



**New South Wales**

# **Legislative Assembly**

## **PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES (HANSARD)**

**Fifty-Seventh Parliament  
First Session**

**Thursday, 6 February 2020**

Authorised by the Parliament of New South Wales



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## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

**Thursday, 6 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.

### *Notices*

#### PRESENTATION

*[During the giving of notices of motions]*

**The SPEAKER:** I will put the Government Whip on a call to order if he continues to interject.

### *Visitors*

#### VISITORS

**The SPEAKER:** I extend a warm welcome to veterans Paul James, Peter Liston and Matthew Moseley, who are guests of the member for Campbelltown.

### *Motions*

#### BUSHFIRES

**Debate resumed from 5 February 2020.**

**Mr JAMES GRIFFIN (Manly) (09:46:43):** Fortunately, I represent a community that was geographically far away from the impact of the bushfires, so it is with reluctance and a tinge of guilt that I contribute to this condolence motion. I will be brief, because many members wish to contribute. Although people in my community have been directly impacted, the overall outcome of what they have managed to do to support a number of other communities brings great hope and speaks to the humanity of all our communities. It is somewhat embarrassing to say that I had not heard of some of the towns across New South Wales that are certainly now etched in the memory of most people, if not all of us. Cobargo, Tinpot and Conjola are places that have become synonymous with the bushfire crisis as well as the support, goodwill and efforts of our Rural Fire Service and other agencies that helped to manage and combat those fires. I convey the heartfelt condolences of the people of Manly to every individual, family, friend, loved one and community that has experienced the tragedy we have all witnessed.

We have heard from the Deputy Premier, the Premier and the relevant Ministers that we must now turn our efforts to the bushfire recovery process and to helping the people who lost everything but were lucky enough to survive. As we reflect on what has happened, we also look forward to try to understand what can be done in future. There is no doubt that we are asking a number of questions: What could have been done differently? What effect did the weather, climate change, drought, fuel loads and human activity have on those bushfires? I commend the Premier for instigating the independent inquiry into this bushfire season. It is an important step in remembering those who are no longer with us. By forensically looking at the preparation and planning for future bushfire threats and risks across New South Wales we will be respecting the sacrifice that many people made.

It is important to recognise and acknowledge that what crystallised people's concern and led to their outpouring of grief and support for those communities were the images that were beamed across New South Wales and around the world by incredibly brave members of the media who took photos and filmed what was happening. We say thank you to the members of the media who brought home to communities who were geographically pretty far from any danger the impact of what was going on. I thank members of this place for sharing their insights and expressing their heartfelt stories of what they went through and the impact it had on their communities. In particular I share the sentiments of the Minister and member for Bega, who yesterday said that New South Wales is not out of this crisis; there are months to go this season and our firefighters are continuing to fight blazes around the State that are threatening life and property. Some of the contributions members have made in this place have been incredibly brave and have shone a light on the mental health issues and the challenges that many people will face in the months and years ahead.

I must put a few thank-yous on record, and it is a great pleasure to do so. One of them is for the team at Terrey Hills. They are our RFS brigade on the northern beaches. They have been shuttling in and out to various

bushfire zones across the State and doing an outstanding job. I was privileged to receive a briefing from them about the work they are doing across New South Wales and how the trucks were coming in, getting cleaned and going out the next day. The management told a fantastic story about the "cleaning angels". Essentially, the trucks were coming from the bushfire zones, parking at Terrey Hills and group of volunteers were cleaning them throughout the night so they were ready to go out in the morning. That is one example of the way in which people in Manly and on the northern beaches made a small but important contribution to what was happening across the State.

Rory Amon is a councillor on Northern Beaches Council and has been a member of the RFS for a very long time. He spent his Christmas break and his summer doing important work for the RFS and putting his life on the line. I acknowledge my running partner, Cory Allen. The president of my branch in Fairlight, Andrew Morrison, has property that was impacted in Kangaroo Valley. He has spent some time with the RFS and he said to me that after being with the RFS for only a limited time he was full of admiration for the work that it had been doing. I say a huge thanks to the Manly Business Chamber and the four hotels in Manly that at very short notice donated 40 hotel rooms to RFS volunteers who had lost their homes or their livelihoods while volunteering and fighting fires. The community of Manly will be welcoming those volunteer firefighters in the cooler months once they have completed all the work that they need to do. I thank Manly Novotel, Sebel, Q Station and Quest Apartment Hotels which between the four of them have put up the 40 rooms.

The Manly Business Chamber has contacted the local businesses that provided food vouchers to Manly's best restaurants, which were to say thank you and, perhaps more importantly, to provide some respite for volunteers and their families so they could recuperate, rehabilitate and take a bit of a breath after what has been a harrowing summer. I place on record my thanks to those hotels and to the Manly Business Chamber. They said, without question, "This is something we want to do. We will come together as a community and we will do this." Those 40 rooms are ready and waiting for the volunteers and their families. My community members are incredibly proud that we can do our bit to meet the challenge that has been faced across the State.

