during the crisis to assist with urgent accommodation for evacuees and the Rural Fire Service. The Berry Sport and Recreation Centre was made available for overflow crisis accommodation for evacuees on the South Coast and used as accommodation by the RFS for international and inter-region firefighters. The Office of Sport worked with the Berry Pony Club to provide agistment for displaced horses and livestock. It also coordinated donations to support a local initiative creating school packs for students returning to school in impacted areas.

Jindabyne Sport and Recreation Centre made available 750,000 litres of water in rainwater tanks to the RFS for refilling tankers. In addition to offering the centre as accommodation for the RFS, it also donated food and supplies to the Cooma evacuation centre, Cobargo Recovery Centre and the RFS. The Jindabyne centre also conducted a regional youth program for Snowy Monaro Regional Council free of charge, as its original youth program could not run due to bushfires. Many sport and recreation centres participated in the Drought Break Program, which began just two weeks ago, a free holiday program for children in drought- and bushfire-affected areas that offers them an opportunity for mental and physical respite. To date the Office of Sport has contributed over \$200,000 to the program, and an additional \$100,000 has been committed to running the program during the 2020 Easter school holidays. I thank all the staff and volunteers from the Office of Sport for their help throughout the drought and more recently through the bushfires.

As Acting Minister for Multiculturalism, I recognise the support that has been offered by our multicultural communities across the State for various bushfire appeals. There are countless examples across all communities that collectively have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars and have expressed their support in so many different ways. These include, but are not limited to, the Chinese Precinct Chamber of Commerce, the Way In Network, Sydney Chinese Australia, the 2020 Chinese Lunar New Year Charity Dinner, the Australian Chinese Buddhist Society, the Mingyue Lay Buddhist Temple, Tzu Chi Australia, the Korea community in Ryde, the Australia Korea Business Council, Fairfield City Council and the Laos community who live there, Cambodia Vision, the Salvation and Cambodian Culture Association of NSW, the Cambodian Buddhist Society, the Cambodia Friendship Group, the Federation of Democratic Kurdish Society Australia, western Sydney's Hazara community who have been fundraising from local Hazara businesses, the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, the Chabad communities across New South Wales, the Sikh community at the Gurdwara Sahib Glenwood, Turbans 4 Australia and the Assyrian Church of the East Relief Organization.

They are but a few of the countless multicultural organisations that have banded together during this difficult time and continue to support our communities that have been affected by bushfires. On behalf of the Government I thank those community groups and individuals across the State for their contributions and for banding together to raise much-needed funds for bushfire-affected areas. I know that all of the communities of New South Wales are resilient. I know that they will endure this adversity and emerge stronger for it. We all know that rebuilding bushfire-affected communities is a long-term project and one that requires all arms of government to work together. Over the next few weeks and months, recovery will be at the forefront of our efforts. I can assure the House that agencies across government will play a strong role in the recovery process by working together in fire-affected regions and communities and delivering responses that are tailored to individual needs. I know that everybody in this House will support the recovery.

As the Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education, my role is a difficult one. Clearly, we must balance the need created by the initial impact of the fires against the need to upskill and re-skill individuals in their local areas. We want them to become part of the fabric of our new communities by building homes, businesses and infrastructure. We are determined to make sure that we provide local jobs for local residents. We are determined to make sure that we keep the jobs in the regions, train the people in the regions and cater for that training based upon what the regions want. We are reaching out to those regions to talk about rebuilding, while being mindful of the initial shock that will last for not just weeks or months, but for the years that it will take to rebuild these truly devastated communities. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms LYNDIA VOLTZ (Auburn) (12:05:53): On behalf of the people of the Auburn electorate, I offer my condolences to all those who lost family, friends, homes, communities and much of their local flora and fauna during the horrific bushfire season. We pass on our sympathies to the families of Rural Fire Service volunteers Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer, Samuel McPaul, Colin Burns, Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, and to the families of Robert Lindsay, Gwenda Hyde, Vivian Chaplain, George Nole, Julie Fletcher, Barry Parsons, Chris Savva, Russell Bratby, Robert Salway,

Patrick Salway, Laurie Andrew, John Butler, John Smith, Michael Campbell, David Harrison, Ross Rixon and Michael Clark.

On behalf of the people of the Auburn electorate, I also offer our deepest thanks to those who fought to protect and save as many lives, homes, buildings and bushlands as they possibly could. They were always in our thoughts as many of us could only look on at the unfolding tragedy and offer what little assistance we could. We thank those who took in the surviving wildlife for their hard work. Many people who live in the Auburn area, which is one of the most multicultural places in the country, came from war and devastation in their homelands to the safety of Australia. They deeply felt the heartache and loss of those in the path of the bushfires. Even on Christmas Day I was answering calls from leaders of local community groups who were asking where they could go to help and who were ready with whatever the community needed.

The reality is that we needed to let those with the experience get on with doing their jobs, but many across the Auburn electorate offered whatever support they could. They did it without fanfare or social media blogs, and they often did it in the dead of night. Those with little to their name gave whatever they could. Organisations such as the Auburn Gallipoli Mosque and the Bhanin El-Minie Association held barbecue fundraisers and raised thousands of dollars. The Lidcombe Bowling Club was rocking with its Sunday afternoon bushfire fundraiser, which also raised thousands of dollars. Young people were holding street stalls to help save our wildlife. Everyone in the community was donating money to charities and goods to Foodbank. In the dark of night, workers from the Granville division of the St John Ambulance were packing their vehicles to head to the bushfire-affected towns.

Across the electorate of Auburn, people gave whatever they could. It is difficult to express how much the bushfires affected the local community, who felt powerless to help. They could only listen to the horrific stories of those who ran from their homes, gathered on beaches, tried to save their livestock and pets, and escaped with only their lives. Across New South Wales, Australia and the world, everyone wanted to help by giving what they could. Many organisations were on the ground ready to start rebuilding. I was able to spend a few days at a BlazeAid camp. We pass on our thanks to those organisations that are there to help rebuild.

What stood out were those who turned up to help. Firstly, there was an army of grey nomads who turned up with caravans at the ready. Whilst I thought my age would relegate me to the kitchen, here were men and women well into their seventies turning up to do the heavy lifting—fencing is not light work. Their experience was invaluable. The other stand-out were the people who normally relied on casual work in the agricultural sector, many of whom had no permanent home of their own and were living out of their car or a tent, who, with no work available, turned up to help. The jobs they were expecting to pick up were gone and the season lost so they used their resources where they were needed the most. I note also how many of those who turned up were former defence personnel and many who were without a permanent home. But as former soldiers, they did what they do best.

The heat was unbearable on most days, a heavy smoke lay across the land and every night they would roll back into the dining room exhausted. The scenario was repeated again and again by those helping in charities and organisations across the bushfire-affected zones. To the north, south and west, everyone worked tirelessly, providing food, looking after animals, finding clothing for those who had lost everything, and putting fences back up. The State Emergency Service, St John Ambulance and Surf Life Saving turned up again and again, helping the hurt, protecting those trapped on beaches, and providing shelter in local showgrounds and parks. Often our public servants do not get the recognition they deserve, but they deserve our thanks. Across New South Wales our nurses, doctors, teachers, paramedics, administrative staff, council workers, environment department, National Parks and Wildlife Service and Housing are all a part of their local community. They did what they could to save infrastructure, provide comfort and support the recovery.

As the shadow police Minister, I thank the NSW Police Force for its service. I know that the Auburn Police Area Command released four or five officers to help with the bushfires. That was the story across the metropolitan basin, as police were deployed to where they were needed most. I thank all those who took on the extra load so that resources could be deployed where they were needed. I thank the police working in the bushfire area for everything they did. Many lives were saved because the police were there knocking on doors, directing the traffic and getting those in the path of the fire to safety.

Some lost their homes while performing their duty. Senior Constable Aaron from the Riverina command lost his home to fire in Batlow whilst on duty. I understand that he has been inundated with support from the blue army of the Riverina district. But the worst job that any police officer can face is the call to find those unaccounted for after a bushfire has ripped through a town. We can only imagine the heartache of such a search, particularly given the death toll of this tragedy. Once again, thank you. There are not enough superlatives to say thank you to the men and women of our Rural Fire Service and the New South Wales fire brigade.

Going out to fight against fire in the face of such terror is something that only you can understand. Be kind to yourself and take time to process it. You will never be the same again. Do not underestimate what those sleepless nights, the waking in fright or sweat, and the unusual reaction that is out of character mean. Those are natural reactions to terrible times. They may not manifest today or next week; they may take months or years. It may be a smell, a colour or a change in the wind that makes you uneasy. Do not shut it out; talk to someone. Today major papers are talking about the number of former defence personnel who have taken their own life. Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past. No-one is super human; emotions are part of our defence mechanisms. Take heed of them and look after yourself.

We need to look to the future for recovery. Life is fleeting and quite frankly sometimes we need to take a break. So this autumn and winter I suggest a couple of options. A visit to Braidwood is a good place to start. The earrings I am wearing are from a quite trendy little clothes shop there, so you know the shopping is good. I recommend at least a beer in the pub near the river, which is almost in its original layout. The Narooma Oyster Festival is on in May and I plan to be there. I highly recommend it—beautiful waters of the Sapphire Coast and beautiful food. Take a leisurely drive and stop at places along the way. There are some particularly good cheeses. Glenn Innes is beautiful in the winter with some wonderful motels and restaurants. Take a leisurely drive and stop at places along the way—there are some particularly good cheeses.

Glenn Innes is beautiful in the winter, with some wonderful motels and restaurants. Take a drive up the New England Highway, cut across to Drake and visit the Lunatic Hotel for a beer, then across to Lismore and the beaches of the Pacific Highway, Ballina, Urunga, Nambucca Heads, Foster—so many great places to stop. Do not forget the drought is still on, so take a trip along the Murray. Try the new Moama Beach and drive out into corner country, where there are little art shops, lots of great food and an emu or two. Take a map though—I managed to get lost on the Hay Plains. This year let us take at least one trip to a place in New South Wales we have never been before. Take the road less travelled. If you wonder where a road goes, turn on to it and drive.

The past is another country. We are in the twenty-first century and the world has changed. In 1904 when Dorothy Mackellar wrote *My Country* the population of Australia was under four million. Our current population is moving towards 25 million. It is not a time for reminiscing about a poem originally written amongst the rain and bustle of England over a century ago. This is a condolence motion, but there is a need to talk about the very real changes in our environment, mapped out by the Bureau of Meteorology, brought forward by scientist after scientist and warned of by fire chiefs. This issue is not going away, and while today is not the day, the day for that debate must be soon—very soon.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH (Sydney) (12:15:33): On behalf of the Sydney electorate, I speak in support of this condolence motion and share our sadness for lives lost, homes lost, animals killed, communities damaged, habitats destroyed and all who have been impacted. This bushfire season has been the most ferocious and devastating that our State has seen and not a single person has failed to be affected. The bushfires did not divide country and city; they united us in support of those in need. Many people from the city come from regional areas that have been impacted by the bushfires and have family and friends there. Some of my constituents have had threatened their family homes and the communities in which they grew up, and all of us have had our State's natural environment almost irreparably impacted.

The toll of homes lost is unfathomable, reaching 2,400, and there may be more with fires continuing to rage. I cannot imagine what it would be like to so suddenly lose everything one has worked for and to have to start over again. The sheer horror of what people have gone through is overwhelming—making decisions about whether to stay or leave without knowing which decision is safer; facing the fire front as it surrounds your home or your car as you try to escape; not knowing if friends or family are in danger. We know that the experience has left many traumatised and in need of mental health care and support. I thank and commend all our colleagues in this place who have shared their personal experience of the bushfires and in doing so have truly demonstrated the close and loving relationship they have with their electorates.

The loss of human life has been especially distressing, with 25 people having died in New South Wales alone. People have died in their homes, defending their homes or that of others, or in trying to escape or fight the fires. On behalf of my constituents, I pass on sympathy to all those who have lost friends or family members in this bushfire season. I pay a special tribute to the volunteer firefighters who died, including the three American firefighter pilots who came to this country to help. Their service to the State will always be remembered.

While most of the news around the bushfires has been dire, the unity and solidarity among people across the State has been heartening. People of all walks of life and from all regions have donated unparalleled amounts of money to help those affected, including for rehabilitating wildlife. As always, artists have been particularly generous in donating works or giving free performances at fundraisers. I am proud of the contribution of the many communities in my electorate.

The City of Sydney has donated \$620,000 to bushfire and drought relief and wildlife rescue. It used its New Year's Eve event to raise over \$13 million to support the work of the Red Cross in helping affected communities. It is assisting regional councils to replace damaged civil infrastructure and has helped to establish an office to link councils that need support with others that can offer assistance to rebuild. This Friday Sydney's LGBTI community will hold a fundraiser across venues on Oxford Street for bushfire recovery efforts. Almost every community group that I can think of has engaged in fundraising efforts to support those impacted. We will assist with any further help that is required.

I thank the Premier for her leadership during this time and for giving members the opportunity to express their condolences to those who have experienced such great loss in the bushfires. I thank all government agencies for their role in supporting communities, especially the NSW Rural Fire Service, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, the New South Wales State Emergency Service, NSW Health and Service NSW. I hope that this Parliament will work to help reduce the suffering of affected communities and wildlife—I welcome the commitment to that made by all members—while also establishing the policies needed to prevent such devastation in the future. That will mean tackling the big challenges of climate change and land management. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr EDMOND ATALLA (Mount Druitt) (12:20:44): On behalf of my electorate of Mount Druitt I join with members of this House in extending my sincere condolences to the people of New South Wales and Australia who have been impacted by the recent bushfire epidemic that is affecting our nation. It has been heartbreaking and devastating in the extreme to witness the loss of lives and property. I wish to recognise, thank and commend the selfless members of our communities who have put their lives on the line to help in these most difficult of circumstances. The scope of the fires is unequalled in recent history. The destructive capacity of the flames is unprecedented and terrifying. The world was shocked last year by headlines announcing that upwards of 900,000 hectares of the Amazon rainforest had burnt. This is just one-fifth of the devastation we have seen since September in New South Wales alone. Damage to our neighbouring States increases the total area burnt to over 7.7 million hectares.

The effect of the fires on our native wildlife is also of great concern. It is estimated that over one billion animals have been affected since September—an unthinkable painful number, made infinitely more unbearable by our wildlife's uniqueness in the global context. We are the only continent, island and nation where the kangaroo, koala, platypus, emu, Tasmanian devil and other animals can be found. Throughout the world it is increasingly rare to find terrestrial fauna that has not been affected by the homogenisation of animals through trade. That makes our ecosystem all the more precious and fragile. It is for this reason that I am so deeply disturbed by the catastrophic events of the last few months. As the custodians of this rich and diverse land, it is our duty to protect and ensure the survival of our nation's wildlife. I urge all members to consider that when reflecting upon the devastation this epidemic has caused. Any future policies should consider and include the protection and wellbeing of our native fauna.

I have spoken on other occasions about the significance of volunteers in our communities. That significance has been demonstrated again by these fires. I am certain the fire situation would have been so much worse without the valuable aid of our volunteers, in particular the NSW Rural Fire Service volunteers who have led the fight against this catastrophe. I am so grateful and thankful to those who risked their own safety and even their own lives out of concern for others—acts of generosity rarely seen in today's society. However, I was saddened and angered to see so many volunteers without proper breathing equipment and tools to assist them. It is time to show how much we value their contributions and provide them with this vital equipment.

Likewise, I commend all the volunteer organisations that have been assisting those who have lost loved ones or properties. I commend the volunteers who have rescued and treated our injured wildlife. Again, I cannot thank all of them enough. I also recognise the contribution and support given to us by our friends overseas. I personally thank the people of New Zealand, Canada, Singapore and the United States for their support in lending firefighting personnel and equipment over the past few months. It is an incredible sacrifice to leave your families and homes to help us in a foreign country. The loss of three American firefighters in the tragic water-bombing plane crash this January is very devastating.

Once again I am overwhelmed by the level of compassion those men showed to our communities. They left behind their families and their homes to assist us, risking everything to do so. They are true heroes who, sadly, paid the ultimate sacrifice for others. I extend my deepest condolences to their families and friends and assure them that Australia will never forget this sacrifice. I thank and recognise the other nations that offered support by putting troops on standby to help if an urgent request was made. I also thank the individuals who donated their time and money to help our devastated communities to rebuild and recover. To those whose homes were threatened or destroyed, to those whose friends or loved ones were affected and to those who we have lost, I am truly sorry and I extend my heartfelt condolences.

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal) (12:26:19): I contribute to and support the condolence motion moved by the Premier. As the Premier said at the beginning of this condolence motion, "Never before have bushfires in New South Wales burned for so long and with such ferocity." On behalf of the people of the electorate of Terrigal, and as the Parliamentary Secretary for the Central Coast—which includes the people of the Entrance, Gosford, Wyong and Swansea—I offer my deepest condolences to all of the families who have lost loved ones during these events. As Minister Elliott reminded us, the bushfire season is only halfway there. Vigilance is key. The Central Coast is surrounded by national parks, State forests and beautiful open space. Indeed, everyone on the Central Coast should have a bushfire plan. The Central Coast is not immune from bushfires, as we have seen multiple times.

The purpose of this motion is to honour the 25 people who have lost their lives. Behind each of those 25 people is a story and a network of families, friends, loved ones and local communities. I express my deepest condolences to the families and friends, colleagues and neighbours and all of those who knew those 25 people. The Central Coast fires started many kilometres away at the Three Mile fire in November. Those fires spread rapidly eastwards into the Blue Mountains, the Hawkesbury and the edges of the Central Coast. In December many property owners and businesses around the Central Coast in areas such as Mangrove Mountain, Peats Ridge, Spencer, Glenworth Valley and Somersby were under immediate threat.

The fires also put wildlife under threat at our iconic Australian Reptile Park. I pay tribute to the great team at the park. They did an incredible job evacuating the wildlife that were in imminent danger. Thanks to good weather conditions the incredible RFS team was able to save the park. Again, I commend the outstanding team at the Australian Reptile Park on the forethought and the vision to make sure that there was an evacuation plan for those unique and iconic animals. As Dorothea Mackellar said in her poem *My Country*, Australia is a place "of sweeping plains" and "ragged mountain ranges"; it is a land "of droughts and flooding rains" and of "flood and fire and famine". Nowhere is that truer than on the Central Coast with the Australian Reptile Park being evacuated firstly because of fires and again a couple of weeks ago because of flash flooding. Those two extremes of our nation were evident on the Central Coast within weeks of each other.

New Year's Eve was not a time for celebration for the residents of the Central Coast due to strong southerly winds that pushed an out-of-control fire towards a deeply residential area in Charmhaven. It was a terrifying New Year's Eve for those thousands of residents who did not know what to expect. Unfortunately, we believe those fires were deliberately lit, but we were incredibly fortunate with the wonderful management of the RFS, Fire and Rescue NSW and our local police force who had a wonderful strategy put in place to protect Charmhaven, which I will discuss later.

On 4 January I was able to visit the RFS command centre in Charmhaven. On the day I visited, the temperature was around 47 degrees Celsius. While we were on site at Charmhaven, two new fires began. One was due to an electrical substation arcing; the other was a suspected arson attack near the Wyee train station. It was such a phenomenal experience to see how each of the people at the centre worked in their area of responsibility to produce a seamless response to that situation, which literally took place in front of our eyes. The speed with which those fires took hold was quite something to experience. It was with great pride that I was able to see the skill sets of all of our emergency services personnel in Charmhaven that day.

We have the Local Emergency Operations Controller, which is made up of our local police—both Tuggerah Lakes and Brisbane Water—NSW Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW, the SES and the Central Coast Council. They all work together as a seamless team to provide what is required to protect our region from deliberately lit fires and those caused by nature such as dry lightning strikes. I have said publicly, in the immortal words of David Elliott, that unless politicians are buttering sandwiches or holding a hose, they should stay out of the way. I was invited by Superintendent Viki Campbell to Charmhaven that day. Otherwise I was quite prepared to stay out of their way because we do not need valuable resources being allocated to mind a politician.

It was great to spend some time with them at the command centre and to see firsthand those emergency services working together. On that same day at Charmhaven we also watched the dispatch and aerial units. It was a seamless exercise and we should be incredibly proud that so many government departments can break down perceived barriers to work together. The Central Coast region is incredibly well served by the NSW Rural Fire Service. I note the member for Myall Lakes is in the Chamber today. He is a member of the Rural Fire Service in his region. It is the selflessness of volunteers like the member for Myall Lakes and others that keep our communities safe. I know that he is not afraid to walk towards a fire when his area is in danger. I commend the member for Myall Lakes for his passion for his region. As I said, it is the selflessness of the many members of the Rural Fire Service that keeps our communities safe.

I acknowledge Superintendent Viki Campbell, the district manager for the Central Coast, who I mentioned earlier. Her role is to be the incident controller. She has been truly phenomenal in her unceasing commitment to the job and her incredible cool-headedness under pressure. It is thanks to the work of Viki and

hundreds of paid and volunteer personnel that our region has been so fortunate in having fire risk both controlled and put out. I mentioned the fire at Charmhaven. Viki and I were in communication on New Year's Eve and she has kept me constantly updated on fire situations right across the Central Coast. That particular evening was a nervous night for all of us.

The fires, which were believed to have been deliberately lit, were fuelled by a strong southerly breeze that changed the direction of the fires. When we were looking at the maps in the control room it was quite alarming to know that up to 300 homes were at risk that night. However, we were reassured by plans A, B, C and D that Viki and her team had put in place to protect the people of Charmhaven. Indeed, the fact that only one residential property was lost that evening highlighted the professional way in which the team tackled the issue. The result could have been a lot worse, with thousands of people at risk.

The effort, research, science and experience that goes into fighting fires is nothing short of amazing. When we were at Charmhaven that day we looked at plans on how they were going to deal with the fires on New Year's Eve. They were able to call up the history of the fires that had happened two years earlier, including the temperatures of those fires. They then used that information, based on what happened two years earlier, to ascertain how much fuel remained on the ground. Those calculations and the areas of fires they had previously mapped allowed the RFS teams to work out the best line of defence for the 300-plus homes in Charmhaven at risk that evening. The science, technology and experience all paid off. Tragically we lost one home, but no lives were lost and the almost 300 other homes were protected from a catastrophic disaster that evening.

As I said earlier, Viki is currently responsible for the overall coordination of the RFS firefighting capabilities and bushfire risk management across the Central Coast and Lake Macquarie local government areas. That is an enormous area. The Central Coast is an area the size of the Australian Capital Territory, with a population the size of the Northern Territory. That does not include Lake Macquarie. Viki has 57 RFS brigades under her command and 20 staff working under her, along with 2,300 volunteer members. Her service to emergency response organisations has spanned over 30 years. Viki commenced as a volunteer with the RFS in 1990 and became a staff member in 2015. She has extensive operational experience in firefighting, including field operations, incident management and aerotactic coordination. Those skills were put to the test in great measure with the fires in Charmhaven and in the mountain areas of the Central Coast.

Viki is a true professional and I was absolutely delighted to hear that she was appointed as the Australia Day ambassador for the Central Coast. There could be no more fitting tribute to Viki than that appointment. On Australia Day I had the pleasure of joining her at multiple events. On Australia Day quite a few of our RFS brigades were out flying the flag and doing their work. Viki Campbell is also the incident controller for the Deputy Speaker's electorate of Port Macquarie and she is doing a phenomenal job. On Australia Day we got to see the great comradery of our RFS units; they have been doing it so hard for so many months. People were thanking them for what they have been doing for months on end to keep not only our region but also other regions across New South Wales safe.

One thing I love about the people of the Central Coast is their willingness to get in and help others. The RFS units in my electorate and right across the region take risks for others without fear or favour. I have obviously spoken with all of the units in my electorate but as the Parliamentary Secretary for the Central Coast I will take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all the RFS units from across the Central Coast region for their outstanding work. It is an extensive list: Avoca Beach, Awaba, Berkeley Vale, Brisbane Waters, Calga-Mount White, Cameron Park, Charmhaven, Coorabong, Copacabana, Dooralong, Dora Creek, Empire Bay, Gwandan, Kariong, Killcare-Wagstaff, Killingworth, Kulnura, Lake Munmorah, Macmasters Beach, Mandalong, Mangrove Mountain, Mannering Park, Martinsville, Matcham/Holgate, Mooney Mooney, Narara, Ourimbah, Patonga Beach, Pearl Beach, Peninsula, Seahampton, Somersby, Spencer, The Bays, Tuggerah, Wadalba, Wakefield, Wallarah, Wamberal, Warnervale, Wendoree Park, Wyee, Wyee Point and Yarramalong. I also acknowledge the outstanding work done by the Gosford and Wyong catering units in supplying food to those fantastic units.

RFS units from across the Central Coast have not only protected our region; they have travelled to all areas of New South Wales and provided support to other RFS units. Fire and Rescue units across the Central Coast have also taken part in the protection of our region and greater New South Wales. It is this teamwork that has provided such protection to all of our residents. They are truly exemplary. The police also controlled a lot of the situations and were able to direct people to safety. I thank the great teams at Tuggerah Lakes and Brisbane Water area commands. We have a wonderful spirit on the Central Coast: coming together and working as a team to protect others.

I am so proud of all of the RFS units. Some people have worked for weeks on end. In this time of crisis their employers have been more than happy to give them time off work to provide protection to other people. I also acknowledge the fantastic team at the Wamberal Rural Fire Brigade, which has grown in size and membership. Angela Burford started out as a volunteer and is now a full-time employee of the RFS. Angela is

now an outstanding leader in her unit, which has gone from one end of the State to another. It was a pleasure to welcome Her Excellency the Hon. Margaret Beazley, AC, QC, to the Central Coast. The Governor visited the Wamberal RFS where she talked firsthand with people on the ground about their experiences.

I thank Her Excellency for the large amount of time that she spent with the volunteers. They really appreciated her engagement and the questions she had about their experiences. The RFS officers and the volunteers are all incredibly proud of their unit. They were delighted to show the Governor around the station, to answer her questions and to spend time with her. They were proud to speak about the great equipment and wonderful trucks they have, as well as the extension to their fire station that was recently finalised. Indeed, I was proud to represent the Minister at its opening.

Debate interrupted.

Committees

COMMITTEE ON THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION

Reports

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Hornery): The question is that the House take note of the report.

Mrs TANYA DAVIES (Mulgoa) (12:43:34): As Chair, I speak to the first report of the Committee on the Independent Commission Against Corruption in the Fifty-Seventh Parliament entitled *Review of the 2017-2018 Annual Report of the ICAC and the Inspector of the ICAC*, which was tabled on 20 November 2019. The role of the committee includes examining each annual report and other reports of the ICAC and its inspector. This report is the result of the committee's review of the 2017-2018 annual reports of the ICAC and the inspector. This review focused on two main topics: the operations of the ICAC and the inspector after recent structural changes to the ICAC and the reputational impact on individuals who are named in an ICAC investigation.

The committee was pleased to hear from both the ICAC and the inspector that the three-commissioner structure at the ICAC is continuing to work well. We heard from the Chief Commissioner that the three-commissioner model has given the ICAC the capacity to hold overlapping investigations. As a result, the ICAC has increased its output for the 2017-18 reporting year. The committee has recommended that it reviews the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act in 2021, similar to the independent reviews from 2005 and 2015. This review could examine every aspect of the ICAC's operations and the Act. The committee was interested to learn of the establishment of the Strategic Intelligence Research Unit [SIRU] within the ICAC. We commend the ICAC for developing a proactive, intelligence-based approach to its investigation and corruption prevention work through SIRU.

The committee also commends the ICAC for developing a witness cooperation policy to encourage and assist more people to come forward with information about potentially corrupt conduct and to cooperate with the ICAC in its investigations. Both the ICAC and the inspector expressed their concerns over the current funding model for the ICAC. The ICAC argued that the current funding model could not sustain the ICAC's operational requirements long term, which would be detrimental to the ICAC's investigations. Both the ICAC and the inspector proposed an independent funding model for the ICAC to ensure that the ICAC can carry out its functions and operate independently. The committee recommended that the New South Wales Government examine this in the current budget cycle.

The committee was pleased to know that the outstanding complaints the inspector inherited upon his appointment have all been finalised and that the inspector finds he is adequately resourced to carry out his functions. The committee also recommended that the inspector publishes procedures and guidelines on how he assesses and manages complaints. This will give the public more information about the inspector's role. The committee welcomes the inspector's report on the ICAC's procedures for dealing with counsel assisting in investigations and inquiries, which was tabled in Parliament on 19 December 2019. We look forward to the inspector's audit of the welfare of ICAC witnesses when it is completed. As I said, the committee also considered the reputational impact of being adversely named in investigations of the ICAC. This is a serious problem and not addressed fully by the available remedies. The committee also found that one possible remedy to address reputational impact is an exoneration protocol. Indeed, this issue is a contentious one that requires a great deal of thought. The committee will have more to say on this in the coming months.

I thank the ICAC's Chief Commissioner, the Hon. Peter Hall, QC; commissioners Stephen Rushton, SC, and Patricia McDonald, SC; and the ICAC's executive team for their contributions to public hearings for the committee's review. I also thank the inspector, Mr Bruce McClintock, SC, for his contributions to the public hearings. In addition, I thank my fellow committee members for their valuable input during the review process.

Finally, I thank the committee staff for their assistance in conducting hearings and preparing the committee's report: Clara Hawker, David Hale, Jessica Falvey, Abigail Turingan and Ze Nan Ma. I commend the report to the House.

Mr RON HOENIG (Heffron) (12:47:50): Michael Gallacher was a Liberal Party member of the Legislative Council, Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council, police Minister and a former police officer with a longstanding reputation of integrity. On 2 May 2014 at a public hearing of the Independent Commission Against Corruption counsel assisting Geoffrey Watson, SC, put to a witness he was examining that the witness and Mr Gallacher had "hatched a corrupt scheme". The assertion that Mr Gallacher had acted corruptly was made without any prior warning while the Minister was attending an access class inspection of police on the parade ground of the New South Wales Police Force Academy in Goulburn.

The consequences of that assertion caused the then Premier to demand the resignation of the Minister, who for the remainder of his parliamentary term was required to sit on the crossbenches of the other place and was not permitted to attend Liberal party room meetings. The ICAC inspector Mr Bruce McClintock, SC, has concluded, following an audit of ICAC, that the question was "inappropriate and unfair". His evidence to the committee was that he had examined the documents upon which the ICAC relied on to make the allegation that Gallacher "hatched a corrupt scheme" and had concluded such an assertion was not warranted or justified. The inspector concluded that it was a serious lapse of procedural fairness.

Due to the practical effect of it, I regard it as a serious interference with the State's democracy. The inspector concluded, "Unfortunately the examination of Mr Williams is not the only example of the conduct of Operation Spicer which I considered to be unsatisfactory", and he gave a variety of other examples. He then concluded, "While I consider Mr Watson's conduct to be inappropriate and unfair to Mr Gallacher, that was, however, the failure of process and not a failure of substance ...". He found that failure of process did not seem to have any effect on Mr Gallacher's conduct which could be "supported independently of Mr Watson's questions to Mr Williams."

I reject the inspector's conclusion. The fact is that the ICAC, arising from the decision of the High Court in the Cunneen case and some amendments enacted by this Parliament, had no jurisdiction to make any corruption findings against Gallacher. If it has no such jurisdiction to make such findings, what was its legitimate forensic purpose of making factual findings against him? These were findings of facts made not on admissible evidence and made in circumstances when counsel assisting's conduct in a number of areas had been found by the inspector to be inappropriate and unfair.

The bar rules, as they then were, required counsel assisting to conduct themselves as if the commission were a court and "must fairly assist the court to arrive at the truth" and "not by language or other conduct seek to inflame or bias the court against the accused". No court would, except in the most exceptional circumstances, allow a conviction or finding to stand against any person after it concluded counsel, or a prosecutor, conducted themselves unfairly. I have unresolved concerns about the chief commissioner's letter he wrote to the committee shortly after the inspector gave evidence and I am ethically bound not to comment at this stage while the commissioner has before him an investigation into the Labor Party over conduct and the conduct of Kaila Murnain, whom I was once close to prior to the recent Labor leadership contest. I will wait for that report to be given before I pursue the matter further.

As no finding was made against Gallacher, he has no remedy. Parliament gives enormous coercive powers to a corruption-fighting body as it accepts that serious public sector corruption cannot be uncovered by traditional law enforcement means. While I accept the evidence of the inspector, that with the amendments to the Act the requirements of procedural fairness and the high quality of the appointments of the current commissioners we will not see a repeat of these legacy issues, I am not satisfied that the appropriate checks and balances for the future are in place to prevent significant reputational damage to people.

I am a criminal lawyer from the era where it took the High Court decades to effectively stop law enforcement agencies fabricating confessions. The Premier's department referred to agency capture when it suggested the three-commissioner model as one check and balance. We need a structure in place for the future when the current occupants move on. Do I really have to remind the House that the previous commissioner was effectively sacked by legislation—legislation opposed by the Labor Party? Effective checks and balances have to be a continuing process.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) (12:52:43): As a member of the Committee on the Independent Commission Against Corruption, I make a brief contribution to the discussion with respect to the *Review of the 2017-2018 Annual Reports of the ICAC and the Inspector of the ICAC*. This report fulfils one of the committee's obligations under the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988 and follows a self-referred inquiry by the joint committee to fulfil those obligations. Those obligations include to monitor and review the exercise by

the ICAC and the Inspector of the ICAC of their functions, to examine the annual and other reports of the ICAC and to look into trends and changes in corrupt conduct.

I acknowledge the chairperson, the member for Mulgoa, Tanya Davies, and all my fellow members of the committee. The committee held two public hearing days during the course of 2019. I acknowledge the Chief Commissioner of ICAC, Mr Peter Hall, QC; commissioners Mr Stephen Rushton, SC, and Miss Patricia McDonald, SC; and the Inspector of the ICAC, Mr Bruce McClintock, SC. The committee heard from a number of executive members throughout the hearings. I pay tribute to each of them for the operation of ICAC and for ensuring the integrity of ICAC as well as public confidence in our political system.

The report stipulates that a great deal of work has been undertaken by the Independent Commission Against Corruption in the past 12 months in particular. I acknowledge that in the 2017-18 financial year it managed an extra 262 matters, with a total of 2,751 matters. The ICAC conducted 41 preliminary investigations and four public inquiries of 47 days, compared with 27 days in the previous year. I also note that the ICAC delivered 248 anti-corruption presentations and had more than 7,000 face-to-face meetings with community members.

This year we are heading into very important local government elections. In 2015 the Australian Labor Party made it very clear that it would ban property developers and associates of property developers from being candidates in local government elections. To date the Liberal Party has failed to commit to ban them and we still do not have any legislation in this House to ensure that property developers cannot be in a position to influence local government. Many inquiries conducted by the ICAC relate to local government, an area in which the public expect the best due diligence.

Given the significant elections in September, I encourage this Government to introduce legislation that will ban property developers, their associates and real estate agents from being candidates in local government elections. One only has to read earlier ICAC reports to know about the significant inquiries into local government. It is clear this area requires better due diligence to give communities confidence that we are doing all we can to ensure that we prevent and stop corruption at that level.

Report noted.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Reports

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Horner): The question is that the House take note of the report.

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) (12:57:35): As Chair: I lead in debate on the report entitled *Examination of the Auditor's-General's Performance Audit Reports May 2017-December 2017*, which was tabled on 22 November 2019. There has been a significant delay due to 2019 being a parliamentary election year. With the finalisation of the Fifty-Sixth Parliament and the establishment of the Fifty-Seventh Parliament, the delay was caused by lack of opportunity for the Public Accounts Committee to review the reports. This was evident in the subsequent public hearing when, it is fair to say, many of the issues that had been examined by the Auditor-General had been addressed in some other way or by policy or needs had changed.

The report reviews 11 performance audits covering the period from May to December 2017 conducted into mining rehabilitation security deposits, medical equipment management in New South Wales public hospitals, NorthConnex, Sydney region road maintenance contracts, information and communications technology [ICT] in schools for teaching and learning, Office of Strategic Lands, planning and evaluating palliative care services in New South Wales, energy rebates for low-income households, sharing school and community facilities, Government advertising: campaigns for 2015-16 and 2016-17, and managing demand for ambulance services. The breadth of matters that the Auditor-General looks at is wide. The role of the Public Accounts Committee is to then examine reports from the Auditor-General—to work hand in glove with the Auditor-General's office in a sense—and to follow up to ensure that agencies look at the matters that have been raised and that they have been addressed properly. In this case, the inquiry into NorthConnex and Government advertising campaigns were two matters that were considered to be unnecessary for any further action.

Additional information was sought in four matters: mining rehabilitation security deposits, ICT in schools, energy rebates for low-income households and managing demand for ambulance services. The five matters that were considered for a public hearing were medical equipment management in New South Wales public hospitals, Sydney region road maintenance contracts, Office of Strategic Lands, planning and evaluating palliative care services in New South Wales, and sharing school and community facilities. Many of those are very important to all of our local communities. Some are quite evocative and have an emotional sense to them—for example, palliative care services. I will first deal with a matter that did not need any further information:

Government advertising campaigns. All members will remember those two great campaigns: the Stronger Councils, Stronger Communities campaign, which was a favourite among some members in this House; and the Dogs Deserve Better campaign, which was about the greyhound racing ban.

The matters that required attendance of members of some agencies were subsequently well addressed, but it is important to note that the process continues to involve the office of the Auditor-General. I thank the Auditor-General, Margaret Crawford, for all the assistance that she gives to the Public Accounts Committee in doing its work. The Auditor-General and her team are excellent at providing the information to members of the public and members of the Parliament to hold the Government to account. That is really important. I also thank the Deputy Auditor-General, Ian Goodwin. I note that he is also a member of the Army Reserve and has been very much involved in the bushfire planning and action at the moment. I thank him for that. I also thank the Assistant Auditor-General, Claudia Migotto.

The report was quite benign and has been well implemented by agencies. However, it is important that we continue our work. I thank the members of the committee, including the deputy chair, the member for Mulgoa; the member for Terrigal; the member for Heathcote; the member for Keira, who is in the Chamber; and the member for North Shore. I foreshadow that we will be replacing one of our members. I thank the member for Terrigal, Adam Crouch, who I understand is taking on another role. I note that the new member will be the member for Albury, Justin Clancy. I very much look forward to working with him. I thank everybody on the committee for their assistance.

Mr RYAN PARK (Keira) (13:04:36): I make a brief contribution to the take-note debate of the *Examination of the Auditor's-General's Performance Audit Reports May 2017-December 2017*. It is a real privilege to be on the Public Accounts Committee, which is arguably one of the most important committees in the New South Wales Parliament. The committee is under the careful leadership of my good friend the member for Lake Macquarie and we have a really good committee. The deputy chair is the member for Mulgoa, Ms Tanya Davies, and committee members are the member for Terrigal, Mr Adam Crouch; the member for Heathcote, Mr Lee Evans; the member for North Shore, Ms Felicity Wilson; and me. The member for Lake Macquarie outlined earlier the changes that will be made to the committee membership.

This examination is an important process that we go through. We essentially examine the performance audits conducted by the Auditor-General in order to further investigate action that has been recommended by agencies in response to those reports. It is an important follow-up. The Auditor-General in New South Wales does an outstanding job, along with her team. Anyone who is interested in public policy should go to the Auditor-General's website and go through those reports, which investigate and interrogate previous reports. It is a very good source of policy ideas and policy options, how things are being implemented and what can be improved. For those of us who are here for a love of policy, the Public Accounts Committee and the Auditor-General's office is a very good place to start reviewing and looking at initiatives, how they work, how they compare, how they are funded and what things the Government should be doing to improve them. I pay my respects to and congratulate the Auditor-General.

This report reviewed 11 performance audits and covered the period from May to December 2017. It involved very important issues such as mining rehabilitation security deposits, medical equipment management in New South Wales public hospitals—something I am very interested in—major road maintenance contracts and how they are rolled out, information and communications technology in schools for teaching and learning and the New South Wales energy rebates for low-income households. The committee made a total of six recommendations to the New South Wales government agencies. Those recommendations included developing key performance areas to better manage the sharing of school and community facilities. I am passionate about this issue and raised it as the shadow Minister for Education. I believe schools are community assets, not assets owned by a principal, and they should be used accordingly.

A recommendation was made to improve the collection of patient data. Further, a recommendation was made to manage medical equipment in New South Wales public hospitals, which is a very important initiative. Going forward, a recommendation was made to secure the long-term future of the financial and operational sustainability of the Office of Strategic Lands. An important recommendation was also made to better manage Sydney and regional roads maintenance contracts. All of us in this place would recognise that there is a great deal of work to do and a great deal of improvement to be made in that space.

I thank the chair; he is very inclusive and always open to ideas. If we disagree with the Government on issues he finds a way to have those issues aired. Members of the committee appreciate that. As the Opposition member on the committee, I especially appreciate it and my predecessor, the member for Maroubra, would also have appreciated that. I look forward to working with the Public Accounts Committee over the course of this year to further improve how things are delivered by the New South Wales Government and its agencies.

Report noted.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Horner): I shall now leave the chair. The House will resume at 2.15 p.m.

*Visitors***VISITORS**

The SPEAKER: I welcome guests of the member for Wollondilly: Councillor Garry Turland, Deputy Mayor of Wingecarribee Shire Council; and Councillor Ken Halstead, OAM, a former Mayor of Wingecarribee Shire Council. I also welcome guests of the member for Blacktown: Enrico Obletter, head coach of the Italian women's softball team; and his wife, Giovanna, who is a team trainer. I acknowledge their son Giancarlo who is also in the gallery. I welcome the former member for Mount Druitt, Richard Amery. Finally, I acknowledge those in the gallery who are here today for the Labor Legislative Council Community Caucus. They are guests of the Leader of the Opposition and member for Strathfield.

*Members***REPRESENTATION OF MINISTERS ABSENT DURING QUESTIONS**

Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst—Minister for Regional Transport and Roads) (14:15:26): On behalf of Ms Gladys Berejiklian: I inform the House that I will answer questions today in the absence of the Minister for Transport and Roads.

The SPEAKER: I understand that the Minister for Health and Medical Research will act as Leader of the House today.

*Question Time***BUSHFIRES INQUIRY**

Ms JODI McKAY (Strathfield) (14:16:18): My question is directed to the Premier. Given a Minister in the Premier's Cabinet has spoken out against the Premier's closed-door inquiry into the bushfires, will the Premier now commit to holding public hearings so people in fire-impacted areas can have their say?

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby—Premier) (14:16:39): I appreciate the question asked by the Leader of the Opposition. I advise her not to take out of context words articulated by the member for South Coast and my good friend Minister Hancock. I say at the outset that I have made—

Ms Jodi McKay: Mr Speaker—

The SPEAKER: I note that the clock has not started. We will address the problem. The Premier may continue.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I would never presume to speak on behalf of Minister Hancock. I suggest that the Leader of the Opposition not do so either. When we announced the inquiry, and leading up to the announcement of the inquiry, I said on numerous occasions that I anticipate and expect the inquiry to be robust and all-encompassing. I have spoken at length to the two outstanding individuals who will lead the inquiry in New South Wales. The terms of reference are on the public record; they are extensive. I say this to the Leader of the Opposition: If the Opposition is serious about adopting recommendations that might emerge ahead of the next bushfire season, it will support the Government's inquiry. In addition, I appreciate that residents of many communities will want to speak about their experience, as will many experts or people who have been fighting fires and those who have been involved in land management for many years.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Maroubra to order for the first time. The Leader of the Opposition will remain silent.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: As I have said on a number of occasions, the two outstanding individuals leading the inquiry can speak to whom they like and visit locations across the State that they think is appropriate to make sure they gather evidence and information that will allow our State to move forward. When I have spoken directly with the people impacted, their concern first and foremost is to rebuild their lives. This inquiry is important and vital, but we cannot lose sight of what matters to people today or what their expectations are of us as elected representatives.

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

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: The two outstanding individuals who are leading the inquiry will take submissions and speak to people. I have absolutely no issue whatsoever if they publish the information they are

gathering on a daily basis. This will be an open, robust process. I have heard members of the Opposition say on a number of occasions that they are sick of inquiries where recommendations are not adopted. If public hearings were held, thousands of people might want to speak.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Swansea to order for the first time. The member will remain silent. I call the member for Keira to order for the first time. I call the member for Maroubra to order for the second time.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I do not think this is funny. As I have said, we want to ensure that we can adopt any recommendations ahead of the bushfire season, which is fast approaching. As the Minister for Police and Emergency Services well knows, and as many members in this House would well know, the bushfire season pretty much started for us on 1 July last year. Similarly, this year's bushfire season will unfortunately start on 1 July this year. If we are serious about taking forward the recommendations that emerge, we will need to ensure that occurs. There will be many inquiries at a Federal level, so there will be many opportunities for people to bring forward their views. I anticipate and expect that the process will be open and robust.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will remain silent. I call the Leader of the Opposition to order for the second time.

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: Not only do we have to be sensitive to what is happening on the ground in our communities and what the public mood is at this stage, but also I stress that as I have visited many communities across the State—

Mr Nathaniel Smith: Mr Speaker—

Ms Yasmin Catley: Mr Speaker—

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: I have not finished my answer.

The SPEAKER: Does the member for Swansea wish to take a point of order?

Ms Yasmin Catley: No, I have a question. The time has expired.

The SPEAKER: The Premier's time has expired. I will give the call to the member for Wollondilly, who got to his feet at the same time as the member for Swansea. I thought the member for Swansea had a point of order.

BUSHFIRE RECOVERY ASSISTANCE

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH (Wollondilly) (14:22:44): I address my question to the Premier. Will the Premier update the House on the recovery effort moving forward?

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby—Premier) (14:22:50): I thank the member for Wollondilly for his question. I note particularly the extent of the impact on and the devastation in his community, especially in Buxton, Balmoral and Bargo. I acknowledge his contribution to the condolence motion last night. I note his community's heartfelt feelings not just in relation to the people who have lost their homes and the impact that has had on the community but also for the two brave firefighters Andrew and Geoffrey who lost their lives fighting fires in his community. I know from the member's comments and those of the member for Prospect how deeply felt the community's gratitude is not just to those two brave firefighters who lost their lives but also for the efforts of the entire Horsley Park brigade in that community. I acknowledge the contribution made by the member for Wollondilly.

Off the back of those comments, I take the opportunity to highlight the instances of resilience and generosity that we have seen in the community over the past few months, and also to talk about the bushfire recovery process and progress we have made to date. I appreciate many members attended a briefing yesterday. What is important for all of us is to make sure that every person who needs help knows about the help they can receive, because it is there. It is getting to people who need it, but we want to make sure that nobody is left behind.

I bring forward some examples of absolute heroism that I have witnessed not just in relation to the brave firefighters on the front line but also in relation to communities. As the member for South Coast, Minister Hancock, said today in her contribution, ordinary people are stepping up and doing extraordinary things. For example, having spoken to first responders, whom we often do not think about, who have to go into a scene after the carnage, after the destruction—whether it is recovering bodies or doing other difficult tasks—I know how deeply many of them have been impacted by that. It is the first responders who were with firefighters who lost their lives and who are still carrying injuries, and their heroism. It is the father and son I met in Hawkesbury who had just lost their wife and mother to cancer but who felt the best contribution they could make on Christmas Day

was fighting fires. It is the couple at Tomakin whom I mentioned yesterday who opened up their home to 27 strangers, including the children's pets.

A gentleman I bumped into with Minister Hancock and Commissioner Fitzsimmons at Lake Conjola said he had never visited a counsellor in his life—he would have been in his 60s. He said he did not feel right. He went to speak to a counsellor. The counsellor assured him that what he was feeling was normal. Because he had that confidence, he went out and helped others and encouraged them to seek counselling also. These everyday acts of heroism are making a difference in our communities. Many members have mentioned in their contributions community members who stepped up when communities were isolated, roads were closed and telecommunications were down in those vital hours straight after tragedy struck—communities coming together, providing vital supplies, assistance, counselling and support to those isolated communities. Regrettably, time will not permit us to talk about all those examples of heroism but we know they are there. They are from people who ordinarily go about their lives but when something like this strikes they really step up and make a difference for their communities.

As the Deputy Premier and recovery Minister has highlighted, I am very pleased to say that a clean-up contract has been awarded to Laing O'Rourke. We know that psychologically once the clean-up starts communities can feel the future is one of hope and not just one of destruction, which is unfortunately what many people feel at the moment. We know the clean-up job is huge but we are hoping and anticipating that next week there will be evidence on the ground of the clean-up starting. We hope that by the end of June the vast majority of people will either feel a major difference or else be on the way to having the rebuilding process start for them.

I also acknowledge the contribution of the Federal Government in this process. The State Government is managing the process but we are splitting the cost between us. It will be in the hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars, but that is a cost we bear because we know the importance of it. Talking about clean-up and recovery, I stress again the psychological boost that was afforded communities through the efforts of the education Minister. We had at least 80 schools impacted, 178 assessed and three completely destroyed but on day one every child was able to go to their school. Every child was able to know that their community had kept going. [*Extension of time*]

Every child was able to know that their school community was there and they had that routine established. It has given a huge boost to those communities who otherwise are going through a very difficult time. I also extend my gratitude to everybody at Service NSW. In a very short amount of time Service NSW now has a special care line for people impacted by bushfires. We hope that every person who has been impacted has just one contact who is able to provide them with information on all grants available—not just State Government but local, State and Federal information and non-government information. I am pleased to advise the House that, to date, we have had over 3,800 people register in a very short amount of time, which demonstrates the scale of what we are dealing with.

I have to confess that I was with a family who had lost a loved one and I mystery called the line and was pleased that it worked and the person at the other end was able to give that vital information. But, again, the biggest challenge with this is to make sure that people who need the help register because then we can ensure that they are provided with information and support and they do not have to bother contacting multiple different agencies. We can provide them with that one-stop assistance. To date, 3,800 people have accessed that service. Also on that front, I am pleased to report that we have had mobile buses go into communities on 42 occasions and 550 people have registered through those mobile buses. This means going into remote communities that might be isolated or cut off. On 42 occasions those buses have visited different communities around the State. I know they are continuing on that path. I want to assure communities that even though some may still be feeling the shock and deep trauma of what they have experienced, there is hope to rebuild and there is hope for support. All we need to do is make sure they are registered so we can provide that vital assistance. [*Time expired.*]

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Canterbury to order for the first time. I call the member for Tweed to order for the first time.

BUSHFIRES INQUIRY

Ms YASMIN CATLEY (Swansea) (14:30:30): My question is directed to Minister for Local Government. On radio the Minister said that the bushfires inquiry should not be held behind closed doors and that she would pursue the matter with Cabinet Ministers. Will the Minister let us know whether she had any luck this morning?

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK (South Coast—Minister for Local Government) (14:30:57): I guess that is the best you have got—both of you—about the bushfires and my community. You think you are speaking on behalf of my community; you have no idea and you have no right to open your mouth. My community has suffered greatly, particularly in Conjola Park, which the Leader of the Opposition visited for five minutes or so.

If the local community tell me that they want something of a community nature in a community hall where their views are heard and that they want the rest of their community to be there to support them, I will support them in that request.

Ms Yasmin Catley: Which is good.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: Of course it is good. However, if there are members of my community—and I believe there are—who want to be heard confidentially because of the confidential nature of the information they want to give, they should be treated with sensitivity as well. I will support them.

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

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: If the Opposition believes that I believe in a bells-and-whistles, lights-blaring public inquiry where people who do not necessarily want to speak—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister is answering the question and will be heard in silence.

Mrs SHELLEY HANCOCK: If people do not want to speak under those circumstances then they should be entitled not to. It will be horses for courses for every community. If people want to speak confidentially with some degree of sensitivity then they should be allowed to do so. But for others who really need the support of their community, I absolutely agree that there should be some form of meeting of a public nature. At the moment—right now—in almost every town and village that I represent there are meetings occurring with the Rural Fire Service and others who are leading conversations about the bushfires. They are listening to the concerns right now.

If any community member misses out and feels that they will not have an opportunity or any community feels that they will not have the opportunity to come together, I will make sure that I call a meeting with them and I will make a submission on their behalf to this inquiry. Please understand that we understand our communities and what they have been through. By interjecting in such an aggressive manner Opposition members just show how irrelevant they are. They lack understanding. They are trying to be relevant but they are not. They think that they can fly into a community for five minutes and fly out so that they can say in a speech that they have been there. They have no idea about the needs of the community. The member for Strathfield is a sad excuse for a Leader of the Opposition.

BUSHFIRE RECOVERY ASSISTANCE

Ms STEPH COOKE (Cootamundra) (14:35:40): 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) (14:35:58): I thank the member for Cootamundra for her question. The member is a very good Parliamentary Secretary to me. I acknowledge her work and effort in supporting communities impacted by fires over the summer break. The member for Cootamundra was often seen with the member for Wagga Wagga and worked alongside him in areas of his electorate impacted by the fires of this horrific summer, particularly in Tumut, Tumbarumba and Batlow.

As I said yesterday, it is a summer from hell. As the crisis ends and the adrenaline leaves, the reality of what is in front of us becomes a challenge that we have to come together as communities to take on. I spoke in this place yesterday about those in this place coming together as leaders of our communities, not as politicians, to make sure that this recovery is a great recovery, which is so important to the future of our regional and rural communities, many of which are very unique and require a different approach. Over the weeks, months and, in some cases, years ahead we have to ply every resource, focus and priority of the Government, Parliament and leaders in partnership with communities to make sure we achieve a great recovery. Communities in regional and rural New South Wales deserve every resource that the Government can put towards the recovery.

Yesterday the Government took a bipartisan approach and invited all members of this House to a briefing at which the RFS gave members an update about the fires over the summer. When it was put into context and the stages, the impact, the requirements from our volunteers and firefighters, the assets and resources that were required from late last year right through to January were compared with data on fires in the past 10 to 15 years, the magnitude of these fires stand alone in the history of this State—a magnitude that we have never seen in our lives. The recovery must focus on that magnitude. Yesterday the Government was also able to update members about the stages of recovery, identifying what those impacts look like. Some 2,500 homes have been destroyed by fires and another 10,000 properties impacted. Close to 40,000 homes across the State are being assessed for direct or indirect impact of the fires. This has a significant impact on our community and on our citizens.

The Government is getting on with the recovery and last week appointed Laing O'Rourke. Subcontractors will fill the void and hopefully stimulate the local economy. The Government has gone with a head contractor model across the north and south parts of the State. The lessons learned from the 2009 Black Saturday fires in Victoria make it clear that this approach will give New South Wales the best chance for a speedy recovery. When I say a speedy recovery, it is still a massive task. As the Premier alluded to earlier, we have set an ambitious target with Laing O'Rourke to have most of the clean-up done by 30 June. It is ambitious, but for people, families and landholders who have been waiting for a couple of months and will be waiting for the next five months, it still may be a difficult journey. We are all anxious to get back on our property.

The clean-up is a part of the healing, which is important for our communities to move forward, to see hope and to start planning their future. Their futures will be very different. Their futures have been changed this summer, but I am confident of our brighter and better future for our communities. I am confident we will start to see some of that clearing begin next week through Laing O'Rourke. Some of the impacted properties will see activity on the ground. I will be working with members, communities and local government to ensure the work is done in a sensitive way that is in line with community expectations.

The process going forward is that the landholder has a role to play in the scope of works, signing off on the scope of works and also signing off at the end of the clean-up—we envisage for most properties between two and four days. This is a significant investment by both the State and Federal governments. As the Premier alluded to earlier, it is hundreds of millions of dollars. The final figure is yet to be determined, depending on what is still to occur this fire season. Members can clearly see that the Government is focused on the clean-up. We believe that is our priority. People cannot plan for the future if they cannot get onto their land. That is why for both businesses and residents we are picking up the tab. On average a resident will be saving between \$50,000 and \$60,000 on the clean-up. If your property is insured, that means \$50,000 to \$60,000 from your insurance claim going directly to the rebuild, which is very important. [*Extension of time*]

Of course, for those who are not insured it means one less problem, one less issue that they need to worry about. But we also have support hitting the ground now and the money is flowing. This includes \$75,000 grants to primary producers—that is up in excess of \$11 million. Yesterday there was an additional announcement in relation to small businesses that are indirectly impacted of interest-free no-repayment loans for two years up to \$50,000, with five years to pay it back after that. This is one way to really fix that cash flow problem for those businesses indirectly impacted by fires. There are \$50,000 grants for businesses that are directly impacted—those that have been burnt out. There are other loan products: up to half a million dollars interest free, with no repayments and then 10 years to pay it back. Again, that is to support businesses getting back on their feet. This is all important in supporting our businesses.

There will be a stimulus that comes out of the rebuild. The rebuild of a thousand homes on the South Coast will in itself stimulate that economy. Local accommodation will be picked up by subbies and tradies who will hit the region in relation to the rebuild. We will continue to support families with the customer care program through Service NSW, making sure that we appoint a case manager and work with every individual, not only at the start of the journey but until the end, so that we can make their recovery the best recovery for them.

This is a massive task. There is support for everybody. I encourage those families and businesses affected by the fires to register with Service NSW on 13 77 88, jump on the website or, more importantly, visit a Service NSW office. We have a number of Service NSW mobile units hitting the towns and villages that need that support. We want to hear from people. We are not pretending that this is perfect. We do not pretend that people are not going to fall through the cracks. However, the more that people inform us—and I invite everybody to keep sending me their information—the more we can respond. Together, we can rebuild regional New South Wales.

BUSHFIRES AND DEFENCE FORCE ASSISTANCE

Ms TRISH DOYLE (Blue Mountains) (14:42:35): My question is directed to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Is the Prime Minister correct, as reported on 2 January and 28 January, that the Minister's Government rejected an offer from Canberra during the bushfires to use the military to evacuate the South Coast?

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills—Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (14:43:00): I thank the member for her question, ill-informed as it is. Suggestions from members opposite that the New South Wales Government has not sought or has ignored the support of the Australian Defence Force [ADF] or, indeed, any Commonwealth assistance are completely incorrect. Not only are the Australian Defence Force and the Commonwealth written in to the various State emergency management plans, and not only do we have very, very well-established processes, procedures and protocols when it comes to defence aid to the civil community and to civil powers, but it was a matter of public record that as early as July last year we had been working with the ADF to ensure that we were prepared for this particular incident. Indeed, I refer the member for Blue Mountains to

news articles around July when the member for Hawkesbury and I were at the Royal Australian Air Force [RAAF] base at Richmond welcoming the commissioning of the large air tanker *Marie Bashir*—

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: The New South Wales Government welcomed the work being done by defence at the RAAF base at Richmond, which took the responsibility to house the *Marie Bashir*, the large air tanker that of course has been so well utilised over the course of this bushfire period. As I said, the shadow Minister for Emergency Services is ill informed when it comes to the Australian Defence Force response. She would only need to go to any number of fire lines to see the Australian Defence Force.

Ms Trish Doyle: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. Is the Prime Minister correct? The question refers to the South Coast.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: I am given five minutes in which to answer. I am surprised that the member for Blue Mountains wants to interrupt to such an extent. In the past she certainly has never missed an opportunity to make an ill-informed comment in the public domain. Here is an opportunity for the House to be updated on exactly what the Australian Defence Force has provided.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will remain silent. The Minister is answering the question seriously and should be heard in silence.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: Over the course of the bushfire season, as I have previously stated, since July the Australian Defence Force and the Commonwealth have been providing New South Wales with a significant level of support in accordance with the existing protocols. In relation to individual situations, if the member for Blue Mountains had bothered to investigate exactly how those protocols and procedures work she would know that it is the Commissioner of the Rural Fire Service, normally on the advice of the other commissioners who include the Commissioner of Police, the SES commissioner and the Commissioner of Fire and Rescue NSW, who determines what operational requirements exist.

From every individual situation I have faced over the course of this season I know that every time the New South Wales Government asked for assistance—and this is the important point. The protocols say that the New South Wales Government has to ask for the assistance to demonstrate that the assistance is needed and that the New South Wales Government does not have the capability to provide that assistance. Every single time the commissioner responsible—in this case normally the Commissioner of the Rural Fire Service, Shane Fitzsimmons—makes the call. I know Labor members do not like Commissioner Fitzsimmons. They keep questioning his integrity. They criticised him and suggested he is somehow biased or there has been political interference, whereas he was a Labor appointment. Indeed, the Cabinet that appointed Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons included Labor's Leader of the Opposition. But let's not let the truth get in the way.

Ms Trish Doyle: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 73. I ask the Minister to retract that comment.

The SPEAKER: It is not a breach of Standing Order 73, but the Minister has been asked to retract the comment. Does the Minister retract the comment?

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: No.

The SPEAKER: The standing orders do not require it. It is at the discretion of the Minister.

BUSHFIRE RECOVERY ASSISTANCE

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY (Albury) (14:48:15): My question is addressed to the Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Auburn to order for the second time. I ask the member for Albury to repeat the question. I was unable to hear him.

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY: My question is addressed to the Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services. Will the Minister update the House on how the Government is providing housing for those affected by the bushfires?

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama—Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services) (14:48:52): I thank the outstanding member for Albury for his question. I must say it was a real privilege to be in his community twice in January to speak to him and meet with residents of the Albury electorate about the impact of bushfires on them. We spent some time at the bushfire evacuation centre in Albury and met a family of eight from Tumbarumba. It was very heartening to see that they were receiving the supports they required as their

children were with Save the Children Australia, which is a charity operating in many parts of the State to provide child care to families and those who need child care during these difficult times.

I also appreciated visiting Albury Wodonga FoodShare and meeting Peter Matthews. FoodShare collected 60 tonnes of food—usually it is about 10 tonnes—ready to go out over the Christmas period. It is a very passionate charity that serves Albury and Wodonga. It was wonderful to meet John, Leanne and David from Care Bear who provide support, food and care to families that were affected by fires in the Albury region, particularly the high country. I thank the member for Albury for his leadership in his community and all the local members in their various communities.

Since 8 November we have seen an extraordinary event in this State. The Department of Communities and Justice has responded with supports to people who need it during these critical times. All governments need to do all they can to support vulnerable people but during extraordinary times of natural disaster and crisis vulnerable people often bear the brunt of these circumstances. Since the outbreak of fires on the South Coast 2,418 people have lost their homes and many more were damaged. In order to respond to that we established the Bushfire Housing Response Team, under which we have two groups of people doing two wonderful sets of work. The Bushfire Housing Assistance Service has taken 5,318 calls for assistance to provide housing supports to those who need it. It is in many forms—for example, temporary accommodation for more than 7,000 people in great need across this State, rent assistance, rental bonds and forward rent to assist people with issues that they confront in their communities.

I was humbled to join my friend the member for Bega, Andrew Constance, who asked people who were fortunate enough to have a holiday home to make it available for a family in need in areas in the south-east. I appreciate all the people who have assisted during this time. Evacuation centres have been at the forefront of the response. Eighty-eight evacuation centres have been established across this State. I pay tribute to Paul Vevers from my department and Briony Foster who have coordinated this work. I also pay tribute to Shane Meijer, the welfare agent in the south of this State. I thank all my staff.

Staff from the Department of Communities and Justice have borne the brunt, like many people in communities. Recently I spoke to Hal Butterfield, who is an adoption caseworker. He was working in an evacuation centre, providing assistance to people on the frontline of those fires in South Coast communities, whilst his home was burning to the ground. I pay tribute to all staff of the Department of Communities and Justice who established those centres to respond to the needs on the ground right up and down the coast. It has been a privilege to travel the State and to be in places like Albury and Wagga Wagga with the local member and with Wes Fang from the Legislative Council at the Wagga Wagga Evacuation Centre.

I travelled the South Coast from Ulladulla down to Eden, where I saw councillors like Tony Allen, a local farmer, open his home to provide support for people who had lost everything. Mitch Nadin was on the frontline speaking with agencies and supporting them as a local government representative. I appreciate the efforts invested by people in order to try to raise their communities. We will continue to provide those supports as best we can to communities in need. The Kiama community has been affected by incredible fires. I pay tribute to everybody up and down the South Coast who has assisted during these difficult times, particularly the volunteers. As the State's Minister for Volunteering I am appreciative of the efforts that have been invested during this difficult time by volunteers. [*Extension of time*]

It does not matter where people are from, volunteers from the RSPCA through to various charities have been on the frontline everywhere providing support. When we established the Bushfire Housing Assistance Service I wanted to make sure that everyone was aware of it. It has received more than 5,000 calls. I thank the shadow Minister for Housing, Ryan Park, for coming to the Bushfire Housing Assistance Service to meet the staff and to be briefed about the establishment of this line. As the Deputy Premier and Premier have said, there is no politics in this. We just want to see the best possible outcomes for the people. Will we get every single situation right? Probably not. But the focus across Government—indeed, across this Parliament—is on every individual who has confronted the most harrowing experiences, from the smallest child through to the oldest of people.

We have met some extraordinary people around this State. I have to say that one of the most uplifting things I have seen as I have moved through those communities has been the Australian spirit. It is a shame that it takes a disaster to shine a bright light on what we all know is there across our communities—that is, the spirit of volunteerism and the spirit of giving. People opened up their homes to strangers, and volunteers went to communities that they may have never been to and helped individuals they may not have known. What a great thing it is to live in this wonderful country and, indeed, this wonderful State of ours.

I pay tribute to both the Premier and the Deputy Premier for their extraordinary leadership during this very difficult time. I thank them for providing support to my agency and my department as we provide housing responses, including temporary accommodation, and other assistance to those who need it. I thank every member

of Parliament who has been in touch with people who have been affected throughout this extraordinary period. I also thank those from across the political divide who have been in touch with me as a local member who has been impacted. It has been greatly appreciated and it has shown a great deal of political maturity from those who took the opportunity to do so. I thank all members for their interest and their support for these communities during this most extraordinary and difficult time.

BUSHFIRES AND DEFENCE FORCE ASSISTANCE

Ms TRISH DOYLE (Blue Mountains) (14:55:49): My question is directed to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. On 4 January the Government welcomed the deployment of 3,000 army reservists by the Prime Minister. Given that the bushfires had been going since August and millions of hectares had already burned, why did the Minister not request army backup in such numbers much earlier?

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills—Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (14:56:23): I am reluctant to respond to a question that is based on a lie. The Commonwealth only deployed 600 reservists to New South Wales, not 3,000. Those 600 reservists were deployed in accordance with the protocols that I mentioned in my previous answer. In relation to the second part of the question, which was vaguely correct, the shadow Minister probably does not realise that soldiers are not qualified firefighters. We cannot send them out to shoot the burning trees. That is not our responsibility.

The SPEAKER: The Clerk will stop the clock. The Minister is answering the question seriously and directly, albeit members may not like the answer. I warn members that if they interrupt I will put them on calls to order. I call the member for Auburn to order for the third time.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: As I said in my previous answer, the Defence Force was deployed as early as July. Specialist reservists had been involved in the response to these bushfires since before that time. The Prime Minister's decision to deploy the 600 to New South Wales was primarily to assist us with recovery, not response.

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

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: Now, if the member for Blue Mountains claims to be the shadow Minister for Emergency Services, I strongly recommend that she brief herself on the difference between response and recovery.

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

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: I would hate to see her send a whole bunch of civilians out into a bushfire just because she wants houses rebuilt immediately.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Canterbury to order for the second time.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: I encourage the shadow Minister to take up my regular offer to brief her on what is going on in relation to these bushfires. I am sure I can speak for the Deputy Premier in saying that we would welcome her being briefed on the recovery.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Blue Mountains to order for the first time.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: I will conclude on this point: Since the bushfires commenced in July, the shadow Minister for Emergency Services has not asked one question about the welfare of our volunteers or our emergency services. In the dozens of fire lines that I have been involved in, the primary objective for the New South Wales Government has been the welfare of our Rural Fire Service officers, firefighters and our emergency service personnel.

Ms Sophie Cotsis: Did you read the story yesterday about her son?

Mr Chris Minns: She asked her son about his welfare; did you ask her about her son? Did you ask about his welfare?

Ms Sophie Cotsis: Did you ask about her son?

Mr Chris Minns: Did you ask about her son's welfare?

The SPEAKER: That is enough. The point has been made. I have shown a bit of leniency. Members will remain silent.

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT: As I said in my opening remarks in the earlier answer, I am very comfortable with the response that the Australian Defence Force has offered to the New South Wales Government. I am very comfortable with the processes, procedures and protocols that the Commonwealth and the State have for defence aid to the civil power. I am very comfortable with the way that they have been operating. I encourage all members to familiarise themselves with the response by the Australian Defence Force in their electorates. It has done a

fantastic job. It has been an unprecedented response. Not only our domestic emergency services but also those from overseas have highlighted that it is more than appropriate for the defence force to be called in to provide us with this response. My only hope is that they get it done as quickly as possible because, as many members have said over the past couple of days, the best way of recovering from this disaster is to get our lives back to normal as swiftly as possible.

BUSHFIRES

Mr CHRISTOPHER GULAPTIS (Clarence) (15:01:05): My question is addressed to the Minister for Water, Property and Housing. Will the Minister update the House on how the government land has been prepared and utilised to assist the bushfire response?

Mrs MELINDA PAVEY (Oxley—Minister for Water, Property and Housing) (15:01:24): I thank the member for Clarence. Since September last year the member for Clarence, the member for Northern Tablelands and I have been experiencing the Bees Nest fires up and around Ebor. We share communities such as Tyringham, which is in the electorate of the member for Clarence, which is one of the impacted communities. We have all been on this journey together for some time. Our communities have been supported as best we can. The reason for the fires is quite simply a natural disaster known as drought, which has been impacting the State for the past three years in the most profound way.

Since March 2017 there have not been any major inflows into the Sydney catchment. In a month it will be two years since there was an increase in the Sydney catchment, when it received 313 gigalitres. Our Facebook feeds, synoptic charts and satellites are showing that over the next five days a major rain event is coming towards the coastal and inland areas of New South Wales. We can cross our fingers that the rain will have a major impact on our catchments, particularly in the north, where for the past three years there have been the lowest inflows into our systems. The most important thing is that we are preparing for a major downpour. We have had major fires around Warragamba Dam. Silt curtains and boom gates are operating and ready to go to ensure the sanctity of the Sydney water catchment.

We are also helping support our local councils through these major issues throughout regional New South Wales. If needed, there are silt curtains at either Nepean or Tallowa dams as well. Today we will cart water to Tottenham, Murrurundi, Euchareena, Coolabah and Fifield. I thank our brave firefighters for what they have been doing and, in particular, my agency of Crown lands. Over recent months it has been playing a major part in supporting the Rural Fire Service. Around 27 Crown lands staff are working with our RFS staff to go out into the homes to catalogue and take photos to ensure that we know how to manage the clean-up of those properties throughout the south, north and central west of New South Wales. It has been arduous. They have been on the go, they have been on call and they have been putting in extraordinary hours. I thank them for their work.

I also highlight the work of one of our Crown Lands teams led by Scott Vale. Scott has been leading a project since 2017 that has been pioneering the deployment of helicopters with RFS personnel on Crown land to ensure our fire trails are accessible. That work has been able to give us a significant increase in the number of fire trials we can inspect in a more timely and efficient manner. Scott and his team were awarded a Crown Lands award last December for their work. I acknowledge that innovation and the work that they have been doing. I also acknowledge the work the agency of Crown Lands has done. Over the past 10 years we have had a significant increase in funding to our Crown land estate for our hazard reduction programs—\$26.2 million has been spent over five years on Crown land.

Last year almost 4,000 hectares of Crown land underwent hazard reduction, helping to protect over 21,000 properties. We have managed the bushfire risk to our property as much as possible. Of the 5.5 million hectares of land burnt across our State, 142,000 hectares were Crown lands. The bushfires have had a significant impact on our estate. Around 2.5 per cent of the whole land mass across New South Wales that has been burnt has been Crown land. Over 1,705 reserves, over 79 leases, over 417 licences and over 1,695 enclosure permits have been affected. [*Extension of time*]

On Crown land 315 buildings have been damaged or destroyed, including roads and waterways. Major recreational trails managed by Crown Lands, including the Great North Walk, the Six Foot Track, the Hume and Hovell Track and the Zig Zag Railway, in the electorate of the member for Bathurst, were directly impacted, with significant damage to track-related infrastructure including camping ground toilets and shelters, buildings, bridges, signage and steps, and trees falling over tracks. Our staff on the ground have done an amazing job helping the RFS, cataloguing and taking photographs of properties that were damaged. They have been doing amazing work to recover and rebuild. Many of our Crown Lands staff and employees throughout regional New South Wales also back up as RFS volunteers—dozens of volunteers for the RFS are directly employed by Crown lands.

I acknowledge our estate and I acknowledge the work done by Crown lands and its innovations. I hope that the rain forecast over the next five days—in some areas 200 millilitres to 300 millilitres are predicted—does not fall too fast but gently and enough to go into the catchment. There have been improvements in rainfall, particularly in the north. The land has a little bit more moisture in it now so there will be more that goes into the catchment. I look forward to updating the House in the next sitting week on the rainfall that we have had, and on the much-needed replenishment to our catchment and our water supplies across New South Wales.

BUSHFIRES AND WILDLIFE

Mr JAMIE PARKER (Balmain) (15:08:22): My question is directed to the Minister for Energy and the Environment. Considering the devastating and unprecedented destruction caused by the bushfires in New South Wales, what additional resources are being allocated by the Government to begin the process of rehabilitation and regeneration of our native flora and fauna?

Mr MATT KEAN (Hornsby—Minister for Energy and Environment) (15:08:54): I thank the member for Balmain and everyone in this House who has expressed their concern about the impact of these bushfires on our natural environment. The fires have had a devastating impact on people and property across New South Wales. Tragically we have lost 25 lives and, as of today, we have lost more than 2,400 properties across the State. The absolute decimation of our natural environment has not been widely recognised. We are still trying to determine the full extent of the damage. Keeping in mind that fires are ongoing throughout New South Wales, at this stage we have lost 5.3 million hectares, including more than 2.7 million hectares of our national park estate. Recent reports suggest that we have lost more than 800 million animals, not to mention key habitat of some of our State's most vulnerable native wildlife.

Make no mistake—this is the most widespread and extreme bushfire disaster our State has ever seen. The Government has a critically important role to do what it can to support environmental recovery. For the benefit of the member for Balmain, I note that this does involve additional resources. Immediate, urgent interventions to support our wildlife and their natural habitats have already begun. We have commenced supplementary food drops for some of our most endangered species, like the brush-tailed rock-wallaby and the mountain pygmy possums in the Kosciuszko National Park. Those measures are critical because the destruction of many native animal habitats exposes animals that have escaped the fires to the risk of starvation and dehydration—a situation made worse by the ongoing drought.

We have dropped thousands of kilograms of carrots and sweet potatoes from the sky to support our endangered rock-wallaby populations and deployed watering stations for koalas at several key sites, particularly on the North Coast. In Kosciuszko National Park we have provided supplementary food and water for mountain pygmy possums and we are undertaking emergency works to repair damaged infrastructure at the southern corroboree frog field enclosures. Some animals and plants are at significant risk as a direct result of the fires. To give them the best chance of recovery we are collecting seeds for banking and individual animals for care and emergency housing until it is safe to release them back into the wild.

Rescue operations are currently underway for platypus populations, grey-headed flying foxes, genetically important koalas from the Blue Mountains region—I note the member for Blue Mountains' advocacy on that issue—Manning River helmeted turtles and northern corroboree frogs, to name just a few examples. Those are some of the primary endangered animals for which we are providing emergency housing. We will release them back into the wild once the danger period has passed. However, we are also targeting other animals.

Another concern for our native wildlife that survived the fires is predation by feral animals. Fire-affected landscapes expose our native animals to feral cats, dogs and foxes and leave our native animals to compete for scarce food with feral deer, pigs and goats, to name a few. That is why we have announced the largest feral pest eradication program in the history of NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. It will include between 1,500 and 2,000 hours of aerial shooting, up to 60,000 kilometres of aerial baiting, plus ground shooting, trapping and baiting in key locations. I advise the member for Balmain that we have provided an additional \$1 million of emergency funding for injured native wildlife. That started immediately and has been set aside as part of a \$6.5 million investment to support volunteer wildlife rehabilitation and veterinary professionals on the front line.

All these actions have been informed by science and represent the Government's immediate response to the issue. Work is ongoing to assess the full impact of the damage. Our scientists are working with the RFS and other research bodies, including universities, using satellite imagery to help inform the next stage of our recovery plan. The actions I have outlined to the House are what we have done immediately. Members must understand that medium-term and longer-term bodies of work are required to make sure that we give our native environment and native animals the best chance of a full recovery. [*Extension of time not granted.*]

BUSHFIRES AND SCHOOLS

Mrs LESLIE WILLIAMS (Port Macquarie) (15:14:26): I address my question to the Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education, and acting Minister for Sport, Multiculturalism, Seniors and Veterans. Will the Minister update the House on the impact on schools as a result of the bushfires?

Dr GEOFF LEE (Parramatta—Minister for Skills and Tertiary Education) (15:14:43): I thank the member for Port Macquarie for her question and congratulate her on her wonderful efforts over many months working for her communities through the bushfires and their effects. This has moved from a crisis in one area to a State crisis that is really of national proportion, so I thank the member for her fantastic work. I have heard great reports about her leadership in the community, so I thank her for that. I speak for all members in the House when I say that our thoughts and prayers are with the communities across the State that have been affected by this incredibly tough bushfire season. I acknowledge the leadership shown by the Premier and the Deputy Premier and their work championing the efforts of government, which has ensured a quick, appropriate response to the needs of the community.

We all understand this will not be solved overnight. For many communities it will not take days or weeks, but years, to progress. I thank the amazing people who have been on the front line and those who were involved with evacuations, including the Rural Fire Service, led by Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, and all of its selfless volunteers. I thank the Fire and Rescue NSW, State Emergency Services, NSW Police Force, Australian Defence Force personnel on the ground and, of course, the volunteers who have dedicated many hours across our State to address this national crisis. With schools at the heart of our communities, it was absolutely crucial for the New South Wales Government to get them up and running in time for day one, term one in 2020. We wanted to give students in these bushfire-affected communities a sense of normality and safety after what has been a terrible holiday period for them.

I will update the House on several initiatives the New South Wales Government has implemented to ensure that schools are appropriately supported in the wake of these fires. Last month Minister Mitchell announced a recovery effort valued at approximately \$20 million to ensure the 178 schools affected by the bushfires would be up and running by day one, term one. Schools that were impacted had damage ranging from lost fences, damaged outdoor play equipment and contamination from ash and fire retardant through to severe damage, as seen at Bobin and Wyaliba public schools. I am happy to report that the New South Wales Government managed to ensure every bushfire-affected school was ready to go in time for the staff and students' return on day one, term one, in 2020.

I commend Minister Mitchell, the Department of Education and everyone in the school communities who worked so hard over the break to make this possible. The Government is also increasing the number of school counsellors at bushfire-affected schools to ensure there is appropriate mental health support available for staff and students. We are working alongside principals and school communities to make sure there is tailored short- and long-term support in place to best meet the needs of students. Principals, P&Cs and other members of the school communities will also receive advice on how to properly identify signs of stress in children. Principals are encouraged to request additional counselling services if they believe it is needed. We also have in place a staff preservation model to ensure the number of staff in these bushfire-affected communities does not fluctuate in any way.

Whilst all schools were operational for day one, term one, we acknowledge that due to the loss of homes, businesses and jobs many students will be displaced in different areas whilst their families rebuild their lives. We are not only offering these students support with uniforms and fees for elective subjects, but there are also temporary placement and enrolment processes in place to ensure they have access to a school regardless of where they are staying. We also acknowledge that the staff at these schools have been through an incredibly traumatic time, which is why we are offering them tailored support packages to help them get back on their feet. Whilst the conditions have eased across New South Wales, there are still a number of schools that are non-operational due to the threat of dangerous weather. Our priority is to ensure the safety of our staff and our children, so it is crucial we continue to take advice from the RFS and principals on the ground as to whether it is safe and whether a school should be operating. I know everybody in this House will support this recovery.

Documents

INSPECTOR OF THE LAW ENFORCEMENT CONDUCT COMMISSION

Reports

The SPEAKER: In accordance with section 142 of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission Act 2016, I table the report of the Inspector of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission Corruption entitled *A report*

dealing with a complaint by the Commissioner for Oversight of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission against the Chief Commissioner (Special Report 20/01), dated 3 December 2019. I order that the report be printed.

Petitions

PETITIONS RECEIVED

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

Murray-Darling Basin Plan

Petition calling for a Federal royal commission into the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and requesting the Government to petition the Federal Government to establish a Public National Water Register, received from **Mrs Helen Dalton**.

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

Motions

BUSHFIRES

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal) (15:21:00): With the indulgence of the House, I will take up where I left off before the debate was interrupted. I want to talk about our local NSW Rural Fire Service brigades across the Central Coast, which do an amazing job. I mentioned all of our RFS brigades across the Central Coast who took part and continue to take part in protecting not just the Central Coast but also other regions of New South Wales up and down the coastline, from the north to the south. The Central Coast community is so proud of these volunteers and what they have been doing for months on end.

I highlighted Governor Margaret Beazley's recent visit to the Wamberal RFS brigade. I give a big shout-out to the team there, which is ably led by Captain Angela Burfitt. The Governor was so impressed she stayed there a lot longer than she had planned, which gave the volunteers the chance to talk to her one on one. They are so very proud of their unit and all the other units they work hand in glove with. They hold training sessions with other units as well as with our local Fire and Rescue NSW stations, such as Kincumber. I note that the Avoca Beach volunteers undertake similar training sessions. Our RFS brigades also do cross-training sessions with our local NSW State Emergency Service units. They are an amazing bunch of volunteers.

The Central Coast is renowned for having the highest rate of volunteers in the nation. Our RFS is a shining example of how our community steps up. Its members are prepared to put themselves in harm's way when others are heading in the opposite direction. As I said, the Governor had a great opportunity to talk with the team at the RFS station at Wamberal. They were so proud to show her their station and equipment and to tell her how pleased they are that they are so well resourced. That has occurred across the whole fire season.

As I said, they have fought fires from one end of the New South Wales coast to the other. I often receive messages from other members of Parliament, such as the member for Holsworthy and Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services, who is present in the Chamber, about our RFS crews. I know my RFS crews have been to her electorate multiple times, as they have to the electorates of South Coast, Kiama and Bega. We are so proud when they are on the road, heading off to help others. Again I thank them for their great contribution. I turn to the topic of arson, which is a terrible thing. As we know, many fires, unfortunately, are deliberately started by people. It does not need to be said that bushfire arson is a crime. I am thankful that the RFS and the NSW Police Force are working together to fight the scourge of arson.

Last year we cracked down on firebugs through a change in legislation. The non-parole period for convicted arsonists was increased from five years to nine years. When that legislation went through the House I spoke about this issue because arson is a terrifying fact of life on the Central Coast. Our RFS can plan for dry lightning strikes and different weather patterns, which they are very good at doing, but arson is a very unpredictable threat to work around. I congratulate the RFS and the Brisbane Water and Tuggerah Lakes police officers for the work they do to keep a close eye on suspected arsonists. It is one of the unknown factors that they have to try to manage, especially during this dry, hot season. There are further heavy penalties for people convicted of deliberately lighting a fire, as there should be. A person convicted of recklessly or intentionally causing a bushfire can be jailed for up to 14 years. I am so proud that I spoke in support of that legislation. [*Extension of time*]

When a person deliberately lights a bushfire to damage the life of another person they could be jailed for up to 25 years. Recent amendments to the Rural Fires Act have substantially increased fines for those who

deliberately light fires. Anyone who lights a fire on a day of a total fire ban can be fined up to \$2,200. If a person allows a fire to escape their property on a day of a total fire ban they can be fined up to \$132,000 or be given a prison term of up to seven years. Unfortunately, these measures are necessary because we need strong disincentives for arson.

As I said earlier, on the Central Coast our police were proactive and contacted suspected arsonists on total fire ban days so they knew that they were being watched. I have no doubt that it is because of the proactive measures taken by both the Brisbane Water and Tuggerah Lakes police as well as the oversight of the RFS and Fire and Rescue that there was a reduction in the amount of fire activity on the Central Coast. Those police officers should be congratulated on that outstanding effort. It is unfortunate that those actions need to be taken but they are necessary, and there was a reduction in those sorts of unfortunate incidents as a result.

I highlight also the increased penalties for people who litter cigarettes. With the long drought, all it takes is for someone to throw a lit cigarette out of a car window and a bush or grass fire can be started instantly. That is why fines of up to \$660 and five demerit points apply. However, if a motorist commits the offence during a total fire ban day then 10 demerit points apply immediately, as well as fines of up to \$11,000. It is hard to believe that someone would throw a lit cigarette butt out of a car window but, unfortunately, as I travel around the Central Coast I still see lit cigarette butts bouncing across our streets, highways and—even more unnerving—the M1 and F3. I am sure the member for The Entrance has seen that happening as well. That behaviour is of concern to our communities and I am pleased that these penalties are in place to prevent people from doing something so frivolous and careless.

I once again thank the people across the Central Coast who proactively put themselves on the line to protect lives and property. I was pleased to visit the Gosford RFS catering unit. The outpouring of community support for our volunteers on the Central Coast has been outstanding. Local businesses provided thousands of dollars worth of additional food free of charge. For example, Bounce Foods provided energy bars. My office was flooded with donations from people right across the Central Coast. My wife, Jill, and I drove up to the Gosford RFS catering unit to deliver carloads of additional food to the great volunteers. People were dropping off food and supplies directly to RFS units. That was greatly appreciated. The Gosford RFS catering unit volunteers did some incredible work. At times they were producing more than 700 sandwiches a day. Our fires were being very well fed and I know those Bounce energy bars would have found their way into the lunch packs of our very hardworking RFS volunteers. This is the sort of contribution we were seeing.

Kids at an early learning centre in my electorate put together a book thanking our fires. I had the privilege of delivering the book, together with all the food that was pouring into our offices. The initiatives that have been taken by our community show how they step up in times of crisis. The outpouring of support is not unique to the Central Coast; it has been happening across New South Wales. The way we step up in times of crisis shows the stamina and integrity of the people of New South Wales. When others are running away from danger our volunteers are running towards it and our fantastic communities step up to help them and provide additional support.

The Wyong and Gosford catering units did an exemplary job, to the point where they almost had too much food. The Rural Fire Service brigade had a lot of fruit which could have spoiled. They did not want it to go to waste, so I took the fruit to the Central Coast Animal Care centre. It was a very hot day and the watermelon and other fruit was given to the dogs and cats at the animal care shelter. Good on the RFS for finding a way to re-utilise the food rather than letting it go to waste. That is an example of how the Central Coast works constructively and proactively and comes together during times of crisis.

I do not like to highlight individual actions but I will highlight one resident in my electorate. I have spoken in the House before about Con Ryan. Con and his wife, Marj, are grey nomads and have had a great time travelling around the country. Con and his wife have a very well kitted-out, self-contained caravan that is fully solar powered. Con rang me and said, "We want to give our caravan to somebody who has lost everything." Con would never want me to talk about this publicly but he deserves recognition. He and Marj drove down to the Bega Valley and rang the local church. They gave their caravan to a family who had lost everything, and they expected nothing in return. When Con returned, he became quite emotional when he told me what he had witnessed and about the Bega Valley community coming together.

That is just the tip of the iceberg of the generosity of the people on the Central Coast. So far this season the Central Coast has been lucky. We are seeing the generosity of people like Con Ryan and his wife, who drove down to the Bega Valley to give their very expensive caravan—not expecting anything in return—to a family who had lost everything. On the night the family received the caravan the mother, who is a teacher, rang Con and Marj and said, "This is the first night in two weeks that I have slept on clean sheets." That is the sort of generosity that is being shown by so many people across the Central Coast to others. We are incredibly proud of the people of New South Wales. Their generosity knows no bounds. Millions of dollars are being provided not just by the

Government but through additional support from our community. That is how we pull together in a time of crisis. I thank the Con Ryans of this world. These are the people who step up not because they have to but because they want to. I am so proud to represent a community that selflessly gives to others. We know that if the Central Coast were in the same position others would come to help us.

I say to all of you thank you. I am so proud to be your member. I am so proud to be able to talk about what we have done as a region and the great work that the RFS continues to do. It is going to be a long, hot dry season. We all live through the fear of fires in summer on the Central Coast because we live in a beautiful area that is surrounded by national park. The climate can change so quickly on the Central Coast. Right now we are facing flood warnings due to potential heavy rains. One week we have potential bushfires, another week we have potential floods. At the same time, we live in the best region in New South Wales. We are so privileged to live amid the beauty of the Central Coast. I am so proud to be able to talk about the strength of the people of the Central Coast and the way in which they band together during times of crisis. I thank the RFS, Fire and Rescue, the NSW Police Force, the NSW State Emergency Service, paid workers and volunteers, who will be there throughout the rest of the season to protect everybody on the Central Coast.

Of course, our hearts go out to those people who have lost loved ones during this time of crisis. It is heartbreaking to see what has happened to other communities. I do not think any of us could have been more moved than when the heavy air tanker went down on that particular day. Those people were from another part of the world who paid the ultimate sacrifice to help keep us safe. To them we say, thank you. I thank the Premier for bringing this motion of condolence to the House. On behalf of everyone on the Central Coast, I again say thank you for the commitment that has been made right across New South Wales.

Mr DAVID MEHAN (The Entrance) (15:35:06): I support this motion on behalf of The Entrance electorate and the community I represent. The motion states:

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 have 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.

All members of my community have been affected by those fires. All of them have been shocked by the experience of the Gaspers Mountain fire, which devastated a huge area of the Central Coast hinterland. All of them experienced the smoke in the air, the orange night sky, the ash and burnt leaves that rained down across the whole Central Coast. I thank my community for its response to those fires, whether it was baking a cake to say thank you, donating food and drink to keep our firefighters going or organising donations—as the Central Coast's own comedian Celeste Barber did to raise money for fire victims. I thank you all.

Many of my constituents have worked in the fight against those fires. Firefighters of The Entrance electorate, both volunteer and professional, have been deployed across the State and I thank them all. Berkeley Vale Rural Fire Service brigade under Captain Jason Clunas has 29 active members, including eight officers as well as five trainees who will be assessed for their basic firefighter qualification this coming weekend. Since 12 December the brigade has been part of strike teams attending incidents at Mangrove Mountain, Kulnura, Gunderman, Mangrove Creek Dam, Martinsville, St Albans, Charmhaven, Grafton, Wangi Wangi, Bilpin, Warragamba Dam, Spencer, Bulga, Nowra, Kangaroo Valley, Grose Valley, Cooranbong, Dora Creek and Moruya. These commitments ranged from 12 hours to five days. Through all this they continued to attend to incidents in our local area.

The brigade would like me to note the work of Bob Coffey, who has done five deployments of five days duration to the Grafton area operating a vehicle known as a "Cat 6" tanker. It is a bulk water carrier that can also be used as a firefighting tanker. On some occasions Bob would drive for two to three hours to the fireground where he would spend 10 to 12 hours working before driving back to accommodation. On one of his deployments to Grafton Bob was appointed as divisional commander. He accepted this challenge as he would accept any challenge that was put before him in the service of his community. The brigade has four female

members: Jessica Scappatura, D'Voe Penne, Emma Cooley and Tanya Deger. For the first time in the brigade's history it has attended calls where female members outnumber male members.

I congratulate the Berkeley Vale Rural Fire Service brigade. This information was provided to me by Deputy Officer Les Smith, who is a very proud member of this brigade which has been part of his life for the past 43 years. I pay a personal tribute to the Berkeley Vale brigade. Its dedication to its work is heroic. For example, the storms that struck the Central Coast in 2015 took the roof off their station. It took over 12 months for the roof to be repaired but the brigade members did not complain once during that period and maintained their normal service level to our community. The Ourimbah Rural Fire Service brigade made a similar effort in fighting the fires. I acknowledge that and thank them for their service. I particularly acknowledge the brigade's leaders, Captain Jessica Farlow and Senior Deputy Captain Matthew Shoesmith.

Fire and Rescue NSW has four stations in The Entrance electorate of which two are permanent and two are retained, with 88 frontline firefighters plus senior officers and administration staff. I also acknowledge their service and name them individually: Station 351 Bateau Bay has 17 firefighters across four platoons and is led by senior officers Daniel Webster, Iain Turner, Andrew Grimwood and Guy Brisbane; Station 228 Berkeley Vale has 25 firefighters across four platoons and is led by senior officers Scott Needham, Gary Nash, Raymond Lonergan and Travis Broadhurst; Station 460 The Entrance is a retained station with 13 firefighters led by Captain David Piper, Deputy Captain James Henderson and Deputy Captain Ian Dancaster; and Station 509 Wyoming is a retained station that has 16 firefighters led by Captain Craig Garner and Deputy Captain Mark Edwards. All of those firefighters made a contribution to fighting recent bushfire.

The Wyoming crew is noted for recording the dramatic video that many people would have seen. It was taken during withdrawal from a fire south of Nowra on New Year's Eve. During the withdrawal two of the four trucks were immobilised as a result of the fire. I understand that members of The Entrance station were part of the crew on one of those trucks. I am pleased they made it back to our Central Coast community. Members of the SES also assisted under Unit Commander Steve Tobin. The 130 members of the Gosford SES sent teams to the mid North Coast from Forster to Wauchope to undertake road clearances. The teams assisted in the Wyee-Charmhaven area for two days with road closures. A number of team members also were on stand-by to assist on the Hawkesbury River with possible evacuations and assisted for a week in the fire control centre in Charmhaven by fielding calls from 8.00 p.m. to 8.00 a.m.

The 70 members of the Wyong SES under Unit Commander Matt Le Clerq provided logistical support at Glenn Innis, formed strike teams that were sent to Forster-Tuncurry to provide road clearances and assisted in the fire control centre by manning phones at Wagga Wagga. They assisted at the Charmhaven Fire Control Centre by fielding calls from 8.00 p.m. to 8.00 a.m. for a week and also assisted during the Wisemans Ferry fire by manning boats on the water for a week and looking after Marine Rescue and Fire and Rescue personnel. They also assisted in the Gaspers Mountain fire with road closures surrounding the area. I acknowledge the many public servants who have worked to support the firefighting effort, particularly the staff of many national parks and State forests, which are a feature of the Central Coast. I acknowledge the staff of Crown Lands who were involved in fighting the fire. I also acknowledge and thank the many army reserve members from my electorate who volunteered and were part of the call-up to support fighting the fire and recovery.

The fire season is far from over. I note that currently 61 bushfires are burning across the State of which 15 remained uncontained. I note particularly that one of those has been active since July 2019. Currently 1,500 firefighters and support personnel are deployed across the State. On behalf of my community, I wish them all the very best. I wish to record the names of those who perished in the recent fires: off duty volunteer firefighter Colin Burns, aged 72; Robert Lindsay, aged 77; Vivian Chaplain, 69; George Nole, 85; Julie Fletcher, 63; Barry Parsons, 58; Chris Savva, 64; Russell Bratby, 59; Robert Salway, 63, and his son Patrick Salway, 29; Laurie Andrew, 70; John Butler, 75; John Smith, 71; an unidentified 56-year-old man who died outside a home that had been destroyed by fire near Cobargo; Michael Campbell, 62; David Harrison, 47; Ross Rixon, 84; and Michael Clarke, 59.

When we inquire into the fires we owe it to those people, their families and loved ones who are left behind to honestly investigate the causes of the fire storm which has swept this State. We need to consider the role of climate change in those fires. When we consider our response we also need to consider what steps we might be able to take to reduce climate change and its negative effects. We should also assess our ability to fight fires. Are we best equipped for the longer fire season and heightened tempo of operations which would appear to be a trend rather than a one-off event? I thank all of those who have served in fighting the fires. I wish them all the very best for the future.

Ms MELANIE GIBBONS (Holsworthy) (15:44:53): I support this condolence motion on the bushfire season raised in this place by the Premier, the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian. The 2019-20 Australian bushfire season culminated in hundreds of fires, including some mega fires that have been or are still turning across New South

Wales. The fires took their toll. Devastatingly, 25 lives have been lost, lives of people who were fighting the fires or who got caught up in them. Thousands of homes have been lost and mementos are gone. Our hearts go out to all those who have been impacted, but we are just so sad for the families and friends who have lost their loved ones. I am thankful to the Premier for putting on a memorial to honour those lives: 23 February will be a special day and a much-needed day for our State. It will be a chance to grieve as a whole.

As of yesterday when this motion was moved, 65 bush and grass fires were burning across the State, 29 of which are still to be contained. Since July and August 2019 fires have heavily impacted various regions of the State from north to south and practically everywhere in between. Three states of emergency were declared, as well as 59 days of total fire bans and 11 statewide bans. To combat the blazes reinforcements from across the country have been assisting to fight the fires and to relieve local crews in New South Wales who have been working tirelessly. We also saw firefighters and equipment come to assist us from places such as New Zealand, Singapore, Canada and the United States of America.

Unfortunately in New South Wales over 2,400 homes have been destroyed and 25 people have lost their life while over five million hectares have been burnt and reports of a million, if not over a billion, animals have been lost. Like many other parts of New South Wales the Holsworthy electorate also saw some fire activity with a fire breaking out in bushland at the back of Voyager Point on 5 January. I thank the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and his staff for keeping me in the loop about the support that was being sent our way. The fire spread rapidly due to a strong southerly wind which was threatening to impact the houses in Voyager Point and Hammondville where my office is located.

Voyager Point has only one road, and a nursing home was in the fire's path if it went further into Hammondville. Authorities were also forced to close the M5 due to smoke conditions as the fire moved north. The fire expanded to 60 hectares which included some koala habitat. In fact, on Australia Day I was honoured to meet one of the firefighters who had helped save a koala while he was there. The south-west has the only disease-free koalas so they are extra special to us. We were lucky. We had phenomenal support on the ground, in the sky and on the water. Thankfully, due to the quick actions of our firefighters, no property was damaged and no lives were lost from this fire. The brigade from the neighbouring suburb of Sandy Point was quickly supported by other teams, aircraft were directed to assist, and the nearby Woronora Rural Fire Service came down the Georges River with their new boat to help from the water.

Minister Elliott recently gave the Woronora brigade the keys to a new boat named Bravo. It is a pretty impressive boat. It was used here and on Warragamba Dam. I saw the photos that were posted on their Facebook page of the team on the dam. Their boat was lowered into the water by crane. I could only think of how isolated those firefighters would have felt, to not see anything around them but water, fire and smoke haze. It must have been frightening and terribly eerie for them. Our local area is no stranger to bushfires and we can all remember the ones that threatened our community in 2018.

In April 2018 flames erupted on the eastern side of the Georges River near Casula train station and continued on through Wattle Grove up to Barden Ridge. This resulted in almost 4,000 hectares of land being engulfed in flames. Like the current fires, they were very close to many houses, with some reports of it coming up to the backyard fences. Local residents stood in their yards with buckets and hoses defending their homes from flames across the street. It must have been a very anxious and fearful time for many residents of Wattle Grove and Barden Ridge and especially residents of Voyager Point, Pleasure Point and Sandy Point, who were asked to evacuate or shelter in place as their escape route was closed. I bring this up because although my community has not seen the devastation in this fire season that many others have, it understands the effect it has on people, physically and mentally. We know it never really leaves you. We lived through the fires of the 1990s and sadly lost homes and lives then. The memories are still raw and fresh. It is not something you would wish on your worst enemy but, like we have seen so many times over the past few months, it brings out the best in us and brings people together.

I pay my respects and offer my condolences to the families who lost someone during the bushfires. I especially pay respects to those who gave up their lives to help fight the fires so that our communities could be saved. Last year I was honoured to have the opportunity to represent the New South Wales Government at the 2019 Emergency Services Volunteer Memorial Service as the emergency services Minister was with the Prime Minister, assessing the damage and consoling those affected by one of the early fires up north. Every year we gather in that place to reflect on the sacrifice and honour the memory of the men and women whose names are engraved on the volunteers memorial. While the memorial service is a time for solemn reflection, it is also a time to take great pride in the fact that across New South Wales people still selflessly commit themselves and their families to the service of their communities.

We are incredibly fortunate to have more than 85,000 emergency services volunteers in the State. They are a special breed of people—selfless, brave and, above all, generous with their time, skills and experience. From

fire and flood to storms, road accidents and other emergencies, our volunteers give their time unwaveringly to serve communities across the State. We must not forget that the safety and wellbeing of a community depends on the willingness of ordinary people to act when they are needed the most. Without volunteers, our communities would be less resilient and more vulnerable to disasters and emergency situations. Obviously, the value of the contributions that volunteers of New South Wales make is immeasurable. Their courage and professionalism are a credit to them, the services they belong to and the ideals that Australians strive to attain.

We know that firefighters are still dealing with the injuries sustained in the fires. Their impacts will be lifelong. We all come together to wish them well in their recovery. I pay tribute to the firefighters who sadly passed away while protecting our lives, homes and environment this fire season in New South Wales. On 19 December 2019 Geoffrey Keaton, 32, passed away while fighting a blaze near Buxton. His 19-month-old son, Harvey, received a bravery medal on his father's behalf. Andrew O'Dwyer, 36, also passed away on 19 December 2019 while fighting the blaze near Buxton. His daughter, Charlotte, also aged 19 months, received a bravery medal on her father's behalf. On 30 December 2019 Samuel McPaul, 28, passed away while fighting a blaze in Jingellic. His wife, Megan, received a bravery medal on her husband's behalf.

Three firefighters from the United States—Captain Ian Macbeth from Montana, First Officer Paul Hudson from Arizona and flight engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr from Florida—sadly passed away when their water bomber crashed while fighting a bushfire near Cooma. These men from near and afar gave their lives to help ensure that others could be saved. As a mother with a little girl just a few months older than Harvey and Charlotte, I can imagine the devastation of these young families. My heartfelt condolences go out to their wives, children and all their loved ones. I cannot begin to understand what pain and heartache they must be going through, but I would like them to know that my door is always open should they need any assistance or support—as I know all our doors are.

The thanks that New South Wales gives for what these men did can never be fully put into words, but we must always remember their sacrifice like we remember the sacrifice of Steve Crunkhorn, Gregory Rolf, Vernon Stedman, David Marshall and William Cummings, nearly 40 years after they lost their lives in the Sutherland shire's worst bushfire tragedy on 3 November 1980, when they were fighting a fire near Waterfall. We must remember their sacrifice like we remember the sacrifice of Leslie Delardes, a member of the Menai Bushfire Brigade who lost his life fighting a bushfire near Old Illawarra Road in the Menai area in 1977.

Seven significant fires occurred locally during the 1976-77 season, with the largest fires burning in the Woronora Dam-Waterfall, Yarrowarra-Bundeena and Holsworthy training area. We must remember their sacrifice like we remember the sacrifice of Peter Escourt of Grays Point, who lost his life in 1997 whilst fighting a fire near Beaumaris Drive, Menai. The fire, which started on 2 December 1997 in the Holsworthy training area as a result of lightning, later burnt down 11 homes in the Barnes Crescent area and damaged 30 others. We must remember their sacrifice like we remember the sacrifices of Keith Campbell, Thomas Bielecke and Gregory Moon from the Heathcote brigade, who died in a fireball near Angle Road, Grays Point, on the edge of the Royal National Park in 1983. We must remember their sacrifice like we remember the sacrifice of firefighter Allan Rendell from the Illawong brigade, who was crushed to death when a tree fell on his fire truck in Lady Carrington Drive in the Royal National Park, near Waterfall, in 1988.

Importantly, whether it was 23, 32, 37, 40 or 43 years ago, we are still paying tribute to those heroes, and I will keep on fighting to ensure that this continues to happen for our fallen emergency services heroes. We will remember and we will always be thankful. I would like to take some time to thank all our local Rural Fire Service volunteers who have been fighting fires and supporting the firefighting effort across our State over the past months. Their service, dedication and passion are second to none. They have given up time with their families, especially over Christmas and the new year holidays, which we were all very thankful for. I have seen photographs from Christmas parties and New Year's Eve parties that were held at mustering points. The mateship in those photographs was wonderful to see, especially against the backdrop of such tragedy. Whilst no-one could blame them for wanting to spend some downtime with their families, they gave up more hours over Christmas to fundraise and to raise awareness of how to prepare your home or be ready in the case of fire.

We all love it when the RFS helps Santa to visit our local areas on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. No-one could have blamed them if they could not or would not help this time, yet they did. They volunteered more time to pack RFS goody bags and hand them out with Santa. I have to admit that even though I am a grown-up I was a little spun out when Santa recognised me on Christmas Day, called me by name and took the opportunity to give me a briefing on the fires. The kids around me were pretty impressed that I knew about the fires and that Santa knew me. We explained that he had just flown his sleigh over the affected area.

I particularly thank the captains from each of my local brigades for the leadership they have shown during this time: Captain David Collins of the Casula Rural Fire Brigade, Captain Mark Cassidy of the Sandy Point Rural Fire Brigade and Captain Stuart Townsend of the Menai Bushfire Brigade. Whilst I have had the chance to thank

and talk to some of our firefighters, I wish I could individually name and thank all the RFS volunteers from my local brigades who have been out fighting these fires and supporting the firefighting effort. But these are a humble bunch of people so I will thank them in person, maybe over a beer, soon. The New South Wales Government, the New South Wales community as a whole and I thank them from the bottom of our hearts for the months of service they have given to keep many communities safe across our State.

I also take this time to thank the Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service, Shane Fitzsimmons. Commissioner Fitzsimmons has been a reassuring face on the television and a reassuring voice over the radio, on Facebook and in other social media for many people across the State over the past few months. As he is a humble person I know he would not enjoy my publicly thanking him in this place, but it is something that needs to be done. The compassion that this man has for the RFS family is astonishing—he is truly a phenomenal leader. He knows and shares the grief of the families who have lost loved ones fighting these fires and he ensures that they are supported and become part of the greater RFS family. Watching his compassion at the funerals was touching. His compassion is genuine and I know that it is long lasting. I know his care and concern will continue for years and years to come. I am glad that he has been at the head of this crisis because he truly cares about all those serving under him—a trait that is found in the greatest of leaders.

While we had many locals out there fighting fires through the RFS or supporting them through organisations such as the State Emergency Service and our police, we also had many locals and community groups supporting the efforts in their own way. I now give my thanks to them and provide an outline of what some of them did to help. I acknowledge Hunts Hotel Liverpool and the Liverpool Catholic Club for their assistance to bushfire evacuees. Harry Hunt, the owner of Hunts Hotel, opened his hotel to 120 or 130 evacuees from the bushfires. Some evacuees stayed for up to a week, with many of them coming up from the South Coast. During this time Mr Hunt provided his personal mobile number and made allowances for pets to stay at his hotel. Mr Hunt offered 20 rooms to evacuees but ended up giving away 30 rooms because he simply could not turn away people in need. He contacted Mrs June Young, OAM—a lady with a reputation for knowing how to get things done—who got the local Rotary groups involved. They approached Liverpool Catholic Club, which then waived the cost of lunch and provided free ice-skating tickets to distract the children.

During the tragic bushfire crisis businesses and community members stepped up and demonstrated immense selflessness. Some provided fruit and other food and necessities to help people who had nothing. They heard heartbreaking stories from families who had been separated by fire—some family members came to Casula to be out of harm's way while others stayed to protect their homes. The lack of phone service down south only made the distance harder. I cannot imagine how it must have felt to leave a loved one behind—the drive to safety must have been excruciating. On behalf of the community, I thank Hunts Hotel Liverpool, June Young, our local Rotary groups and the Liverpool Catholic Club for going above and beyond and for their generosity to the evacuees.

I thank Turbans 4 Australia, which has been working day and night to support those affected by the bushfires. Its bushfire appeal has been helping affected areas on the South Coast through the delivery of much-needed groceries, water, meals and financial support. All of these supplies were donated by various organisations such as Costco and Bunnings Warehouse and the local community. Turbans 4 Australia representatives delivered supplies to places such as Nowra, Milton, Ulladulla, Mogo and Brogo. The member for South Coast was very grateful to see them on Australia Day. They also provided hand tools, fuel jerry cans, water containers and shovels to farms and properties affected by the South Coast fires and sent semitrailers loaded with bottled water and groceries, such as tea, coffee, cereals, jams, biscuits, tinned food, long-life milk, long-life juice, honey, dried fruit, sanitary items and pet food.

I acknowledge Moorebank Soccer Club and TD Football Academy for their extraordinary efforts in organising a charity football game to raise funds for the NSW Rural Fire Service. Players had a variety of abilities and backgrounds—they ranged from experienced club players to employees and business owners from the local area. Each player was sponsored by a local business, each business choosing their player. An amount of \$18,000 was raised through player sponsorship, the raffling of a signed Western Sydney Wanderers jersey and a barbeque held on the night. How phenomenal is that? I attended the evening despite the unpredictable weather—a hailstorm occurred only hours before—and I was pleased to see the community out in force to support the event. *[Extension of time]*

Members of the Sandy Point RFS brigade were also present on the night, giving up even more of their time to thank the community for supporting them during this unprecedented bushfire season. I hope they know that it was the community who wanted to thank them for all the work they have done. The event showed the level of support and admiration that residents of the Holsworthy electorate have for our emergency services workers and volunteers, who have contributed tirelessly to protecting our community and other communities across

the State. I thank everyone who played a part in the event—from the organisers to the players and attendees—for their generous contributions to the RFS.

I acknowledge a number of organisations for the work they have done in assisting the firefighting effort. Anthony and his team from Red Frog Recycling in Prestons did an amazing job, enabling community members to donate their 10c from plastic bottle recycling to our local RFS brigades. Anthony and his team are very community minded. They have already raised funds to support communities affected by the drought. I was more than happy to help them launch their "Funds for our Furies" initiative at the end of last year. The Lions Club of the City of Liverpool is raising money for the New South Wales RFS volunteer bushfire appeal through a barbeque at Casula Mall, supported by Casula Mall, Bakers Delight, Sydney Tasty Meats and Sahara Cafe & Grill. Turning Pointe Dance Company at Prestons has raised money for the Red Cross to support those affected by the fires by holding a sausage sizzle and holding dance classes by donation. Wattle Grove Lions will be holding a trivia night at the end of this month, with funds raised going towards the Sandy Point Rural Fire Brigade.

Georges River Grammar has organised a community collection drive and delivered the supplies to the Sutherland Fire Control Centre at Heathcote. Sydney Manoosh in Chipping Norton is a great local business that took it upon itself to collect food and supplies and deliver them to firefighters and victims of the fires right across the State. The staff did that very early in the piece. I do not think that I have seen such a collective of individuals come together to help people they do not even know for some time, if ever. To hear about and to see these stories makes me proud to represent the electorate of Holsworthy. I know that our local RFS brigades were inundated with donations and supplies. I saw many Facebook posts thanking community members and local businesses that donated.

It was great to see people not only donating supplies, but also giving up their time, such as when Shire Family Medical helped Menai Rural Fire Brigade with some gardening, mowing and cleaning that it had not had a chance to get to because it was busy fighting the fires. It was wonderful to see our community's young people getting involved and wanting to say thank you. During the early part of January, two girls positioned themselves outside the IGA at the Hammondville shops near my office to gather messages of thanks on a poster for our volunteers, which was then presented to the Casula RFS. Additionally, year 1 students at Dalmeny Public School wrote letters reflecting on the bushfire crisis, and they shared some lovely messages with Casula RFS. Not only does that help the kids to cope and understand, but I am told that these initiatives gave these members a much-needed boost to their morale. I am proud that our community has come together to help those affected by this devastating crisis.

The New South Wales Government, led by Premier Berejiklian, has been focused on ensuring those affected receive support as quickly as possible. I thank Premier Berejiklian for her leadership throughout this bushfire season. I do not know how or when she slept, because it felt like she was always at a briefing, a meeting with residents or giving us updates. It was wonderful to work with such an inspiring and compassionate leader who obviously cares deeply about this situation. During these fires the Premier has brought together a team that includes the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, David Elliott. The education Minister, Sarah Mitchell, is looking toward recovery, along with the Minister for Customer Service, Victor Dominello, who is mobilising Service NSW. The Minister for the Environment, Matt Kean, is assisting with the efforts in our national parks and helping to ensure the survival of our animals, while the Minister for Communities, Gareth Ward, is assisting people to find homes and support.

The creation of the portfolio of Disaster Recovery, headed by the Deputy Premier, will mean that there is a coordinated approach. People can turn to the Deputy Premier and know that they will be heard and assisted. The New South Wales Government has committed to provide \$1 billion over the next two years to help rebuild bushfire-affected communities. This bushfire season alone, the Government has provided \$230 million in assistance to those affected. These costs include \$166 million to fight fires, \$25 million to clean up both insured and uninsured homes destroyed by fires, \$23 million for grants of up to \$15,000 for assistance with clean-up and replacement for small businesses and primary producers, \$6 million to provide additional mental health services and \$11 million to fund the Economic Recovery and Community Resilience Grants Program.

These funds will provide immediate assistance to fire-affected communities to ensure that these communities fast-track rebuilding as soon as possible. During the height of the bushfires, the New South Wales Government requested that major telecommunications providers, including Telstra, Optus and Vodafone, provide unlimited access to emergency services websites for customers in bushfire-affected areas. Additionally, we have deployed teams of mental health clinicians to support people affected by the bushfires. More than 200 tonnes of fodder has been distributed to bushfire-affected farmers in south-east New South Wales due to the devastating number of livestock killed in the fires. They also obviously need our assistance down there on their farms.

I echo the call from the member for Bega, Andrew Constance, who has asked for people to consider donating to Lifeline. As he says, Lifeline will answer the phone at 2.00 a.m., 3.00 a.m. or any time someone needs

assistance. There is always someone available to listen and to help. No-one should be embarrassed or ashamed to ask for assistance or counselling. Native animals and plants impacted by this season's unprecedented bushfires will receive expedited help under the New South Wales Government's 2019-2020 Wildlife and Conservation Bushfire Recovery plan.

The immediate response includes supplementary food for endangered species like the brush-tailed rock-wallaby and mountain pygmy possums, drinking stations installed for native wildlife, extensive aerial and ground-based feral animal and weed control operations, the rescue of six species already taken into captive protection, \$1 million in emergency funding set aside as part of a \$6.5 million investment to support rescue and care of injured wildlife, Taronga Conservation Society's vet and wildlife experts providing frontline support for injured animals and fire severity and habitat mapping to guide rescue and recovery.

Additionally, we are planning for the longer term restoration and recovery of our native animals, plants and landscapes across New South Wales. This includes protecting the remaining areas of unburnt habitat. This need was brought home to me when I travelled to Port Macquarie in January. I took my young girls to the Port Macquarie Koala Hospital. Seeing the huge white board with the names and conditions of all the koalas they were helping was just so sad, but how lucky we are to have such a service helping to ease their suffering.

Much like the trees along our local Heathcote Road, the other thing that stood out to me on that trip to Port Macquarie was that green shoots were growing back already along the sides of the freeways and roads. The smoke has cleared, green sprouts are showing and hope is returning. Throughout our time in office, locally we have already provided new RFS stations at Sandy Point and Barden Ridge. These premises have provided much-needed modern and up-to-date facilities for our volunteer RFS members to train and to use as a base of operations during the bushfire season. I will be writing to the emergency services Minister and the Treasurer to ensure that Casula RFS station is considered for an upgrade as well to ensure these members can utilise their facilities to the fullest.

Finally, I once again pay tribute to those who have lost their lives in these devastating fires and I look forward to doing so on 23 February. To those firefighters who have passed away fighting these bushfires, we will always remember your sacrifice. Our hearts ache for your friends and families. I again thank all the RFS volunteers who have been or still are fighting these fires. There is a quote from one of my favourite TV shows, *The West Wing*, that I keep thinking of, and I will share it today. It is by the character, President Bartlet, and it is known as "Ran into the fire". He said:

The streets of heaven are too crowded with angels, but every time we think we've measured our capacity to meet a challenge, we look up and we're reminded that that capacity may well be limitless.

It is when we think we are drained, tired and being tested as a society that the best can be seen. We have the best volunteers and I say to them: You are all heroes and I thank you for your service.

Mr JAMIE PARKER (Balmain) (16:11:57): On behalf of The Greens, I wholly endorse the motion before the House moved by the Premier and extend my deepest sympathies and those of my colleagues to the victims of this devastating tragedy, especially those in our community who lost their lives over the summer. Here today it is with great sadness that I along with all the other members in this place offer my deepest condolences to their families and friends. The victims of this disaster came from all walks of life. They were fathers, firefighters, friends, sisters, brothers, mothers, relatives and neighbours who made an extraordinary contribution to their communities.

This summer will be remembered for the scale and ferocity of destruction New South Wales has endured. We will remember flames licking high above the canopy, we will remember the darkness as smoke blocked out the sun, we will remember acrid pollution choking our lungs hundreds of kilometres from the inferno, we will remember our waterways blackened by ash and we will of course remember the heartbreaking images of wildlife fleeing from fire and then famine. It will take many years for families and communities to recover from these fires. While we cannot fathom your loss and we cannot sufficiently console you in your time of grief, I hope that this week's condolence motion can begin the process of healing.

I thank every emergency services worker, every member of the SES, every health worker, every defence force member, every army reservist, every police officer, every local council worker, every social or community services worker and of course anyone who has lent a hand to a friend this summer, contributed, volunteered and sent their best wishes to people who have been labouring under all these attempts to bring these fires under control. I pay special tribute to the remarkable volunteers of the NSW Rural Fire Service, to our professional firefighters and to those who have travelled from overseas to fight our fires. I particularly acknowledge the remarkable leadership offered by the RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons who has carried our State on his back through this disaster.

The destruction we have witnessed this summer was unimaginable, but it would have been so much worse if it were not for the heroism of all of our firefighters. It is a special type of person who will see a blaze approaching and stand right in front of it. We owe a debt of gratitude to all of those people and we thank them sincerely. In addition to the human tragedy of this disaster, the environmental tragedy has been monumental. December figures revealed that more than 10 per cent of the area covered by New South Wales national parks had already burned in the season's bushfires. Figures indicate that 20 per cent of the Blue Mountains world heritage area has been destroyed and 12 of 28 New South Wales world heritage reserves have been at least partly affected by fire. In response to a question I asked during question time today, the Minister for Energy and Environment outlined the truly terrifying extent of the damage to nature in New South Wales.

Damage on this scale will change the nature of New South Wales. Drought conditions have dried wet ecosystems that have never burned before. We simply do not know if these wetlands and marshes are resistant to fire and have the capacity to regenerate. The fires have also generated pollution on a totally unprecedented scale. Many of us in Sydney have seen the effects of that pollution in our local communities and electorates. In January it was reported that the fires covering the south east of Australia had generated approximately 400 million tons of carbon, according to Dr Pep Canadell, a lead scientist with Australia's national research agency and the Executive Director of the Global Carbon Project. To put that figure in perspective, Australia's total emissions from man-made sources last year was 540 million tons. These bushfires generated 400 million tons alone.

In December the ABC reported that Australia's bushfires have been so devastating that the country's forests may not be able to reabsorb all of the toxic carbon dioxide produced by the blazes. Whilst bushfires are normally considered to be carbon neutral because, unlike fossil fuels, their emissions output is reabsorbed when the vegetation in fire-affected areas regrows, many experts fear that the sheer scale and intensity of this year's unprecedented fires, coupled with worsening drought conditions, have disrupted the recovery process. The impact on wildlife from this disaster has been equally monumental. At the beginning of January, Professor Chris Dickman from the University of Sydney estimated that the number of animals killed in the bushfires was more than 800 million, with a national impact of more than one billion. Those figures include birds, reptiles and mammals, excluding bats. They also exclude insects and frogs—which many people do not think about—meaning the true number is likely much higher.

Regardless, raw numbers cannot adequately capture the extent of the suffering they represent. Animals have lost their habitat, been burned or suffocated to death. The animals who have been spared from the fires now languish in famine. Wild animals who survive bushfires in the first instance by fleeing or going underground will return or re-emerge into areas that do not have the resources to support them. Others will fall victim to introduced predators such as feral cats and red foxes. Even the birds or animals able to flee to unaffected areas will rarely be able to compete successfully with animals already living there, and succumb within a short time.

Australian biodiversity has been in significant decline for the past several decades, and it is fairly well-known that Australia has the world's highest rate of extinction for mammals. Events like this hasten the extinction process, and with so many of our animals endemic to Australia, we are facing the real prospect of entire species extinction events. I acknowledge the comments made by the Minister for Energy and Environment today when he outlined the steps the Government is taking to provide drinking water and food for many of our native animals. I acknowledge the work of every animal organisation, wildlife hospital and carer who has contributed to the wildlife recovery effort, given our animals the health care they need and provided food. The list includes, but is not limited to, Animals Australia, Sydney Wildlife, the NSW Wildlife Council, Animal Rescue Cooperative, Two Thumbs Wildlife Trust, LAOKO Snowy Monaro Wildlife Rescue, Wildlife Rescue South Coast, the Shoalhaven Bat Clinic and Sanctuary, Helping You Help Animals and the Native Animal Rescue Group.

I acknowledge the personal impact and the work of all the members of the Chamber and their electorate office staff who have fought fires in their communities, supported survivors and helped ensure our communities can continue. I make special mention of my colleague Tamara Smith, the member for Ballina, who spent her summer out in her community helping and supporting her local electorate, as did all members in impacted areas. I acknowledge the frank discussions being had by many in this place and our communities about the devastating impact this crisis is having on mental health across the State. I thank all members for their honesty and highlight the need for us to continue to talk about the toll that this devastation can have on our mental health and the importance of seeking expert advice and assistance. The fact that the Parliament is talking about this in the first instance is a very important part of that.

It is difficult to imagine how hearing firsthand accounts of these fires could not change the fabric of a person. The Mayor of Glen Innes, Carole Sparks, told Sky News in November that the fires, which have burned over thousands of hectares, are unlike anything she has seen after living in the town for 40 years. She said that it was burning in an area that has not been burnt, has been quite green, for many, many years. She said that they have never seen it like this. The animals are all lying on the ground dead. She said she thought they are all a bit

shell-shocked and coming to terms with the death of friends and coming to terms with losing all of their belongings, their structures, their homes and their lives. They are going to have to have a big rethink about the future of the community. They have lost so much. The Mayor of Shoalhaven, Amanda Findley, said that the fires from near Nowra to Bawley Point have terrorised her community. She said of the impact of the fires:

I've been spending time listening to people whose pain at present is beyond comprehension ... It made me think about how we as a nation then inform ourselves about understanding people's trauma. As the days and months move on how will we respond to someone who just has a meltdown, a moment, an angry flair up - understanding that the reaction we might be witnessing is most likely not related to the moment - but an expression, a release from the trauma carried - how do we train ourselves in compassion - to not react with anger or frustration to the person before us? Do we need to have some mental exercise where we count to 3 and remind ourselves that the person may we'll have been through untold trauma and to be gentle on them.

Nick Hopkins lost his home at Malua Bay in fast-moving bushfires on New Year's Eve. I read his gut-wrenching letter to *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 16 January. He said:

Like thousands of others, I stare at the smoking rubble that was once my family home. I am two parts shattered and three parts enraged.

Nick has every right to be enraged at us because what happened to him was not an act of God. It was a symptom of a bigger problem that we need to confront. We need to be offering our condolences. I acknowledge the inquiry that the Government is holding into this matter so that we can learn from this tragedy and apply those learnings to the future. So many people have given, donated and supported, but they want to see us move forward. I will take time over the next few weeks to acknowledge all of the organisations and groups in my community that have worked and supported, including the Lord Wolseley Hotel and Dick's Hotel.

We need to be better prepared. We must resource our firefighters better so they do not have to rely on donations. We must commit to helping families and communities recover and rebuild. We need to be doing everything we can to make sure that this inquiry is detailed and brings forward all of its recommendations for the future. Everything is on the table in New South Wales at the moment. We need to better adapt and recover from future crises. We also need to address the factors which will precipitate them. Australia is a nation of problem solvers. We are not problem deniers and this is a problem that we have the power to solve. Yesterday our Deputy Premier said that now is the time to show leadership and he was correct. Leaders have to guide their communities through crisis and many of the speeches today have been an important part of that.

We need to give them hope and to offer condolence. We need to act to prevent a crisis, not only build resilience and prepare to respond one; while that is important, it is not enough. Crisis prevention is an incredibly powerful way to honour the memory of those who have passed. We can pay respect to those people who have lost everything in their lives by doing everything in our power to prevent this from happening again. We know that the intensity of severe weather events will continue to rise unless we as a nation and as a world decide that we will make a significant difference when it comes to climate change. I acknowledge all members who have spoken. We have had some incredibly heartfelt contributions and I acknowledge all of those speakers. I thank all members who have worked so hard in their communities. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms STEPH COOKE (Cootamundra) (16:24:29): I join my colleagues from both sides of the House in expressing my condolences to the families and friends of the 25 victims of the bushfires that continue to burn around the State. I thank the Premier for moving this condolence motion. It is entirely appropriate that we mark these tragic bushfires with condolences. In homes in Australia and overseas families and friends mourn the loss of loved ones who gave everything defending our communities. We have also lost homes, properties, livestock, fruit trees, beloved horses, pets and gardens. My deepest sympathies go out to everyone who has experienced loss as a result of these fires.

As the member for Cootamundra I speak in support of all who served and volunteered in the Dunns Road fire, which started by lightning strike on 28 December 2019 just south of Gundagai in my electorate. This blaze impacted some of our most famous alpine towns and mountain villages, destroying homes, pastures, assets and wilderness areas in Talbingo, Tumbarumba, Green Hills, Wondalga, Willigobung, Courabyra, Tumut, Gilmore Valley, Yarrangobilly, Laurel Hill, Yaven Creek, Batlow, Oberne Creek, Tumblong, Mount Adrah, Taradale, Mannus, Tooma and others. These communities have all been deeply impacted. The fire ripped through 113,000 hectares of private land, 125,000 hectares of national park and around 92,000 hectares of State forest. Fire crews are still on site as they mop up the remnants of the massive combined fire front.

Regional New South Wales is more connected than we sometimes appreciate. The rapid spread of news on the old bush telegraph, social media or the close ties on a family tree keeps us in touch with others we care about. Tragedy in one part of the State is felt by loved ones all over. Whilst hundreds of volunteers and supporters were working on the Dunns Road fire on New Year's Eve, another fire near Wandella took the lives of two incredible and much-loved family men.

I acknowledge Renee Salway. A creative soul, Renee worked for me in another life when we were both florists in my business Native Botanical. Renee loved flowers, but she loved Patrick, horses and farm life more. This beautiful woman left her job with me in Young to marry Patrick Salway and create a wonderful life and family of their own. Patrick and his father, Robert, were killed on the family farm near Wandella. Patrick was just 29 and Renee is pregnant with their second child. I express my deepest sympathies to her and to all the family of Robert and Patrick. I also pay tribute to David Harrison of Goulburn who, aged just 47, lost his life defending the property of a friend at Batlow. His tragic loss during one of the terrifying nights of the Dunns Road fire is a testament to his character. I offer his loved ones, family and friends my deepest condolences.

There were many others who risked everything to defend properties and their livelihoods. The people of Batlow were told that their town was not defensible and to expect the worst. I was at several community meetings, including when this news was delivered to the people of Batlow. Even with this information, brave locals and Rural Fire Service volunteers—many from my electorate—stayed on to fight the terrifying blaze that tore through the pine plantations and apple orchards that are the livelihood of so many in the region. In the town of Batlow tens of properties were destroyed. It is a testament to the incredible work of the RFS and emergency services that the losses were not greater. I commend Captain Daryl Watkins of Batlow and everyone who defended the town for their remarkable efforts. The Dunns Road Fire continues to burn on the southern edge of my electorate and was only officially contained on Sunday afternoon. It has turned some of our pristine wilderness into funeral pyres of our unique flora and fauna. It has taken an enormous effort to contain this beast.

In the face of this unprecedented challenge, the leadership of RFS Superintendent Roger Orr from Narrandera in the west of my electorate was nothing short of extraordinary. I feel privileged to have met so many volunteers and emergency service workers who showed incredible courage in the face of unprecedented fire conditions. They were joined by colleagues in other organisations including Fire and Rescue NSW, the Forestry Corporation, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the emergency and fire services of other jurisdictions that included the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory, Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia, the United States and Canada. I thank you for supporting our local RFS brigades and others from across New South Wales, many of whom I will mention shortly. I got to see firsthand the amazing response of those on the front line of firefighting and in supporting roles.

We owe these volunteers and staff an enormous debt of gratitude. I still marvel at the number of farmers and property owners who left their own homes undefended on severe and catastrophic fire condition days and came together to defend many properties and communities, such as Tumbalong at the tip of the Cootamundra electorate. These crews included brigades from Tumbalong, Mundarlo, Boorowa, Gundagai, Maimuru, Wombat, Murringo, Thuddungra, Rugby, Boorowa North, Boara, McMahons, Kingsvale, Adjungbilly, Began Began, Stockinbingal, Cootamundra, Wallendbeen, Frampton, Cooneys Creek, Brawlin, Mount Horeb, Coolac, Wambanumba, Rye Park and distant Quambone. And let us not forget the Mosquito Squad consisting of scores of farmers and their slip-ons across the fireground who worked alongside the RFS and played such a vital part in saving properties. It was a privilege to catch up with so many of you, to make you snack packs and sandwiches, to chat about your brigades and to spend time talking about all that had gone on.

At its core the RFS is for the community, by the community, organisation—and it must always remain so. It brings together people from all walks of life, and it is not uncommon to see several generations of the same family on the one tanker: fathers, daughters, sons, cousins, siblings, even grandparents and grandchildren. I witnessed many of these relationships in the crews fighting the Dunns Road fire and worked alongside people like Di Lippiatt in the Tumut fire control centre who not only silently carried the worries of the ever-changing fire front, but how it would affect her husband and daughter on tanker crews on the Tarcutta end of the fire, mostly in the Ellerslie Range and Westbrook Road.

Her daughter, Courtney, also spent time in fire comms in Tumut. Also in fire comms were Wilma Cunningham from Griffith and Di Droscher from Batlow, who worked the day we thought Batlow would be lost and then could not return home for several days thereafter. The fire comms team worked around the clock relaying messages between the fire control centre and brigades on the fireground and relaying critical information on what the fires were doing, the areas under threat and, most importantly, where all the firefighting personnel were on the ground. The welfare checks were a highlight of our work during this uncertain time.

I thank the comms team for helping me learn new skills like scribing, and logistics officers, Geoff Frowd and Michael Borg, for allowing me to be an active part of their team. These are just some of the people who rarely make the news but who are an integral part of the firefighting effort. Seeing the incredible work of this close-knit organisation firsthand was a privilege. RFS Superintendent Roger Orr, who I mentioned earlier, Inspector Jon Gregory and the teams under their command dealt with difficult terrain, in many places only accessible on foot or by aircraft, conditions permitting. They were fighting a bushfire that joined with the East Ournie Creek and Green Valley Creek fires to become one of the largest on record.

The success of the RFS fire crews and those who joined them would not have been possible without the help of the Forestry Corporation and the team headed up by Dean Anderson, regional manager for the Snowy Mountains. The corporation's employees joined firefighting crews, created fire breaks and helped save more than 120,000 hectares of pines, which are so crucial to the region's economy and the State's timber industry. The Forestry Corporation, Hume Forests, Hyne Timber, AKD Softwoods, Visy and others are now working more closely than ever to process the more than 50,000 hectares of burnt pine from the immediate supply area.

I note the efforts of the Volunteer Rescue Association and Search and Rescue in Batlow, Tumut and surrounding areas. The members of these teams worked tirelessly to help others and I know at least one member who lost his home while he was saving the homes of others. My thoughts are with Mick and his family. I thank the volunteers of the State Emergency Service, particularly those from Grenfell, my hometown of Temora and my own unit at Junee for their supporting efforts. I particularly mention RFS volunteers Donna Martin and her husband, Graham, who is the Tumut group captain. As with so many others they worked around the clock and they also found room to put me and my dear friend, school teacher Nicole Sanderson, up in their home day, after day. I will never forget their kindness and hospitality.

Our firefighters, fire control and emergency operations centres were fed by an army of volunteers. Just down the road, the town famous for its dog and tuckerbox saw thousands of volunteers, led by Sue Houstain, making countless meals and snacks for more than a fortnight—feeding firefighters in places like Tumblong and Adelong, and making care packs for those who had lost everything. This energy was seen everywhere. In Tumut a team of volunteers responded to a call out for help to make meals at 9.00 pm. Within a few hours we had made 500 sandwiches. It would be remiss of me not to mention Robert Donges and Wendy Silk of Donges Supa IGA in Young. Like so many businesses and individuals they went above and beyond to do their bit.

Donges Supa IGA appealed for donations of non-perishable food, water, toiletries, baby needs, pet supplies and money for the communities of the South Coast and Snowy Valleys. To date, \$5,000 to the Snowy Valleys recovery centre, \$12,000 to the South Coast, \$1,700 to Cobargo, \$4,000 to Eden and \$2,000 to Tumblong have been distributed in IGA gift cards. Donges Supa IGA has also donated much needed water, food and toiletries valued at \$20,000 to Tumut and Cobargo. I was in Tumut to meet and unpack the trucks. What an incredible effort! Young is a small community but this was not its only fundraising effort. The Temora Rotary Club also gathered donations from Temora and surrounds. It collected more than four trailer loads of donations, which they took to the Tumut Citizens Boys Club. That was a particularly special day because two of the cars were driven by my parents, Marie and Stephen.

In Junee, Tearnna Mitchell, Madison Quinn and Jodie Coote, with the assistance of the Locomotive Hotel, organised a fantastic family day and fundraising event. In Cootamundra, Justyn Smith put out a call for donations of non-perishable food and supplies to take to the evacuation centre in Bermagui. They ran out of bags to pack donations in and asked for more; around 2,000 were delivered by the community. When they realised they did not have enough bottles to go with baby formula, another 200 were donated. Less than 7,000 people call the township of Cootamundra home.

Further down the road in Wagga Wagga, people came from far and wide to drop off goods, sort donations and help displaced people find a change of clothes and food for their families. The volunteers ranged from locals lending a hand, to Yazidi refugees who know first-hand what it is like to have to flee their homes. The people coming in to these centres were understandably shocked and shaken, but I was told a great story about one who had not lost his sense of humour—namely, a man who had been evacuated from Batlow, who was overcome with emotion at the amount of donations on offer, stopped crying, smiled and said, "Imagine, all this help for us hillbillies."

We have heard about the mental and emotional toll these fires have taken. We must ensure that we have adequate mental health support moving forward. People who would normally have had time to relax and recharge over January instead gave up their holidays to do what they could to help. Thousands of people—including some in this Chamber—have come back to work after having spent their summer dealing with this crisis. I commend the Emergency Operations Centre [EOC], the Fire Control Centre and Snowy Valleys Council for keeping the residents of towns such as Batlow, Tumbarumba and Tumut informed before, during and after the fires. They continue to deal with challenges like boil water notices and fallen and dangerous trees. They are helping property owners who are keen to get back on site and back to work.

Mayor James Hayes, Deputy Mayor John Larter, who is a paramedic himself, and General Manager Matthew Hyde are still working hard for their shire and have an enormous recovery ahead of them. I also note the efforts of the Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council staff and thank them for their work in refilling water bombers, helping to create firebreaks and supporting their colleagues in the Snowy Valleys Council. I commend Superintendent Bob Noble, inspectors Stephen Radford—who very nearly lost his own home—and Peter McLay, Adrian Telfer, John Aichinger, Maggie Deall and others for their leadership in the EOC evacuation centres. I also

commend all the police who calmly did their jobs in and around firegrounds, including officers Mick Jones from Tumbarumba, Amy Zwickl from Batlow, and Aaron Kilmurray, also from Batlow, who lost everything in the fire and still caught a looter who had stolen a car. Their professionalism and courage is something we can all admire.

The efforts of workers at the Murrumbidgee Local Health District [MLHD] are also noteworthy. The staff successfully relocated Batlow hospital patients and aged-care facility residents to safety in June. They also relocated residents from the Tumbarumba Multi Purpose Service to facilities in West Wyalong, Temora and Narrandera, all of which are wonderful health facilities in the Cootamundra electorate. The staff at those centres rose to the challenge of having additional patients and went above and beyond to care for them. The MLHD successfully returned all evacuated patients home again. That mammoth task was done with precision and care, and all staff should be praised for their skill in alleviating the distress that those frail and vulnerable people must have experienced.

Now we must head fearlessly into the recovery phase. Our national parks rangers have worked as hard as the emergency services personnel, with people such as Matt White and Jake Shoard playing a vital role at the Tumut Fire Control Centre. The task ahead of the National Parks and Wildlife Service to help restore and rejuvenate our wilderness areas is enormous. I acknowledge them for all of their efforts so far. The outstanding work of BlazeAid is now well and truly underway. Those volunteers are rebuilding thousands of kilometres of fencing and helping farmers to get back to being the world-beating primary producers that they are. It would be impossible to name every person and every organisation that has gone above and beyond during this crisis. The long efforts of recovery will not always be front-page news, but they will dictate the future of many communities.

We often say that regional communities are resilient. In the case of these fires, that term fits neatly. These communities are already looking to the future. Batlow is determined to hold CiderFest in 2020, despite extensive damage to the region's orchards and apple production, thanks to community leader Ray Billing. Cider makers like Ralph Wilson want people to remember the best of the region, not the worst. CiderFest will give us an opportunity to sample the region's craft cider and other delicious products. I hope members will join me at that fantastic event and the many others that are scheduled for the Tumut, Tumbarumba and Batlow areas. There are months of hard work ahead and I urge people to help in any way they can. I hope they buy a ticket to Tumbafest, make sure their apples are from Batlow and stop in at Gundagai on their way there. Already there are people such as James Zimmerman, who is leading the Regrow Batlow movement, who are working hard to get their towns back on their feet and sharing stories about recovery. [*Extension of time*]

Finally, I thank Premier Gladys Berejiklian and Deputy Premier John Barilaro. I can think of no better people to coordinate and lead the State's recovery and rebuilding. I also thank the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, David Elliott, and the entire Cabinet for their strength in leadership, which has helped us all serve our communities better. I acknowledge the work of the member for Bega; the member for South Coast; the member for Wagga Wagga; the Hon. Bronnie Taylor in the other place, who has been personally touched by this disaster as her property at Yaven Creek was one of the first burnt; and all members who have been personally and deeply impacted.

I thank the Premier for announcing an inquiry into the fires and I look forward to all of us working together to adopt its recommendations. We must do everything in our power to protect the lives of our people and communities and our unique flora and fauna from these sorts of disasters. This summer has been frightening. The fact that so many of us are sharing our condolences is a tiny glimpse of the impact on our State and nation. May we do everything to ensure that it does not happen again. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms SOPHIE COTSIS (Canterbury) (16:46:12): For all members this motion is the first contribution to debate in Parliament in 2020. We come here with heavy hearts. It has been devastating, particularly for the members who represent bushfire-affected communities. As the member for Canterbury, I want them to know that my community has been very concerned. On behalf of my community, I express our condolences to the families of the people who have passed. It is absolutely tragic. I want them to know that throughout the past few weeks our community has been touched. I cannot say how many phone calls I have received every day from religious leaders, community leaders, councillors, local constituents and people I meet at the local church and functions asking me, "Sophie, what can we do? We want to help." We have heard many such stories over the past couple of days.

Many of my Greek, Italian and Lebanese constituents have holiday homes on the South Coast. It reminds them of their home in Europe. A number of my constituents were evacuated on the beaches or in the clubs. They have been in contact with me at different times. My condolences go to everyone who has been affected. The scale of the bushfires is unprecedented. While the full extent of the damage is not yet known, it is estimated that this summer more than 11 million hectares have been burnt across Australia. To put that into perspective, it is the equivalent of burning the entire area of the Netherlands, Belgium and Denmark combined. This devastation has had a terrible toll. Although we are hearing different figures, it is estimated that up to one billion animals have

died as a result of the bushfires. More than 30 people have died, including firefighters who have paid the ultimate price in the service of our community. In particular I acknowledge Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer of the Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade who died fighting the Green Wattle Creek fire near Buxton.

I acknowledge the eloquent contribution of my colleague the member for Prospect, who was on the front line of the fires for weeks on end. This has been a tough time for him, his family, his community and his brigade. Our arms are wide open and he should know that he and his colleagues from the NSW Rural Fire Service have our warm hugs and our hearts and that whatever he needs at any time we are there for him. Samuel McPaul died fighting the Green Valley bushfire. I acknowledge our long-time friends in America. Firefighters Ian McBeth, Paul Clyde Hudson and Rick deMorgan Jnr were killed when their C130 water bombing aircraft crashed in the Snowy Monaro region.

Across New South Wales thousands of volunteers and professional firefighters have worked tirelessly to battle extraordinary blazes. I thank the leadership of the RFS—Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons and Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers—for the extraordinary work that they have done in leading their organisation and in talking to the local community. On some days the commissioner, along with the Premier and Ministers, were reporting to all of us—the public, the citizens of New South Wales—every couple of hours. Whether you were in a pub or a club, whether you were working and had the radio on or were watching television you were glued to the reports. Everyone was concerned about their fellow Australians and Shane Fitzsimmons, when providing expert professional advice, was the face of comfort and compassion and reassured the community. Shane Fitzsimmons has been doing an extraordinary job and we thank him.

I also thank and acknowledge the contributions made by the NSW State Emergency Service, our NSW Police Force, our local council workers, our utility workers and everyone else who has been working to restore communities and to help people get back on their feet. Whether they are clearing roads or reconnecting water and power supplies, there are many unsung heroes who are working to restore communities as quickly as possible. A few days before Christmas, on 23 or 24 December, my staff and I went next door to the Campsie fire station where we shared some cakes and goodies. We wanted the firefighters to know that we care and that we love them and we wanted to boost their courage and strength on behalf of our community. A couple of our local firefighters said that the previous weekend they had been out at Bilpin, in the electorate of the member for Wollondilly. All our suburban firefighters have been out fighting fires. It has been really tough but they are doing extraordinary work. I want them to know how grateful we are.

Our shadow Minister for Emergency Services, Trish Doyle, has done an extraordinary job over this period representing the Labor Party in the portfolio of Emergency Services. Her own electorate of Blue Mountains has also been affected. Not only did she do a wonderful job in the Blue Mountains but she also kept an eye on what was going on across the State. We heard the extraordinary story about her young son. We all say it is a miracle but God kept that crew together. I want the member for Blue Mountains to know that all members were very worried and we are very glad that those guys made it out safely. We are hearing and will hear a lot of stories. My electorate was not directly affected by the fires. However, one of the most difficult days for me was the day I was watching the news and saw that our colleague the member for Bega was unaccounted for. That was really tough. Regardless of our political differences, all members in this place are representatives and leaders of our communities and our colleague had been noted as unaccounted for. I know that a number of colleagues across the political aisle were very worried and made phone calls to make sure he was okay.

My wonderful colleague the member for Lismore, Janelle Saffin, has been at the forefront of her community for many months. Months later so many people in her community are still doing it tough. They are either homeless or have lost a little bit of themselves. It is important that members are steadfast in standing with their communities and advocating strongly for important services, like my colleague the member for Lismore has been doing. Some Government members have said, "Don't play politics." We are not playing politics. We are elected by our communities to represent them and advocate for them. The Government should acknowledge where gaps in services exist. When we raise issues on behalf of our local communities, the Government must take them seriously and take them on board.

I thank my Federal colleague Fiona Phillips, the member for Gilmore. She has been doing an extraordinary job representing her community, along with Mike Kelly, the Federal member for Eden-Monaro. I thank my colleagues the member for South Coast, Shelley Hancock, and the member for Kiama, Gareth Ward. I thank the community leaders—the councillors and mayors—who have been doing extraordinary work. I thank the Federal member for Macquarie, Susan Templeman, for her work in the Blue Mountains and the Mayor of the Blue Mountains City Council, Mark Greenhill. Our colleagues the member for Wollondilly, Nathaniel Smith, and the member for Ballina, Tamara Smith, have been doing important work as leaders in their communities. The community of the member for Wagga Wagga, Dr Joe McGirr, is going through a tough time. I want the member to know that whatever we can do at our end we are there for him.

As I mentioned earlier, our community has been asking, "What can we do? How can we support our fellow Australians?" In my local area the Federal member for Watson, Tony Burke, the member for Lakemba, Jihad Dib, our local councillors and I have joined together. In the space of 24 hours about 40 community leaders—religious leaders, club leaders, sporting leaders—came to Tony Burke's office to offer help and support. We have now established a group called Side By Side. The member for Lakemba has visited a number of places, including down south and at Taree, with our local community leaders.

Our community has been extraordinary in providing donations and assistance. There was a call-out for no more food because of a lack of storage. I understood that and I raised it with my local community groups. But some people in our community opened their cupboard, took whatever they had and came to our office, the church at Belmore or Human Appeal at Lakemba and said, "This is all I have." For me this is worth a million dollars. They gave to help our fellow Australians who do not have anything to eat. It is extraordinary generosity under these very difficult circumstances.

I thank the many organisations who have contributed and the people who have donated. I want to give a shout-out to the many clubs that established evacuation centres. Many of the workers at those clubs worked for nothing because people had nowhere else to go. I mention those clubs, which included the Adelong Services & Citizens & Bowling Club and The Country Club at St Georges Basin. I visited that club last week to thank the staff, who told me extraordinary stories of people coming to the club with their pets and their animals.

Mr Gareth Ward: It was like the Ark.

Ms SOPHIE COTSIS: That is what I was told, that it was like the Ark! There were extraordinary stories about people's humanity and about people opening their doors. As a previous speaker said, one person opened their door to 27 strangers so that people could have a drink of water and eat and sleep. Some are now lifelong friends. The list of clubs also includes Tumut Bowling and Recreation Club, Talbingo Country Club, Batlow RSL Club, Sussex Inlet RSL Club, Tura Beach Country Club, Bomaderry Bowling Club, Club Narooma, Eden Fishermen's Recreation Club, Moruya Golf Club, Batemans Bay Soldiers Club, Club Sapphire Merimbula, Tathra Beach Bowling Club, Tomakin Sports & Social Club, Narooma Golf Club, Culburra Bowling & Recreation Club, The Milton Ulladulla Ex Servos Club, Mollymook Golf Club, Bermagui Country Club, Nowra Bowling Club, Husky Sports, Tathra Beach Country Club, Tuross Head Country Club, Tumbarumba Bowling Club, Delegate Country Club and Mittagong RSL Club.

I have mentioned those clubs to thank the staff, management and directors for the extraordinary work they have done over the past few weeks. I want them to know how much we appreciate all the work they have done. They were pivotal at those very important times. I also thank the Insurance Council of Australia, which has done really good work getting the assessors out there on the ground and setting up kiosks and mobile offices. I thank the head of operations at the Insurance Council of Australia, Karl Sullivan, as well as Sam Morton and Richard Shields for the phenomenal work that they are doing.

We have to keep in perspective that the road to recovery could be a very long one. We know from the experience in Victoria following the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires that it can take years to resolve legal issues and claims. It took eight years before Victoria's Supreme Court approved the distribution of \$700 million in compensation to the victims of the 2009 fires. That length of time is unacceptable and I hope those kinds of delays will not be repeated now. I know that they will not because the Government is doing what it can. As I said earlier, we are here to assist and to provide feedback based on what we have heard from people on the ground in our electorates. I call on all stakeholders, including government bureaucrats, to take it on board.

As the shadow Minister for Customer Service, I thank the Service NSW staff very much. I have been keenly watching and I have sent a number of letters to the Minister for Customer Service to indicate how Service NSW, which is doing an extraordinary job, can do better. I raised the issue not only in correspondence but also yesterday at our parliamentary briefing with Deputy Premier Barilaro and the recovery team that they need to increase the number of Service NSW mobile buses and that those buses need to go from town to town and village to village. It needs to be done the old-fashioned way. People need to be out there doorknocking and letting our communities know when the next mobile bus is coming, making sure the community is aware and can access the information.

My colleague the shadow Minister for Investment and Tourism has travelled the South Coast, the Monaro and the mid North Coast for two weeks, listening to tourism operators, businesses, advocates and community groups and raising a number of issues about what needs to happen on the ground. I joined the shadow Minister in Huskisson for a meeting with tourist operators. They are phenomenal people. The member for Kiama, the member for South Coast and the member for Bega would know those operators. They have been around for a very long time. They are very successful entrepreneurs doing extraordinary work in the tourism and hospitality industry.

But as we all know, they have lost 90 per cent of their business and they need a tourism plan. Our shadow Minister has been calling for a coordinated tourism plan. [*Extension of time*]

She has been raising the issues that they have identified, whether they are insurance issues or how to get people back into our communities. I also call on the Government to look at a coordinated plan to involve all aspects of services and tourism. The reason I say that is because when businesses go down, workers lose hours because the businesses cannot sustain them. That means those employees cannot pay their rent, rego or insurance. Their situation can then spiral out of control and we do not want that to happen. We need to get in there with a rapid response. That is why I have been calling on the Government to come up with a coordinated plan for the services.

I acknowledged in the media that there are four Service NSW mobile buses, two of which were diverted to the South Coast. The Government has more resources and more mobile buses in other departments. Those mobile buses should be there as a rapid response. We were given figures yesterday that there have been over 500 mobile bus interactions, which comes to about 20 a day. That is not enough. If we multiply that number by the number of people who need help, it will take a couple of years. We need all hands on deck. I am calling on the Treasurer to open the chequebook and to deploy more people from Service NSW and our professionals from across the State to go down south. We need to help people on the ground as part of the recovery process. I support the Government's one-stop shops. Leader of the Opposition Jodi McKay, Penny Sharpe, Tara Moriarty and I made representations to the Government for getting case managers based on the Victorian model.

I acknowledge that the Deputy Premier took those representation on board and over 3,800 interactions have taken place. That is great but there is more work that needs to be done. People tell us, as they have told the member for Maitland and me, that they cannot keep telling five different government agencies the same thing. They cannot spend two hours on the phone to Centrelink, or to their water, energy and insurance providers. They do not have the time. They need to be dealing with their businesses and working out how their lives and communities are going to recover. That is why I have called on the Government to bring government to the people in those towns and villages. I do not care about getting credit or glory; it is about helping others and ensuring a rapid response.

For the next couple of months the Government should open those static Service NSW locations in South Nowra, Batemans Bay and the other locations along the south on Sundays and extend the Saturday hours so that they do not close at midday. The Government should extend the hotline hours and make it a 24-hour service. People need to resolve their administrative issues so they can get their lives back in order. When they have their paperwork and documents in order they can start to get on with their lives. I am grateful that the Government has listened to our feedback, but the feedback the Opposition is hearing is that this is necessary as part of the recovery process. I hope the Government considers all of those proposals.

I thank everyone who has contributed to the different charities. I know the Government will make sure that the funding, whether it is from Red Cross or any other organisation, goes directly to the people affected and that it will provide important oversight. All members have spoken about the need to look after the people who have suffered tremendously; that is as an absolute priority. There should be no bureaucratic red tape. I know the Government is doing the best it can, but it is important that in six months time the people who have suffered from those fires are not bogged down in bureaucracy and Government red tape. I thank everyone who has assisted. There is a lot more to come. I spoke to a number of people who were helping down south, and I thank them.

I acknowledge my Labor Party stalwart in Bega, Leanne Atkinson, for the extraordinary work she has been doing with community groups, not-for-profit organisations, volunteer food and pantry groups and animal and wildlife organisations. Many people have rolled up their sleeves to help people get back on their feet. After the experiences that many people and their families have endured I do not know if their lives will ever return to normal. But I want to ensure that all those people who have been affected know how much the people in my electorate and I care about them. I have been to a number of church services at my local All Saints church in Belmore. The Saint Charbel Maronite church also held a service at which we expressed our love and care. God bless all the families affected. I pray that the families who lost loved ones have strength and courage. I say to them: we love you and we hug you. It is going to be a very long and tough road, but I hope they know that they are loved by the people in my electorate.

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Attorney General, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence) (17:14:05): I echo the sentiments of my parliamentary colleagues in recognising how truly devastating the recent and ongoing bushfire crisis has been for New South Wales. Tragically lives have been lost, homes and other properties destroyed, wildlife populations decimated, and millions of hectares left utterly scorched. It will be a long, painful and challenging road to recovery as many communities begin the work of cleaning up and rebuilding. While homes and infrastructure will eventually be rebuilt, the loved ones killed can never be replaced. The heartbreak that their families and friends are suffering is unimaginable. That terrible loss

of life includes three of our dedicated Rural Fire Service volunteers who were taken far too soon while fighting hard to protect their communities. Three United States airmen who left their country to serve ours in our time of need were also killed in a firefighting plane crash. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten. Each of us here extends our deepest condolences to their families and all of the loved ones grieving a loss as a result of those horrific bushfires.

None of this downplays what it means to lose your home or the surrounding infrastructure that allows your local community to thrive. It is true that you can rebuild a house—and many people I have met in my travels in recent weeks intend to do exactly that. But it does not mean that losing your home, the place you have shared with your family and friends does not leave you devastated and hollow. So many memories and so much love and life can be tied up in the place you call home. There is the doorway where you measured the height of your children as they continued to grow into the young adults you know today, the lounge room where your partner got down on one knee and asked you to spend the rest of your life with them, the dining room table where you shared meals and laughter with those you hold most dear, the study where you spent many gruelling hours studying or where you finally landed your dream job. The home is where many build a life and many welcome new life with all the sentimental and unique valuables and possessions that our individual journeys inevitably entail.

Every firefighter across New South Wales, as well as their interstate and international counterparts, has been battling blazes in unprecedented conditions. The fire season is far from over and climate change means it is likely we will face tougher conditions in the future. The impact of climate change, the associated weather conditions, emergency responses and land management will all be considered as part of the State's independent bushfire review in the coming months. The dial has shifted and the shift is significant. We all must do everything we reasonably can to mitigate and adapt to this new reality.

But let me return to our brave firefighters and allow me to put it as simply as possible. They are heroes in our eyes. They run towards danger when most people are escaping it. They do so to save lives and property and to protect communities and our environment. Saying thank you does not seem anywhere near adequate to recognise the service they have given us. Nevertheless, I thank them for what they have done and what they will do as the bushfire season continues to confront us all. I thank every volunteer from the Sutherland Shire who has put themselves in harm's way to protect communities in New South Wales. Since last August more than 1,500 emergency services personnel from the Sutherland Shire have been deployed to battle fires across New South Wales, including a number of deployments to South East Queensland.

Those involved include volunteers from the two Rural Fire Service units in the Cronulla electorate, namely Grays Point and Kurnell. They have given up their time and put their lives on hold to serve the people of New South Wales. I thank each volunteer from Grays Point: Craig Byrne, Andrew Deards, Matthew Garrett, Josh Howes, Adrian Brugger, Jake Kearns, Ian Kemp, Trent Kemp, John Lawler, Matthew Lee, Aaron Minshull, Craig Mulley, Michael Schlatter, Ben Smith, Craig Smoothy, Sien Tjauw and Robert Trinnie. From Kurnell I thank: Cianan Fitzgerald, Brenden Galluzzo, Danielle Edwards, Scott Goodhew, Amelia Glass, Andrew Green, David Hinshelwood, Rebecca Hinshelwood, Megan Horsman, Martin Jovanovski, Mark Kouzmenko, Judith Krautz, John Lawler, Michael Johnsen, John Macey, Colin More, Shahriar Moudud, Alex Naylor, Jeff Pottuaine, Kathy Shapero, Daniel Sweeney, Adam Sorensen and Thomas Tsiamis.

It is not only our dedicated volunteers who have been pitching in to support the community. Shire residents have been digging deep and finding creative ways to contribute too. Last month residents joined Sutherland Shire Council in throwing their support behind fire-ravaged communities on the South Coast. People pledged money, donated clothes and even offered to open their homes so that those who had been left stranded would have a safe place to stay. Sutherland Shire Council also offered operational and technical staff to help recovery efforts on the South Coast, and that offer was taken up by Shoalhaven City Council. Two tree clearance teams were deployed with equipment. Three trucks, a backhoe, chainsaws and other equipment were also provided together with nine personnel. Teams undertook tree felling and clearance work under very difficult conditions to restore access to public roads. At the same time, Sutherland Shire Council donated \$50,000 to Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla Shire and Bega Valley Shire councils and an additional \$25,000 to support our brave emergency services workers as the disaster continued.

We have seen extraordinary scenes of firefighters with melted boots and charred protective gear, such is the intensity of the fires they have been battling. On 13 January over 1,500 locals gathered at dawn to walk from Cronulla Park to Elouera Beach and back in a sign of strength and solidarity for communities left devastated on the South Coast and the volunteer firefighters who fought so tirelessly to protect them. That walk was organised by locals including Dan Wagstaff, Adam Goode and Samantha Dorahy and raised \$24,000. Well done to everyone involved. Tradies GyMEA held a fundraiser on 24 January that saw almost \$14,000 donated to bushfire relief—amazing generosity from everyone across the community. Cassandra Scott from GyMEA Bay has raised more than \$4,700 so far—with donations continuing to grow—to supply meals, clothing, toiletries and mental health support

to RFS volunteers. These are just some examples of that generosity, and the names I gave earlier of Rural Fire Service volunteers are just some examples of volunteers from the Sutherland shire.

I acknowledge the tireless efforts of the New South Wales Sheriff's office staff members and many others across the Department of Communities and Justice who have been called into emergency management roles to support the State's bushfire response. Some 118 staff from the department have performed temporary roles since the bushfires began. Meanwhile, the Office of the Sheriff of New South Wales' Operation RFS Assist has provided in excess of 11,000 man hours across more than 100 incident management team roles. Officers have been working in a variety of capacities, including communications operators, logistics officers, finance officers, logistics support roles, operation support roles, planning support roles and safety officers.

It has been humbling for me as Attorney General, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence to see staff members put up their hand for these roles to help out their colleagues in other departments who have been working hard during emergency and evacuation operations and, more recently, recovery operations. Each one of them has done a tremendous job. I thank them all for continuing to provide their support as recovery operations are bolstered across the State. Like many members in this place, in the past month I have travelled from my electorate to see firsthand the bushfire devastation in our regional and coastal communities. I was humbled to meet with members of the community, most importantly, while also seeing that evacuation and recovery services being delivered by the Department of Communities and Justice and that free legal assistance services were operating as effectively as possible.

As Australians, we have a reputation as battlers. We love an underdog. We are resilient. We care deeply for one another. We feel strong connections to our local communities. Those admirable traits are never more strongly on display than when we are facing a crisis together—whether that be as a community, a region, a State or indeed a country. The worst of times often bring out the best in communities. I think all members in this place have been moved by the sheer determination, mateship, courage, tenacity, selflessness, kindness and overwhelming generosity shown in the face of this unprecedented crisis. I saw all this when I visited the Wollondilly and South Coast electorates in recent weeks.

One RFS volunteer shared his firefighting experiences and how he was forced to make decisions under immense pressure for which he could not possibly have been prepared. He spoke of arriving in a street where two houses were already ablaze and a third remained safe but was surely moments from going up too. His dilemma was this: Should he try to save the two homes that were already alight or should he mitigate the risk to the third that was currently safe and had the greatest chance of staying that way? Each home had a family that was desperate to save it, so whom should he help first? It was an impossible choice, and one that no doubt is repeatedly forced upon firefighters each day as they continue to battle these blazes. Meeting and speaking with locals also crystallised in my mind how many people were willing to stay behind and defend their properties, as well as their pets and livestock who were facing grave danger rather than fleeing without them.

Local communities understood this deep connection and the sense of protection that those people clearly felt, and adapted to their needs by opening the doors of the evacuation centres to residents but also to plenty of animals. For example, the Mittagong RSL was home to the local community but cats, dogs, sheep and even a snake set up a temporary home there until the danger subsided. I saw the Ulladulla recovery centre where a host of services had set up a one-stop shop to support locals as they began to get back on their feet. The Department of Communities and Justice housing assistance service, Service NSW, SafeWork, Legal Aid, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, NSW Health, Centrelink, Environment Protection Authority, local council, chaplains and insurers—just to name some—were there, with the Office of Emergency Management's disaster welfare team overseeing daily operations. They were meeting with residents and doing all they could to help them.

To brighten their day, if only in a small way, some of the handlers and furry friends from the Canine Court Companion Program met staff and residents. Two of these lovable labradors regularly support victims and witnesses at the Nowra Local Court while the third had travelled from their usual posting at Manly. All the handlers had generously volunteered their time. The playful pups put plenty of smiles on people's faces, with lots of people enjoying the pats and hugs on offer. At Lake Conjola I visited a community-led relief centre that was established independently when locals were cut off from the surrounding areas at the height of the crisis. They took it upon themselves to organise, mobilise and help one another as best they could. That in itself was a remarkable thing to witness.

A humble community hall had been transformed into a bustling coordination point, teeming with volunteers and donations, from grocery items to pet food, clothing to kitchenware, appliances and everything in between. All this was spearheaded by former ACT emergency services commissioner Peter Dunn, who showed great leadership in empowering everyone to come together and to keep moving forward. I had the sobering experience of driving through Conjola, Lake Conjola and in particular Conjola Park to see blackened vistas across

what was normally a stunning landscape, to see welcome signs that had been melted in furnace-like conditions, to see charcoal remnants that would overwhelm anyone let alone people who call the area home.

Standing on one particular street that overlooked the lake, I felt the wind and the heat that day, which had reached extreme levels, and it was clear that the community was operating with a sense of heightened awareness and anxiety. You could feel it. These were the same conditions that pre-empted the ferocious fires that had destroyed homes and killed loved ones just a little earlier. That community had been brought to its knees, but they have come back swinging. I thank everyone who was so gracious that day in welcoming me and showing me the streets that had been swept by the blazes, talking me through recovery efforts and explaining the struggles that they were now facing—concerns that I could then take on board and hopefully help to rectify to make their lives a little easier wherever possible.

That day as I travelled back north I passed 15 screaming fire trucks that were heading to the fire front that had flared up earlier that day—including in Milton that I had not long passed through myself—and was now beginning to spread. The degree of coordination that is required in an emergency response really hit home when I visited the Shoalhaven Emergency Operations Centre. Here every emergency service and key service or infrastructure provider was working hand in glove to safeguard their communities. It was an impressive and extremely well-organised operation. I had the good fortune to speak with the RFS and Defence Force personnel during my visit, as well as the local emergency coordinator. Sadly, it was during this visit that the centre learned that the Large Air Tanker manned by three American airmen had crashed while performing aerial firefighting duties in the Snowy. While at first there was some hope that they would survive the crash, those hopes were sadly dashed as more information came in from the front line. It was a confronting moment to be amongst our emergency services heroes when three of their own had tragically perished while working to protect the rest of us.

The vision of our RFS commissioner, Shane Fitzsimmons, fronting the media to share the dreadful news of further firefighting losses moved many to tears—whether you knew those courageous firefighters was totally irrelevant. Together, we have all grieved their loss. The commissioner described them as "extraordinary individuals", and that is certainly how they will be remembered. And who could possibly ever forget the commissioner presenting bravery medals to the children left behind when their firefighting fathers were killed on duty? Those images are forever ingrained in our country's psyche. Commissioner Fitzsimmons has been our trusted voice, guiding us through this disaster—his knowledge, experience, empathy and leadership have been astounding.

Visiting the Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre also gave me helpful insights. Our community legal centres on the whole do amazing work every year supporting the most vulnerable members of our communities. Members of the Shoalcoast centre are an excellent example of this work and were a wonderful team to meet with and hear from last month. The dedicated centre staff were busily preparing for increased calls for legal assistance from those impacted by the bushfires—insurance disputes, tenancy concerns and employment issues, just to name a few; all of which they expect to increase in the coming weeks. While on the topic of legal assistance, in addition to community legal centres, the new Disaster Response Legal Service established in the wake of the bushfires and operated by Legal Aid alongside Justice Connect is also able to refer people to private lawyers who have offered their services pro bono. They are contactable on 1800 801 529.

As at 31 January, the helpline had taken 160 calls from the community, legal advice had been provided more than 200 times at recovery centres, 53 New South Wales law firms had registered to offer pro bono services, and Legal Aid disaster recovery lawyers had provided legal advice services over the phone on 91 occasions. In a positive move for impacted communities, Legal Aid NSW, Justice Connect and our State's private legal practitioners teamed up to pitch in and help those confronted with complex legal issues arising from the fires. Legal Aid has already been helping out with free advice to individuals on issues including insurance claims, tenancy issues, financial hardship, social security entitlements and employment—similar to our State's community legal centres. Farms and businesses are not automatically entitled to Legal Aid's help, so this additional pro bono support from the legal profession is helping to meet what is expected to be immense demand for legal advice as the recovery continues.

Another challenge that the Shoalcoast Community Legal Centre was preparing for, alongside other frontline services, was the expected increase in requests connected with domestic violence. We know that when disasters strike, violence at home can also increase. This was sadly documented in the wake of the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria, after Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and after the Christchurch earthquake. Services are preparing for the same spike in the coming weeks and months across communities worst affected here in New South Wales. [*Extension of time*]

While there is no doubt that people have suffered enormous trauma through the ongoing drought and now the devastating bushfires, one thing remains clear: There is never ever an excuse for domestic and family violence. Everyone deserves to live a life free from violence. No-one should think for a moment that because their

house is still standing, they should somehow learn to tolerate violence that they are being forced to endure. Services are ready and willing to support you. My message to victims and survivors is that it is not your fault—not now, not ever. Nothing justifies abuse being inflicted upon you—and that includes during natural disasters. There are incredible frontline services available to help you. I urge you, when it is safe, to call them and get that support. When you feel that you can, please pick up the phone and call 1800 RESPECT on 1800 737 732. It is a national, experienced, confidential information, counselling and support service.

Finally, if there is one thing the bushfire disaster has highlighted, it is that Australians are strong, resilient, caring and generous. A man drove a truck to Lake Conjola with portable showers on the back, unprompted, just to give people a safe and accessible place to care for themselves. Another unsolicited volunteer rocked up in the same area with fodder for livestock and soon returned with an entire truckload to be dished out as the relief centre saw fit. Children have donated pocket money, people have opened up their homes, concerts have taken place with all the profits going to the relief effort, and businesses have offered their services free of charge when they too are struggling to survive. Millions and millions of dollars have been donated from across the State, country and, indeed, the globe in our time of greatest need. People with so little to begin with have given so generously—and they continue to do so. That enduring, unnerving and utterly herculean spirit, which wills us all on and refuses to yield even an inch when so many have every reason to give up hope—well, that is the stuff of legends.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong) (17:36:51): On behalf of my community of Wyong, I contribute to debate on this motion about bushfires. Like all members, I acknowledge the tragic circumstances in which many lives were lost. I also recognise the work of our volunteers and professionals who were involved in emergency services. It is very important for us as MPs to not speak about ourselves but about our community members who do not get the same opportunities. Many speakers before me have gone over the statistics, but I will repeat them for the sake of people in my community who will read this contribution. Across Australia, tragically, the death toll has been 33, including eight firefighters. New South Wales has had the most fatalities at 25. It has been the worst affected State. Nearly 2,500 homes have been lost, some of which were the homes of our emergency services personnel who were out fighting the fires while their own homes were lost.

In my electorate, we lost one home, but our emergency services did a great job in defending many others. I will name the people who tragically lost their lives because it is important that we continually record their names as heroes of our State and nation. Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer were colleagues and friends of the member for Prospect. I was very moved listening to his contribution, the way he described the role of volunteer firefighters and what a huge job it is, and the effect on families at a very personal level.

In 2007 for a period of time I joined the operational support unit, which supports the Rural Fire Service on the Central Coast. Back then it was called Wyong Lakes. I did my basic fire training and even though I never had the opportunity to participate in an actual fire it was very clear that every single volunteer is highly skilled, the training is very good and they put themselves well and truly in danger. As a community we probably do not recognise that enough. The member for Prospect put that into great context. I pay tribute to his contribution and to his role during the fire emergency.

Samuel McPaul passed away at Jingellic; Colin Byrnes passed away at Belowra near Cobargo; an American air crew perished when their water bomber tragically crashed outside of Canberra—Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jnr. When we think of volunteers it is a big thing for people in their own community to face these terrible conditions, but to come across the world to lend a hand takes a special kind of person. I know that we had people from all around the world come to assist—as our firefighters often travel across the world to assist in other places. But to lose your life in the line of duty helping humanity—not necessarily helping your own neighbours or your own community, but assisting humanity—is so incredible and we pay tribute to them.

The civilians who lost their lives were Robert Lindsey and Gwenda Hyde, Vivian Chaplain, George Nole, Julie Fletcher, Barry Parsons, Chris Savva, Russell Bratby, Robert Salway and his son, Patrick Salway, Laurie Andrew, John Butler, John Smith, Michael Campbell, David Harrison, Ross Rixon, Michael Clarke and the yet to be identified person, who hopefully we will be able to identify and make sure that he is recognised appropriately. These are people who, while living normal everyday lives, were placed in danger through these bushfires either trying to protect their homes or trying to escape, and have lost their lives. As other members have said, and who have explained the circumstances far better than I can, these people will be missed by their families, their friends and their communities, and will be mourned right across the whole State. As I said, I am taking this opportunity on behalf of my community to pass on our condolences to all of their families, and to acknowledge their lives and their contributions. I pass on our support to their families at these very difficult times.

As I said, this is an opportunity to also acknowledge the contribution of our local RFS brigades, professional firefighters and all those involved in emergency services who, on a daily basis, put their lives on the line to protect our communities. My electorate has a number of Rural Fire Service volunteers in Dooralong,

Yarramalong, Tuggerah, Wadalba, Charmhaven and Warnervale. I have met with many of the members of those brigades over the years and I acknowledge their contributions. I always attend what was the Wyong Lakes and now is the Central Coast Lakes Blessing of the Fleet each year. I was at the Blessing of the Fleet this year at Mingara where all of the crews from right across our region gathered together to get their long service medals, to recognise the contributions that people have made, and also to bless the fleet. What we always say on that day is "We hope that you have a boring summer." Unfortunately, this year it has been very much the opposite.

I also recognise the NSW Fire and Rescue crews that serve my electorate. Some of them are full-time professionals, such as the crews at Hamlyn Terrace and Berkeley Vale. We also have retained firefighters at Toukley, Doyalson and Wyong. I have had the opportunity to attend their firefighting championships and meet a lot of the men and women there. I also got to be a firefighter for the day—I joined the Wyong brigade and took part in some training exercises with other prominent members of the community. I know that they and the RFS have not only been involved in our local area but also they have lent assistance to other areas in the form of strike teams. They have travelled from our area to the mid North Coast, the Blue Mountains, the South Coast and north-west New South Wales. In fact, they have contributed on firegrounds across the State.

Shortly before Christmas the Federal member for Dobell Emma McBride and I visited fire control at Arizona Road and spoke to the incident management team. That was when the Gaspers Mountain and Three Mile fires were burning on the western border of our electorates and heading towards more populated areas. On that day we had the opportunity to see the incredible job the incident management team does—the professionalism and knowledge that is available to help defend our community. The individuals involved in that are impressive—their decision-making and how they deploy the different crews to get the best outcomes for our community.

A lot of people think that the fire truck just turns up at the fire and the crew turns the hoses on. However, there is a lot of planning and systematic thought about back-burning and how they might be able to control the fire. Weather monitoring information is also factored in. At the same time a person is constantly updating the Fires Near Me app to ensure people have the latest maps and information. It was very impressive. I have been there before during a flood and have seen the way that all the services work together—police, SES, national parks, the local council, NSW Rural Fire Service, professional firefighters and ambulance. They all have a seat at the table and they make combined decisions. On the Central Coast we are very blessed to have their professionalism and their knowledge.

We also met one of the helicopter pilots whose job it was to fly ahead of the fires and spot people still on the ground and either let them know that they need to evacuate or, in some cases, carry out that evacuation. Anyone who understands how a fire works will know that a fire front generates its own weather pattern. It generates incredible winds. It takes a special kind of bravery to be a pilot who flies just above that, making sure that people are all right. The helicopter is fitted with a 360-degree camera so that fire control can get real-time visual feedback on what is happening at the fire front. It is great to know that cutting-edge technology is available to them.

Incredibly, we met some of the volunteers as they were returning to the yard from the Bilpin fire to get their trucks restocked and to get some rest. They had driven from the fire field in the Blue Mountains to the Central Coast, operating on rotating shifts. When they arrived we met the Dora Creek crew—based in Lake Macquarie—who were on a Brisbane Waters truck because they had been rotated through. When they pulled in they still had blackened faces, dirty from having worked through the night. They had come in so the next crews could get the truck refitted and go out again. The volunteers were doing that before Christmas after they had already fought the fire at Gaspers Mountain and Three Mile—basically, they had not stopped.

We also visited the catering unit. While we were there, members of the community brought in donations to make sure that firefighters had lip balm, sunscreen, gloves, health food bars and the sorts of things that they were using up faster than could be supplied. Nobody saw the size of the fire season coming, so they did not start off with enough resources. As the season went on they were literally running out, so the community was coming in and dropping things off. Most of the workers in those catering units are not young people and they are working hard as volunteers. Some of them are involved in service clubs, like Rotary and Lions. I had met some of the people who were there in other lives doing other things. They were making sure that every single volunteer who was going out on the fire line was fed, looked after and had the supplies they needed to do the job from behind the scenes.

We then headed over to Charmhaven Rural Fire Brigade. The whole crew had gathered because we wanted to thank them on behalf of the community for the work that they had done. Their message was that it was important for people to realise that most of them had actually been on duty since August and we were there in December. They had been working since August in your electorate, Deputy Speaker, and up around Tenterfield. I recall a husband and wife team who had their children with them. They had barely seen their children in a month because they had been rotating in and out of the fire front. They were saying that they just wanted people to know

that they were tired and strained but that they knew that they had an important job to do and they were quite prepared to do it.

We were shown around the incident management centre by Viki Campbell, the very skilled management team leader, whose service with emergency response organisations spans 30 years, including with the NSW Rural Fire Service and the NSW Ambulance. She is currently responsible for the overall coordination of RFS firefighting capability and bushfire risk management across the Central Coast and Lake Macquarie local government areas. This incorporates 57 brigades, 20 staff and over 2,300 volunteer members. Viki was also the first female air attack supervisor in RFS history, and she was the first woman to undertake the training. This is the level of skill that we had on call. We were very pleased that Central Coast Council named Viki as the Central Coast Council Australia Day Ambassador. She turned up to many events.

I put on record that from 11 August until now Berkeley Vale was involved in 13 out-of-area incidents, Charmhaven was involved in 16 out-of-area incidents, Dooralong was involved in five out-of-area incidents, Tuggerah was involved in nine out-of-area incidents, Wadalba was involved in five out-of-area incidents, Wallarah was involved in 17 out-of-area incidents, Warnervale was involved in 16 out-of-area incidents and Yarramalong was involved in 11 out-of-area incidents. This is where the brigades have gone to other areas to help outside of our own area and they continue to do so. Strike teams are still heading towards the South Coast. There were also 76 staff and volunteers who worked as incident management team members, helping out on an administrative level.

As I said, our area was threatened by several fires on the western fringe at Gaspers Mountain and Three Mile. These fires joined and threatened more than 100 rural properties in the Kulnura and Central Mangrove area, parts of which are either in, or border, my electorate. Because of the skill of the Rural Fire Service they were able to stop it up on George Downes Drive to protect the majority of houses. If it had crossed George Downes Drive and reached the Somersby plateau it would have been an absolute disaster. The RFS were somewhat helped by the weather because of wind changes, but as Rural Fire Service people say, "Where the wind is good for some areas, it is a disaster for others." What happened was the fires spread north and south and threatened a lot of areas, including the Blue Mountains.

I also acknowledge the work of my colleague the member for Gosford, Liesl Tesch, who visited the areas of her electorate that were affected by the fire but also in the early days kept us up to date with the efforts of the firefighters. Labor MPs on the coast made a team decision that we would not all inundate the emergency headquarters because the last thing they want is politicians looking over their shoulder, so Liesl took on the role of liaising with them and with us to keep us up to date. That was a good move and it was certainly appreciated by the fire service people.

Closer to home, on New Year's Eve we had the fire at Charmhaven. That was very real for me because the fire was one kilometre from my place. It started near the Pacific Highway and Arizona Road which, ironically, is right near the fire control centre. Unfortunately it seems it may have been started on purpose, which is still being investigated. One house was completely destroyed and another four were damaged in the ferocious fire at Charmhaven. It flared up on New Year's Eve. The fire started near Charmhaven and jumped the Pacific Highway very close to houses. [*Extension of time*]

I thank the House for its indulgence. In that area there is a creek called Wallarah Creek. The fire burnt up to the creek, jumped the highway and went very close to the residential suburb of Charmhaven. It was burning to the south and it headed towards the heavily populated new suburb of Woongarrah before a wind change turned the fire north. At one stage it looked like we were in for a real disaster. Liam O'Neill, a friend of mine, lives in Hakone Road. The fire was about 400 metres from his place. They could see it coming and were preparing for the worst when suddenly the wind changed and moved it to the north. The problem with that was that it then headed back up north and threatened the residential suburb of Blue Haven, which again is heavily populated, before crossing the Pacific link road and heading towards Wyee.

Large ember attacks occurred on Birdwood Drive as the fire flared up and headed towards Blue Haven, where multiple fire crews became involved in the response. It is amazing up there—it has burnt right up to the fences but there is very little damage to property. You cannot imagine what it must have been like. I have seen photos and videos of the size of the flames. A lot of people were evacuated. Others stayed. I was talking to a friend of mine, Beryl Gillard, whose house is in that area. On the phone the other day I asked her if she was alright and she said, "My son's shoes melted and I just want to see if there is any help for him to get a new pair of shoes." That is how hot it got and that is what was going on. I will talk a little more about that. The Rural Fire Service Central Coast and Lake Macquarie District Superintendent Viki Campbell said the fire had blackened 400 hectares and will continue to flare internally for weeks. It also destroyed nine outbuildings. She said:

We did lose one house but most importantly, given the nature of the fire—

as I said, so close to houses—

there were no serious injuries, no fatalities, and 278 homes were defended ... The Thompson Vale Road, Doyalson home that was lost is in an isolated area but I am pleased to say the house was insured. I got in contact with friends of the family to make sure they were okay. I acknowledge staff from Minister David Elliott's office who contacted me on the night. It was New Year's Eve so as you can imagine there was a lot going on. They kept me up to date with what was happening. Friends of the family told me that the family from Doyalson just escaped, spotting the flames moving towards them at the last moment. Sadly they lost the family horse. One of the tragedies of fire is that it is not only people but also animals and wildlife that suffer, as others have described. I want to read a contribution from Councillor Jillian Hogan. She is on Central Coast Council but she is also manager of the Epicentre at San Remo, the neighbourhood centre at San Remo. Jillian wrote: The impact of bush fires in a small residential community

You may ask during the devastation of the national bushfires, how does an urban village of 6000 people get caught in the rush of raging fires?

Well it happened in Blue Haven, a town bordering on a small creek and bush.

The fire started in bushland in a neighbouring town called Charmhaven.

The helicopters and planes bombed the fire with water and the fire brigades were busy on the ground putting out the fire and making fire breaks to stop the flames.

At first it seemed like the fire would just burn out the bush however, the winds changed and headed straight for the houses.

Many people stayed to defend their homes and the community rallied together to share water and hoses and anything else that people needed.

One house was lost, several outhouses were burnt down and pets and wildlife were injured, but human life was spared.

It is a credit to the fireies who saved 279 houses and as the embers started to go out, there was an eerie silence and calm that fell over the community.

I wondered what that felt like for families?

I questioned how people felt when facing fires so intense that it singed the hairs on their faces?

How do people recover, what do they need?

In response, we opened up the San Remo Neighbourhood Centre to offer any assistance we could from food, clothing or toiletries.

Our volunteers were the first on the scene responding to differing needs, giving a listening ear and giving back hope.

We met more than 7 families who told their stories of mateship, of hope, of support yet anger and fear.

They spoke about loss, loss of material possessions, but what was clear was the loss of feeling "safe".

Safe from further fires, safe from the endless smoke that got caught in their lungs, loss of clean air through their houses, loss of income because people are fearful to leave the house, loss of security as families are displaced to other homes and the grief felt after the event, the loss of the ability to think clearly in the face of a disaster.

People spoke about what they would do in the event of another fire, how they would protect their family members, their animals and lastly their properties.

In all of the horror and stories, one conversation left me wanting to do more and needing to question the system, how we communicate, how we respond during a disaster and how we respond afterwards.

A young girl of 15 I met had blisters on the back of her neck, just from the sheer intensity of the fire.

She was outwardly traumatized and couldn't go back in the house.

Her scars will heal but the mental anguish, fear and sadness she feels will take some time and a lot of support.

Whilst our bush land will grow back and our wildlife will continue to replenish, we cannot underestimate the mental, physical and social impacts that these fires have had and will have for quite some time.

It is the individuals that need the support; those that have lost their homes and pets and also our dedicated brave first responders.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Viki Campbell, Superintendent for the Rural Fire Service for her appointment as Australia Day Ambassador for the Central Coast.

They were the words of one of the support people in the community of Blue Haven. Despite the carnage, the bushfire crisis gripping the State has brought out the best in many people, young and old. The Charmhaven RFS brigade received a heartwarming letter and hamper at their door from a young boy named Oliver, an event reported in the *Central Coast Express Advocate*. His handwritten note said:

Thanks for fighting the fire because I was very scared.

I want to be a brave fireman one day!

From Oliver

Our community has reacted in support of affected communities across the State. They have been raising money, collecting goods and holding charity events. The Central Coast is full of big hearts. I acknowledge all of our emergency services personnel, both volunteers and professionals, for their past and ongoing contribution during this crisis. Hopefully the worst is over, but, sadly, it may not be as the fire season still has several months to go.

Our volunteers' ongoing welfare should be foremost in our minds because these events affect people in different ways.

A good friend of mine, Ross Beckley, was an on-call retained firefighter with Fire and Rescue NSW for more than 20 years, and served as a deputy captain for 15 of them. In 2003 he became an instructor of professional firefighters and taught people in the Hunter, mid North Coast and Central Coast regions, as well as inter-State and aviation firefighters. During his career he received two Meritorious Service Awards and a State medal for emergency and recovery response. He knows firsthand the effect traumatic incidents can have and what kinds of strategies should be used to assess the wellbeing of frontline responders and their families.

Over the last seven years Ross has become involved in many community activities supporting professionals and volunteers who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD]. Ross was himself diagnosed with PTSD in 2009 and remained in the job until 2014 when he was medically discharged with an on duty post-traumatic stress injury. When Ross runs these events his message is that people are affected in different ways by these emergencies. Sometimes it is immediate; sometimes there can be trigger down the track. We need to continue to support these people. Ross works with his partner, Veronique, running seminars and helping people deal with the effects of PTSD. As part of the recovery let us not forget that post-traumatic stress can go on for months and years, and that it affects people in different ways. A sad thing about Ross's experience is that he was followed and persecuted by insurance companies. They followed him and tried to claim that there was nothing wrong with him.

Ross was a decorated firefighter who had fought in some of the State's most horrendous fires. He has received medals for his bravery and trained other people. After he left the job he was followed and persecuted. Let us be compassionate and understand that these memories can develop into a variety of post-dramatic issues if left unchecked. In the worst cases, they can cause severe emotional breakdowns that are not only debilitating for the front-line heroes but also for everyone around them—their mates and their families. An alarming number of emergency service personnel suffer from depression, PTSD and other behavioural health issues. These issues can affect their work, their families and their capacity to live a happy and healthy life.

We must learn the lesson that it is not over the day the fire season finishes. We have to continue to monitor and support these people; not persecute them down the track. We must make sure that the recovery process does not only cover physical things, but that the mental health of everyone who has been affected by these fires is looked after. I extend my community's condolences to the families, friends and communities who have lost so much. I thank the Premier for giving us the opportunity to speak to the motion.

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET (Epping—Treasurer) (18:07:06): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this condolence motion. At times like these words are not enough. Words cannot convey the terrible things we have seen this summer: the destruction, the burnt earth, the loss of life. Words cannot convey what we feel: the grief, the desperation, the heartbreak, the fear. Words cannot bring back the people we have lost or restore the homes that no longer stand. Words cannot extinguish the flames or prevent them from flaring up again. Words are not enough. Today we speak in this Chamber to mark the record, to mark for posterity our deep sorrow, to honour in the pages of our Parliament's history those who have given their lives, to pledge our solidarity with those who have lost the ones they hold most dear, and to thank the men and women who have fought so fiercely to defend our State in its time of need.

Despite all that we have lost, the bushfires have revealed to us that the people of New South Wales are made of strong stuff—the strongest. With fires still burning, and so much rebuilding ahead of us, we have work to do. But we will do it together and we will not leave anyone behind. In our unity it is my hope that we will emerge stronger than before. The fires have brought unspeakable tragedy on the people of our State. I join with the Premier, my community in Epping and every member in this place in expressing my sorrow and deep condolences to the families and friends of the 25 men and women who lost their lives in the fires this summer.

When we saw the images of those young fathers and the young families left behind, when we read of the valiant men and women defending their own homes and the homes of others who did not make it out, when we heard reports of an aerial tanker that was no longer responding, all of us were overcome with grief. But our grief cannot compare to the grief of the families of the deceased or to the pain felt by their colleagues and friends. To those people we say that we are truly sorry for their loss—it is unimaginable. However, when they are in pain they should know that they are not alone. We are here with them. We stand with them. We will support them in their grief. Those people and the precious loved ones they have lost are forever in our prayers and will not be forgotten.

As well as the tragic loss of life, our State has suffered the loss of thousands of homes and other properties. In many rural and regional areas this new devastation came on top of years of gruelling drought. Even from afar the scale of the destruction has been terrifying, but to see it up close is truly gut-wrenching. Early in

the new year I travelled to northern New South Wales to meet with some of the local people and see what the fires had done to their communities. From Kempsey we travelled north-west to Willawarrin. Just outside that town farmer Jennifer Mainey showed us the ashen remains of a burnt-out gully crossing on her property. We saw the fallen homes, incinerated fence lines and scorched paddocks.

Back in Willawarrin, I spoke to some of the incredible volunteers from BlazeAid helping the community pick up the pieces. Local publican Karen Anderson shared with us the community's deep sense of loss and anxiety about the future. Later I visited Rappville, a small town between Lismore and Grafton where about a third of the buildings were no longer standing. It is difficult to grasp the enormity of the damage and the job that lies ahead for people in dozens of towns just like Willawarrin and Rappville. The job of rebuilding will take time and the best efforts of everyone in our State. We must not fail these people. Today we pledge our solidarity to stand shoulder to shoulder with them as we rebuild together.

One thing is for certain: The losses across our State would have been so much worse but for our firefighters. I cannot praise highly enough the efforts of the Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue NSW. From the exceptional leadership of RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons to the unrelenting stamina of professional and volunteer firefighters right across our State, the effort has been nothing short of heroic. In my own community the Cherrybrook RFS brigade has been untiring in its contribution. Since the fires began our 47 active firefighters have attended more than 80 out-of-area incidents in locations far and wide—from the Hills to the Hawkesbury, the Central Coast, Taree, Port Macquarie, and the Lower Hunter to the north; Lithgow and the Blue Mountains districts to the west; and Tahmoor, Bargo, Bowral, Mittagong, Nowra, Sussex Inlet and Moruya to the south.

They have been able to crew every 12-hour shift asked of them, and their willingness to serve has been mirrored by crews right around our State. The crew has particularly asked me to thank its callout officer Rene Beutler for his tireless work over the summer. I am also grateful for the assistance given by firefighting brigades around the country and around the world, as well the support from the Australian Defence Force. I also commend the work of the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Forestry Corporation, both of which have been at the frontline throughout this crisis keeping communities safe and helping them in the aftermath. The men and women at the fire front have also been assisted by countless other frontline and supporting agencies, community groups and individuals all pitching in to support the firefighting effort.

In my lifetime I have never seen such a demonstration of generosity, solidarity and self-sacrifice from the people of this State. I thank each and every one of the people who has contributed to this herculean effort. There is not enough time to commend and thank everyone who deserves to be thanked. I commend the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, who has provided exceptional oversight of the firefighting efforts alongside the commissioner. I also commend the Deputy Premier, who has been a tireless champion for the regions throughout this crisis and is now leading the way as the Minister for recovery. But I give special thanks to the Premier. She has carried the weight of this horrendous fire season on her shoulders. For the 8 million people of New South Wales she has been a beacon of hope and an example of fortitude. It has been gruelling. It has been harrowing. I know she has felt every loss deeply. But throughout it all, she has carried herself with immense strength and steadfast composure and I know that she will continue to give our State the strong leadership it needs as we rebuild. That is exactly what we must do now: rebuild.

Nothing about the rebuilding process will be easy. There is no doubt that this will be a tough year for New South Wales. More than ever before, the people of our State will be depending on the people in this place to put aside their differences, to roll up their sleeves and to get on with the job. We can do this—but only if we do it together. We owe it to the men and women whose lives have been lost. We owe it to the people who mourn them. We owe it to the families whose homes have been destroyed and to the communities whose futures now hang in the balance. We must rise to the occasion. I am sure I speak for every member in this place when I say that we will give it our all.

Mr MARK TAYLOR (Seven Hills) (18:15:39): At the outset of my speech in response to the Premier's motion, I first make the observation of how fortunate all members of this House are to be even standing here and speaking on behalf of our communities, directly affected or not, by the recent and ongoing bushfires. We are fortunate because of the dedication, professionalism and sacrifices of our first responders, some of whom are salaried but very many of whom are volunteers. We are fortunate because, if it were not for them, there are members and most certainly constituents of members of this House who would have suffered losses of life and property even far greater than that we have witnessed. We are also particularly fortunate because of the immense privilege and indeed responsibility we have to reflect in this motion the grief and heartache of our constituents, most of whom had to bottle up their sense of loss and feelings of pain to get on with their lives at work and with their families as the new year began.

I particularly acknowledge and express my deepest sympathy to the members of this place and their constituents who have been directly affected by the devastating fires. I wanted to speak before members who led from the control room at Homebush, members who served in the Rural Fire Service and members who had to fend off fires on their own property and properties that were close to theirs. This House is not short of members who are willing to put service to the community above all else. It is and will be clear from the speeches made in response to the motion yesterday and today, and the speeches that will follow tomorrow, that service to the community bears no political colour in this place—and that is something of which this House can be proud. The motion states:

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. I will start by personally expressing my deepest condolences to the families, communities and loved ones of the 25 men and women who have tragically lost their lives during the current bushfire season. My words, like any, will not bring back the loved ones that have been lost. They will not replace the warm embrace of a mother, father or grandparent. They will not replace the companionship of a sibling. But they will, like all of the words spoken in this debate, show that my constituents in the electorate of Seven Hills and the citizens of this entire State grieve with all of those who have lost someone near and dear as a result of these terrible bushfires.

I hope it can provide some solace to those families and communities that although Macquarie Street is far removed from their coastal town and inland region, this place is close to them in thought and in heart. This motion rightfully honours the extraordinary sacrifice of Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer and Samuel McPaul. All three of those gentlemen were volunteers in the NSW Rural Fire Service and tragically lost their lives on duty whilst protecting the lives and property of others. They, like so many on the front lines of the bushfires, risked their own lives to save the life of others. There is no greater sacrifice on Australian soil than that of a first responder who dies in the line of duty. We owe it to those three gentlemen to never forget their names, their story and their sacrifice and that is why we record their heroism in *Hansard* forever.

They showed a courage and a selflessness few are born with and fewer still are willing to deploy in the most dangerous of conditions they face. When we consider these three great losses to our State we should remind ourselves that those three men were wanting no pay, no accolades and no reward for their service. They were doing what they did only because they believed it was the right thing to do when communities, properties and lives other than their own were at risk of being engulfed by flames. Those three men were volunteers and in every way embody the great Australian spirit of volunteering and mateship. They had other lives, other occupations, and all three were fathers to young children but we will always remember them as volunteer members of the NSW Rural Fire Service.

We will remember them as such because it speaks more to their character than anything else. This State does not deserve volunteers as dedicated and professional as Geoffrey, Andrew and Samuel but we are ever so lucky that we did have them when we did. That, in many ways, makes their passing an even greater loss. From the community in my electorate of Seven Hills, I place on the record my gratitude and thanks to these men and extend my sincere condolences to the family and friends they have left behind.

I will turn to the Americans who lost their lives in the service of our State. The passing of these gentlemen sent shockwaves around the State, perhaps for the particular cruelty of their death in spite of their extreme selflessness. All members will know that our bushfires received international press coverage which, in many cases, included rolling coverage and updates on the status of the fires. It is one thing to hear about and to see our fires. It is another thing to pack up everything and travel to the other side of the world to fight some of the most ferocious fires on the planet. Those three men were killed only a fortnight ago flying a C-130 Large Air Tanker which crashed in the Snowy Monaro region.

We acknowledge what these fine servicemen did in Australia, providing critical air support to our fireys on the ground. But, importantly, we acknowledge what these men left behind when they came to our help. Captain Ian McBeth, 44, from Montana, left behind his wife and their three children. First officer Paul Clyde Hudson, 42, from Arizona, left behind his wife. Flight engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, 43, from Florida, left behind his two

children. The names of these men will be forever etched into the great history of service to this State and this nation. Their willingness to be in Australia in our hour of need will not be forgotten and speaks volumes not only of their personal sacrifice but also to the enduring connection between the services in this State and nation and that of the United States. Rightfully, those men will be remembered at a State memorial service in the United States later this month. We are equally indebted to these great and selfless men who died serving this State.

From the community of Seven Hills, I place on the record my gratitude and thanks to these men and sincere condolences to the family and friends that they left behind. I also offer my deepest sympathies to those who have been affected by the fires, whether through injury, the loss of property or by damage to their homes and livelihoods. As a natural disaster of the highest order, these fires did not discriminate between towns, streets, businesses and family homes. They did not spare those who were more worthy or save those who were vulnerable. They were merciless in their destruction of property and livelihoods. Families and communities will eventually rebuild themselves, but they will forever carry the scars of this bushfire season. Paperwork and equipment can be replaced, but nothing will replace the memories and keepsakes that were also casualties of the fires.

Many people are now faced with the daunting prospect of having to start again—in some cases, from scratch and with very little. This will no doubt test their character in ways that the actual fires never did. Because of this, those communities and families are worthy of our sympathy, respect and ongoing support as they rebuild their lives. As members have expressed in this House, that will occur. I acknowledge the priority that this Government and the Federal Government have accorded to the recovery effort. On behalf of my community, I say that our thoughts and prayers are with the families and communities affected by the recent fires. I acknowledge the utter devastation caused by the bushfires this season. Some 2,400 homes were destroyed, over 11,000 buildings were lost or damaged, 5.5 million hectares were burnt and countless local businesses were affected.

I have spoken much today about loss; however, I will now speak about the response to the devastation caused by the fires. This summer we saw the people of our State once again rise to the threat and challenge posed by a natural disaster of the highest order and the harshest kind. The leadership displayed in our frontline services has been second to none. I acknowledge the Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW, the NSW Police Force, the Forestry Corporation, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW Ambulance, the State Emergency Service and many other agencies. Over the course of the summer, 70,000 New South Wales men and women volunteered for the Rural Fire Service. The majority of them served on the front lines of the fires.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge those in this place who worked tirelessly over the summer to ensure that the resources and services of this State could be effectively managed and deployed, especially the Premier and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and their staff. It is testament to the character of the people of this State that those who had no personal connection with the areas or people affected were so quick to offer their support in the ongoing recovery effort. From donating hard-earned cash to driving trucks carrying water and supplies or assisting at evacuation centres, there was nothing that ordinary men, women and even young people were not willing to do to help out those most in need. As representatives of such constituents, we have much to be proud of.

On behalf of my community in the Seven Hills electorate, I pass on my gratitude to all those who led with professionalism and distinction throughout this terrible summer. I also thank those who were not in uniform but who supported the people in need. It has been an immense privilege to contribute to the debate on this motion. As we turn to the recovery and rebuilding effort, the people of the Seven Hills electorate send their condolences, thoughts and prayers to all those who were involved in and affected by the bushfires this summer.

Mr RON HOENIG (Heffron) (18:28:37): On behalf of the people of my electorate of Heffron, I make a brief contribution to debate on the condolence motion moved by the Premier. At the outset I express my grief and sympathy for those who lost their lives during this terrible bushfire season. As of today, 33 people have died across Australia, 25 of them in New South Wales. A number of them were firefighters who died in the line of duty. Those firefighters—NSW Rural Fire Service [RFS] volunteers Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer, Samuel McPaul and Colin Burns and American air crew Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr—gave their lives in the defence of others and will rightly be remembered as heroes. Australians owe an immense debt of gratitude to them and the thousands of other professional and volunteer firefighters who have served on firegrounds across Australia this bushfire season.

While it pales in comparison to the loss of human life, there has been an immense toll on property, with thousands of homes destroyed, and ecologists estimate that perhaps a billion animals have perished. Recovery will take months and years. Over the summer I had in my thoughts the many friends and associates that I made over the years as a public defender on circuit on the far South Coast of New South Wales. I particularly extend my condolences and well wishes to the member for Bega and his constituents. I count many of his constituents as friends of mine. I have a deep affection for communities in the Bega Valley—places such as Bega, Tathra, Eden, Moruya, the people's republic of Broulee, Batemans Bay and Mogo, which have borne the brunt particularly hard.

The bushfire season does not come as a surprise to any Australian. We know that when the Test match cricket and Christmas Day come, so, too, do the bushfires. Living in and representing the community that I do, where mercifully we have been spared of that disaster, those fires can feel a world away. This year what shocked us was the intensity and the ferocity of those fires. When smoke blanketed the city day after day, when it felt like we had not seen a clear blue sky for weeks on end, when fires encircled Sydney in a continuous front that stretched from the Illawarra through to the Blue Mountains and on to the Central Coast and beyond, it gave us in the city just a taste of what millions of our fellow Australians in rural and regional areas experience every year.

What inspired us was the bravery and the courage of our fellow Australians, whether they were those firefighters on the front line, people defending their homes or just passers-by who did their bit. It was people such as Toni Doherty, who literally gave the shirt off her own back to rescue Lewis the koala from an advancing fire near Port Macquarie, that gave us the most iconic and inspirational images of this summer. The depth of generosity from our fellow Australians has been astonishing.

Comedian Celeste Barber alone has raised \$51 million in donations from around the world. The Port Macquarie Koala Hospital set out to raise \$25,000 through GoFundMe to care for injured koalas and has raised \$7.7 million as of this morning. Millions of dollars more have been given to the RFS, Red Cross and other organisations such as the one run by my very good mate John Robertson, to which I gave relatively generously. We saw our fellow Australians in a time of need and we dug deep. The crisis has brought out the angels in our nature. We have seen the best of Australians this summer.

This week is not for a dissection of what might have gone wrong, what could have been done better or whether anyone is to blame. It is not the time to debate fuel loads, climate change or hazard reduction. These are conversations for another day. I have received dozens, if not hundreds, of emails from people in my electorate expressing their distress and empathy for those affected by the terrible fires. What this week is about is saying to the people of rural and regional New South Wales and those from the outskirts of Sydney, who have suffered so monstrously this summer, that we are on your side. From the city to the bush, we extend our complete solidarity. We hurt with you, we mourn with you, we will be there for you once this crisis has passed and we will fight for you to rebuild your lives and your homes. Once again I express my condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr VICTOR DOMINELLO (Ryde—Minister for Customer Service) (18:34:11): I thank the Premier and the Deputy Premier for bringing this condolence motion to the House. Our iconic Australian summer has this season been beset by tragedy. Our State has been ravaged by disastrous fires all across our coast that have stretched to our neighbours in Queensland and Victoria. The extent of the impact those fires have had is difficult to comprehend. The season has left a heavy emotional and literal shroud over all of New South Wales. This motion is not just about a fire sweeping through; it is about the devastation that the fire has brought to communities and families, which will remain with them for weeks, months and years.

There is an immediate impact on housing, infrastructure and community—all torn down overnight for some families. It is a complete shift that will forever affect their future. Broad aspects of this disaster will affect us all for generations, including both economic capability and environmental qualities. Whilst the New South Wales Government will work hard to rebuild and fight for the future of those regions, it will never be the same. The wider community across New South Wales has proven that we will all do our bit to help those touched to any degree. The sacrifices all of us make help those in need and every contribution, regardless of its form, is treasured.

I thank the contributions of those people in Ryde who gave so generously to support fire relief efforts for those on the front line. Every contribution is extremely important, helping at every end of this disaster. Evan Lister is a local icon who operates small steam engines out of West Ryde. Volunteering with the Glenhaven brigade, Evan exemplifies the heroism and selflessness of an RFS volunteer that should be recognised. Shannon Mason has also devoted an immense amount of time to the RFS. He is a deputy captain working with both the Warringah and Llandilo brigades, leading teams of six and monitoring up to eight vehicles in incident management as well as keeping up the training of several brigades. Shannon goes to great lengths to ensure that the different learning strengths and capabilities of all volunteers are catered to, maximising the professional capability of our Rural Fire Service brigades. Shannon also spoke to me about the community and culture created in the RFS across each brigade. He states that the RFS considers each volunteer a member of a family, with the unifying cause to do the right thing.

Those who did not have the capacity to directly volunteer also put in an astounding effort. Local businesses, despite their size and the stresses that can come with being a smaller business, generously donated. I recall Rumbles Cafe on the corner of Eastwood plaza donating 20c for every coffee sold. Furthermore, I thank the local service clubs such as Lions and Rotary for all their efforts. The Rotary clubs of North Ryde and Macquarie Park focused their Carols at the Common event on raising funds for fire relief. Other social groups

such as the Ryde District Mums managed to donate six ute trailers of goods, amongst other things, in under 24 hours. It was a generous effort that deserves applause.

These initiatives are not unique. All across Ryde and New South Wales innumerable people, volunteers, businesses and organisations both big and small are banding together to do their bit to help those struck with this immense adversity and challenge, and we will continue to support them as best we can. Each community, family and individual of New South Wales has been impacted by the bushfires, whether a member of Fire and Rescue, a volunteer, a local business owner, or family or friends waiting eagerly to hear their loved ones are safe.

Earlier this week I asked my community to send me their stories and to pay tribute to those involved in the devastating bushfires. I take this opportunity to share some of the many responses I received. Sally Last said: Graeme Last has been a member of the Davidson Rural Fire Brigade for over 30 years, and resides in Denistone. This fire season his participation started in early September responding to the Drake fire in the far north of the state. Since then, he has been fighting fires all the way down the coast including at Tenterfield, Glenn Innes, Wyaliba, Kempsey, Colo Heights, Mangrove Mountain, Bilpin, Hill Top, Balmoral Village and Adaminaby Complex. He has undertaken a variety of roles from firefighting to leading task forces, driving trucks around the State and repairing storm damage. He has found time to participate in the Furies Climb for Motor Neurone Disease and his team were acknowledged as the highest fundraisers. Graeme's commitment and passion for firefighting is supported by his family and workplace, as it results in lengthy absences from home. Amy Lee, another local, wrote:

As we give our sincere thanks to our heroic fire fighters and all related personnel. We must not forget their families because they too are involved in this battle with the natural inferno. Please help the families and loved ones of these fire fighters, by giving them supports and the much needed encouragement!! Thank you. - Amy Lee.

Glen Castensen from the Ryde Hunters Hill District Hockey Club wrote:

Hockey is a national sport with strong participation and wonderful support from regional centres. Many of our players also come from the bush far and wide. Our heartfelt sorrow for all those people and animals that perished and that were impacted. And the warmest of appreciation to all those involved fighting the fires and assisting with the rebuild of all that was lost. Our love and best wishes are with you all.

Petrea Doyle wrote:

To Shane Fitzsimmons, who led our selfless men and women of the RFS, our volunteers, and community leaders. We could not have done this without you. Thank you for your bravery. To our Premier Gladys and MPs who have been on the ground. Thank you for your leadership. To those who lost loved ones and property, my thoughts and prayers are with you. To the animals who have suffered through this, we shed tears and hope we can do better into the future.

Morgan Lee wrote:

Today I write to you as a former constituent and an expat living in Phoenix, Arizona. As you will be aware there were three U.S. fire fighters who tragically lost their lives whilst fighting the fires and one of those men, Paul Hudson is from a small town within the city of Phoenix. As a representative of the members of the Australians in Arizona community it would be wonderful to hear Mr Hudson and his two other crewmen, Rick De Morgan Jnr and Ian McBeth's names acknowledged for their service and sacrifice during these horrific events.

These stories help to personalise the tragedy that has unfolded across our State. They are also powerful reminders of the bravery and courage demonstrated throughout every community across our great State. I acknowledge the outstanding work of the Premier, Deputy Premier, my colleagues in Government and members opposite in coming together and making sure that we are doing our best in this time of crisis. As I mentioned in this House yesterday, I have been working with Service NSW to help provide access to emergency services, funds and more. However, it is clear that there is an immense amount of work still to be done.

I thank all of those from Service NSW and all of those who are part of the broader Customer Service family who were able to provide their services to the impacted communities. The aftermath of those bushfires will haunt us forever. There is no quick fix to this tragedy. I thank the frontline staff, volunteers, their families and friends, the local community groups and all donors in New South Wales and around the world for their bravery, sacrifice and generosity. Australians are united by our strong volunteering spirit, courage and mateship. Those values will continue to bind us together as a community.

Ms JO HAYLEN (Summer Hill) (18:43:33): How do we put into words the scale of the bushfire catastrophe we have experienced over the past few months? How do we describe the agonising loss felt by those who have lost loved ones or their homes? How do we convey the pain, fear and shock experienced by communities affected by fire and the terror of families huddled together on beaches when the sky was heavy with smoke and ash? How do we take stock of all that we have lost, or the impact on our mental health and local economies? How do we measure the collective trauma that will be felt for generations? How do we thank the volunteers who have kept us together when so often it has felt like we are falling apart?

The Premier and others have outlined the numbers that give some shape to this tragedy, such as the 33 people who lost their lives across the country, including eight firefighters, three of whom were volunteers with the Rural Fire Service. Countless more people have been injured. There have been 1,000 bush and grass fires, 5.5 million hectares have burned, 2,432 homes have been lost and 1,021 more homes were damaged. More than one billion native animals have died and some species have been pushed to the brink of extinction—the koala is just one of them.

Sydney has experienced over 81 consecutive days of dangerous and poor air quality. The public health consequences are yet to be known. Weeks, perhaps months, of the worst of the bushfire season is yet to come. I do not think the numbers quite tell the story. It is hard to capture the extent of those fires because of the emotional toll it has taken on us all. The fires have changed us and they are still changing us. It is really important to acknowledge that this catastrophe is still unfolding. Communities are fighting fires as we speak. Volunteer fireys will be out on the fields again in the weeks to come. For months to come volunteers from local clubs and community groups such as the Salvation Army and Red Cross will be making meals and looking after RFS fireys and those who have lost their homes.

Home owners who have been spared the worst may continue to lie in bed on hot nights refreshing the Fires Near Me NSW app, waiting for advice. Business owners and farmers will be fighting to save their livelihoods every day. This week we need to acknowledge that our State is still burning around us. However, recovery is underway. Of course, it will be some time before people are back on their feet. Thirty-three people lost their lives in those terrible fires and 25 of them were from our great State of New South Wales. They include: Robert Lindsey, Gwen Hyde, Vivian Chaplain, George Nole, Julie Fletcher, Barry Parsons, Chris Savva, Russell Bratby, Robert Salway, Patrick Salway, Laurie Andrew, John Butler, Col Burns, David Harrison, John Smith, Ross Rixon, Michael Campbell, Michael Clarke and others yet to be identified.

Their stories are stories of bravery, resilience and deep humanity. Newlyweds died together fighting to defend their home. Women died fighting to save their beloved animals. Farmers died fighting to save their cattle. Neighbours died helping neighbours. A grandfather died while trying to escape the fire to return to his family. Each of them are loved and profoundly missed. They are mothers and daughters, fathers and sons. I also acknowledge the tragic passing of Courtney Partridge-McLennan who died from an asthma attack brought on by the toxic smoke that has hung over our towns and cities for months. Three of those who died were volunteer firefighters: Samuel McPaul, Deputy Captain Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer. Those brave men were the best of us. They gave their lives to protect communities at their most vulnerable.

Together we are united in our grief and we honour their sacrifice. They leave behind loved ones, including small children. Their deaths have reverberated across our nation. None of us will ever forget those moving images of Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons pinning a medal of bravery on the chest of Harvey Keaton, the 19-month-old son of Geoffrey Keaton. No image captures our collective grief more than a boy standing in for his beloved father. Three United States aviators died in a crash in the Snowy Mountains. They were Captain Ian H. McBeth, First Officer Paul C. Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick A. DeMorgan Jr. They travelled from the other side of the world to protect us. I am sure they knew the risks but I doubt they would have known the value of their sacrifice or the extent to which they have moved an entire nation.

I have spoken about our collective grief. I have spoken about our shock and shared horror as these fires have gripped our State. But I also want to speak about our hope and optimism. Since October we have seen remarkable acts of bravery. We have seen compassion and generosity as people rallied together. In the great Australian tradition, we have seen humour, inspiration and gratitude. Over 72,000 volunteer firefighters are serving in more than 2,000 brigades across the State. Nearly all of them have been shoulder to the wheel fighting these fires for months. They are exhausted. Let us never forget the images of volunteer firefighters collapsed on the side of the road after hours spent battling ferocious fires. Many spent time away from their families over Christmas and the summer holidays. Many fought fires while they lost their own homes. Every day they put themselves at risk to protect their communities. What greater service could citizens of New South Wales give than that offered by those men and women?

They are led by a remarkable man, Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons. Time and again, as dark as it got, we could find some solace in the fact that a man of his calibre and capacity was in charge. I had the pleasure of meeting the commissioner at the RFS Homebush headquarters back in November. We discussed the challenges of running an organisation made up of over 70,000 volunteers. Let me say that with Commissioner Fitzsimmons what you see is what you get. Whether you meet him in person or see him on the television screen, he is clearly a man of decency and conviction, driven by a deep commitment to keep us safe. Thank you, Commissioner Fitzsimmons.

Brave RFS volunteers were joined by volunteers from many organisations across our State—the Red Cross, the Salvos and WIRES as well as local clubs and organisations. These people have made meals, run

evacuation centres and cared for animals and pets. They have helped out at medical centres and hospitals. They have been there as a friendly ear or as a shoulder to cry on. They have shared stories and given people hope for a better future. On behalf of the Opposition and as the shadow Minister for volunteers, I offer my deepest thanks to everyone who has done their bit through these tough times. In the face of these catastrophic fires, which have shown us just how fragile we are, all of you who have volunteered have given us hope. We are indebted to you and I send my deepest and most heartfelt gratitude to you and to your families.

Some like to talk up so-called differences between the city and the bush. I have never felt this was real. I think people in the city and the bush hold a deep affection and affinity for one another, and I think the response to these fires has truly demonstrated that. In my electorate of Summer Hill and across Sydney's inner west, residents have been doing whatever they can to support fire-affected communities reeling from the ongoing devastation of this unprecedented bushfire season. This weekend Inner West Council is holding an Rural Fire Service fundraising concert, pledging \$50,000 to the RFS and fire-affected communities. Our local mayor, Darcy Byrne, has led a push for metropolitan councils to come together and coordinate support in whatever way they can for regional and bushfire-affected communities.

Local SES units, including Marrickville and Leichhardt in my neck of the woods, have been assisting with the firefighting and recovery efforts. Over the holidays volunteers at WOW Food Pantry collected food and clothing donations from hundreds of residents to be transported to isolated fire-affected communities. Local musicians have been rallying together to hold pro bono concerts to support the RFS hosted by Marrickville Bowling and Recreation Club, where local artists raised over \$4,000 one night. Cafes like Outfield have held events and donated their day's takings, and local hospitality workers across the inner west have been donating their tips to the RFS, including at the Marrickville Hotel and the Ritz.

Multicultural communities across Australia have also made huge contributions to this volunteer effort to support the RFS and those communities in need. The St Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in Marrickville hosted a fundraising concert and raised over \$8,500. The Sydney Portugal Community Club has been running a community fundraising campaign. Dozens of volunteers from Sydney's Sikh community travelled to the South Coast to make meals and provide a helping hand at the Milton Showground. In fact, Sikh groups across New South Wales have raised in excess of \$20,000. During the height of the fires in December and January the Australian National Imams Council called all Muslims to action. The Afghan community group donated \$18,252 to the RFS.

Truckloads of food and supplies were sent by Human Appeal Australia, Lighthouse Community Support and the Australian Islamic Mission to Cobargo in early January. The New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies raised tens of thousands of dollars for the bushfire efforts. In November Sydney's Chinese community raised over \$390,000 at a gala dinner. Chinese community groups have continued to raise and distribute money to regional communities affected by fire since then. These are just some of the stories of multicultural communities coming together to support vulnerable people affected by these fires, and I believe just another wonderful example of the hope and optimism that has shone through in these dark times for our State.

I also address one of the strongest emotions evoked by these fires in our community, and that is profound anger. If these bushfires do not wake us up to the urgency and existential threat of climate change, I honestly do not know what will. People are exasperated. They are furious. I will not be told that talking about climate change diverts or disrespects the tragic losses these bushfires have brought. Those in fire-affected communities deserve support and action, not hollow words, forced handshakes and delays from government, just as all of us deserve to be led by politicians who are prepared to face up to the threat of climate change and stare down those who get in the way of action. It is fact that these bushfires have been the worst on record and they come in the middle of the worst drought on record. It is fact that climate change is making our climate drier and hotter. It is fact that if we do not act on climate change now, these fires will be the new normal.

Given all the horror we have experienced, we deserve nothing less than frank honesty and action on climate change. Time is up on climate denial. Time is up on empty rhetoric and climate stunts too. We will work together to rebuild communities. Let us at the same time rebuild the quality of public debate. Let us work together to make meaningful change when it comes to phasing out coal and fossil fuels, to embrace the new dawn of renewable energy, and to reduce our emissions and give our kids a real future—not one marked by seasons of fire and smoke and flood and fear.

There is so much to say, but I believe there are some more questions that we need to ponder. How will we remember the summer of 2019-20 and where do we head next? What will the Australia we leave our children and grandchildren look like? We have been sorely tested these past months, but our great Australian qualities have pulled us through: resolve, resilience, humour, humility and incredible generosity. Most of all, we have been moved by our common humanity and our essential drive to support one another and to have each other's backs. Let us grieve together. Let us rage together. Let us express our deepest gratitude together. But most of all, let us

never forget these past few months, because we need to work together and fight side by side to make sure it never happens again.

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater—Minister for Planning and Public Spaces) (18:57:43): I speak today on behalf of my community of Pittwater to express our sincere condolences to those who have lost husbands, wives, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, family and friends in the bushfires that have dominated our State since the middle of last year. I express my community's condolences to those thousands of people who have lost homes, businesses, livestock and loved possessions, many of whom are not back home yet and may not be for some months as the rebuild begins. We are all diminished by this loss.

It saddens me to think of the immeasurable damage to our natural environment caused by these fires. Places of unique beauty like the Blue Mountains, lakes on the South Coast and bushland on the North Coast will take decades to recover. Conservatively, a billion native animals have been killed. The rebuild is not just homes and businesses; it is rebuilding lives. My community of Pittwater, though fringed by bushland and national parks, has been largely unaffected by fires this bushfire season—a lot of this down to rigorous preventative measures by our vigilant local Rural Fire Service in the months leading to the bushfire season. There have been a couple of scares with occasional spot fires on the Northern Beaches; however, we have been lucky.

Watching the scenes of these past few months on the North and South coasts and visiting some of those communities has reminded me of the 1994 fires that ripped through my community of Pittwater when I was a teenager. The memory of those fires is still seared on my consciousness, but they were a pale shadow of what we are seeing now. The fires that have ravaged much of the New South Wales coast have been some of the worst on record. Smoke has crippled our cities and towns almost daily. It has circled the globe and returned to our shores. A shared impact on resources owned by no-one individually but all of us collectively—our air, our water, our natural heritage—points to the reality of a changing climate, the urgency of mitigation and the challenge of adaptation. These fires have left a mental scar on those whose lives they have changed forever. For some, we will not know that toll for months and years. It will be a defining act of a generation, and I do not think any of us will truly be the same after the experience of the past few months.

During the debate on this motion it has been both distressing and encouraging to hear the stories conveyed by colleagues on both sides of the Chamber. My friend the member for Bega conveyed his own experiences fighting fires on his property on New Year's Day: the tension of the beach evacuation centres on the South Coast, the anxiety of not being able to contact his loved ones during that ordeal, the stress of the clean-up and the strength he has shown to guide not only his family but also his entire community through this recovery process. It was harrowing to hear from the member for Prospect about the fire conditions on the ground the night that Geoff Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer lost their lives. The member's recollection of the last words he heard from Geoff Keaton was particularly touching. Stories of tragedy, such as those heroes of our Rural Fire Service who lost their lives on the front line protecting the communities and homes of our countrymen, will stick with us all forever.

Then there are the stories of hope amongst the trauma. To those communities still suffering, I say tragedy will linger but hope will flourish. Stories from our communities of pub owners who have opened their venues to house and feed those who have lost their homes, multicultural communities travelling thousands of kilometres to provide relief and supplies to those who have lost everything, more fortunate farmers helping out fire-affected neighbours with their livestock as they commence their rebuilds, or the thousands of donation drives from community groups across the State have been touching, and are emblematic of the great and generous Australian spirit. These stories are hope in action.

As Minister for Planning and Public Spaces and head of the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, I acknowledge the hard work of the frontline staff in my department, such as our statewide National Parks and Wildlife Service and councils, and those in our agencies who have been working tirelessly to find ways to coordinate responses to recover and rebuild. I also acknowledge the leadership of Shane Fitzsimmons, Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service, who—as described by all members in this place—has shown incredible leadership. Commissioner Fitzsimmons and Commissioner Baxter from Fire and Rescue NSW have been Svengali-like figures, guiding not only volunteers and workers to protect homes and businesses in regional NSW but also the entire State. Commissioner Fitzsimmons has been on our televisions every night. He has led from the front. Theodore Roosevelt once said, "People ask the difference between a leader and a boss. The leader works in the open, and the boss in the covert. The leader leads, and the boss drives." Commissioner Fitzsimmons is a leader, and one we must all aspire to emulate.

Despite its distance from fire fronts to the north and south, my community of Pittwater has been actively assisting in any way it can to fight fires and support communities ravaged by disaster. Pittwater has always been, and continues to be, a generous community, offering its help to those who need it the most, no matter the circumstances. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge that generosity and also the direct linkages between

the Pittwater community and the South Coast, in particular, and the North Coast as well. Many people who lived and raised their families in Pittwater have then retired to the coast. I am thinking particularly of former Mayor of Pittwater Robert Dunn and his family, who relocated to the South Coast, as a small but tangible expression of the human connection between Pittwater and those fire-affected communities. In another example, a few local church groups go down regularly to help with the Scripture Union NSW beach mission at Lake Conjola and were among those trapped as fire enveloped that community.

I must thank our local Pittwater RFS volunteers and staff for their extraordinary efforts to support fire-affected communities over the past several months. The Northern Beaches District Rural Fire Service has 13 brigades, 10 of which are in the Pittwater electorate. The Northern Beaches District RFS is ably led by Acting District Manager Inspector George Sheppard and District Group Captain Scott Crossweller—remarkable men, leaders and servants of our community who exemplify everything that is wonderful about the Australian spirit. Since September, district RFS has been sending down teams of volunteers from local brigades to fight fires on the North and South coasts. Three to four strike teams of 30 volunteers have worked on constant rotation—90 to 120 crew on any given shift. These volunteers have travelled to Taree, the Gospers Mountain fire, Spencer, Lithgow, south-west Sydney, Bargo and Balmoral. Many of the local volunteers, including those with decades of experience, have reported that the fire conditions and ferocity are the worst they have ever experienced.

I thank Scott and George and their volunteers for their ongoing efforts in complementing the work of our RFS across the State in battling these blazes. Everyone in Pittwater is so proud of their efforts. It is heartening to hear that the number of new applications to volunteer with the RFS is growing in response to this year's fire crisis. Serving our community is one of the best ways to give back. It is the appropriate time to thank the employers and businesses in Pittwater that have allowed our local RFS volunteers to give their time to help others. I have heard many stories of employers and businesses paying volunteers as normal, rather than requesting they take leave. A gesture like this makes the lives of our volunteers easier and, in effect, provides downstream support to those communities that are being served by our local RFS volunteers.

I also give a shout-out to other emergency services workers from the region who have given their time to serve other communities. To the Marine Rescue NSW volunteers at the Terrey Hills communications base who have provided, and continue to provide, communications coverage for the South Coast area—thank you. To the Broken Bay and Cottage Point Marine Rescue NSW crews who have been on active standby to cover crews from different regions as the need arose—thank you. To our local National Parks and Wildlife Service staff who have been sent to other areas of the State during fire events—thank you. Your generosity to other communities is recognised by me and by those you have helped. I acknowledge the surf lifesaving movement and the wonderful Steve Pearce, who leads us at a New South Wales level, as well as president George Shales and all the volunteers and clubs on the South Coast that have done an incredible job to provide frontline support and service during the ongoing emergency and in recovery.

In addition to the assistance being coordinated by the Office of Local Government, with councils that are not affected by bushfire helping affected councils, my local Northern Beaches Council has been going above and beyond to coordinate our region's generous community spirit to raise funds for those in need. On Saturday 15 February the council is hosting the Rock Relief concert at Brookvale Oval, with acts including Shannon Noll, the Hoodoo Gurus and Hot Dub Time Machine helping to raise more than \$1 million for fire-affected communities. Last weekend the Sun Run raised donations for the Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service [WIRES] at the time of registration. The Sun Run was a great success, as always, and I am excited to see the results of those donations.

Over the summer period, the council has worked with Rotary and the RFS to collect donations at Christmas concerts, New Year's Eve events, the outdoor cinema and other events to raise more than \$9,000 in gold-coin donations. One of our local councillors, Rory Amon, is an RFS volunteer and has been serving on the front line. The council continues to direct our local community to the best ways that they can contribute to the fire effort. I thank Mayor Michael Regan, Chief Executive Officer Ray Brownlee and all councillors and council staff who have gone above and beyond during this trying period.

I also thank the countless organisations, businesses, schools and volunteers who have given their time and money and have organised events to help affected communities. I thank Avalon Beach Surf Life Saving Club, led by President Ashley Cardiff, and volunteers such as Louise Lindop and Rob Hopton, who collected a huge amount of goods, supplies and water and distributed them to fire-impacted communities through Foodbank. To the Newport Surf Life Saving Club, led by Glen Borg, and volunteers such as Jan Proudfoot and Bev Barnes, who are organising a fundraiser on 15 February—thank you. To Peter Johnson of Johnson Bros Mitre 10 and Bunnings at Belrose, who donated tools and supplies to fire-affected communities—thank you.

But looking at my Pittwater community, first I must thank the extraordinary efforts of our local RFS volunteers and staff who have supported fire-affected communities over the past several months. The

Northern Beaches District Rural Fire Service has 13 brigades, 10 of which are in the Pittwater electorate. The Northern Beaches District RFS is ably led by Acting District Manager Inspector George Shepherd and District Group Captain Scott Crowweller. Both remarkable men, remarkable leaders and remarkable servants of our community who exemplify everything that is wonderful about the Australian spirit.

Since September the district RFS has been sending down teams of volunteers from local brigades to fight fires on the North and South Coast. There have been around three to four strike teams of 30 volunteers working on constant rotation—around 90 to 120 crew on any given shift. These volunteers have travelled to Taree, to the Gaspers Mountain fire, to Spencer, to Lithgow, to south-west Sydney, to Bargo and to Balmoral. Many of the local volunteers, including those with decades of experience, have reported that the fire conditions and ferocity are the worst they have ever experienced. I thank Scott and George and their volunteers for their ongoing efforts in complementing the work of our RFS across the State in battling these blazes. Everyone in Pittwater is so proud of your efforts.

It is heartening to hear that the number of new applications to volunteer in the RFS is growing in response to this year's fire crisis. Serving our community is one of the best ways to give back. It is the appropriate time to also thank the employers and businesses in Pittwater that have allowed our local RFS volunteers to give their time to help others. I have heard many stories of employers and businesses paying these volunteers as normal rather than requesting they take leave. It is a gesture like this that makes the lives of our volunteers easier and in effect provides downstream support to those communities that are being served by our local RFS volunteers.

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Councils worked with Rotary and RFS over the summer, collecting donations at events like Christmas concerts, New Year's Eve events, the Outdoor Cinema and others to collect more than \$9,000 in gold coin donations. Even one of our local councillors, Rory Amon, an RFS volunteer who has been serving on the front line. Council continues to direct our local community to the best ways it can contribute to the fire effort. I thank Mayor Michael Regan, Chief Executive Officer Ray Brownlee, all councillors and council staff who have gone above and beyond during this trying period.

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I thank the many Mona Vale Hospital staff who have been part of the medical and support teams from the Northern Sydney Local Health District who have travelled to the Murrumbidgee and Southern New South Wales local health districts. I thank the local cafes and restaurants who collected their tips for the fire efforts, as well as Toula from Terrey Hills Takeaway, who prepared meals and supplies for our local RFS volunteers, including JR and the Cottage Point crew, as they went off to fight the fires across the State. I sincerely thank the local schools, including Barrenjoey High School, for raising funds and reaching out to impacted schools to develop friendship arrangements for ongoing assistance, support and mateship. I thank the local vets, including Dr Ben Brown, who have donated animal care supplies to affected communities and farms.

I thank the Sydney Wildlife volunteers, including Lynleigh Greig, for their work. There are so many people caring for wildlife, which is part of the huge biodiversity challenge that these continuing bushfires are creating across New South Wales. I have heard so many sweet and touching stories of local kids raising funds for our RFS, WIRES and the bushfire victims through cupcake and lemonade stalls. One of my neighbours, Abbie Lye—a little girl who started year 7 this year—cooked, along with her mum and grandma, a huge number of cupcakes and sold them outside the local Newport Coles. These children are showing that a generosity of spirit starts early. I thank them all so much.

Finally, I pay tribute to all those in our State whom I may have missed who are affected by or working tirelessly to combat these fires. As our State has burned our communities have stepped up. We must now honour those who have lost their lives and those who have survived and now must rebuild. We must honour those who stayed and fought for their homes and those who came after to help with the clean-up and recovery. We must honour the heroism, the sacrifice and the compassion. We must all work together to support our communities through the next stage of this trial by fire.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth—Minister for Better Regulation and Innovation) (19:11:16):

I pay my respects to and sincerely thank the NSW Police Force, State Emergency Service, Volunteer Rescue Association [VRA], Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW and all the volunteers who came to the Tamworth electorate, New England and north-west to help take the battle to the fire fronts in a number of areas, including Nowendoc, Walcha, Yarrowitch, Nundle, Hanging Rock, Crawney, the Moonbi Ranges and the Mount Kaputar National Park in the west of the Tamworth Regional Council area. I pay tribute to the volunteers who took time out from their jobs and their families to fight the fires across the region and the State during the Christmas and New Year break. Their efforts are beyond price; they are selfless and reveal the strength of our communities and the people who live in them.

I pay tribute to the businesses that have supported their staff and allowed them to go away to fight these fires. Their contribution is also priceless and the community as a whole extends its thanks for their support. We also had personnel deployed from our region to help out down south, with the air force providing the air support to get them there and back safely. We thank our defence forces for that assistance. Our region was on high alert, with many spot fires breaking out near farms. Our local brigades always swung into action quickly, along with our local farmers, many of whom are members of those brigades. The community rallied together to put any fires out. Water was also a significant problem and I thank the farmers who offered water from their own dams to help the firefighting efforts, even when they themselves were suffering stock and domestic water shortages.

We lost some buildings across the district and, tragically, we also lost a life. Police reported that a 59-year-old man died months after sustaining injuries while fighting a fire on his Yarrowitch property in December last year. He suffered serious burns defending the land from the Stockyard Flat fire on Blomfield Road and Kangaroo Flat Road at Yarrowitch, 70 kilometres from Walcha. Our thoughts and prayers are with his loved ones. Our region saw an incredible amount of vehicular traffic from the RFS brigades and emergency service personnel going north, south, east and west. We became a central point for replenishment as they did their important, lifesaving work.

On one of my trips to Walcha to support the community I came across a team of RFS volunteers from way out west. They had just arrived at the top of the Moonbi Ranges in their trucks and were receiving a briefing. They came from as far as Bermagui, Walgett, Bathurst, Orange and the Riverina and were swinging into action to fight and control fires on the Moonbi Ranges. People from afar came to help locals they had never met and we thank them. The town's inaugural motorcycle rally organised by the local council was another reason to head to Walcha that weekend.

Close to 1,000 visitors attended the rally, but unfortunately many more had called off the trip as they had been impacted by fires. It spoke volumes of those who made the effort to support Walcha and its businesses. Small towns and regions were impacted from not only a fires perspective, but from a tourism perspective. People who could make the effort to support Walcha travelled. Even when roads were closed they found a way around. People came from South Australia, Central Queensland, the Darling Downs and southern New South Wales. They knew our region was hurting and that the best way to support was to turn up.

When I returned to Tamworth later that day I spoke with my mate Hamish McLaren who is part of a family-run Moreno sheep stud. The Moonbi fire had burned its way to Hamish's boundary, but he told me the damage to his boundary fencing was minimal and there was no loss apart from that—good news there. That was the story, spot fires breaking out everywhere and people rallying to stop them before they got too big. I then took the Woolbrook to Limbri road through the locality of Danglemah where I was able to see the effects of the Moonbi Ranges fire burning its way east. The fire was at the Watch and Act stage. The front trickled its way out of the high rugged hills onto lower grazing land with the expectant RFS volunteers ready to spring into action.

There I caught up with local landholder Harry Tunnicliffe, who was carefully monitoring his water supply from bores on his drought-impacted farm. He was ready to provide water if the fire units needed it. His property is at the bottom of the range and if the fire had taken off and the wind strengthened, it would have been a very dangerous and different situation. We thank God that it did not. The impact of smoke over Tamworth and surrounding communities was incredible. Many residents were troubled by the amount of smoke lingering around.

The Moonbi fires left their mark with smoke hanging over the city for many days, combining with smoke drifting in from Nundle and perhaps even further way from Yarrowitch and east of Walcha. Sports were cancelled, outdoor activities rescheduled and flights cancelled. The command post for our region was in Quirindi. I visited the Liverpool Range Fire Control Centre as a guest of Superintendent Allyn Purkis and was able to spend time meeting with staff and others who are coordinating the fight against fires from the Liverpool Range through the Nundle district, Moonbi Ranges, and the Halls Creek and Retreat districts. These staffers and volunteers were organising crews to attend fire fronts, and food and water supplies for those who are on the ground.

At the control centre in Quirindi I had the honour of meeting three Canadian firefighters who were on a month-long secondment. Travelling from Calgary in the west and Ontario in the east, the men and women expressed their pleasure at being able to assist in our emergency. Reserve personnel from Queensland also made the trip down to Quirindi to man the control centre at the Liverpool Range headquarters. I thank them for their efforts in helping our crews get on top of the situation. Our Canadian friends said they had met a number of Australian firefighters who had been to Canada to provide firefighting support. They said it was fantastic to be able to repay the favour.

Another important part of the battle against the fires will be the recovery process. I am grateful to hear that the New South Wales and Federal Governments are making relief available for that process, as well as payments to help support the volunteers who gave up their time to battle the fire fronts. Many businesses answered the call to assist the RFS with heavy machinery to create fire breaks and clear debris. Hotels, motels, restaurants, cafes, shops, and service stations provided food, fuel and a place to rest. This has been an unprecedented fire season with an unprecedented demand on services, not only on the frontline but also from the administration side. That has created its own set of challenges. We thank those businesses in our smaller communities that were putting their hand up to protect our communities, taking time out of their core business to ensure that the services they were able to provide and those provided by the RFS were available and ready to go at a moment's notice.

It did create its own set of challenges. Particularly, there was an unprecedented demand in relation to prompt payments for those businesses in regional New South Wales that have put their hand up when asked. Through adversity comes opportunity, and businesses are keen to assist in streamlining processes so that no-one is disadvantaged when supporting those in need. There are lessons to be learnt on many fronts. Heaven forbid we find ourselves in this situation again, but if we do our communities will be ready. The community spirit will remain strong. I wholeheartedly thank each and every one of our emergency services personnel and every person who puts up their hand to protect our communities for their service. We are so grateful for your community spirit—that Australian spirit. And we keep praying for rain.

Mr PAUL SCULLY (Wollongong) (19:20:50): Unprecedented, intense, incredible, massive, unimaginable, unbelievable, destructive: These are just some of the words that have been used to describe the fires that have devastated millions of hectares of New South Wales over recent months. When I reflect on the past few months—not forgetting that there are still around 60 fires burning in New South Wales—it is hard to conceive that the start of this parliamentary session is taking place in similar circumstances to the end of the last parliamentary session: in a haze of bushfire smoke in various parts of our State. In extending our condolences, our sympathy and our generosity to those who have suffered the worst impacts of the fires over Christmas and January, people need to remember that this fire season started way back in August of last year. It has literally been months of fires stretching the length of New South Wales.

Many other speakers contributing to debate on this motion have run through the list of statistics on this fire: the hectares burned, the properties damaged and, sadly, the 25 lives lost—including those who were fighting fires in communities that they did not even live in and may never have visited before. However, no words can truly express the depth of our collective gratitude for their sacrifice. No words can truly express to all of those who fought the fires just how grateful our entire community is. I hope that the bravery and willingness of those people to run into the face of fire when everyone else was directed to run away from it, as well as their willingness to put their lives on hold—and on the line—inspires many more to join organisations such as the RFS, the SES and other volunteer organisations aimed at helping others in times of distress.

It is worth comparing these fires to those of previous years. Yesterday, in a briefing from the RFS and the disaster recovery team, members in this place got a sense of the size of this disaster. The fires have burned 5.5 million hectares of land; the next largest of the more recent fires in 2002-03 burned 1.5 million hectares by comparison. These fires destroyed more than 2,500 homes; the next largest fire in those terms in 2013-14

destroyed 248 homes. The magnitude of these fires compared to those of the past is staggering. It puts the size of the task that faced our firefighters in context. It also puts the size of the task of recovery in context.

Before I extend some personal thanks, as the shadow natural resources Minister I extend my thanks to the staff of Forestry Corporation and the timber industry for the role they have played in fighting the fires. I thank them in advance for the role they will play in the recovery effort. There has been considerable praise heaped on our volunteer and employed firefighters, and rightly so—they did an incredible job. In saying that, I extend my gratitude and that of the Wollongong electorate to the Mount Kembla Rural Fire Service brigade and the Farmborough Heights brigade. I know many of the members of those brigades personally. Many of them have dedicated decades to the task of helping communities. Many years ago my father served as captain of that Mount Kembla brigade. Standing shoulder to shoulder with them were more than 500 Forestry Corporation staff and countless timber industry workers, many of whom moved from fire to fire as the fire front moved. The industry not only lost assets that will take decades to regrow but also lost equipment. The industry that supplies timber for all sorts of things—from paper to housing—will need considerable support as it recovers.

Timber industry workers and timber industry dependent communities also will need considerable support as they recover. At the moment there is some urgency in salvaging logs so that we will have timber for housing and other uses over the coming years, but after that there will be some tough times ahead for the industry. I commit myself in this role to doing all that I can to provide support and assistance to the industry as we move forward and to work with the Government in that sense. I make that commitment because for the most part these companies not only are the largest employers in their region but also are Australian owned and operated businesses. Simply abandoning them, abandoning the families they support, abandoning the small businesses from which they procure goods and services, and abandoning the communities they support and replacing them with imported timber products is simply not a solution that I support.

We were fortunate enough in Wollongong, and we were fortunate enough in most parts of the Illawarra, not to be directly affected by the fire, but of course there were friends and family who were. New Year's Eve was not a night I will forget easily. One of my staff and a good friend of mine, Frances Kerkham, had her parents go missing. Her parents, Alan and Katrina, had stayed behind to fight the fire that was attacking their house. For a period of 36 hours their daughters did not know where they were. They were quite panicked and frantic, as any children would be when they do not know where their parents are in a fire front.

I thank the Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services and member for Kiama, Gareth Ward, for his support that night. Having spoken to Gareth in the days leading up to New Year's Eve I knew that he was in the area and was being briefed on a regular basis. I did not want to contact RFS members who were fighting the intense fire and distract them from the task at hand so I contacted Gareth about Alan and Katrina. He was able to get in touch with people. I thank him. Gareth and I have a sparring relationship in politics from time to time and we always will, but that shows we can set that aside in emergency circumstances. I would like to record my personal thanks and the thanks of Frances Kerkham for looking out for her parents.

The Federal member for Gilmore, Fiona Phillips, and the Federal member for Eden-Monaro, Mike Kelly, have been doing an incredible job for their communities over the past weeks and months and will continue to do that incredible job over the months and possibly years ahead as their communities recover. I also acknowledge the staff of their electorate offices for putting in more hours than any electorate office staff ordinarily would do. That speaks of the level of commitment of their member and individual staff members to supporting communities as they recover.

Recently I spoke to the Lord Mayor of Wollongong who said, "If you get the chance, please acknowledge the mayors on the South Coast and the effort that they have put into their communities and will continue to put in for their communities." He had been dealing with them in preparing Wollongong, should something happen in the Illawarra escarpment, and had been communicating with them with a view to preparing Wollongong for the possibility of evacuation and organising an evacuation location. I acknowledge Kristy McBain of the Bega Valley Council, Liz Innes of the Eurobodalla Shire Council, Amanda Findley of the Shoalhaven City Council, Duncan Gair of the Wingecarribee Shire Council and Matthew Deeth from the Wollondilly Shire Council.

The task is not over for any of those mayors and the task is not over for any elected representatives of fire-affected communities, but to know that members of this place will be doing all we can to support the effort of their recovery and support their communities as they recover would lend some support and encouragement to their efforts as they go forward. The thing about these fires is that they galvanise and strengthen community support throughout New South Wales. My social media feed, my email and my phone exploded with people who were spontaneously taking up the cause of collecting food, clothing, household goods, money—any items for both people and their animals. I lost count of how many there were but I thank every single person in the Wollongong electorate in the Illawarra who contributed to those causes. In Wollongong, as I said before, we have so far avoided

any direct impact of the fires but we are not out of the woods yet. Despite not experiencing the flames, the heat or the intensity of the fires, people in the Illawarra and Wollongong felt compelled to contribute.

I acknowledge a few people and their contributions. In saying that, I am sure that I will miss some people because I do not have the most comprehensive list of everyone who started a fundraising effort or a collection. In particular, I acknowledge Theresa Gregory; Chase Murray from Attaboy cafe in Dapto, who decided to start putting together baskets for firefighters so that they could get some sustenance along the way; I attended a concert at the North Wollongong Hotel—going back to the days of my youth—organised by Hockey Dad, that great band from the nineties Tumbleweed and the Yours and Owls festival group, who all came together with 100 per cent of the proceeds going to the bushfire recovery. I thank everyone who contributed—all the bands who contributed their time, Yours and Owls for contributing their organising skills, the North Wollongong Hotel and, in particular, Oh Dang! Espresso cafe, who was also involved in organising it.

The Illawarra Indian association contacted me and said, "We have raised \$10,000. How do we get it to the people who need it most?" Thank you to them and to the Vietnamese community who did the same thing in the Illawarra. The Spanish and Latin American community in the Illawarra also contacted me and said, "We've got this money and we want to make sure it gets to the people who need it most. Can you direct us to them?" I also thank Bridget and Jenny Denham, who kicked off a creative and innovative campaign that took off across the Illawarra to collect back-to-school supplies for school kids who had lost everything in the fires, so that when they turned up to school this term they had a backpack, some pencils and something to do. That was organised through a number of schools but Yanderra Public School and Figtree Heights Public School were a couple that were involved with that initiative. I thank the Federal member for Werriwa in south-western Sydney, Anne Stanley, who sent down a huge box to my office to add to that collection after she saw it on social media. When I thanked her she said, "Well, it was something practical to do for kids."

I also thank the IMAM Foundation, a group from the local Islamic community, who travelled down to the South Coast almost every weekend recently to cook a barbecue to make sure that people had food, along with the numerous church groups that are providing both practical support and comfort through psychological support. I also thank the various local media outlets in the Illawarra that served their communities with distinction during the fires. National reports are important but when people are faced with such fast-moving fire and local impacts there is no substitute for those who know the area and know it well; for people who could translate the excellent information that was coming from the RFS communications team into directions that locals understood.

At times like this there are no substitutes for local knowledge, whether that be councillors or council officers supporting people; surf lifesaving clubs and their volunteers sheltering people; forestry and timber industry workers, who know the landscape; or local media outlets who have the contacts on the ground and the local knowledge to help get information in an accurate and timely manner to those who need it. The *Illawarra Mercury*, the WIN network, the Nine network and the local radio stations, including ABC Illawarra, made sure that timely and accurate information was available to people. I thank them for the hours they put in and the dedication to task that they presented.

In concluding I echo the comments and the call of my colleagues from the South Coast and North Coast that our communities are open for business and people should be travelling there. I look forward to heading to the South Coast in the coming weeks for a weekend and I am sure that it will not be the last time that I am there, spending money in those communities as they rebuild and recover. As a gentleman on ABC radio in the morning earlier this week said, "Don't just come and gawk." The people who are trying to recover and trying to get their lives back on track are growing tired of people who come down, take a photo and then drive off again. If people take the time to travel down to the South Coast or up the North Coast then they should spend some money in those communities. That is what they really need. They should not go there, take a selfie and drive away so that they can say they have visited a fire-affected community. They should do something practical. They should open their wallets, just like others who in earlier times opened their hearts, to thank, recognise and appreciate the work that is being done. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr ALISTER HENSKENS (Ku-ring-gai) (19:34:53): I speak on behalf of the people of Ku-ring-gai on this condolence motion to honour the loss of precious life, to acknowledge the terrible impact that these bush fires have had on people's lives and property, to recognise the bravery of our emergency services personnel and to offer my sympathy to those affected by the bushfires in this most extraordinary summer. It is a summer the likes of which we have not experienced before—it is nothing like anything that has occurred before in my life.

When I was a kid growing up, Australia Day was not only our national day but it was a psychological marker. It was the time when you had a barbecue to celebrate the end of summer. After Australia Day you stopped putting board shorts on when you woke up in the morning and started to put on your school uniform. Throughout my life I have never looked forward to the end of summer but this year Australia Day could not have come quickly enough. For the first time in my life I wanted summer to end. I suppose we are all trying to process these past

months in our own way. Yesterday the Deputy Premier described it as "the summer from hell". As the words spoken already in this condolence motion show, that description is not an exaggeration.

At the very least, we have all been impacted by the smoke in the air created by the unprecedented magnitude of these horrific fires across the State. That smoke and the threat of bushfires is still with us as many fires continue to burn in our State and across our nation. From the outset it is appropriate to not only give condolences for those who have suffered loss but also to thank all of the RFS and State Emergency Service volunteers, the police, Fire and Rescue NSW, other emergency service workers, public servants, the Commissioner of the Rural Fire Service, the Premier, members of Parliament and everybody who has worked so hard to help the people impacted by these bushfires.

I will speak later about some of the volunteers from my electorate who have helped fight these fires but the response of the Ku-ring-gai community has been quite extraordinary. In addition to the work of our RFS volunteers many people have been involved in local fundraising and in-kind donations organised by Rotary and Lions clubs, Turramurra Community Bank and sporting, school and community groups. This is a great indication of the empathy and sympathy for those impacted by these fires and the community in which we live. For example, at 3.30 p.m. this Sunday 9 February, at Claude Cameron Grove Dog Park, Westbrook Avenue, Wahroonga, a "bark run" is being held to raise funds for the New Killara Rural Fire Service Brigade. I encourage our community to attend. It is a chance for people to bring their dogs, friends and family along to thank our RFS volunteers and help raise vital funds for the Killara brigade.

The Ku-ring-gai electorate is boarded by two national parks and many of us have thought "but for the grace of God go I". Despite living in an urban area, in the early 1990s bushfires impacted the Ku-ring-gai community. We understand that it could so easily have been our area of the State losing life and property. In Australia our homes are our cherished private sanctuary. One thing that really struck me when I was reading about the 25 people who lost their lives is that many of them died in or near their homes. As that typically iconic Australian movie *The Castle* amply demonstrated, in our country we consider that our home is a safe haven. It is our special private place where treasures can be dispatched to the pool room and where we share moments with the people that we love. The psychological importance of our homes cannot be put into words. It was best described in *The Castle* as "just the vibe of the thing".

Those impacted by these fires have had their safe places penetrated. People have lost cherished loved ones. They will never again get to sit around a dinner table with them or to enjoy a cup of coffee or tea with them. They have lost photographs, trinkets and memories of good times. Probably in the depression that many of them are suffering at the moment, they have lost hope itself. Through the terrible bushfires, some people in New South Wales lost their lives in or near their homes. We do not know the names of all of them, which is tragic as we cannot publicly acknowledge all of them by name. Bob Lindsay, aged 77, and Gwen Hyde, aged 68, of Coongbar died in October last year, side by side, trying to save their isolated property. They were a couple who fell in love later in life and left behind children from former relationships.

In November last year Vivian Chaplain, aged 69, of Diehard was protecting her home and animals when the Kangawalla blaze tore through the Northern Tablelands community of Wyaliba and took her life. George Nole, aged 85 and also of Diehard, was also taken. He was a Greek-born Australian and an electronics genius who had worked on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's [NASA] Apollo space missions. He also died in his home. Julie Fletcher, aged 63, of Johns River had a longstanding family connection with that area. She loved her Angus cattle so much that she could never sell them for slaughter. "Her cows died happy and old," her friend said. She was described as a "kind and thoughtful lady". Julie was found in her burnt-out home in November after the fast-moving fire took her life.

Barry Parsons, aged 58, of Willawarrin left a poignant Facebook post shortly before he died in November last year, describing the fires around him. He was found not far from his shed where he would care for stray cats. His friends referred to him as "a lovely, peaceful and gentle" man. Chris Savva, aged 64, of South Arm was a long-term resident of the town near Bowraville. The wooden bridge that was his only line of escape from the fires near his home was destroyed by the flames. In November last year his sport utility vehicle ran down an embankment when he tried to make it back home from the bridge. He was described as a "doting father" and his grandchildren were the apple of his eye. He was a wonderful man. He was incredibly kind and had a great sense of humour.

At the end of December a 59-year-old unnamed man died after being rescued from his rural property at Yarrowitch, about 70 kilometres south-east of Walcha. He had severe burns. He was found in a water tank, after trying to stay and defend his property from the Stockyard Flat fire. On 30 December Robert Salway, aged 63, and his 29-year-old son, Patrick, lost their lives at Wandella while trying to save their home. If the loss of a father and son is not enough, Patrick's wife, Renee, is expecting a child. Within 30 hours of their death, Robert's elderly mother, Edna, died without learning of her son and grandson's fate.

A day later, Laurie Andrews, aged 70, of Yatte Yattah was found deceased outside his home on Myrtle Gully Road. Laurie was a former Shoalhaven Water site supervisor and a founding member of the Mollymook Longboarders. He was remembered as a stylish surfer and all-round great bloke. On that same day an unidentified man, aged 56, was discovered outside a home at Coolagolite, near Cobargo, where his property had been reduced to ash in just minutes. The man was private and kept to himself.

Col Burns, aged 72, of Belowra also died that day. He was a RFS volunteer. He was off duty on his isolated property when it was hit by the same fire that flared and hit towns, including Cobargo. On that day another unidentified man, aged 75, of Yatte Yattah was found in a burnt-out car on the road off the Princes Highway near the fire-ravaged community of Lake Conjola, where 89 homes were lost. On the first day of this year Michael Campbell, aged 62, of Sussex Inlet was found in his car. On 4 January David Harrison, aged 47, of Batlow died of a heart attack as he battled to save his best mate's home from the Dunns Road blaze. He refused to leave his school friend alone to fight the fires. David's brother described him as "a great Aussie hero" who was "hands down the favourite uncle to his nieces and nephews". He said that when David walked in a room "you would just smile".

On 6 January John Smith, aged 71, of Nerrigundah was found. He is believed to have died fighting to save his property in the tiny community inland from Bodalla. Earlier his 10-year-old daughter Emerald had used the Coles gift cards she had been given for her birthday to buy treats to make goodie bags for RFS volunteers to take on their truck. On 18 January an unidentified man aged 84 years died at Cobargo. He suffered critical burns at his home when he is believed to have been trying to defend his property. On 23 January Michael Clarke, a pecan farmer aged 59, told friends he would barricade himself in the shower in his home. The fire surrounded his property and he had limited opportunity to save himself. His son described Michael as a great guy "Australia epitomised".

In starting a tribute to our firefighters it occurred to me that a few years ago, on the centenary of Anzac Day, I privately asked the questions: Would we do today as the Anzacs did 100 year ago? Would we give our lives to protect the community? Would we be so brave and selfless? Does our generation have the qualities of that generation? Whilst I hope large volumes of civilian volunteers will not have to go again to fight an offshore war, the inspirational work of the RFS volunteers in this time of crisis has answered those questions with an emphatic "yes". In every sense they meet the description of modern-day heroes.

The first two RFS volunteers to tragically be taken were Geoff Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer. They were men in their early thirties. They were best mates and they were both fathers. They died in terrifying conditions, battling the Green Wattle Creek fire near Buxton. Unfortunately, a giant gum tree—sadly called a "widow-maker"—ended their lives. At their funeral their young children, Charlotte O'Dwyer, aged 18 months, and Harvey Keaton, aged 19 months, were told their dads had left only because they were heroes. The sadness around their deaths is almost unimaginable.

The next RFS volunteer to be taken was Samuel McPaul, aged 28. He was with the Culcairn North West brigade as they fought to save properties along the Murray River. His crew had entered a paddock to round up cattle. They were on flat ground just 50 metres from the farm gate with little around to burn, but the Green Valley fire was so large it created its own weather system, whipping up 140 kilometres-an-hour winds. Two of his crew mates were injured at the same time. He and his wife, Megan, had been married for 18 months and she was pregnant with their first child, due on 4 May. Culcairn fire captain Andrew Godde, who was in charge of the truck, described McPaul as a "ripping young bloke" who would always put others before himself.

Sam's death particularly resonated with me personally. He was very like me at 28 years of age. He coached and played basketball like I did. He was a basketball manager and administrator, as I was at the same age. He was obviously a very community-minded person, being an RFS volunteer as well. Like other people who have died in these fires he had much to look forward to. It is tragic that he will never get to meet his child. Then we lost the three American airmen, Captain Ian McBeth, 44, First Officer Paul Hudson, 42, and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan, 43. These three gentlemen came to our country to help fight our fires. They were extraordinarily well credentialed and experienced, each with outstanding military careers in the United States of America. It was so tragic that they lost their lives when their plane came down.

Ku-ring-gai has two local RFS brigades: the Ku-ring-gai and Killara brigades. The Killara brigade is only two years old. Both brigades have been engaged in fighting the New South Wales bushfires since August last year. The brigades' tankers and crews have been deployed to fires from the Queensland border to the Snowy Mountains and all points in between. In the past few days crews from the two brigades have been fighting the fires in the Australian Capital Territory and southern areas of New South Wales. The crews were also deployed to Queensland in August. Those deployments have varied in duration from 12 to 14 hours through to five days.

The four Killara and Ku-ring-gai tankers were the first RFS tankers on the scene at the Turramurra fires, which occurred in November last year on the first of Sydney's catastrophic fire danger days. Fortunately, that fire

was quickly contained with the assistance of multiple strike teams and air assets, including a C-130 air tanker. Unfortunately, one of the Killara brigade members, Yoel Hyman, whom I know well, broke his arm while fighting that fire. That incident was reported in the media. Although that injury has taken him off the fire line for the rest of the season, Yoel has been running bushfire survival plan meetings and working with Ku-ring-gai residents to prepare their plans. The crews from the Ku-ring-gai and Killara brigades have experienced the heartbreaking loss of homes and outbuildings, together with the elation of saving other homes and businesses. They have saved much more than they have lost.

In addition to these deployments, the brigades have had crews on stand-by during total fire ban days of elevated fire danger in the Sydney region. Brigade members have also undertaken extensive community engagement activities, assisting Ku-ring-gai residents to understand the risks they face and to prepare bushfire survival plans. In all, around 80 members of the two brigades have contributed to this vital work in the period since August 2019. Unfortunately, the emergency is not yet over. Indeed, there is every indication that the brigades' services will be required for many weeks yet. Andrew Wilson is the captain of the Killara brigade and Nic Lyons is the captain of the Ku-ring-gai brigade. It would be remiss of me to speak on this condolence motion without also drawing attention to the incident that occurred at Mogo on 23 January 2020, in which a fire truck from one of our local brigades flipped over. One of the injured firefighters, Ian, said:

Things just went black. We just kind of approached the barrier and went straight through it. We started rolling around just like being in a washing machine.

Thankfully the men managed to escape the truck, landing upright after crashing into an embankment at Mogo. They were treated for minor head, back and neck injuries at Batemans Bay Hospital. It should be noted that one of the RFS volunteers on board was Luca Dahl, the current school captain of Ku-ring-gai High School. He has been volunteering in the service for four years. His father, Lars, was also in the truck. Luca, his father and the men in the truck that day epitomise the contribution that our local firefighters have made throughout the State helping to fight fires in the areas I have mentioned. Even though the bushfire emergencies in our State have been an enormous physical challenge to life and property, they have certainly brought out the very best in people. People have supported each other and put their lives at risk. Without the hard work of all the emergency services workers we could reasonably expect far greater losses than have happened, both of people and of property.

This condolence motion is a very fitting tribute not only to the people who have died but also to the people who have stayed alive due to the efforts of all of those emergency service responders. It is very appropriate that this week Government business has been suspended in the New South Wales Parliament to acknowledge the great contribution from people, the tragic loss of life and property and the impact the fires have had and will continue to have on people's lives and to let people know that we are sorry for their loss and that we will be with them as they rebuild their lives.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG (Macquarie Fields) (19:54:55): It is with sadness that I contribute to the condolence motion for the victims of the bushfires. I commend and wholeheartedly support the first motion of this parliamentary calendar. This Parliament speaks with one voice on an issue that has impacted us all in every community, whether or not the fires came to our electorates. The motion is a tribute to and recognition of all of those who have played a role in some way and to ensure that those who have lost their lives, property, homes and businesses will always be in our thoughts and that we will always be here to help them.

In a perfect world there would be no need for this condolence motion. In a perfect world the firefighters and residents who lost their lives would be safe with their families and friends. In a perfect world the nearly 2,500 homes that were razed would still be standing, filled with pictures, furniture and memories. Sadly, the devastating bushfires over the past few months have served as a stark reminder that our world is far from perfect. On behalf of my constituents and my family, I offer my deepest condolences to the families, friends and loved ones of the 33 people who lost their lives across Australia, including the 25 people here in New South Wales. The pain of losing someone you love is unimaginable. I offer my utmost thanks to the thousands of firefighters and emergency services personnel who put their lives on the line to protect people and property, including our international friends who came to help in our time of need. This shows the level of respect that people around the world hold for Australia and Australians. Their bravery and unwavering commitment will always be remembered and treasured.

The bushfires over the past few months have brought unspeakable tragedy. I know that our summers are hot, and I have always loved our summers, but the continual heatwave and the hot and windy conditions is something I have never experienced. I hope that we never have to experience this again, though I know that cannot be guaranteed. The tragedy has not dampened the formidable Aussie spirit. It has been heartening to see so many acts of kindness, strangers helping strangers. The call for donations was overwhelming. We answered, and we answered fast. People opened their doors to shelter those who lost everything. In the chaos and heartache the great Aussie tradition of volunteerism was inspiring, the generosity was flowing and the kindness was unlimited.

Like many other Australians I watched in horror as volunteer firefighters battled ferocious fires. They left their families to brave these horrific conditions. Sadly, some volunteers lost their own homes while fighting to save the homes of others. The spirit of these volunteer firefighters and the scenes of devastation prompted a sea of donations and a new wave of volunteers. People packed up trucks or car boots with food and water to relieve our NSW Rural Fire Service [RFS] fireys. The community response to these terrible bushfires has been extremely heartening. People gave very generously in my own electorate. One example was the Silver Coin Project—Back to School Bushfire Appeal. Residents donated thousands of school stationery supplies, which were packed into nearly 600 backpacks and donated to six schools in the electorate of Wollondilly that were affected by the bushfires. Drop-off points across the Macarthur region were inundated with donations. It was a great privilege to join the volunteers as they prepared the backpacks full of much-needed supplies. Whilst we managed to fill almost 600 backpacks, there were still more containers and boxes of school items, which will be donated to bushfire-affected schools in the local area.

On that note I also recognise the tremendous efforts of Jenny and Darko, who run the Silver Coin Project, for their initiative and dedication to the success of the Back to School Bushfire Appeal. They came up with the idea and within days it all went so well. I recognise their dedication not only to this cause but to many others throughout the year. I also acknowledge Nicole at Ingleburn Village where the charity kept and stored all the supplies. The management of Ingleburn Village was very generous in offering space for free to ensure that donations, which just kept on coming, were able to be stored in a secure place. I also acknowledge members of the Rotary Club of Ingleburn who were there, as they always are, to do the barbecues, the Salvation Army who were collecting donations and, of course, the many other community groups which in their own way were collecting every coin and every dollar for those in need.

The images of the bushfire devastation may have made many of us feel a little helpless. Donating and volunteering made us feel a little less helpless and that we can all play a part in rebuilding our communities. It was the least we could do for the volunteer firefighters and communities who bore the brunt of the ferocious fires. On my way to work I noticed a house in Leumeah, which is on the southern bounds of my electorate, with a large sign draped over its back balcony with the words "Thank You RFS", complete with a big red love heart. This illustrates the profound impact the bushfires have had on all of us, regardless of where we live, and shows how grateful we are for those who came to help in any way possible. I also saw a café putting up a sign that said all RFS fireys were able to eat for free at any time of the day. The generosity, thoughtfulness and gratitude can be found anywhere and everywhere in Australia. It is heartening to know that in our time of need Australians always look after each other.

The healing process ahead is a long one for the families that have lost loved ones and the communities still reeling from widespread devastation. The rebuilding process can be daunting for those who lost their homes, businesses and livelihoods. However, all of us can contribute in our own small way through donations and if you are thinking of having a holiday there is no better way to support communities on the South Coast than to holiday there. Many families and businesspeople have worked so hard to build up their small businesses. To see them lost or destroyed through no fault of their own is very disheartening. What we can do is make sure we go and spend our dollars to help the local economy and rebuild businesses, livelihoods and jobs for those people. To everyone affected by these terrible bushfires, please know that the people of New South Wales and all Australians stand beside you through your recovery. As a nation we have great resilience. With the help of all Australians, through our generosity and kindness, we will get through the rebuilding process together. I commend the motion to the House.

Mrs WENDY TUCKERMAN (Goulburn) (20:03:02): Today I speak in recognition of the devastating toll this bushfire season has had on this great State, particularly in my electorate of Goulburn. I thank the Premier for the opportunity to speak to the condolence motion that she has put before the Parliament. I recognise Mr David Harrison, a resident of Goulburn who lost his life on Saturday 4 January defending his friend's farm on Batlow Road, Batlow. When the Dunns Road fire rose to emergency level, David's brother asked him to evacuate. They said David did not wish to leave his mate and chose to stay and defend his mate's home. They had a fire plan and David chose to fulfil the plan alongside his friend.

While carting water David suffered a heart attack. He was found unconscious in his ute. David's actions on that Saturday were a legendary example of Australian mateship. When help was needed, he was there to lend a hand. This act of loyalty, bravery and sacrifice leaves a legacy for David Harrison of a true friend, a great mate and an Australian hero. David was much loved by his brothers and family, and a favourite uncle to his nine nieces and nephews. Twenty-five people have lost their lives and each one of them has touched the lives of many. They will be feeling the pain of their loss and I give my condolences to them at this difficult time.

I thank all firefighters who paid the ultimate sacrifice. Their family, friends, colleagues and loved ones can be very proud of their bravery and our hearts break at their loss. I recognise the extraordinary efforts of our

Rural Fire Service volunteers and staff, Fire and Rescue NSW, all emergency service workers, the staff of New South Wales State agencies, local council representatives and staff across a number of local government areas, but particularly those in my electorate—the Wingecarribee Shire Council, Upper Lachlan Shire Council, Goulburn and Hilltops councils.

I thank the communities of the Goulburn electorate for their diligence in preparing their homes and fire plans. Community meetings were held in village halls of those areas under threat. I commend New South Wales police Inspector John Klepaczarek and Rural Fire Service community liaison officers David Stimson and Lachlan Gilchrist for preparing and informing the community of the impending concerns. There were many community members—and I mean many—who attended those meetings and walked away better informed of the risk and threat. Ultimately they were better prepared. I thank the RFS community liaison teams for their outstanding work. I have no doubt that those informative meetings helped to save lives and homes.

I thank the firefighters who bravely fought the Green Wattle Creek, Bannaby, Currowan, Morton, Charleys Forest and Clyde Mountain fires, all of which directly impacted my electorate. Even though homes were lost, their efforts saved so many more. The days, weeks and months that they have all endured are beyond words. Their bravery and actions are unbelievable. I thank members of the RFS and Fire and Rescue NSW brigades in my electorate, State forest and national parks personnel, as well as members of the State Emergency Service, New South Wales Ambulance and the NSW Police Force whose officers bravely attended fire-ravaged zones to assist.

There are so many parts to the RFS firefighting capability, including the fire control centres and support brigades as well as members of the catering teams who provide not only sustenance but also comfort, a hug and an ear. I thank those who give behind-the-scenes support; the staff who run the evacuation centres; the remarkable work and support from clubs such as the Mittagong RSL, the Moss Vale Services Club and the Goulburn Recreation Centre, who went above and beyond in providing help; the New South Wales agency teams; the volunteers from the Australian Red Cross, Anglicare, St Vincent de Paul, the Salvation Army and members of their communities who were offering so much support and comfort. Local Land Services and local wildlife rescue groups went above and beyond the call of duty in extreme heat and conditions to assist in caring for animals that were impacted by the fires. There are so many stories to be told and so many people to thank. I found it very difficult to put it into words.

The aerial support in fighting the fires is astounding. The work of the aviation crews is extraordinary. I give my condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of those brave men who lost their lives in the C-130 crash. Thor and its crew played a significant part in fighting the fires in my electorate. I have witnessed great leadership during those times. The Premier's effort has been unbelievable and it continues to this day. She objects to the accolades; such is her nature, but her strength, endurance and exemplary leadership during this disaster has been remarkable. She deserves all the accolades she gets and more. Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons' knowledge and his calm and controlled manner brought great comfort to many people and I thank him for the role he has played. He was ably supported by Commissioner Baxter and Goulburn boy NSW Police Force Deputy Commissioner Gary Worboys. I thank my colleagues for their support. Your presence and assistance has been remarkable and I truly thank you. To the communities impacted, your extraordinary generosity of spirit and community connectedness has been the shining light.

Places such as Quest for Life at Bundanoon, which offer specialist care and are highly experienced in trauma counselling, have provided free counselling, nurturing and kindness to many who have been impacted. Contributing to the healing process are the businesses that have donated generously even when they have had reduced income due to drought and fires; the children and staff from the Anglicare childcare centre who decorated cupcakes for the Tarlo brigade's catering unit to give to firefighters at the Taralga fire station; our wonderful service organisations such as Rotary, Lions and Apex that are always willing to support their communities; and the communities that have organised fundraising concerts such as Fire Aid 2020 to support our firefighters. The generosity of people throughout the world has been remarkable.

There are so many stories to tell of people being saved by our brave firefighters in communities such as Wingello, which is a small village that lost 14 homes. The owner of the Wingello general store, David Bruggeman, and his family left one night with a wall of fire roaring towards them. David left without any hope that the community could be saved, let alone his home and the store, which sits next door to the community hall. Remarkably, those buildings still stand due to the brave firefighters who saved them. Approximately 14 homes and many outbuildings were lost that night, but many were saved. Many residents got out safely thanks to the heroic firefighters and police who evacuated over 200 people from the place of last resort at Bundanoon when the fire was at its peak. It is a remarkable story of courage and bravery.

I thank those who spent and continue to spend time away from their families to help others such as the brave fireys who spent valued time away from their loved ones at Christmas to do everything they could to help

people they did not even know. Firefighters Christopher Grimson and Vince Leslie from Fire and Rescue NSW Station 232 Boorowa spent Christmas at the South Coast helping where they could. Many farmers put in hours and hours fighting the fires or supporting firefighters. After they had spent 12 to 14 hours fighting fires, they returned to the farm to continue working to feed stock and check water points, which is incredible. I know lots of others from local stations and all over the State did the same, including members of brigades in the Rural Fire Service Southern Tablelands Zone, the Southern Highlands Zone and the South West Slopes Zone.

Staff from the State Emergency Service, New South Wales Ambulance and the south-east and Murrumbidgee local health districts have been absolutely tremendous. They have provided so much support and care to our communities. I give my sincere thanks for their extraordinary efforts. I am blessed to represent them in this place. Although there is still so much more to do, the fires in my electorate have only just been contained by many local firefighters and others from all over the State. They include the Horsley Park brigade and the member for Prospect, Hugh McDermott. After such loss their brigade's courage and fortitude will long be remembered. Brigades and firefighters also came from interstate and overseas. I simply say thank you. I take this opportunity to thank the Deputy Premier John Barilaro who is leading the recovery. His understanding of the needs and wants and his responsiveness has been remarkable.

As our communities recover and people who have lost their homes begin to pull their lives back together we need to ensure that the building process is timely and not encumbered by red tape. The impact on business has been significant. On top of the impacts of drought we must continue to support our business community and encourage visitors. We must continue to support our firefighters and help our community to heal. Most importantly, we must prepare for the future. I support the condolence motion.

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) (20:15:10): Today I speak on the Australian bushfire crisis. These are uncertain times for people living in bushfire-prone communities. Many have lost their homes and all that they own. Fortunately, my electorate of Cabramatta was spared from this disaster. I cannot comprehend what it would be like to lose everything you own in your life. Families that for generations created cattle farms which took years to bring the reward of breeding stock to fruition lost everything in maybe half an hour as fire swept through their property, destroying all they had. They lost their homes, personal belongings and memorabilia in seconds. But there is always one thing guaranteed during times of crisis and that is that the communities of Cabramatta and from all corners of Australia will gather together to lend a helping hand.

We have seen many community groups across Australia donating crucial supplies to those affected as well as businesses and banks providing concessions. It is at times like this when everyone truly gets together to lend a helping hand, assisting in any way they can. I acknowledge the efforts of people from the Bonnyrigg Sports Club who raised over \$40,000 as well as those from the local Cambodian, Chinese, Assyrian, Spanish and Vietnamese communities. The Australian Chinese Buddhist Association raised \$81,000, donating \$10,000 to each of the families of the two volunteer firefighters from the Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade who lost their lives. Communities in my area raised well over \$300,000 and I thank them very much for their efforts.

It goes without saying that our bushfire crisis would have been much worse if not for the brave men and women who were part of the relief effort. I acknowledge members of the Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade including the member for Prospect, Dr Hugh McDermott. Unfortunately it lost two of its finest volunteer firefighters on the front line and I pay my respects to Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer on behalf of both sides of the House. Our heartfelt condolences go out to their families. I also acknowledge and thank Minister Constance, the member for Bega, for the great work he did in his area in helping to fight those fires.

I also acknowledge all the police and ambulance personnel who were on the front line alongside our local firefighters and RFS volunteers. I pay my respects to the three firefighters from the United States whose water bomber crashed. They came to this country to help us but lost their lives while fighting the fires in Australia. I thank the volunteers who did an amazing job in providing aid to those who were directly affected in those communities, ensuring everyone got the crucial information they needed. Finally, I acknowledge the brave men and women who manned the numerous operations centres across New South Wales and abroad, and coordinated the relief efforts. Without them, our emergency services personnel would not have received the vital information and support they needed to protect lives and communities.

It goes without saying that we still face an unprecedented risk of bushfires over the coming weeks. We need to do everything we can to support the volunteers who are working on the front line. I end my contribution by acknowledging the Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service, Shane Fitzsimmons. Never in my life would I have been able to do what he did. He stayed calm and collected throughout this period and is to be commended for his professionalism and dedication to the management of the bushfire crisis. He is a hero in my eyes, as well in the eyes of many others. I wish everybody on the front line godspeed as we enter the next few weeks of unprecedented bushfire risk. I am pleased to work with everybody in this Parliament to make sure that our volunteers get the resources they need to protect our communities.

Ms ROBYN PRESTON (Hawkesbury) (20:20:31): The Hawkesbury fires began on 22 October 2019 with a lightning strike at Running Creek. For 79 days Hawkesbury, the Blue Mountains, Lithgow and the Central Coast—seven local government areas in total—were held ransom by the ferocity and devastation of that natural disaster. In Hawkesbury 24 homes were lost. The rest of New South Wales was not spared either. There were dreadful bushfires in the north of the State, followed by the tragedies that unfolded in southern New South Wales. I watched in horror—along with many others—as those events took place. Today I was deeply moved by the contribution of the Minister for Local Government, and member for South Coast, Shelley Hancock. She spoke so sincerely of the reality of not knowing what to say to console someone who has lost everything. What do you say?

I do not have an answer, but this week I have listened to the outpouring of sympathy, thanks, appreciation and sorrow from all members as they have spoken about the bushfire season and its impacts on them and their communities. It is a time when we can all make a great contribution to the recovery of this State by working in a bipartisan way to look at solutions for the rebuild of many regions and emotional healing. It will take many years for the towns and villages affected to revive. Since 1 July 2019 there have been 11,182 bush and grass fires across this State. In the 1993-94 New South Wales fires 800,000 hectares of land were burnt, 225 homes were destroyed and five lives were lost. In comparison, this bushfire season—which is not even over yet—5.46 million hectares of land have been burnt, 2,432 homes have been destroyed and, tragically, 25 lives have been lost.

In times of adversity an amazing tenacity often surfaces. I have witnessed that throughout this bushfire ordeal. When Hawkesbury became a victim of the fires, a resilience and fearless attitude quietly came to the surface of our community. For the past 11 years I have been chairperson of the Hills Bush Fire Management Committee as a councillor on The Hills Shire Council. During that time I got to know many RFS crew members and other volunteers working behind the scenes. I have been able to attend many service awards on behalf of the Minister and as a local councillor. A typical RFS volunteer does not want any recognition on the night; they feel very awkward when they have to get up, be applauded and stand for photos. It is not in their make-up to want to be the centre of attention. That is the sort of individual who is attracted to a role in the Rural Fire Service. They are quiet achievers; they go about their work without fuss or bother. They just want to get on with what they are best at.

They are highly trained individuals, as I saw as I drove around Hawkesbury after the devastation. The homes that had been protected contrasted massively with the blackened landscape surrounding them. I was amazed by the skill and technique that the volunteers had used to save assets and protect people's homes and businesses. Colo Heights Public School had to delay its end-of-year presentation because the fire had burned through the area. But, like many in Hawkesbury, the community was resilient and held the event around 21 December. I went up there to a blackened landscape. We stood there in tears as families came together. They were not going to let the fires beat them so they came on that day for the presentation. I acknowledge the wonderful students who won awards, the families who came and those who had been fighting the fires. The parents and children were quite shocked—you could see that around Hawkesbury—but they were so resilient. They came together that day as a community.

I acknowledge the first responders who died in the line of duty. They were RFS volunteers. I acknowledge Samuel McPaul, Deputy Captain Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer. Some 25 men and women lost their lives in the bushfires around New South Wales. Three American colleagues—Ian McBeth, Paul Hudson and Rick DeMorgan Jr—passed away in the tragic crash of a C-130 Coulson tanker. I met some of their colleagues when I attended the morning briefings held by RFS Superintendent Karen Hodges at the Wilberforce Fire Control Centre. I saw my colleagues and got to meet many of the wonderful souls who came from America to volunteer. A phone call came through to an area where volunteers were packing kits and a group said, "We can offer 200 eskies." Those eskies were packed every day by volunteers and sent to the brigades. They were topped up with fruits and vegetables donated by the good people at the Sydney Markets.

People came together from around New South Wales to create resources and offer support at the back end. One volunteer I met who was packing eskies had come from Victoria for six weeks. She just wanted to lend a hand and had found a place to stay through a billeting system. Everywhere I went people who were not closely involved with the fires became involved as volunteers. I met many people as I drove to Bilpin on 22 December—the day after the massive fires swept through. It was a blackened landscape. It was a sombre moment for me. I remember posting on my Facebook page news of those who had survived and buildings and family homes that had been lost. People were watching because they could not be there at that time. I was privileged to go up with the RFS.

People had been asked to flee Bilpin and they went to a safe place at the community club in Richmond. I recognise Kimberley Talbot and the crew at the Richmond Club for their massive efforts. At the time there was pressure from different councils in the area who called me to say that they needed an evacuation centre to be opened. I quickly rang John Hojel, the superintendent of the Kenthurst Rural Fire Service, and Karen Hodges and

asked their advice. They said, "No, stand your ground on this. It's okay, we have not got to that stage." When an evacuation centre opens many more resources must be maintained in that area. So we stood our ground, pushed back calmly and said, "No, on advice from the RFS"—and I treat their advice with the greatest respect—"we have a safe place for people to go."

Those from Colo Heights, St Albans and Bilpin went to the Richmond Club. I visited and in those safe places families were quietly sitting with their pets—their dogs and cats. I saw children playing on their mobile phones to distract themselves but grief and terror were in their eyes. They did not know whether they were going back to a home or to rubble. It was a safe place, it was the right thing to do and, while they were sitting there anxiously, folk from the Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW and NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service were fighting to protect their properties, their homes, their livestock and their territory. The angst of not knowing also created drama.

I recognise the generosity of the Richmond Club, which put on meals for people, found places and rooms for them to quietly sit and even had the top floor converted into a pet sanctuary, with kennels for dogs to be kept in a safe place and have somewhere to sleep. It was great to see people from all spectrums of society and different areas pulling together. On the way there it was devastating to see the iconic Tutti Frutti Cafe, which many members might know, burnt to the ground. It had been a place to buy great ice creams for 16 or 20 years. Sadly, weeks after, looters stole a brand-new water pump that the owners had bought. The house next door, owned by their children, Chris and Megan, was also burnt to the ground. I recognise John Groat and his partner, Cynthia Demmocks, who owned the Tutti Frutti Cafe. It was a devastating time for them, but they have shown the resilience of many local Hawkesbury people and want to rebuild. They were able to take the time to join me on visits by very interested and concerned members of Parliament.

I thank Senator Marise Payne, Minister David Littleproud and the National Bushfire Recovery Coordinator, Andrew Colvin, OAM, who came and spoke to families about their needs and the recovery process. That meant a lot to those people. I also recognise the Hon. Damien Tudehope and Senator Michaelia Cash, who came up on separate visits. They spoke to people such as Margaret and Simon Tadrosse. I recognise Margaret as a rock in the Bilpin community. Margaret and Simon own the Bilpin Fruit Bowl, which is an iconic, landmark building. It is a family business that has been run for many, many years. After leasing it out for some time and seeing the business sadly decline, they took it over again because they could not stand to see it go downhill. They put up a sign, "Under old management again".

Margaret took us around for a tour of her property, which incorporates an orchard as well as the shop that sells the best Bilpin apple pies. I encourage all members to get up there and try the fabulous apple pies that it is renowned for. The Tadrosse family has lost 6,000 apple trees. They planted those apple trees seven years ago, which is how long it takes for them to bear fruit. This year was the first year the trees were bearing fruit, but 6,000 of those apple trees were wiped out. Sadly, protective netting on 50 acres on the farm was been burnt out. Orchards are covered with netting to protect the fruit trees from bats. This is a family business that has lost 6,000 trees and approximately \$1 million worth of netting that is not covered by insurance—it was covered for hail, not bushfire. At least another six other orchards in Bilpin have suffered that same devastation. I am working with the coordinator and the Government to get some support for those families and businesses to get back on track.

I had a call for help from Phillip Miscuso who owns Bilpin Blossom Farm. At the time of the fire on 21 December sprinklers had been installed in the roof of his house and shed. He and his cousin stayed on his property at the time of the fire. The RFS used over one million litres of water from his dam to save nearby farms and houses. I have since seen the avocado crops and the flowers—all perished. He was grateful that he saved his house and shed, but nothing else was able to be saved. He said to me, "I have 180,000 seedlings arriving next week, but I have no water to put in the crop. I have had to put off five people who are regular staff members. Can you help me?"

I asked "How can we help?" He said "I need some water." I rang Local Land Services and to its credit within 48 hours he had approval to restore one million litres of water to his dam. Water was delivered to the dam in tanks. Mr Miscuso has re-employed his five staff to plant 180,000 seedlings that he hopes will be ready for Mother's Day. That is a good news story, but there are many other businesses that may fall through the cracks. This Government has to come together to look at solutions for businesses like that.

I also acknowledge Councillor Sarah Richards and a team of locals who launched #backtobilpin, a promotion that amazingly revived businesses at Bilpin after Christmas. People did not come to rubberneck, but to educate their families on what bushfires can do. Families, perhaps from Cabramatta or the inner city, came to the area to look at the devastation. They also wanted to help where they could. The back to Bilpin campaign actually brought families to the area to buy from local businesses, such as Pie in the Sky, the Bilpin Fruit Bowl, Hillbilly

Cider and a whole range of them—they were run off their feet. They could not keep up with the demand. I am happy to say that people from outside the Hawkesbury came to support them.

I also acknowledge the very special effort of our Premier Gladys Berejiklian, who is a beacon of hope to eight million people in New South Wales. The Premier came to the Hawkesbury, visited the Fire Control Centre at Wilberforce and talked to the volunteers and to someone very special whom I have got to know more intimately since the fires, that is, Karen Hodges, Hawkesbury Superintendent of the RFS. Karen was the coordinator of these bushfires from woe to go during the 79 days of peril. She is an amazing woman who did an amazing job. She has had 31 years' service and is a local person from the Kurrajong area.

I acknowledge the neighbouring Rural Fire Service superintendent, John Hojel. I also acknowledge the 23 Hawkesbury brigades who were able to come together. Twenty-one of them were active while the others provided behind-the-scenes support such as catering and in other areas. Time and time again, I saw brigades from outside of Hawkesbury. Mitchell Blue and the crew from the Glenhaven brigade were wonderful in turning up. I thank the Bilpin brigade and the Mountain Lagoon brigade. There is a story about the koalas that they rescued from there. I acknowledge Deputy Premier John Barilaro and Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, who was a rock throughout all the trauma we went through. [*Extension of time*]

I have acknowledged the Rural Fire Service brigades. I will also acknowledge Fire and Rescue NSW and the National Parks and Wildlife Service volunteers and employees who did a stellar job working together. If there was ever a time to see a group of people come together and demonstrate tenacity, resilience and camaraderie, it was then. Up to 3,000 crew members were on duty per day. That was an amazing example that I saw. In Hawkesbury I saw cooperation between the three levels of government. Federal member for Macquarie Susan Templeman has worked very closely with the council, as I have. Hawkesbury City Council General Manager Peter Conroy lives at Manly. He was at the council every day of the holiday break. He did not have a holiday. The Premier did not have a holiday. None of us had holidays. We were there on the ground and we came together as a community to share the pain of the locals who were experiencing the fear of the bushfires.

I acknowledge the Rotary Club of Kurrajong North Richmond. Its members were at every community forum to cook barbecues and provide sustenance for people. Paul Rogers, the president of the club, managed to obtain 70,000 P2 masks that were donated from overseas and brought here by DHL. We distributed them throughout Hawkesbury and among the southern New South Wales folk who needed them as well. He then came up with the other 3,500 that we have now for the frail and elderly people who might have respiratory problems as a result of the bushfires. Those people do amazing things in the community. I also thank the Country Women's Association. I also recognise Colo High School, which converted into a brigade depot to service the brigades that were at that end of town. Just recently I went out to St Albans to attend its belated community Christmas function—200 people came out of nowhere. It was an amazing group of people from all walks of life.

The community forums that I attended at Colo Heights, Bilpin and St Albans gave me great hope and encouragement. Some of the people who came together felt guilty that their houses had not burnt down but their neighbours' had. The mental anguish that they are suffering will continue to grow and fester. Some of the people are very resilient. They are stoic. They say, "I have been through bushfires before. This is just another one. You just get on with life." But, in another couple of months, when the fanfare and the bulk of our support seems to have quietly waned, the cracks will appear. That is when we, as a community, need to be in touch with our people. We need to keep connected and provide counselling. If you provided an opportunity for counselling at the hall on the weekend, you probably would not get anyone coming. They do not want to talk about it much. They might talk about it quietly amongst the Rotarians or at the men's shed. When you knock on the door of the place they are staying—because they now have no house with a door to knock on—they might talk about it one on one. We need to be mindful of that as a family in New South Wales.

To those who have lost their homes, I share your pain in a personal sense because five months ago my house was burnt to the ground. All was lost in a house fire. I did not face the fear, anxiety and trauma in the lead-up to the fire that took your home. I was not there when my home burnt down to the ground. The fire came without warning. But, like you, I was devastated when I walked towards where my home once stood, and saw a smouldering heap of rubble that so disrespected all the history that was created in that home, which we had designed and built 31 years ago. I feel your pain in my pain. I am glad I have that empathy and understanding for you. I have gained a new strength from listening to your stories about fires that you have lived through in the 1990s.

Some locals expected this devastation because of the build-up of fuel on the ground. When I listened to people at forums, it was very raw for me, but in a way it was like a healing process for me. I found that people just wanted to talk about their situation; they just wanted someone to listen, to not judge them and to be just a good ear for them. That is what I became. When I listen to stories of families that have been impacted by this, I can relate to them. I share their grief. But as a community we will rebuild; we have to. That is what we do.

Just recently as I drove up Colo Heights I looked out across the landscape and saw a smattering of new, green growth amongst the blackened, scorched landscape. It gave me hope that we can regrow our communities and we can rise up from the ashes. Just like Hawkesbury's DNA, we will recover. There will be scars and wounds that will never heal, but over time perhaps the pain will be managed and we will live to tell the story to our grandchildren: Where were we at the time of the fires? It will go down in history, but know that we will work together as a community and as a State to restore a wonderful community that we once enjoyed.

Mr GURMESH SINGH (Coffs Harbour) (20:47:58): The scale of this bushfire season has meant that every New South Welshman has experienced the gravity of the bushfire threat at some point during the past six months. The fire started in the north of the State before September. I recall attending a thank you barbecue held on 3 October with member for Clarence Chris Gulaptis and Deputy Premier John Barilaro at the Gulmarrad brigade, which had fought the Angourie and Yamba fires. That was over four months ago. I recall conversations with RFS volunteers on the night: There was certainly a sense of release, but also a sense of dread that the worst was yet to come. At that time no-one could have imagined the scale of the devastation that would touch so many.

It is traumatic enough for people to lose fences, farm sheds and stock, but we have also lost nearly 2,500 homes across the State. There are families now in temporary and emergency accommodation who have lost not only the physical assets of their homes, but also the memories and the emotional security that comes with a family home. But the devastation of these fires has also unfortunately extended well beyond the 5½ million hectares burnt out and the extensive property losses. This week we remember the 25 lives lost and extend our deepest condolences to their families, loved ones and communities. Three were RFS volunteers who tragically lost their lives protecting the lives and property of others. Geoffrey Keaton, 32, and Andrew O'Dwyer, 36, were killed near Buxton in south-western Sydney on the evening of Thursday 19 December. They were on their way home 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 Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade, where our parliamentary colleague the member for Prospect is also a member. Geoffrey was the deputy captain of the Horsley Park brigade and joined the RFS in 2006. 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 its members were back fighting fires the day after they lost their mates Geoffrey and Andrew.

On the evening of Monday 30 December a third RFS volunteer was tragically killed at Jingellic while on duty at the Green Valley fireground, east of Albury. Samuel McPaul, aged 28, was a member of the Morven Rural Fire Brigade, but he went out with the Culcairn crew that day to give their team some additional support. The crew's fire truck was flipped over by the extreme tornado-like winds associated with the fire, killing Sam and injuring two other crew members. An RFS truck weighs many tonnes, so one can imagine the intensity of the winds that night. Sam had been married just 18 months. Sam's wife, Megan, is expecting their first child in a few months' time.

All three RFS volunteers—Andrew O'Dwyer, Geoffrey Keaton and Samuel McPaul—have been awarded posthumous commendations: the Commissioner's Commendation for Service and the Commissioner's Commendation for Bravery. On behalf of the Parliament and on behalf of the electorates we represent, we extend our condolences to the families of these firefighters and to the wider RFS community, which has borne this heavy loss. Our communities mourn with them.

During the early northern bushfire season, firefighting efforts were also supplemented with crews from around the world. During my commutes to and from Parliament I would often see two large air tankers at Coffs Harbour Airport, one being the RFS 737 Marie Bashir and the other a C-130 from Coulson Aviation based in the United States of America. During those weeks the C-130 would fly a relatively low path for a plane that size, often just to the east of our house. Both large air tankers flew very different flight paths from regular passenger planes, so the whole community noticed them and appreciated them and were proud of the fact that our airport was able to play a part in the firefighting efforts.

The terrifying news of 23 January, that a C-130 had crashed during a firefighting mission, was especially tragic. The three American crew members—Captain Ian McBeth, aged 44, First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson, aged 42, and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, aged 43—had left their families and communities on the other side of the world to help save our families and our communities from this terrible threat. Captain Ian McBeth 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 is survived by his wife, Bowdie, and three children. First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson, 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 is survived by his wife, Noreen.

Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, from Navarre, Florida, served in the United States Air Force. He had 18 years of experience as a flight engineer on the C-130. He had logged more than 4,000 hours as a flight engineer, nearly 2,000 of which were in a combat environment. He is survived by two children. These three men made the ultimate sacrifice in a distant land away from their loved ones while defending us and our homes. Their sacrifice will never be forgotten. The families of all three United States firefighters will attend the State memorial service later this month. Our community went through a harrowing experience about three months ago and is now trying its best to rebuild. On the worst day of the fire threat in our area the Orara Valley and the township of Nana Glen was under threat. John Lardner, the captain of the Nana Glen brigade, described the conditions when the brigade was forced to retreat from the front line, encircled by a wall of fire:

It was like waking up in hell. I waved goodbye to the captain of the Woolgoolga Fire Brigade and I thought that was the last time I would ever see him.

Jeff Luke, the captain of the Woolgoolga brigade, described his drive out of the firestorm:

I couldn't see anything out the front window and had to drive out of the fireground looking through the camera on the front of the truck.

The brave crews from Nana Glen, Coramba, Boambee, Bonville, Moonee and Woolgoolga and the crews that relieved them are estimated to have saved over 750 homes that day. There were also unsung community heroes—people who stepped up and were the backbones of their communities. Alison Johnson from the Idle Inn Cafe and Stephanie Luck from the Golden Dog Hotel in Glenreagh deserve special mention for the work they did and continue to do on behalf of their communities. I acknowledge the tremendous strain that this tragedy has put on communities, families and individuals. It is often said that we are a resilient people—and we will bounce back from this—but our communities will need time to heal. I encourage anyone who needs help to seek it out. Captain John Lardner, who has been with the RFS for 38 years, writes poetry to help him cope with the horror of what he has been through. On 19 December, after learning of the deaths of Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer, he wrote a poem for his fellow RFS volunteers. I conclude my contribution to this condolence motion with his words:

The last bell rang on a life of two
 Passing away at a job they do
 Others injured and not well too,
 But they did a job and did it true.
 As we pray for health for those that are left,
 That job goes on we do our best.
 Tears of sadness are hard to bare,
 Those tears are shared everywhere.
 To the north and to the south
 That grieving news in every house.
 A family breaks of that passing life,
 But that job's not done as we honour their lives,
 We don our gear and wipe a tear
 Your mortal life gone, but we know you're here.
 It's not so easy, it's never so clear
 But we know you're near, it helps with fear.

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY (Albury) (20:57:50): Late on the afternoon of Sunday 29 December 2019 a lightning strike started a fire in the upper Murray area near Jingellic. The fire was about five hectares in size. As it grew, it came to be known as the Green Valley fire. Overnight the fire grew to about 45 hectares in size, despite the efforts of fire crews with heavy plant. Unfortunately, it could not be contained and it developed on the southern and eastern flanks. We expected terrible fire conditions the following day. This came to pass as temperatures soared to over 40 degrees. The fire held for a number of hours on the Monday. After 2.00 p.m. the weather contributed to the fire growing significantly. It created its own weather system, known as a pyrocumulus cloud. The column of cloud reached a height of about 8,000 metres and became very unstable. Like a bucket of water upended from a height, the column collapsed, causing erratic fire behaviour and erratic winds at the foot of the fire in all directions.

The RFS pulled crews back to safe ground. Unfortunately at around 1800 hours a crew from Culcairn North was attempting to save some cattle that were caught in a corner of a paddock. At the time the crew were only 50 metres from the gate that they had entered and were on reasonably flat ground with a very low fuel load. The crew decided to move away from that area when, quite unexpectedly and very suddenly, they experienced extreme winds and what could only be described as a fire tornado that lifted the back of the truck and fully inverted it onto its roof, trapping three crew. The two crew members who managed to escape were very lucky to do so. The driver sustained minor burns while the other crew member sustained serious burns and was transported to The Alfred hospital by air. Unfortunately, one firefighter was fatally injured.

The volunteer who passed away was Samuel McPaul, a firefighter from the Morven brigade who, at the time of the accident, was working with the Culcairn North brigade. Sam lived in Holbrook with his wife, Meg, and they were expecting their first child in May. He leaves behind a family that is now without a father and

husband. Sam was 28 years old and joined the RFS in order to help us all. He was a highly trained volunteer who was doing everything right on the day. These are largely the words of Superintendent Pat Westwood from the Southern Border fire control centre as I stood alongside him in front of the media on New Year's Eve. Eloquent words cannot match the rawness of the words spoken by Pat in that moment.

To Megan, to Christine and the McPaul family, we continue to hold you dearly in our hearts. I give thanks for the selflessness of your Sam. On New Year's Day I travelled along River Road through the fireground at Green Valley with Superintendent Westwood and Reverend Catie Inches-Ogden. I will recount travelling along River Road that day and the days that followed in the Upper Murray. Firstly, to witness the truck that Sam was travelling in and another truck and ute caught up in the blaze remains with me. The driver of the truck that day, Andrew Godde, was a veteran. He was a captain with over 35 years of experience. Alongside Sam was Rodney O'Keeffe. Speaking from hospital, Andrew said he thought that the ground they were on was safe and that they were in the right spot.

Andrew went on to say that it was a freakish weather event that had to be seen to be believed and, even then, other veteran firefighters could not believe what they saw. You cannot plan for an eight-tonne truck being engulfed by flames and strong winds and then being literally picked up and flipped over. The Back Creek truck was just a few kilometres from the Culcairn North truck. Its crew of Stuart Anderson and Andrew Julian was engulfed in flames. Stuart and Andrew defied the odds and escaped to the Murray River, where they were able to nurse their burns until help arrived. The truck sat next to the river, its dashboard now melted plastic. Ian Avage's command vehicle was tossed back from the road into a drain before again being engulfed in flames. One fatality that day was horrible. The fact that there were not more staggers belief.

I acknowledge the RFS crews that have worked tirelessly, both in our region and across the State. I acknowledge John Hawkins, Ged Taylor, Jingellic captain Alby Maras, Talmalmo captain Stuart Green Hill, Lankeys Creek captain Jason McBain and Matt Hicks for their leadership of their local people on the fireground in life-threatening circumstances, protecting life and property. Adrian "Pud" Keogh and Greyd'n Davis, I can still see them at the corner of Jingellic Road and Holbrook Road as they made plans that night—New Year's Day—to tackle the fire around Karoo. They were not going to give any quarter. I acknowledge people like Jo Corrigan, who was at the Jingellic Showground ready to take on the night shift—he took on night shift so that he could return to feed the livestock on his farm during the day.

I acknowledge the crews such as the teams from Conargo and Temora and strike teams from Western Australia who travelled so far to protect others—and so many others. I acknowledge those whose role it was to be in RFS command over those days, genuine people who daily face difficult decisions: Superintendent Patrick Westwood, Inspector Andrew Gray, John Osmond, Aaron Powell, Shane Griffin, Paul Muir, Craig Warwick, Sally Smith, Lee Marshall and Kim Rooke. I acknowledge the volunteers who came into the command, the international and interstate presence from Queensland, Idaho and Canada. It was my privilege to get to know these people over the last several weeks. I also acknowledge the many others who gave their time. I speak of southern border command but I recognise that in my electorate we were also served by the fire command at Tumut and the many firefighters and RFS facing other fires.

Again on River Road there were the graders and dozers. To those who risked their lives to sit on a grader or dozer to help construct containment lines I say thank you. There are many heroes in RFS suits but not all heroes wear the yellow of the RFS. Within 36 hours of the active fire at Green Valley I witnessed Essential Energy crews already in action in the paddock adjoining that North Culcairn truck and I saw Local Land Services [LLS] veterinarian Mark Corrigan already busily at work in recovery. I take the time to speak of Gary Rodda and the team of LLS for their wonderful work in the most difficult of jobs. I saw people like Dave Pearce of the National Parks and Wildlife Service doing their best, working alongside the RFS.

River Road leads you to Jingellic and to people in support such as Mary Hoodless, who whilst her own farm was being so threatened was looking to make sure that the RFS crews had something to eat, and council workers waiting patiently with tankers to refuel the RFS. The image of the council worker barely touches on the work done by local councils within my electorate. I acknowledge Mayor Heather Wilton and General Manager Steve Pinnuck of Greater Hume Shire Council, Mayor James Hayes and General Manager Matthew Hayes of Snowy Valleys Council, and councillors such as Julia Ham and the wonderful, hard-working council staff of Albury City who, whilst not directly impacted, gave much support.

Driving east on River Road into Jingellic, and focused on the level of destruction immediately around us, Pat said to me to look up to the scene in the distance. There was an almighty plume of smoke that was the Dunns Road fire. Like a battlefield, each fire consumes the energy of those focused on it, only to realise that there are so many other battles raging. I lift my gaze from the Green Valley fire. I acknowledge the communities impacted by the Dunns Road and Ournie fires that ultimately coalesced to form a mega blaze on the south-west

slopes and the Upper Murray—Courabyra, Ournie, Paddys River, Tooma, Tumbarumba, Munderoo, Laurel Hill and Cabramurra. I acknowledge the pain and the loss of livestock, property and homes.

I thank the many wonderful agencies and people who have supported and lead those communities, including the New South Wales police. I make special mention of Mick Jones and Pete Townsend of Tumbarumba and Mike Pomona of Khancoban. Mick spoke at a community meeting at Tumbarumba with a mixture of tough love and hard realities that he was prepared to keep his community safe. A week or two later at a further community meeting Mick spoke of not wanting to see anyone fall between the cracks. There is a lot to rebuild, such as the softwood industry in particular, but also many lives. I see those who are ready to rip into the next chapter, like Nicu and Angelina at Courabyra, and those whose petrol tanks are bone dry. Recovery will not be easy; there will be challenges. Like Mick, I do not want to see anyone fall between the cracks.

I thank those who are on the front line of outreach. On New Year's Eve Pat Westwood asked me to reach out to local priests, and they all answered the call. Katie, Father Joel Wallace and Australian Defence Force chaplains Marcaus Muller and Geoff Trail, Father Thomas Brancik and RFS chaplain Ian Spall were there to listen. In Khancoban I was privileged to witness the planning that was taking place to protect the town and crucial assets like the Snowy Hydro's Murray 1 and Murray 2 power stations. RFS brigade captain Adrian, Fire and Rescue NSW teams from Albury, Captain John Vandeven and Drew Trigg and his team from Snowy Hydro were poring over a map on the back of a ute tray at the Khancoban RFS. Drew and the team from Snowy Hydro were taking notes of what they were doing at this most difficult time so that they would be more informed for the future. This is what we must do. I welcome the inquiry announced by the Premier. If there is any sense to be made of the fires it is to learn from them.

Lifting my gaze further, I see the fires that have stretched across our State. I extend my sincere condolences to the families of Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer, both young fathers, who were killed when their truck overturned near Buxton. The Horsley Park brigade was there to farewell Sam at Holbrook in a beautiful gesture of solidarity. I also extend my condolences to the families of Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Hudson and Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, the three American firefighters who died when their plane crashed while battling raging bushfires 15 kilometres north-east of Cooma. I extend my condolences to each of the families and friends of all those who have died as a result of those terrible bushfires.

I acknowledge those who have lead our State during this time. The Premier has been there whenever I have needed to call upon her. She has a genuine care for the people of this State. I thank the Deputy Premier, Minister Hazzard, Minister Ward, Minister Ayres and Minister Elliott, who have each visited the Albury electorate. I thank the members for Cootamundra and Wagga Wagga and Federal members Susan Ley and Mike Kelly. I thank RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons and Fire and Rescue NSW Commissioner Paul Baxter. It is a privilege to know them.

From River Road at Talmalmo I can see where the Green Valley fire jumped the Murray River into Victoria. My thoughts are with the people of north-east Victoria and the people across the nation who are impacted by the fires. State borders do not mean anything to a fire. I was grateful to see a Country Fire Authority [CFA] liaison officer in the Southern Border Fire Control Centre in Albury on New Year's Eve. There has been collaboration between the RFS and CFA as well as between other agencies. It does remain, however, that for our communities there is a need for more coordination between the States. For the community of Khancoban, the nearest place of assistance is in Corryong, which is in Victoria. The sense of isolation is compounded when the information you receive about assistance is not applicable to you because it is from another State.

Now is the time for reflection and clear thinking as we work our way towards better outcomes for all of our communities. Travelling back down River Road last week, I was reminded of the impact on our livestock and our native wildlife. The stark reality that it impacts not just our land, but also our waterways, contributes to the sadness and heartache of these fires. Yet again there are those who seek to help, such as members of the Lavington Anglers Club who were at Talmalmo doing their bit to clean up waterways. There has been a most beautiful outpouring of spirit and generosity in these times. I thank the people of the Albury electorate, whether it be Albury Wodonga Regional FoodShare, the people at Albury Showgrounds, Lavington RFS or any number of community organisations helping coordinate relief.

To Teena and the team at Family and Community Services; to Carolyn and all at Service NSW; to Barb Chenoweth and all at Albury Wodonga Equestrian Centre, who helped provide shelter for dogs, cats, horses and just about any other animal you can think of; to local Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service [WIRES] and veterinary clinics; to people like Allana Hayes, who organised the Bushfire Relief Table Top Hike this past weekend to sit at the top of Table Top Mountain at the centre of where Sam's life would have been in the Albury region; to anyone and everyone who reached out to one another to care for one another—thank you. I am humbled and privileged to witness such generosity and care. Please keep looking out for one another; leave no-one behind. Driving through Tooma just a few days after the fire, I came across Steve on his four-wheel bike. I pulled

up just to say, "g'day". When I said, "How are you faring?" He said, "I'm alive and I'll crack on." And so it is; crack on we shall. I support the condolence motion.

Mr PETER SIDGREAVES (Camden) (21:17:19): I speak in debate on the condolence motion to convey my sincere condolences and the condolences of the rest of the Camden electorate to everyone who has been affected by the bushfires. Over five million hectares of land in New South Wales has been destroyed by the fires and every day this figure grows. The Green Wattle Creek fire has spread over 278,200 hectares. We have watched with grief at the loss of human life and livestock. The struggles of local businesses trying to keep afloat and thousands of people whose homes have been lost or damaged has been heartbreaking to see.

I acknowledge Camden Council, which was proactive in offering whatever support it could to our neighbour Wollondilly Council and its bushfire response. In Camden, the Narellan community centre and the Camden Bicentennial Equestrian Park were made available to those needing refuge. The Narellan community centre was used as a welfare centre to help with the overflow from the Wollondilly welfare centre. The Camden Bicentennial Equestrian Park was a safe haven for horses and livestock. I thank all Rural Fire Service brigades, Fire and Rescue NSW and all emergency services that have helped battle these extreme and erratic bushfire conditions. They have given up their time and been away from their families to help save others selflessly. They have done so even over the Christmas period. I heard of so many families that did not celebrate Christmas while their loved ones were out battling the fires. We are blessed to have fellow Australians that are selfless when it comes to helping our country in times such as these.

I thank and remember the three NSW Rural Fire Service volunteers and the three Americans killed in the air tanker crash in the south-east of New South Wales. My condolences go to the families of each of these fallen heroes. Thank you Deputy Captain and firefighter Geoffrey Keaton, aged 32, and firefighter Andrew O'Dwyer, aged 36, of the Horsley Park brigade who both served in the RFS for a number of years. I also thank firefighter Samuel McPaul, aged 28, of the Morven Rural Fire Brigade. Our thoughts are with the families, friends and colleagues of these Rural Fire Service volunteers.

My condolences also go to our fellow fallen American firefighters who died helping save Australian lives and property. Captain Ian McBeth was a highly respected C-130 pilot and qualified instructor with experience fighting fires both in the military and with an aviation company. First officer Paul Hudson, from the United States Marine Corps, had 20 years of service in the United States marines. Flight engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr served in the United States Air Force with 18 years as a flight engineer on the C-130. To those three men, our thoughts are with you and also with your family, friends and colleagues. Each of these six men represent the thousands of volunteers who on a daily basis put their own safety on the line to protect others. We cannot thank each of them enough for their sacrifice.

To all volunteers from my local RFS brigades in Austral, Bringelly, Camden West, Catherine Fields, Cobbitty, Leppington, Luddenham and Narellan, I pass on my personal thanks. Our communities have suffered with the lives of loved ones lost. We cannot and will not forget the individuals who have perished among our devastated communities. There have been many more injuries whose victims will no doubt suffer lifelong trauma. As we process our grief, there is a long road to recovery. I acknowledge not just the physical damage but also the emotional trauma that will stay with those people forever. I sincerely wish them the best.

Mr CHRISTOPHER GULAPTIS (Clarence) (21:22:11): My electorate of Clarence was the first electorate impacted by the bushfires last year. The bushfires started in August at Shark Creek and threatened the community of Gulmarrad and the coastal towns of Brooms Head and Yamba and the village of Angourie. These fires burned the landscape right down to the beach and the village of Angourie was certainly spared by the pink retardant dropped by the 737 aircraft. Our local NSW Rural Fire Service volunteers were fighting fires from August right through to just before Christmas. Many communities across the Clarence and Richmond valleys that comprise my electorate were threatened, with three severely impacted. Rappville, a community of 30 houses lost half its homes. The communities of Ewingar and Nymboida were decimated.

In the Clarence Valley local government area the Liberation Trail and Banyabba fire destroyed 169 homes, 57 were damaged and five facilities were destroyed, including a timber mill, stockyard and a Telstra shed. Some 408 outbuildings were destroyed, 203 were damaged and 1,610 rural landholders were impacted. In the Richmond Valley, which was impacted by the Myall Creek Road fire, 62 homes were destroyed, 25 were damaged, eight facilities were destroyed and another 12 were damaged, including two bridges. Some 176 outbuildings were destroyed, 65 were damaged and 619 rural landholders were affected by those fires. I live in Maclean and, while not directly impacted by the fires, the bushfire was all around us and smoke filled the air. The Fires Near Me app was going crazy with fires all over the place.

I have to confess that when I visited some of the fire-ravaged communities I felt like the bloke that never went to war when his family and friends came back with horrific stories. One example of that was the story Scott

Campbell told the Deputy Premier when he visited the Ulmarra fire control centre last month. Scott—an RFS volunteer from Lawrence—and his crew helped out when a ferocious fire ripped through Nymboida. They were in their truck heading down a track to a single house to check if anyone was there and to warn them to evacuate because the fire was threatening. No-one was there but the fire caught up with them. It was monstrous, ferocious and out of control. Their truck stalled and would not start up again. They looked at each other and thought it was the end. But by the grace of God, combined with the team's training and equipment, the fire passed over and they survived. They headed straight back out to fight the fire again. It is easy for me to tell that story because I was not there to experience the ferocity of the heat and I did not have to fear that I would never see my family again because it might well be the end of my life. They demonstrated incredible courage and selfless commitment to their community.

Then there is the story of the young Fire and Rescue NSW firefighter who was in Rappville when it burned. I asked him what it was like and he said it was like nothing he had ever experienced before. He said he could see and hear the fire from kilometres away but when it reached Rappville he could not see anything. The smoke was so heavy he could not see two feet in front of him. The only way he could find his truck was to follow his hose. The air temperature was 70 or 80 degrees. Again, that is unimaginable for someone who has not experienced fires of such magnitude. But that was the experience of hundreds of people in my electorate and thousands of people across the State. Those people have lost family, friends and lifelong possessions—things they will never recover.

The first two fire victims were at Coongbar in my electorate. Gwen Hyde and Bob Lindsey were overcome by the fire at their rural property and unfortunately lost their lives. I extend my sincere condolences to their families and to all the other families who lost loved ones. It is incumbent on us as members of Parliament and members of our communities to help the fire victims recover as soon as possible. They are homeless, living with an uncertain future. They need our help now more than ever. We must be generous and supportive. I cannot imagine what those people will have to go through to recover.

Over the Christmas break I was profoundly moved by a story I read in the paper about a financial adviser who lost his home in a fire. He was insured but that did not solve all his problems. He talked about his efforts to recover his life on a week-by-week basis. He set targets for where he should be at week one, week two and so on and expected to have his life back to normal after a year. He never met those targets and found that his life would never be normal again. He realised he would have to find a new normal. That is what these fire-ravaged communities will have to do: find a new normal. It is up to us to help them do that as smoothly and as quickly as possible.

I thank the Deputy Premier for visiting Nymboida earlier this year in his role as the Minister responsible for the recovery and for giving the community hope. The bushfires were particularly ferocious in that area and I heard some horrific stories about how it roared through the community, burning everything in its path. Like the bloke that did not go to war, I cannot imagine what those people went through but I do know that we must help them to rebuild. I will certainly do everything I can to assist. It will take years to recover. Houses, outbuildings and fences must be rebuilt; pastures have to grow; farmers have to restock; forests have to recover; and the bush has to regenerate. We need some life to return. We have lost more than one billion native animals. That is mind blowing. I drove through some of the fire zones after the fires and there was not an insect, fly, bird or any other sign of life in sight. It was eerie; it is just not normal.

The Deputy Premier also met with representatives of the timber industry in my electorate. The timber industry has been decimated by the bushfires and its resources severely depleted. Businesses cannot work to capacity and workers will have to be laid off. It is a significant industry on the North Coast and the impacts will reverberate through our communities. I received a call from an apiarist during the fires who told me the industry had lost somewhere between 7,000 and 9,000 hives but that, more significantly, they had lost the flowers and blossoms that fed the bees. The bees would starve without food and he wanted fodder for the bees, like the farmers who were receiving for their stock. He needed about 25 tonnes of sugar to feed his bees and, thanks to the Minister for Agriculture and Western New South Wales, we were able to help out. The impacts of these fires will be widespread and our communities will need some TLC to help them recover. Imagine life without bees, without them pollinating native plants and crops. We would not be able to regenerate our bush and get that positive impact that we need.

For residents on the North Coast it did not feel like the Christmas season leading up to December. The pall of smoke over the North Coast was like a pall of doom over the whole North Coast. In November last year I attended a conference in Newcastle, representing the Minister for Regional Roads and Regional Transport. I left Maclean early Friday morning to drive down to Newcastle. I had to be back in the electorate the next day so I decided to book an overnight stay in Taree, thinking it was only a four-hour drive home. As I drove out of Taree

I noticed a small fire on the eastern side of the Pacific Highway. I did not think much of it at the time but I was aware that fires were burning along the coast and that Taree was under threat.

I delivered my speech and headed back to Taree knowing there was a risk I may not get through but thinking positively that I just might. Unfortunately, conditions had worsened and the highway was closed. Trucks and cars lined the highway for kilometres, police were directing traffic to alternate routes and people were turning back. The Fires Near Me NSW app showed 60 or 70 out-of-control fires raging across the North Coast. I felt I was in a disaster movie trying to escape from a tsunami or volcano. I found myself waiting for Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson to jump out of a helicopter with an axe and get the fires under control. I had to spend the night in Forster because the Pacific Highway was closed.

The only way for me to get back home to Maclean was to go back to Newcastle and drive through the Hunter Valley, up to Tamworth and use the New England Highway to get to Armidale, then down Waterfall Way to Coffs and then back up the Pacific Highway to get home. Halfway between Tamworth and Armidale there was a car crash which started a bushfire and closed the New England Highway. I had to backtrack and take a side route to Walcha, then through to Armidale and then I was on my way to Coffs Harbour. The fires were so extensive that by the time I got home 12 hours later—rather than what should have been a four-hour trip—it felt like the whole North Coast was on fire.

My electorate was on fire from August to December. Many communities were threatened, as well as the ones that were decimated that I mentioned earlier. Leading into Christmas I felt particularly sorry for the kids whose homes had burned down. They had some respite and reprieve from the fires whilst they were in school and were able to engage with others and take their mind off the devastation they had suffered. I was really concerned for their mental health and wellbeing during the holidays—which are supposed to be fun times for kids. I worried about them having to deal with the devastation and the clean-up and seeing their parents stressed and traumatised. I worried about them not having the opportunity to release their anxiety and depression.

I was very pleased when the mental health packages were announced. I was particularly pleased when I secured \$6,000 for Headspace in Grafton for an arts program that will enable the young people to express their trauma through art. I acknowledge Jason Grimes and Mark McGrath from Headspace for their particular focus on providing support for the kids impacted by the fires. I thank the Hon. Bronnie Taylor, MLC, and the Hon. Adam Marshall for assisting with the grant. Our communities are resilient but they do need help and we can help to revive spirits as well as to help them rebuild. Ewingar is one of those resilient communities that helps itself. I was pleased to assist them with a \$10,000 grant so they could stage the Ewingar Rising concert, which is a concert designed to bring the community together.

There has been support for kids and bushfire victims in our community from government agencies, charities, community organisations and individuals. To those government agencies responsible for providing assistance to fire victims I say: Please be sympathetic and generous, do not be bureaucratic and please help those people recover as quickly and easily as possible because they need help and they need it now. Please do not treat people as a number or think of them as voters and understand that most people are honest.

To the individuals who have helped I say: thank you, thank you, thank you. Words cannot describe your kindness and generosity. I particularly single out Gray Stride, who runs the Nymboida canoe centre. Gray took it upon himself to house many of those people who were made homeless by the fires. The canoe centre became the focal point for the Nymboida community. It was a meeting place for fire victims and where government agencies could connect with them. It was a place to house donations and became the centre of Nymboida. I call Gray the unofficial mayor of Nymboida because he did an incredible job to make those people feel like they had a home and a future. He looked after the most vulnerable as if they were his own family and worked tirelessly at his own expense. He deserves to be acknowledged and recognised.

Many others deserve to be acknowledged and none less than the Premier. Gladys has led from start to finish. She has been with us for the whole journey and has given us heart and hope that we can get through this. I sincerely thank the Premier for her leadership. I also thank the Deputy Premier for his role as the disaster recovery Minister. Anyone who knows "Barra" knows that he gets things done. He has instilled confidence in our communities that we will recover from the fires. NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons is a legend. He has been absolutely extraordinary leading the RFS in fighting those catastrophic fires. He has been competent, strategic, articulate and has the confidence of the RFS volunteers and all of New South Wales.

I thank local RFS leaders in my electorate Michael Brett and Stuart Watts, who coordinated our local RFS volunteers so professionally. They were able to save countless lives and property. I also thank the incredible members of our community who are RFS volunteers. We know who they are and we recognise the incredible danger they were in when they did such an outstanding job of protecting lives and property. We cannot thank them enough. I also thank the efforts of Clarence Valley and Richmond Valley councils for showing compassion

and humanity to their impacted communities. I have been to those communities with both councils and have seen the unbelievable effort they have put in to help our communities recover. In particular, I acknowledge the wonderful efforts of Richmond Valley Mayor Robert Mustow, who went above and beyond what is expected of a council representative. He visited Rappville on numerous occasions. I recall that on one visit he went to every house to see if its residents were okay and delivered a slab of drinking water to each. He met with many fire victims and has provided invaluable support.

The RFS were not alone in fighting those fires so I also acknowledge and thank Fire and Rescue NSW, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service firefighters, State forest fireys, SES and BlazeAid. I met with BlazeAid crews in Casino while they were helping to rebuild the fences at Rappville. They were there for months. Those grey nomads have done an incredible job. I thank the police and Team Rubicon Australia, who are ex-military personnel who volunteer. I met them at Ewingar when the Governor-General arrived. They did an incredible job of helping with the clean-up. I thank all the other volunteer organisations and individuals who put their lives at risk and lent support to impacted communities.

As has been so passionately said by the member for Bega, Andrew Constance, "There is no better time than now for us all to put politics aside and come together to lend support to those who have been so severely affected." We must do this so that those who died in the fires did not do so in vain. I extend my sincere condolences to the families and friends of those who died trying to protect their families and property, and sincerely thank all those who selflessly put themselves at risk to protect our communities.

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands—Minister for Agriculture and Western New South Wales) (21:39:09): The devastating summer that we have experienced in 2019-20 will be forever memorialised in the memories of people not only in the electorate of Northern Tablelands but also throughout New South Wales. Words will never do true justice to the significant human, economic and social loss that many of our communities have suffered throughout the north and the south of the State. I will begin my contribution to this condolence motion by expressing my deepest sympathies to the families of the two victims who died during the fires in early November last year in the small community of Wyaliba in the Northern Tablelands.

Everyone who has been to Wyaliba knows there is one road in and the same road out. George Nole had decided to leave the community in his car and flee but, tragically, was caught in the blaze. He was found by the authorities burnt in his car the next day on Saturday morning. The second Wyaliba resident who lost her life was Vivian Chaplain, 69-year-old grandmother who, like so many, decided to stay in place to protect her home rather than leave when the Kangawalla fire swept through at a rapid pace on the afternoon and evening of Friday 8 November 2019. Tragically, in the process of battling that fire and attempting to save her home she sustained serious burns. She was airlifted out of Wyaliba but unfortunately succumbed to the very serious burns to the majority of her body approximately 24 to 36 hours later.

The Wyaliba community suffered a bitter blow with those deaths. It is a small tight-knit community in an isolated area in the middle of a national park that has been there since the early 1970s. Wyaliba has its own Rural Fire Service brigade that did a magnificent job in property protection. It had fought fires in the months leading up to that blaze but nothing could have prepared that community for the ferocity and the speed at which that fire ripped through the valley and wrought so much damage, completely destroying almost 70 homes in that village, including the local Wyaliba Public School, tragically claiming two lives.

This season multiple properties and homes were lost throughout the electorate. Almost the whole eastern escarpment of the Northern Tablelands electorate has been burnt, and those fires fuelled by winds were sent further east into the electorates of Oxley, Clarence and Myall Lakes. We feel in our region doubly sad not only for the loss that was sustained in our communities but also because the fires ignited in our region and sadly pushed through into other communities that sustained far worse damage and loss of life and property than we did. But what value can we as parliamentarians and as a Parliament put on human life?

Every human life is so valuable. On behalf of my communities I extend our most sincere condolences and thoughts to the families and friends of the 25 people who have been lost so far this bushfire season. Nothing can replace their loved ones. I have a very deep sense of obligation as a parliamentarian, let alone as a Minister in this Government, to take stock of what happened in this bushfire season, to learn and certainly change a number of our practices in the future to ensure that we never see a bushfire season and damage on this scale with this human toll and the number of properties that have been lost.

We must change the way we manage land to remove as much fire fuel as possible and mitigate any risk of a disaster such as this ever being brought upon anyone in this State, let alone the vast number of communities that have been affected. In a way, what we experienced in the Northern Tablelands in October and November was just a prelude to what the State would experience closer to Christmas. We have seen the devastating impacts in the south of the State where the fires have been even more fierce and the damage more severe.

The Bees Nest Fire, which started in the Guy Fawkes National Park in September, was really an indicator of what was to come this summer. Local farmers widely believe the fire was started by a lightning strike in the Guy Fawkes National Park. It went on to burn out hundreds of thousands of hectares of public land through the park and then devastate hundreds of thousands of hectares of private land. The fire subsequently resulted in a section 44 declaration, which would go on to cover the New England and Northern Tablelands fire districts. That declaration lasted a gruelling 132 days. We have never seen anything like that in our region. There are far too many individual communities across my electorate to mention that were affected by the fires, like so many members in this place, let alone the brave individuals who fought those fires for days on end.

Of the six local government areas in my electorate, Armidale Regional, Glen Innes Severn, Gwydir, Inverell and Uralla Shire sustained significant direct and indirect damage. In November at the height of the fire emergency across the Northern Tablelands more than 1,000 volunteer firefighters from all walks of life were involved in fighting those fires just in our region. We were blessed to receive assistance from Tasmania, Victoria, Queensland, Canada and the United States of America. The outpouring of assistance was amazing. We all know in the bush that we are practical and selfless people. When the chips are down, we are the very first to offer help, but having other people do the same for us was humbling. We are not used to it in our region; we are very much used to fending for ourselves. To receive that assistance from even overseas was incredibly humbling and uplifting for our local volunteer firefighters. By the time we hit peak in the middle of November they had been fighting fires for over two months and were absolutely buggered. They had had enough.

I come back to the community of Wyaliba, which was absolutely devastated. Almost every home in that community is absolutely levelled now. The RFS brigade's shed was burnt as well. The bravery of the RFS and national parks personnel was extraordinary. But one happy thing has come out of that devastation. The Wyaliba Public School, which is home to 13 students and about five teaching and non-teaching staff, was burnt out and destroyed. The community, my colleague the education Minister and I as the local member were determined that the school, despite burning on 8 November, would be rebuilt and ready for students on day one of term one in 2020. I am very proud to say that the school was completely rebuilt. I have gone back to the school multiple times—twice last week with the Deputy Premier and the education Minister—and I can report that the students are loving their new school. It is bigger and has better, newer facilities than the previous school and they absolutely love it.

I must pay tribute to the New South Wales Department of Education; the school is magnificent. We set the department a very tough task by saying that we wanted to have the students back in the school as it was critical not just for them and their parents but also psychologically for the community to have some normality back in their lives. But the department did it. The beauty is that the department did not bring in people from Sydney to do the work; it used local builders and local contractors, who worked feverishly right up until the day before school started—even laying turf so they could start watering to get it ready for when the students returned.

When we opened that school last Friday it was not just about opening a rebuilt school. The whole community turned out because for them it was the first tangible sign that their shattered lives were going to be pieced back together, that some normality was returning. In the next few weeks when local subcontractors come through to clean up all the properties it will be another weight lifted off people's shoulders and they can begin to rebuild. One of the devastating impacts for Wyaliba, as well as the two fatalities there, was that the bridge into the town over the river was burnt out completely, and this community has one road in and one road out. Glen Innes Severn Council—and I must pay credit to Keith Appleby, Director of Infrastructure Services, and Mayor Carol Sparks—was on the job straightaway, building an alternative access point and temporary crossing of the river.

That was fine when we were in drought—we still are—and there was no water in the river. But we have had some pretty severe storms and that causeway has washed away. As a community, we appealed to the Australian Defence Force [ADF] to come in and build a temporary all-weather crossing so people in that community were guaranteed access and egress. Thankfully, the ADF has agreed and within the next fortnight a permanent temporary crossing will be constructed, which will allow council time to do the engineering designs, call for tenders and build a brand-new, permanent concrete bridge into that community. I am pleased to inform the House that the New South Wales Government will cover the cost of the bridge 100 per cent. Glen Innes Severn Council will not be out of pocket for that bridge, even though it is on a local road.

It is great that the ADF will come in and build that temporary crossing, which will ensure that no matter how much rain we get or do not get it will continue to provide access in and out of that community. That is crucial. Members in this place may not be aware that Wyaliba is very likely the lowest socio-economic community in the Northern Tablelands electorate. Most of the people who live there are not connected to potable water or to the electricity grid and are retirees or on some form of social security benefit. Rebuilding is going to be a tough road for a lot of those people; many did not have insurance and many of the dwellings there did not have development approval. It will be tough for that community but, as the local member, I am determined to do everything I can to

ensure that as much support as possible is provided to people to give them every opportunity to rebuild their homes and their lives.

It would be remiss of me if I did not refer in this contribution to the impact of the bushfires on many farms that border national parks, and public land managers. I will not enter into a debate about bashing public land managers. There will be a time and a place for that during the inquiry process. I will make a firm submission to that inquiry on behalf of my community and my landholders who have been devastated by the bushfires. However, I acknowledge that many farmers in my electorate who have done a good job of maintaining their properties have been the innocent victims of fires that have escaped from public land and run rampant across their land.

Hundreds of thousands of kilometres of boundary and internal fencing have been destroyed and 14,500 stock have been lost across the State. In my patch nearly 1,000 head of stock have been lost, hay sheds containing fodder have burnt down and any pasture that was not touched by drought is now gone. It is a very difficult time for our farmers, who are suffering the double whammy of drought and now bushfire—it is a double disaster hit for them. Unfortunately, some of those farmers will not stick around. They will sell up and move on because the cost of rebuilding is simply too great. They may be older and have no-one to hand the property to. They will move on but I am confident that other people will move in and take over those properties and rebuild.

I finish on this note: The bravery of our firefighting personnel was extraordinary—paid, unpaid, RFS, Forestry Corporation, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and even members of the public who were not part of the RFS and who may not have exactly adhered to the rules but rather jumped in a truck, got on a hose and did their bit. I cannot thank them enough. There will be a time and place at the end of this summer when we can properly acknowledge those people. To my mind, they are absolute heroes—people who gave selflessly, some of whom lost their homes while they were out fighting fires. I cannot praise them enough and I will continue to do that in my local community. They were amazing.

As a State, a Parliament and a government, we must learn from what has happened. From what I have seen and experienced personally and from the hundreds of conversations I have had around kitchen tables with people who have been impacted, I am absolutely convinced that we must heed the lessons from what we have experienced and change the way we manage public land. We must make a concerted effort to reduce the impact of devastating bushfires, regardless of drought, by better managing fuel loads and public reserves. I do not care which agency has control of those parcels of land; we must do it better because we owe it to the people who lost their lives, to those who bravely fought the fires and to those who lost property, pasture, fences and infrastructure. As a Parliament and as a State, if we do not change the practices we will have collectively failed the very people who now look to us to provide leadership and change and to safeguard their interests, their futures and their children's futures in the years to come.

Like many members in this House, I feel awful about what I have witnessed. It was devastating. I hope I never witness it again, whether as a member of this Parliament or at any time while I am on this earth. I hope never to see the devastation and never to see people suffer in the way that I have seen them suffer this season. There are many innocent victims of the bushfires but we must acknowledge that many people are still alive and many properties are still standing because of the efforts of thousands of brave firefighters in New South Wales and from overseas. I pay tribute to them and I mourn the passing of two people in my electorate. They will be forever remembered. May they rest in peace.

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY (Riverstone) (21:59:25): I join with members of the House in supporting the motion moved by the Premier. I extend my condolences to the families, communities and loved ones of the 25 men and women who tragically lost their lives during these fires. In particular, I honour the extraordinary sacrifice of Australian volunteers Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer and Samuel McPaul, and American volunteers Ian McBeth, Paul Hudson and Rick DeMorgan, who came here to help protect the people of New South Wales. Like other members who have made contributions, I cannot help but be moved by the enormity of the experience that we have been through. As a representative of a Sydney electorate that has not been directly touched by fire, in some ways it feels odd to speak when I cannot relate the sorts of experiences of other members who have directly confronted these fires. But it is important to speak on behalf of the Riverstone community on a couple of key points.

I acknowledge the volunteers who come from a Sydney electorate like Riverstone, including members of the Schofields and Marsden Park Rural Fire Service brigades and other agencies involved in fighting these fires. Those two brigades are proud, longstanding brigades in our district. Throughout this long, torturous season they have helped in many parts of New South Wales, including as part of Cumberland's strike teams in various fires. They were dispatched to the north of the State to the massive Gospers Mountain and Green Wattle Creek fires, then south to other areas of the State. During the months of effort, volunteers have lost weekends, they have taken time off work, their businesses have been affected and they have missed time with their families.

As with every other fire season, they have done so willingly and selflessly in support of both their local community and the wider community of New South Wales. After the very tragic events when volunteers lost their lives in the accidents in Buxton and southern New South Wales, the members of these brigades wanted to get straight back onto the fireground to help yet again. Members of every brigade across New South Wales donned their yellow overalls and got back on those trucks, knowing that those accidents could happen to them. They were taking the same risks that those unfortunate firefighters had taken. Those tragic events could have happened to any of them, yet they got up the next day and went out again—and the next day and the day after that.

It is right to pay tribute to the heroism and sacrifice of those who lost their lives, and it is right to pay tribute to the heroism and sacrifice of those who did the same again afterwards. They took the same risks and, although they knew what could happen, they went out there for the good of our communities. These are the best of Australians. In some cases, the best people from around the world have come to join us. The best of humanity is on display in circumstances like this. The Schofields and Marsden Park brigades are long standing and well regarded.

In fact, last year I was present at the seventieth anniversary of the Schofields brigade. It celebrated 70 years of service to the community. I was scheduled to represent the Minister for Police and Emergency Services at the Marsden Park celebration later in the year, but it was unable to hold that event because its members were busy fighting fires. The event fell during this long fire season, so they have not yet had occasion to celebrate that momentous seventieth anniversary. I am sure they will do so in due course, but they have given priority to the urgent demands on them and there simply has not been time for things like celebrations. A huge number of homes, businesses and facilities across the State have been saved by these heroes.

We know the losses—so many homes and so many tragic events in so many communities—and yet we can acknowledge that it would have been far worse but for the heroism, hard work and sacrifice of so many. So much has been saved and we say thank you for that. It is hard to not be moved by the losses that so many in our community have suffered—the loss of homes, the loss of family history, and the loss of memories and precious things that they will never have again. While people are obviously grateful in the main that the loss of life has been contained and so many people have been saved, there are many irreplaceable things that they will never have again because of this tragedy.

An immense aspect of what we have seen over recent months has been the generosity of our communities. So much has been donated so spontaneously. Often without appeals or public calls for help, people have responded to the needs of their local brigades. People have wanted to be involved and do what little they can to help the effort. I have seen that firsthand in my community. I commend the people of Riverstone for that response. The gratitude of the community has been almost as tangible as the smoke we have all had to breathe in. You could feel the community spirit rallying around, supporting those who are supporting us. In the midst of the tragedy of so much loss, that is something to cherish—that wonderful strength of community that we have all experienced.

The worst of times has brought out the best in our community and shone a light on those who truly are heroes. We are seeing them in the thick of it at the moment, but I make the point that in many cases these are people who have given many years of service and who turn up regularly, week in and week out, for what could be called boring training sessions so that they are ready for these times. They do the hard yakka. They prepare themselves. They give of themselves and their time so that they can stand up at times like this. We are right to pay tribute to that and to thank them for that. There will be, as other speakers have said, a right time to commemorate it. I join in endorsing the motion moved by the Premier, as do all members of this House.

Mr STEPHEN BALI (Blacktown) (10:06:37): I speak on the condolence motion for the bushfire victims. The Blacktown electorate is mainly a built-up area with some bushland areas where grassfires sprang up, but the RFS and Fire and Rescue NSW were quick to put them out. Although people living in my electorate are volunteers at the RFS, the SES and St John Ambulance, unfortunately all these units are located in the surrounding electorates of Prospect, Mount Druitt, Riverstone and Londonderry. These bushfires have had a profound impact on our local community as we sat helplessly watching the TV screens, or reading and listening to the news broadcasts.

The devastating news that 33 people across Australia, including 25 in New South Wales, lost their lives as a result of bushfires has had a profound impact on all people across Australia, if not the world. Approximately one billion animals have died. The unimaginable toll this will have on families, the natural environment and communities into the future is incomprehensible. This condolence motion enables me to represent my electorate to express its condolences to all those families impacted by death, injury or loss of property. Whilst there are no words to alleviate the pain you are going through, rest assured we are here when you need us.

We honour all those who have fought the fires—the Rural Fire Service, the State Emergency Service, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Forestry, NSW Ambulance, Fire and Rescue NSW, the Australian

Defence Force, our international contingent, the contractors supporting the firefighters or part of the various air crews and all the community groups such as the surf life saving clubs, the Country Women's Association, Lions clubs, Rotary clubs, Apex clubs, council workers, health workers, social workers and the people who just volunteered to help out in whatever capacity. I am sure there are many others who can be added to the list. Their bravery was exemplary. They were fighting fires knowing that their properties could be under threat. What dedication these people have to continue to fight a fire when their homes are burning.

To all the people affected, on behalf of my electorate of Blacktown I express our sincere and profound condolences. We pray for you, we shed tears for you and we will rally to provide whatever support we can offer. The numbers seem surreal. The briefing we received yesterday provided the following data on the bushfires in New South Wales since July 2019: 11,182 bush and grass fires, burning 5.46 million hectares, which is the equivalent of 6.82 per cent of the State; 59 days of total fire bans, including 11 statewide bans and three state of emergency declarations; 277,415 New South Wales firefighters have been deployed, peaking at 3,641 firefighters on a single day; 6,396 interstate and 305 international personnel; unfortunately 2,432 homes and 265 facilities destroyed; and 1,021 homes and 1,497 facilities damaged. I do not have all the data, but if we put together all the fires that have occurred this century it would be less than what was burnt from July 2019 to date. The burn-out areas over the past 19 years of fires in New South Wales are less than what has been burnt so far this season.

The magnitude of these fires has touched everyone in Sydney in some way. We all have relatives or friends who have moved out of Sydney and are now living across the State. Blacktown City Council has an active sister city relationship with Liverpool Plains Shire Council. Whether it is the drought or bushfires, many tens of thousands of dollars have been raised and disbursed to our sister city. Mayor Andrew Hope has provided strong leadership for a number of years to support his community. I also mention Mayor Mark Greenhill of Blue Mountains City Council and Trish Doyle, the member for Blue Mountains, who provided daily updates, consoled their local communities, and provided strength and leadership in times of adversity. They are both a credit to their local communities.

When the Tathra fires hit in March 2018, Blacktown City Council was quick to donate \$20,000 as an initial donation and support to the local council. We have all made friends over the years with our country cousins, whether through work, holidays or our greater network of family and friends. I have a very good friend who is a farmer in Coonabarabran whom I have known for 30 years. I know that I should be in contact with him and his family more, but we both know we will always be there for each other. Andrew Young and his wonderful wife, Meegan, are active members of their local RFS and together have given 40 days of service already. His tribe of kids are all members of the Rural Fire Service but only one lives at home, Joe, who has put in 17 days of service so far. I know the Young family does not want to be identified or made a fuss of. Sorry, Andrew and Meegan—but I am not really sorry—you have just been named in the nation's oldest Parliament and recorded in *Hansard*. Their story is replicated across New South Wales, whether country, regional or Sydney based.

I thank Dr Hugh McDermott, the member for Prospect, for his service as an RFS member and active servant, as well as other members of Parliament. His contribution yesterday was heart wrenching and one that people should refer to. I pay tribute to the in excess of 277,000 volunteers who have participated in fighting these fires. Thank you. I congratulate the NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons. I am amazed by the wonderful coordination of resources that he has undertaken with his fabulous team and his leadership to work successfully in a multidisciplinary environment. His strength and abilities have guided us through our darkest hours. Whilst we stand in solidarity with all affected areas, the impact has also been felt directly in Sydney.

Whilst they might be seen only as possessions, in many circumstances the old photographs, family heirlooms, jewellery, school report cards and sports trophies cannot be recreated. Hence in years to come there will be difficult, dark times. This is where family and friends or helplines will be important for support. The fires have also impacted on the Sydney region. Jane Hansen from the *Sunday Telegraph* reported that from 22 December 2019 to 8 January 2020, NSW Ambulance received 3,685 call-outs for asthma and breathing-related conditions—a rise of 16 per cent compared to the same period last year. The article identified at least three deaths linked to respiratory and cardiac problems as a result of the smoke haze. Many more people have died; it is difficult to directly attribute those deaths to smoke haze, but no doubt they were a result of the bushfires.

If this is the new normal, the Government and we as a Parliament must re-examine the health resources available as well as the other preparations that must be undertaken, whether in Sydney or in the regions. Currently we are not capable of providing the support needed for our communities. Hence the problems, deaths and tragic circumstances that have been experienced by our country cousins and that were so well described by all the members of this place, as well as the horrific impacts on their own areas, which have had real and demonstrable impacts on all Sydney residents.

As a result, many city-based members of this House have spoken about how our areas have rallied to support people impacted by bushfires. I congratulate Sydney-based councils on the coordination of resources to

be made available when bushfire-affected councils need them. Whilst we all want to rush in and help, the last thing the bushfire-affected areas need is us city people telling them what to do. I thank City of Sydney Mayor Clover Moore and President of Local Government NSW Linda Scott for setting up a council-coordinated resource recovery centre. I am proud that Blacktown City Council, under Mayor Tony Bleasdale, has stepped up to provide personnel to the centre and arranged some \$2 million of human resources and physical equipment to support the affected councils.

Many organisations have donated money to the Blacktown City Mayoral Bushfire Appeal. I thank the following organisations: the Filipino sports and recreation club for putting on a bushfire benefit concert last weekend and raising \$5,000; Omega Industries for donating \$10,000; the Riverstone mosque and Islamic Forum for Australian Muslims for donating over \$10,000; and many others, including the Sydney Dragway, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, the Australian Sikh Association at the Gurdwara in Glenwood and various Lions, Rotary and Apex clubs for all the money they have raised through bushfire appeals. Many more have raised money and I will mention them in the future. Do not forget that every time you go to McDonald's or the local shop, they always ask you to round it up. Every cent counts. I thank the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the Leader of the Opposition for coordinating and making possible this condolence motion. Dr Hugh McDermott, the member for Prospect and a proud Rural Fire Service firefighter, summarised why this condolence motion is so important when he said:

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.

It is difficult to comprehend these difficult circumstances of carnage on a mass scale that have devastated and destroyed entire communities. Whilst we have all been affected in some way by this tragedy, we need to support those impacted the most. But how do we do this in a meaningful way on such a large scale? I thank the Premier for her consoling words when she said: 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. I also thank the Leader of the Opposition, Jodi McKay, for her consoling words when she said:

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.

Minister Andrew Constance, you have demonstrated raw emotion and the impact it has had on you. You have become an inspiration for your community and to people across New South Wales. It is important that regional areas and the city-based electorates work hand in hand to deal with the problems that you will be facing into the future. Today I express my condolences to all 33 people who have died across Australia and the masses of people who have either sustained physical and/or mental injuries as a result of these fires. I pay tribute to the community for the way in which they fought the fire battle and for the way in which they have begun to rebuild their lives.

Ms ELENi PETINOS (Miranda) (22:20:49): New South Wales has experienced unprecedented devastation in recent months, with 2,400 homes destroyed, 10,000 buildings damaged, 14,500 livestock lost and over five million hectares of land burnt. Communities stretching from the State's border with Queensland down to Victoria have felt the full effects of the bushfire season, as have those further inland in regional New South Wales. The sheer size of the devastation is put into perspective when you consider that Victoria's tragic Black Saturday bushfires burnt around 10 per cent of what has been lost in our State.

Families across our State have lost their homes, their property and their livelihoods. They will be fighting to put the pieces back together for years to come, with clean-up efforts currently underway revealing the extent of the damage with each passing day. I feel almost a sense of gratitude and also guilt as I represent a community which has not been directly impacted by these bushfires. And yet the city is grieving for the country and has rallied behind those impacted, sharing their heartbreak during this devastating time. These bushfires have had a profound impact on all of us. While the devastation to our New South Wales communities is unprecedented and undisputedly devastating, it cannot compare to the hole left behind by the 25 individuals that lost their lives.

The stories of those who perished over the summer's bushfire season have touched all Australians and will undoubtedly be remembered for decades to come. Bob Lindsey, 77, and his wife, Gwen Hyde, 68, from Coongbar died in a bushfire on their rural property in northern New South Wales, with their bodies discovered the next day. They had been married for three years and are survived by children from previous marriages. Vivian Chaplain of Wyaliba was described by her daughter-in-law as "a strong woman who died protecting her home and animals she loved". Like so many brave Australians, the 69-year-old was critically injured fighting flames

and defending her home in northern New South Wales. Ms Chaplain's bravery will undoubtedly be remembered by the two children and six grandchildren that she left behind.

Then there is the 63-year-old father and 29-year-old son, Robert and Patrick Salway from Wandella. The pair lost their lives in an attempt to defend the family property from the Badja Forest Road fire on 30 December, with their bodies found by Robert's wife—Patrick's mother—the following day. They were described as "one of the tightest, close-knit families you'll ever come across". Robert was a well-known dairy farmer in the Bega region, while Patrick was expecting his second child with his wife of five years, Renee. George Nole of Glen Innes died in his car in the Kangawalla fire on 8 November. The 85-year-old worked as an electrician on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's [NASA] Apollo program in his youth. Julie Fletcher of Johns River was only 63 when she died. Her body was found in a burnt-out building 20 kilometres south of Port Macquarie, one day after the 8 November bushfire crisis in the north of New South Wales. She has since been described as a "quality person". Her family had lived in the region for many generations.

A "lovely gentle guy", 58-year-old Barry Parsons, perished in the same 8 November fire in Willawarrin. Mr Parsons lived alone in a shed not far from where he was found. Devastatingly, he had posted on social media about the tragedy of being alone in such times. Chris Savva of South Arm was 64 when his SUV rolled down an embankment while he was attempting to escape the fire zone near Nambucca Heads. Mr Savva was found in the upturned car the next day after he had fought so hard to save his own house. His neighbour described him as "part of a very tight-knit community"—a community that will undoubtedly be feeling his loss. On behalf of my community I offer my sincerest condolences to the family and friends of these people, who were all lost too soon.

On the night of 19 December Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer devastatingly died in the line of duty when their fire truck rolled. Geoffrey, 32, the deputy captain of the Horsley Park volunteer fire brigade, and fellow volunteer Andrew, 36, were travelling in a convoy after battling the Green Wattle Creek fire near Balmoral when they were killed. Both volunteers tragically left behind young children, with the image of RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimons presenting young Harvey Keaton with his father's posthumous commendation for bravery and service serving as a chilling depiction of the devastating and life-altering impact that these fires have had on so many families.

Similarly, the loss of 28-year-old volunteer firefighter Samuel McPaul has left a young family forever changed. Samuel died when the fire truck in which he was travelling rolled in a "fire tornado" at Jingellic, east of Albury, on 30 December. The third Rural Fire Service volunteer to perish during the fire season, Samuel tragically left behind his wife, Megan, with whom he was expecting his first child in May. He was described as someone who "did everything for the right reasons" and always put his community first. Samuel's self-sacrificing and committed attitude rang true right through to his final moments, when he lost his life attempting to protect the community. Not all heroes wear capes, and we honour those who lost their lives in the service of our community.

The bushfires of this summer have not only touched communities in New South Wales and the rest of Australia, but also been felt abroad. Our State was fortunate enough to receive assistance from United States and Canadian fire crews, who sacrificed their own Christmases to travel to Australia and make a difference in the firefighting efforts. RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons spoke about how these teams provided some reprieve and rest for the crews who had been battling the flames for weeks and months. Tragically, three of the brave individuals who came to our aid paid the ultimate sacrifice, far away from home. American aerial firefighter Captain Ian McBeth, 45, First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson, 43, and flight engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, 44, perished when their C-130 water tanker crashed 50 kilometres north-east of Cooma late last month.

Captain McBeth of Great Falls, Montana, was a "highly qualified and respected C-130 pilot with many years of experience fighting fires", including in the military. He had served with the Wyoming Air National Guard and was a member of the Montana Air National Guard. A qualified instructor and evaluator pilot, Ian spent his entire career flying C-130s. He is survived by his wife, Bowdie; three children, Abigail, Calvin and Ella; his parents; and three siblings. First Officer Hudson of Buckeye, Arizona, served in the United States Marine Corps for 20 years, including as a C-130 pilot. He reached the rank of Lieutenant Colonel before he retired to work for Coulson Aviation, the Canada-based company that owned and operated the plane in which he was killed.

Flight engineer DeMorgan Jr had served in his role at the United States Air Force for 18 years. He had accumulated more than 4,000 hours as a flight engineer, including 2,000 hours in a combat environment. He is survived by his children, Lucas and Logan, his parents and his sister. These three selfless Americans were undisputedly experienced in their field, and their loss was a shock to those at home and abroad. Their willingness to assist New South Wales is testament to the bond and kinship shared between Americans and Australians. I pay my respects to their families on behalf of the Miranda electorate.

As the fires continue we look with hope towards the end of the bushfire season and acknowledge the resilience and mateship of the Australian spirit that has endured during this difficult time. I acknowledge the

efforts of those from the Miranda electorate who have dedicated so much of their time and efforts to assisting fire-ravaged communities. The Illawong Rural Fire Brigade is a trusted team who runs into danger as the rest of us run away from it.

The Illawong Rural Fire Brigade has seen over 1,500 personnel movements from the Sutherland Shire to fires across New South Wales, as well as a number of deployments to South East Queensland. Volunteers have been deployed to the Northern Rivers, Northern Tablelands, Mid Coast, Hawkesbury, Lithgow, Blue Mountains, Southern Highlands, Shoalhaven, far South Coast, Snowy Monaro, Southern Tablelands and Central Coast regions. The team has also supplied members to fill vacancies on both the Cumberland and Macarthur flyer vehicles and deployments with the Bringelly Brigade. Each one of these men and women selflessly left their families over the summer to protect and assist those that needed it most, with some volunteers in the field since August and still deployed at present.

I acknowledge the sacrifices of Captain Mark Pryor, Senior Deputy Captain Simon Delander, Deputy Captain and Strike Team leader John Koole, and deputy captains Christopher Lynch, George Kouroulis, Gregory Last, Jennifer Dolden, Paul Reynolds, Peter Moore and Scott Lepre. I further commend the efforts of volunteer firefighters Adam Smith, Andrew Houghton, Ben Mann, Caitlin Last, Christopher Nelson, Daniel Walters, Danielle Meggos, Darren Rub, David Lucas, Dominic Bondar, Ethan Rucker-Gair, Graham Thorne, Heather Woods, Jake Loosby, James Gallagher, Jason Dimeski, Jason Eshman, Jason Piggan, Jeremy Dicello, Kristin Alston, Kurds Riddell, Les Derwent, Matthew Angus, Michael Bui, Michael Cook, Mitchell Kingsford, Patrick Tuffy, Peter O'Connor, Peter Ross, Qin Gao and Sam Ebenezer. Between its 41 members, the Illawong team has amassed over 4,000 hours in the field—a truly impressive figure that reflects the bravery and dedication of its members to affected communities. I thank them all.

Members of the Sutherland Shire Police Area Command were also deployed to fire affected areas in order to assist with area security and recovery efforts. Sergeant Anthony Smith and Senior Constable Jacob Heagney were deployed to the North Coast to contribute to the recovery efforts following the Taree fires. On the South Coast, teams were deployed to assist near Batemans Bay and Tumut. The teams consisted of Chief Inspector Gary Ford, Leading Senior Constable Nathan Waser, Senior Constable Chris Shade and Constables David Windred, Mitchell Parsons, Joshua Pearce, Jessica Moase and Ben Guy.

A further deployment is scheduled for today, with a team attending Batemans Bay and Tumut for the coming weeks. The team comprised Sergeant Matthew Hecimovic, Senior Constable Luke Hunter and constables Liam Beardsley, James O'Toole, Jonathan Worboys and Juliano Russo. These police officers work day in and day out to keep our community safe. I commend and thank each one of them for assisting the communities that need it most. I highlight the efforts of our local State Emergency Services volunteers deployed over the bushfire season. These volunteers worked tirelessly on containing more local fires as well as those throughout the State, including at Grafton, Ulladulla, Batemans Bay, Casino, Ulmarra and Glen Innes.

From the Cronulla SES unit, capably led by Unit Commander Peter Rozea and Deputy Unit Commander Chris Watts, I acknowledge Colin Bailey, Jonathon Castillo, Bridget Clark, Josh Craig, Colin Curran, John Curtis, Brian Ede, James Gibbs, Igmarr Holm, Mario Maggio, Michael Marusic, Jack Millet, Jae Moore-Lambert, Matt Rafferty, Richard Rhodes, Elyse Riordan, Kyle Riordan, Flavio Scalon, Daniel Stevens, Kent Wallin, Julian Weaver and Sheree Wilson. I commend the members of the Menai SES Unit deployed over the fire season, including Unit Commander Peter Carrigan, Deputy Unit Commander Daryl Brett, Keith Barnes, Andrew Bye, Hayden Charles, Roy Cowley, Anne Davies, Mark Deacon, Paul Hammond, Teddy Haryjanto, Julius Maniago, Gilberto Pardo Cortes, Phillip Rasborsek, Hemant Raval, Peter Robinson, Sebastian Rodriguez and Madeline Whitby.

Sutherland Shire Council played an instrumental role in bushfire recovery efforts. On 2 January Mayor Carmelo Pesce committed \$50,000 to support three South Coast councils devastated by fires. The three councils are Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla and Bega. They will undoubtedly use the funds to assist in the rebuilding of their respective communities. Sutherland Shire Council has also extended the support of a range of operational and technical staff to assist with recovery efforts. On short notice, the council deployed two tree clearance teams to Shoalhaven, including plants, equipment and nine personnel to provide assistance over a two-week period.

The team comprised team leader Adrian Nette, Mark Scerri, Ted Easton, Paul Stinson, Mick Thompson, Tyson James, Wade Wilson, Terry Durbidge and Jordan Bowles. I acknowledge their efforts to aid recovery in the Shoalhaven region and thank them for their service. The council also supplied the Shoalhaven region with three trucks, a backhoe, chainsaws and other equipment to assist in the clean-up. Following the more difficult conditions, the teams undertook tree felling and clearance works in order to restore public road access in and out of the region. In addition to the \$50,000 committed in support of the Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla and Bega councils, Sutherland Shire Council has also provided \$25,000 to support the NSW State Emergency Services.

I commend Sutherland Shire Council Mayor, Councillor Carmelo Pesce, for his leadership and for recognising the great need for support and assistance to neighbouring councils. I thank all involved for their efforts to assist those communities in need, particularly on the South Coast. I am incredibly proud to represent a community in this House that gives so much to others in need. I note that the same can be said for all other members in this place. I commend the efforts of all who have rallied in response to the bushfires and the impacted communities. To those who have lost so much, while words will never be enough, I hope that moving this motion in this place shows that the Parliament is with them and that we will do whatever we can as we move forward together.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) (22:35:40): Faced with unprecedented hot, dry and windy weather and drought conditions, New South Wales has endured months of dangerous bushfires. Over 5.4 million hectares of our State have been burnt—an area larger than Denmark. People across New South Wales have lost their lives, those of family members, homes, businesses, farms, stock, livelihoods, as well as community facilities and infrastructure, to fires that showed no mercy. In New South Wales 25 people have died, more than 2,400 homes have been destroyed and many fires elevated to the emergency warning level. Encouragingly, more than 14,000 homes were saved. My sister and brother-in-law lost their small farm, including stock, dwelling and equipment in Wandella, with the land totally scorched.

It was fortunate that my brother-in-law Antony was not present at the time the fire struck, as his nature is such that he may well have stayed to fight the indefensible—two of his neighbours did, with the father and son paying the ultimate cost. While the RFS and local communities have responded quickly and aggressively to the fire threat, they have been met with severe resistance by fires fuelled by tinder-dry forest floor debris and voracious, unpredictable winds moving flames in different directions at an alarming pace. It seems no region in New South Wales was exempt from their wrath. The fires began on the North Coast and then extended into the Blue Mountains region, the South Coast of New South Wales and the Snowy Monaro region. Southern New South Wales was also severely impacted by fires burning across the Victorian border.

The NSW Rural Fire Service is primarily responsible for responding to bushfires in New South Wales. After a century of experience protecting some of the earth's most fire-prone areas, the NSW Rural Fire Service was established in 1997 by the Rural Fires Act, the successor to the Bush Fires Act. It is the world's largest volunteer fire service and provides fire and emergency services to 95 per cent of New South Wales. It comprises over 72,000 volunteers and over 900 permanent staff. Seventy per cent of them are, or have been, RFS volunteers. New South Wales and Australia have a long history of volunteerism, with many RFS volunteers motivated by a desire to help neighbours protect their property. Members of the RFS are true heroes for their selfless commitment to community service, while putting their own lives and livelihoods at risk.

This fire season their commitment extended well beyond their own communities into areas desperate for assistance at a time when RFS support was overstretched and many local communities were advised to fight or flight the fires. It was an unprecedented emergency situation where over 100 fires were burning simultaneously across the State. The New South Wales RFS has helped save thousands of homes and properties during the current fire season. The volunteers have sacrificed family time, holidays and safety to help protect small towns, large regional centres, isolated bush blocks, rural properties, businesses, stock and local infrastructure in a race against time fuelled by blustering and unpredictable winds. Tragically, some have died fighting fires. I especially pay tribute to those men who were killed when their truck was struck by a tree south-west of Sydney, as well as the United States of America flight crew who lost their lives when their water bomber crashed near Cooma.

While fortunately my electorate of Davidson has not directly experienced bushfires in recent months, the threat is ever present. Indeed, we have experienced bushfires directly in the time that I have sat in this place. Nevertheless, RFS crews from the brigades of Davidson, Killara and Belrose have been fighting fires in the past six months all over the State. These local brigades fall within the Hornsby Ku-ring-gai region and the northern beaches region, from which our wonderful Rural Fire Service Commissioner, Shane Fitzsimmons, also originally hails. I thank them all and say how proud my local community is of them. One of the Davidson brigade, Fiona Johnson, has just been named as Davidson electorate woman of the year. I will speak further of her at another time.

In the wake of the most devastating bushfires ever seen in this country, it has been heart-warming to see the response not only from across New South Wales and Australia but also from around the world. Messages of support have flowed to our New South Wales Parliament from parliaments abroad. Numerous foreign governments have sent expert personnel to assist in our time of need. The generous donation of goods, food and money from across the globe have likewise constituted a great support to those directly affected by the fires. Of course within New South Wales there has also been countless numbers of people who have contributed, and that has been under the outstanding political leadership of Premier Gladys Berejiklian and Deputy Premier John Barilaro.

Locally, I acknowledge the supportive efforts of many constituents and businesses within my own electorate of Davidson. There have been numerous initiatives to raise funds. These efforts have been across the spectrum. Just by way of example, the young children of the Hetherington family of East Lindfield sold vegetables from the family garden at a street stall. Sammie Sachs contributed to the stall by selling flowers from her florist business. Expecting to make about \$100, the families and local residents raised over \$1,000 for the RFS. Another group of school girls in my street sold lemonade and home-made sweets. I thank all who have contributed, whatever amount and in whichever way they have contributed.

In conclusion, as horrendous as these bushfires have been, the crisis has brought our communities together with a common goal to help our State and country cope and rebuild. We will continue to show the world how strong and resilient Aussies are in both adversity and recovery. While the challenge continues with active and serious fires still burning in south-east New South Wales, it is appropriate that this Parliament clearly records its universal support for our wonderful communities and their efforts, and conveys its heartfelt condolences to those who have suffered tragic loss. The very fine contributions to this debate from all members from different parts of the Chamber are a fitting tribute to the people who are the subject of the Premier's motion. They also reflect extremely well on those members who have spoken and on the constituencies they represent. I thank all those who have contributed and will contribute to this debate.

Debate adjourned.

Community Recognition Statements

THANKING CARE ONE CARE ALL GROUP

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Castle Hill)—I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Members of the Sikh community who recently travelled to the New South Wales' South Coast to provide emergency supplies to those affected by the recent bushfires. The 4th Bushfire Run by Care One Care All Group and Turbans 4 Australia started at 3am a few Saturdays ago and finished around 2am on the Sunday. It was a huge effort by these determined volunteers to bring trucks full of supplies to fire ravaged areas such as Mogo. It is outstanding to see in such a time of crisis how people can come together in order to assist those most in need. Compassion for our neighbours is such an integral element of what it means to be a part of the Australian Community, and seeing so many people contribute is a wonderful part of our national character. I thank these charities again for their hard work and good deeds.

JOSEPH GEORGE KHOURY OAM

Mr JIHAD DIB (Lakemba)—Like many people, Joseph George Khoury OAM arrived in Australia in 1970 with hopes and dreams of a new life. After 50 years, the Australian-Lebanese community celebrates his accomplishments and thanks him for this service. Knowing the importance of Arabic language media for migrant communities, Mr Khoury created a new newspaper, Al Mestaqbal (The Future) Lebanese Arabic Newspaper, after initially establishing the El Telegraph paper 16 years prior.

Mr Khoury is very active in the Lebanese community in Sydney. He has served as the President of the Ardeh Charitable Association, World Lebanese Cultural Union Geographic of Australia and New Zealand and was the founder of the Maronite Catholic Society in Australia. Currently, Mr Khoury is the Director of the Miss Lebanon Australia Charitable Association. The spirit of giving back is one we pride ourselves on as Australians, and the services Mr Khoury contributes to our community are a tribute to that. Joseph Khoury OAM has served the Australian Lebanese community for 50 years and has helped shape it into the vibrant community it is today. I congratulate Mr Khoury for his unwavering commitment to our community and for his work in building a better Australia.

PISEY FISCHER

Mr CHRISTOPHER GULAPTIS (Clarence)—I wish to offer my congratulations to Mr "Pisey" Fischer of South Grafton who has taken the Return and Earn Scheme by the horns and is making a difference with the money he receives. Mr Fischer is an avid bottle collector and covers a lot of ground in picking them up, and the people of South Grafton are also assisting him out by throwing their used bottles and cans over his fence. Last year he collected 100,000 bottles and once they had been cashed in, he donated the \$10,000 to the Westpac Rescue Helicopter. I commend Mr Fischer for his selflessness and wish him well with this year's collection.

BRONTE TAYLOR

Mr MATT KEAN (Hornsby—Minister for Energy and Environment)—I would like to congratulate Bronte Taylor from Hornsby Heights for her outstanding success in raising \$1000 for the Starlight Foundation this year already. After unfortunately suffering a health scare two years ago, she has pledged to raise \$2000 by the end of 2020 to give back to others in a similar position. At just 14, Bronte has been selling plants through

Facebook and recycling plastic bottles through the Return and Earn Scheme to raise the funds. This money will go towards improving the quality and provision of services within the Starlight Organisation, and will be particularly targeted at improving ward facilities and the Starlight Wish program at The Westmead Children's Hospital. This is a truly inspiring effort by an amazing member of the Hornsby community and I am proud to recognise her achievement here today. I would also like to congratulate her mother Natalie Taylor and father John Taylor, for their role in supporting their daughter in raising the money and their efforts moving forward in achieving the \$2000 goal. Well done Bronte, I looking forward to watching your every success in the future.

SUPERINTENDENT DANIEL SULLIVAN, APM

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend)—Congratulations to Superintendent Daniel Sullivan, Commander of the Lake Macquarie Police District, on being awarded the prestigious Australian Police Medal in this year's Australia Day Honours. The Australian Police Medal was created in 1986, is awarded for distinguished service. His thirty-year career started in 1989 at Waverly Police Station, transferring into prosecutions in 1993, serving at the South Region and North Region Prosecutor's Office. In 2000, he became Team Leader Hunter Target Action Group. He has stayed in the Hunter and was promoted to the rank of inspector at the Police Assistance Line (PAL) in Tuggerah in 2003.

Promoted to General Manager of the Business Technical Services Client Services Command and then Commander of the Radio Operations Unit at the Sydney Police Centre, Daniel Sullivan was transferred to Brisbane Water Local Area Command as Commander in 2012. In 2017, he came to Lake Macquarie. Superintendent Sullivan has successfully developed and implemented strategic reforms and NSW Police have repeatedly called upon his leadership and advocacy skills. He has been on the Emergency Services CAD Steering committee, mobile technology steering committee and CrimTrac National Police Reference System Board. Congratulations once again to Superintendent Sullivan.

AUSTRALIA DAY

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY (Albury)—Across NSW councils brought their communities together on Sunday 26 January to celebrate Australia Day and recognise outstanding achievers. In Albury local government area, events on the Murray River at Noreuil Park included a Citizenship Ceremony and the Albury Awards 2020. I congratulate Graham Walker on being recognised as Albury City Citizen 2020, with his long history of community service as part of the Lavington Lions Club. Also commended are Joshua Rickard, Young Citizen of 2020 and Buddhi Majhi, the 2020 Volunteer of the Year. This year Albury City Council welcomed a record number 80 new citizens to the community as part of their Australia Day citizenship ceremonies.

Federation Council held events at Memorial Park, including a welcome to country and Australia Day Awards. I make special mention of Elizabeth Dale Seeliger, recognised as Federation Council Citizen of the Year for her work delivering meals on wheels and as an exercise coach. The Greater Hume Shire Council put on a show at the Culcairn Recreation Ground, with a free breakfast from the Culcairn Community Development Committee, Citizenship Awards and family activities. And I also thank Murrumbidgee Council for their several Australia Day events held across the region.

AUSTRALIA DAY, CAMDEN

Mr PETER SIDGREAVES (Camden)—On Sunday 26 January 2020, councils in my electorate hosted an array of entertainment and events to celebrate Australia Day. I wish to commend the Camden Council for their celebrations held at the Camden Civic Centre, which featured the presentation of Australia Day Awards and Citizenship Ceremony, as well as the Macarthur Lions Street Parade. Special mention must be made to the St Pauls Catholic Primary School students who were recognised for their fundraising efforts for the region's firefighters over the Australia day long weekend.

Liverpool City Council held their Australia Day Events at Woodward Park, where Council and the Rotary Club of Liverpool successfully raised \$23,000 in donation for the Rural Fire Service. Special mention must be made to Liverpool Citizen of the Year awardee, Rajesh Venkataramaiah, for his years of continuous volunteer work. I also congratulate Liverpool City Council for welcoming 600 new citizens at two citizenship ceremonies on January 26 and 28. Finally I would like to congratulate Wollondilly Shire Council for their event at the Picton Botanic Gardens, which included the Citizenship & Affirmation ceremony, Australia Day Awards and entertainment.

RAJESH VENKATARAMAIAH

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool)—I am delighted to recognise Rajesh Venkataramaiah. I've known Rajesh for many years and I'm pleased to note that he is the 2020 Citizen of the Year for Liverpool. His award was presented in a ceremony held by Liverpool City Council on Australia Day. He came to Sydney from India in

1998. He has since that time been involved in a wide range of community activities. These include clean-up Australia Day events where he has been a keen organiser involved with Indian community groups. Their activities to support the community extend to coordinating tree planting events across Western Sydney and assisting blood, plasma and bone marrow drives for Australian Red Cross. He's also been involved in arranging regular events to combat social isolation among seniors in the community. And he's been involved in providing support for newly arrived migrants.

KYOGLE COUNCILLOR LINDSAY PASSFIELD

Ms JANELLE SAFFIN (Lismore)—I congratulate Kyogle Councillor and friend Lindsay Passfield, who on Australia Day was recognised with a Local Government New South Wales Outstanding Service Award. Lindsay was elected to Kyogle Council in 1999 serving since then. Born and raised in the Woodenbong area, Lindsay worked on the family dairy farm, cut sleepers, harvested timber and was a builders' labourer before joining the Royal Australian Air Force as a 20-year-old. He trained as an Air Frame Fitter, working throughout Australia, Papua New Guinea and the USA before retraining as a Radio Technician and serving in Malaysia and Singapore. He was given a permanent commission as a Radio Engineer.

After 20 domestic moves in 21 years of service, the father of two retired at the rank of Squadron Leader. In 1991, Lindsay, his wife Ann and their two daughters moved back to Woodenbong to be closer to their extended family. Improving the LGA's roads and bridges network continues to be his passion. Lindsay has successfully lobbied State and Federal governments to develop strategic road links between the Northern Rivers and Queensland's southern Darling Downs and Brisbane. Lindsay is an advocate for the timber industry and timber communities.

ORDER OF AUSTRALIA RECIPIENTS IN WOLLONDILLY

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH (Wollondilly)—A Medal of the Order of Australia is awarded to individuals who are worthy of particular recognition. For the Australia Day 2020 honours a number individuals from my Wollondilly electorate were awarded the OAM. Kenneth Adams from Bowral was awarded an OAM for service to the community and to the plumbing industry, and has been involved with Dreamcricket, Rotary and the Movement Disorder Foundation. Mr Adams' involvement with the Rotary Club of Bowral-Mittagong has spanned over many years. He served as the secretary and was the former treasurer/director of avenues.

He also represented Rotary International and was the former assistant governor and chairman of Rotary Youth Leadership Program. Joy Charlton of Theresa Park received the OAM for service to equestrian sports. Mrs Charlton was an International Dressage judge for nearly 40 years, as well as a Former National Judge, Former coach, Former selector for 2000 Olympic and Para-Olympics. She is also a former volunteer with Riding for the Disabled and received the National Volunteer of the Year award in 2016 from Equestrian Australia. I congratulate these recipients.

101ST BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS FOR ALBERT LE-MERTON AND AGNES BORG

Mrs TANYA DAVIES (Mulgoa)—Congratulations to St Clair residents, Albert Le-Merton and Agnes Borg who celebrated their 101st birthday in November last year. What an incredible achievement and milestone this birthday is! I wish both Albert and Agnes all the best and hope they had a wonderful day surrounded by many friends and family for this momentous occasion. Happy 101st birthday Albert and Agnes!

BOB FITZGERALD VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR 2019

Mr EDMOND ATALLA (Mount Druitt)—I wish to commend Chief Inspector, Bob Fitzgerald of Blacktown Police, and a member of my electorate, who has been awarded the title of NSW "Volunteer of the Year", at the Centre for Volunteering's 13th Annual Award Ceremony in August, 2019. Mr Fitzgerald received this award in recognition of his hard work and dedication in helping his community. In particular, he works above and beyond expectations with the sporting community, helping with both the Olympic and Parra Olympics, coaching of local teams, coordinating events, and much, much more. Chief Inspector Fitzgerald is also a strong advocate for women fleeing from domestic violence, as well as assisting drug addicted persons, and the homeless. Mr Fitzgerald has made an undeniably powerful impact within our local community, and I am pleased he has received this award in recognition of his volunteering efforts.

JAIMEE-LEE WOOLFE

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes)—Mister Speaker, I wish to inform the house of the recent sporting success of young Jamiee-Lee Woolfe. Jamiee-lee has been invited to England in July to play Cricket, for two weeks including training sessions at Old Trafford and Lords. Before this Jamiee-Lee is playing for NSW/ACT Country under 15's to be held in Canberra where she will be aiming to win a place in the national train-on squad. Good luck Jamiee-Lee and we wish you well with your future Cricketing career.

PAULINE JAMES OAM

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG (Macquarie Fields)—Congratulations to Raby's Mrs Pauline James on being named as a recipient of a Medal of the Order of Australia in this year's Australia Day Honours List for dedicated service to veterans. Pauline has been a long-term member of the Ingleburn RSL Sub-branch's Women's Auxiliary and is the current State President of the Returned Services League NSW Women's Auxiliary. Pauline's service to veterans has been largely inspired by her husband, Ray – a Vietnam veteran who served in the Royal Australian Navy. The couple devote their time and energy to supporting veterans. Together, they work to increase awareness, resources and funding to support veterans' mental health.

Pauline instigated the Lest We Forget Quilt project to raise money for DefenceCare. Quilts are displayed at The Australian War Memorial, Hyde Park War Memorial and Anzac House in Sydney. A quilt was presented to the Duke and Duchess of Sussex at the Invictus Games in 2018. Pauline's drive and enthusiasm know no bounds, whether helping grow the women's auxiliary, spearheading veteran campaigns or generating vital fundraising dollars. I acknowledge Pauline's community contributions and her worthy OAM recognition.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECT OF THE YEAR – LINDA SPARROW, BANGALOW KOALAS

Ms TAMARA SMITH (Ballina)—I congratulate Linda Sparrow, founder of Bangalow Koalas, which won the Byron Shire Environmental Project of the Year Award. Linda established Bangalow Koalas in 2016, when the Bangalow koala population was not mapped and the koalas were at severe risk. The aim was to enhance a small koala corridor in Bangalow which expanded into a goal of creating a protected corridor from Byron to Lismore. Thanks to her tireless work, Bangalow Koalas is an organisation of substance and credibility which has achieved registered environmental status. The Bangalow koala population is thriving and hundreds of members of the Northern Rivers community and beyond are committed to making a difference. By 2019, Bangalow Koalas had raised \$240,000 to support the protection and sustainability of local koalas, co-ordinated the planting of 28,000 trees in the Byron Shire, grown a social media presence with 5,200 followers, set up the first landowner's workshop, and run several training and education workshops for the community.

IAN "TRUNKY" TROY

Mrs HELEN DALTON (Murray)—It is my privilege to recognise the outstanding work and commitment of Ian "Trunky" Troy for the Murray River Council and former Wakool Shire. After nearly 43 years of dedicated service to his council Trunky is retiring – swapping his beloved trucks and maintenance plant equipment for woodworking and fishing. Over his many years of service, starting with using his own ute and trailer then becoming the solo Wakool man for 28 years to ending up in Barham depot, he has seen many changes both good and bad. Trunky prided himself on lobbying for changes to equipment which would improve ease of use and just plain old common sense. I thank Trunky for all his hard work and wish him all the best in his retirement.

DUNNS ROAD FIRE RESPONSE

Dr JOE McGIRR (Wagga Wagga)—While the recent fire crisis has affected many lives across the state, in my electorate, it has been particularly harrowing. However, throughout this disaster the bravery and courage shown by the community has been exemplary, particularly that displayed by the hundreds of NSW Rural Fire Service volunteers, who faced harsh conditions on the Dunns Road fire ground for more than a month. In addition to the exemplary work of Local Rural Fire Service crews, I would also acknowledge the support of its interagency partners including Fire & Rescue NSW, NSW Forestry Corporation, NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service as well as:

- Queensland Fire & Emergency Service
- Tasmanian Fire Service
- Western Australian Department of Fire and Emergency Services
- Fire and Emergency New Zealand
- United States and Canada

Many other local agencies have also supported the overall effort including:

- NSW Police Force
- NSW Ambulance
- NSW State Emergency Service
- Snowy Valleys Council

· Hume Forests

Thanks to the efforts of many, many agencies, organisations, individuals and community groups, the Dunns Road Fire was this week officially declared contained.

THE MEN'S TABLE

Mr ALEX GREENWICH (Sydney)—On behalf of the Sydney Electorate I rise to acknowledge support program The Men's Table founded by David Pointon and Ben Hughes. The Men's Table facilitates peer-led groups of up to 12 men coming together to learn and connect through monthly dinner meetings to share feelings and experiences. This is an innovative suicide prevention strategy, reducing loneliness and isolation while encouraging long-term relationships and a sense of belonging.

Table members come from all sorts of backgrounds, including recently separated or divorced men, young fathers and retirees, with a common interest in getting support and camaraderie. There are more than 15 tables and 150 men meeting around the country, with more planned. There's an official launch celebration with entertainment and speakers in February. Many men have learned not to express feelings or show weakness and The Men's Table provides an avenue for men to connect and share with others in a safe space. A partnership with the National Mental Health Commission will evaluate the program. I thank David and Ben for their efforts to build stronger communities and support men in need.

RYAN MCPARLAND

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama—Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services)—I would like to congratulate Ryan McParland of Jamberoo who was named as one of eight finalists for the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW 2020 Rural Achievers Award. This State-based leadership program congratulates future young leaders aged between 20 to 29 years who are making a significant contribution to their local community. Finding a passion for local agricultural shows, Ryan played a founding role in his local show society's "youth in ag" group and is working to build a community group for the South Coast and Tablelands, all while studying his bachelor of engineering. Rural Achievers will receive a share in \$17,000 prize money, complimentary one-year RAS membership, official Rural Achiever uniform and embroidered Akubra and the chance to be selected to represent NSW at the National Rural Ambassador Competition. The 2020 overall Rural Achiever will be announced at the Sydney Royal Easter Show in April.

BRUCE KIMBERLEY

Mr MATT KEAN (Hornsby—Minister for Energy and Environment)—Bruce Kimberley is a local legend within the Hornsby community, for his tireless efforts and utter devotion to local cricket. I would like to acknowledge Bruce for receiving an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for almost 50 years of incredible service to both the Mt Colah Cricket Club and The Hornsby, Ku-ring-gai and Hills District Cricket Association. Bruce first became a member of Mt Colah Cricket Club in 1971, and since then he has played 412 A-Grade games, scored just under 8000 runs and taken over 500 wickets. While this is truly an illustrious career, what is even more special is what he has given back to the cricket community.

Bruce is an icon and a role model for young cricketers throughout the Hornsby area, through his coaching and mentorship of our young men and women. Whether it is for those rising through the ranks or for those getting involved in some friendly weekend cricket, he has always been there to help and support the next generation. I am incredibly proud of everything Bruce has achieved and I am pleased to acknowledge his every success, both past and future. Congratulations Bruce.

GRADUATION MASS AND AWARDS- ST JOSEPH'S OATLEY

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley)—Speaker, I rise to inform the house of the St Joseph's Primary School's graduation mass and award ceremony, held on the 16th of December. School award ceremonies are a highlight of my year and as a former student, St Joseph's ceremony is particularly special. I have a strong connection with the school and parish, which was strengthened by my nephew, Maverick, starting at St Joseph's this year! I am pleased to say that this Government is also supportive of St Joseph's Oatley, recently delivering them a crossing supervisor to ensure student safety at the Rosa Street pedestrian crossing. This has been well received by the St Joseph's Oatley community, who are thrilled that the area is now safer for students and drivers. Thank you to Principal Kylie Brakel for the invitation and thank you to Father Paul Hilder for delivering a lovely Mass service. I would also like to thank the whole St Joseph's community for their continual contributions to our wider community. I wish the recently graduated St Joseph's students all the best as they navigate their way through high school this year.

VCA BUSH FIRE APPEAL

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield)—I would like to express my sincerest appreciation and congratulations to Kate Hoang Vcay, Paul Nguyen and the numerous volunteers from the Vietnamese Community in Australia NSW Chapter (VCA) who recently hosted a Bush Fire Appeal with the Red Cross at Freedom Plaza to advocate for funding and support for communities affected by the recent bushfires. It was my great pleasure to join the VCA during their bushfire appeal, which hosted a variety of entertainers on the day, attracting crowds while raising awareness for the devastating conditions impacting communities across the state. It was truly remarkable to see the community banding together for such a great cause during a truly devastating time.

Thanks to the tireless dedication of volunteers and the tremendous generosity and support of our local community who dug deep for such a great cause, the VCA managed to raise \$42,000 which will go towards bush fire affected communities. On behalf of the Fairfield electorate, I would like to express our sincerest appreciation and admiration to the Vietnamese Community in Australia for their continued efforts to assisting and support those in need not only in our local community, but throughout the all of NSW.

AUSTRALIA DAY 2020

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET (Epping—Treasurer)—Australia Day is one of the most important celebrations of the year. On this day we not only celebrate our nation's history, culture and success, but also take part in the welcoming of those who have chosen to become Australian Citizens. This Australia Day I attended the citizenship ceremony held by Hornsby Shire Council and joined the Mayor, councillors and other state and federal MPs in formally welcoming those officially joining the Australian Family. Witnessing dozens of people from around the world – those who have come across the seas – proudly pledge to become Australian is enough to renew anyone's sense of pride in our nation. I was reminded that this country we are lucky to call home is one that people will make extraordinary sacrifices to come to, for a better life for themselves and for their children. And so I say to those new citizens of Epping, and to new citizens wherever they live in Australia: congratulations, welcome, and we look forward to seeing the great contribution you will make to our great nation and your new home.

EASTLAKES UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE TWENTIETH BIRTHDAY

Ms JODIE HARRISON (Charlestown)—On Sunday 2nd February I was delighted to take part in the twentieth birthday celebrations of the Eastlakes University of the Third Age (Eastlakes U3A). The event also marked the official opening of the Eastlake U3As new base in Glover Street, Belmont. It was clear that a lot of work had gone on to renovate the facility in preparation for the celebrations, and for the year ahead. The leasing of the new premises, in partnership with Lake Macquarie City Council was made possible by a bequest from the Estate of Shirley Miller, one of the early members of the group, and at the opening a plaque was unveiled in her memory. Lifelong learning is not just good for your brain, it is a fantastic way to keep healthy and socially engaged. I am enormously grateful to President Barbara Thomson, and her team, for providing a fantastic array of courses and activities, and a necessary support and friendship network for the retired and semi-retired in my local electorate of Charlestown.

NSW COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD JACK ABERNETHY

Mr LEE EVANS (Heathcote)—I was honoured to present Jack Abernethy with a NSW Government Community Service Award. Jack has been a stalwart of the Engadine RSL Sub Branch managing several executive positions over the years. He also manages events with other members such as Anzac Day and Remembrance Day. Jack is also involved with Engadine Bowling Club as a member of the executive, again holding several positions over the years. I congratulate him for his community work including, involvement in Engadine Probus and Probus South Pacific INC, starting the Engadine/Yarrawarra Probus club, National President RSL Lawn Bowls, Scout leader for 10 years for North Engadine and involvement with the Sutherland Metropolitan District Council. Jack Abernethy is the quintessential community volunteer. Everything Jack is involved with he gives 110% and is always ready and willing to lend a hand wherever that is within the community.

MARIE FICARRA OAM

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Attorney General, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence)—I am delighted to congratulate my constituent Marie Ficarra on her Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the Australia Day honours list, for service to the people and Parliament of New South Wales. Marie's Parliamentary career included the Legislative Council, 2007-2015; the Legislative Assembly, 1995-1999 (MP for Georges River), and Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier, 2011-2014. She was an Alderman/Councillor on Hurstville City Council 1980-1995 including Mayor, 1990-1992; and has been president and treasurer of the New South Wales Branch, Australian Local Government Women's Association.

She has been Ambassador, Life Education New South Wales; President, Georges River Community Service; member, Fundraising Committee, Research and Education Centre, St George Hospital; Chairperson, St George Emergency Services Committee; Vice-President, Georges River Penshurst Cricket Association; Vice-President, St George District Athletics Club; Vice-President, St George Umpire League; and patron of numerous other community groups. Her extensive community work since politics includes the Australian Gynaecological Cancer Foundation (Ambassador, since 2014 and Honorary Executive Manager, Administration, 2016-2017); current fundraiser and supporter for: Cure the Future - Stem Cell Research and Bravehearts; and Special Religious Educator in NSW State Schools. Well done Marie!

SUTHERLAND SHIRE ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

Ms ELENi PETINOS (Miranda)—I congratulate Chase Cross of Como for being named the Environmental Citizen of the Year at the 2020 Sutherland Shire Australia Day Awards. Chase Cross is a young community champion who consistently recycles cans and bottles for the dual purpose of protecting our environment and donating the proceeds to the Love Mercy Foundation, a Sutherland Shire based charity that helps people in Northern Uganda. Chase in fact collected 2,061 cans and bottles in a single school term from home, restaurants, social and sporting events and even family holidays, earning \$206.10 through the NSW Government's Return and Earn Scheme. Chase's inspiring dedication to preserving our local environment is testament to the values imparted on him by his parents, Andrew and Maryanne.

I also acknowledge award nominee Toni Webber of Taren Point, who is the driving force of sustainable and environmentally friendly choices at her Caringbah café, Mr Paisleys. Her environmentally friendly initiatives include a boomerang cup program, Keep Cup discounts and avoiding single-use plastics throughout business operations. I congratulate both Chase and Toni on their achievements and commend their dedication to driving change and environmental awareness in our local community.

DANCE @ SJ

Ms MELANIE GIBBONS (Holsworthy)—I would like to acknowledge the Moorebank dance company 'Dance @ SJ' and their Director Ms Kathryn Ayoubi for their efforts in raising funds for bushfire affected communities. On January 18, Dance @ SJ donated funds from half of all new enrolments at the school's open day towards the communities affected by the bushfires in NSW. During the open day, the dance school also hosted a barbeque, with 100% of these proceeds going towards bushfire relief. Groups like Dance @ SJ regularly give back to our local community and it is inspiring to see the contribution they are making during this devastating bushfire season. I would like to thank Ms Ayoubi and Dance @ SJ for their initiative in helping those affected by the bushfires.

LOCAL COUNTRY LEGEND BLAKE O'CONNOR WINS GOLD GUITAR

Mrs LESLIE WILLIAMS (Port Macquarie)—I recognise local country singing sensation Blake O'Connor for taking out a Golden Guitar at the 48th Country Music Awards at the Tamworth Regional Entertainment and Conference centre. It is the highly prestigious award that all country music singers aspire to win in their career, so it is with pleasure that I announce to the house Port Macquarie's very own Blake O'Connor has taken out a Golden Guitar in the New Talent Of the Year category for his song: "Worth A Little More". At just 19 years of age Blake has already accomplished so much in his career, singing with renowned Australian country music legends like Felicity Urquart and Lee Kernaghan, to name a few and traveling overseas to Nashville to record and perform at America's home of country music. It has been a delight to see Blake rise to stardom since his professional performance at the inaugural Senior's Concert that I hosted in 2015, as part of the NSW Seniors Festival in Port Macquarie. Once again, I congratulate Blake for his well-deserved Golden Guitar and look forward to seeing him again soon on the big stage.

COWRA BEACH PARTY

Ms STEPH COOKE (Cootamundra)—I would like to congratulate the Cowra New Year's Eve Beach Party Committee on a successful 2019 event. This is the second year in a row President Ray Johnston and his committed team have hosted the fantastic event. The Beach Party brings together the Cowra community for a fun family day out with a range of activities including a jumping castle, volleyball, tug-o-war in a mud pit, water slide, maze and a dunking tank. With talented local performers on stage entertaining the crowd. In 2018 the event attracted more than 500 attendees. In 2019 this crowd number record was smashed. This fun, family day out was a great way for the Cowra community to see out 2019. Here's to hoping for a fabulous 2020.

CRANBROOK SENIOR SCHOOL MASTERPLAN RENEWAL PROJECT – SOD TURNING

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON (Vaucluse)—On Monday 9 December 2019 Cranbrook School in Bellevue Hill hosted a sod-turning ceremony to mark the commencement of major works for the Cranbrook Senior School

Masterplan Renewal project. The renewal project will involve a new multi-level education building, a drama and music theatre, a fitness and aquatic centre, a chapel and an underground carpark. I commend Cranbrook school community including Headmaster Nicholas Sampson, Head of Senior School Bob Meakin, COO Andrew Moore, School Council President Roger Massey-Greene AM, School Councillors Jon North and Craig Carroll, Past Chair of the Foundation Liz Lewin and new Chair Katrina Rathie, for the part they are playing to make the project a reality. I thank Cranbrook School for continuing to provide exemplar education for our young people which will be enhanced by these state of the art learning facilities.

NEWTOWN SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS

Ms JENNY LEONG (Newtown)—I draw attention to recent innovative sustainability, waste reduction and carbon positive initiatives in the Newtown Electorate. The Newtown Festival, hosted and run each year by Newtown Neighborhood Centre, continued to expand their sustainability and waste reduction focus at the 2019 festival. The festival partnered with Sydney Sustainability Centre and implemented strategies such as using green energy sources, hosting sustainable living workshops and using compostable plates and cutlery. They also had a worm farm for composting the food scraps – further diverting additional waste from landfill. I extend my congratulations to Liz Yeo, CEO of Newtown Neighbourhood Centre, Sydney Sustainability Project and the festival team for leading the way on environmentally responsible festival practices.

Meanwhile, our local Young Henry's brewery have partnered with UTS to make the brewery's carbon footprint positive. The team has installed 400 litres of algae to capture the carbon emitted by its brewing process. The resulting algae will be repurposed into products including bioplastic, fertilizer, clothing and pharmaceuticals. I congratulate the brewery's co-founders, Oscar McMahon and Richard Adamson, project manager, Greg Hall, and the whole UTS and Young Henry's teams, on their commitment to taking local, sustainable action – and leading the way for others.

CASS HUA XING ACTIVITY GROUP 15TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown)—I was delighted to join celebrations hosted by the Chinese Australian Services Society (CASS) Hua Xing Activity Group on 4th December 2019 in Bankstown marking the group's 15th Anniversary and recognising its many tireless volunteers. I would like to acknowledge CASS Care Foundation Chairperson and Honorary Director Mr Henry Pan OAM, as well as Senior Executive Officer of Home Ageing Services and the group's leader Mr Ivan Wong, and thank them for their kind invitation to attend this wonderful event and the contributions of Mr Colin Chen, Ms Chin Phan Luu and Mr George Poon to the Chinese-Australian Community. Supported by CASS Care, the Hua Xing Activity Group provides valuable services for many local Chinese, Korean and Indonesian speaking seniors, to help break down language barriers and assist them to access information, so they can participate in the community and establish social support networks. He group does not receive government funding and relies upon the enormous contribution of many dedicated and generous volunteers.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to standing and sessional orders, at 22:49
until Thursday 6 February 2020 at 09:30.**