Finally, Rock Relief is on next Saturday. The doors at Brookvale Oval will be opened for free and a number of acts including Eskimo Joe, Hoodoo Gurus, Christine Anu and a host of others will be performing a charity concert. We expect more than 20,000 people to attend. I place on record my thanks to the Northern Beaches Council for the outstanding job it has done in organising the event. We hope the event will raise a significant amount of money for a variety of charities working to help the impacted communities. As members in this place may know, running is a passion of mine. Last weekend I participated in the 10-kilometre Sun Run from Dee Why to Manly.

**Mr Stephen Bromhead:** How did you go?

**Mr JAMES GRIFFIN:** I went all right. I wanted to come in under 50 minutes and I came in 49:31.

**Mr Michael Johnsen:** A personal best [PB]?

**Mr JAMES GRIFFIN:** No, not a PB unfortunately. Every entry fee received for the Sun Run went to the Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service which will assist animals that have been impacted by the bushfires. While the northern beaches may be geographically far away from the impact of the bushfires I proudly say that my community has come together in every way so that it can help support people across New South Wales. We are grateful for the lives that have been saved and in this tragedy we have seen the best of humanity.

**Ms PRUE CAR (Londonderry) (09:55:57):** Like most members of the House I make a contribution to this very important motion to honour those who lost their lives in what has been an absolutely dreadful summer. I make it clear from the get-go that I come before the House in full acknowledgement that I represent a largely suburban, western Sydney electorate that has luckily not suffered from the bushfire season. I say that because neither I nor any member of my community can understand in any way what it has been like for the people of those communities that have been completely burnt down and ripped apart or the members in this place who represent those communities. We do not pretend to understand the impact of that experience and we are not going to say we do.

I represent a community that is always willing to lend a hand at times of natural disaster. It is common that almost every community across the country as well as this State feels the impact psychologically and emotionally because we Australians love this country for its beautiful bushland and forests. Like many people in western Sydney, I have holidayed on the South Coast of New South Wales every year. It is a common story, so it is heartbreaking for us to see what has happened to our beautiful country and to so many beautiful Australians. I acknowledge the people in my community who have made a particular effort in giving back during this time of tragedy. They have showed the true spirit of the average Australian.

I pay tribute to a special little girl I met at Madang Avenue Public School in Whalan during the school presentation season. Whalan is a suburb near Mount Druitt. It is a very long way from the North Coast of New South Wales, but a little girl who won my award felt very strongly about the fact that koalas had lost so much of their habitat. This young girl, Mia, decided to go to school one day and tell her teachers that she was very distressed about that and she wanted to hold a fundraiser. She did so and they raised a couple of thousand dollars, which went to the North Coast of New South Wales. We are talking about communities that sometimes do not have a lot to give, but in my experience communities that do not have a lot to give sometimes are the most generous. Mia is a young girl who decided to take action for her fellow Australians. Anyone who says that they worry about the next generation should go to some local schools and see the local children who really think about the world around them.

I make particular mention of many of the rural fire brigades in the communities around my electorate and particularly of the Llandilo Rural Fire Brigade. Llandilo is a semi-rural town near Penrith. It has a very active fire brigade, mostly comprising a couple of families, and it has had quite a bit of local media coverage about what it has done for the firefighting effort across New South Wales. The brigade even got a mention in Wales. Llandilo is named after the town of Llandeilo in Carmarthenshire in Wales. The rural fire brigade in Wales raised some money for our Llandilo Rural Fire Brigade in New South Wales because it was proud of its namesake's achievements.

In particular, I say a big thankyou to Rick Burns, who is captain of the Llandilo brigade. His wife and his 21-year-old daughter, Madi, are also members. We have heard many such stories over the past three days, but something that really struck me when I met those three the other week is that when they were deployed down south as part of the firefighting effort they had to make the decision to be in three different trucks so they would not risk losing the whole family at once. Luckily, the Burns family is still with us and I think will be running the Llandilo Rural Fire Brigade for many years to come, but it is a harrowing decision to have to make because your family wants to give back to the community. To the Burns family, thank you so much. To Pearce Denton, who has been a fixture of the Llandilo Rural Fire Brigade for many, many years and is an active fixture of our community, thank you for everything you have done.

To the Londonderry Rural Fire Brigade, which had a few appliances and crews deployed; to the Castlereagh Rural Fire Brigade, which was also deployed as part of Cumberland Zone strike team alpha; and to all the local businesses and community groups in the Nepean, western Sydney and Mount Druitt areas that have given back—thank you. I think there has been a bit of a feeling of: We're okay so we need to give back. In particular, a group of residents quickly formed a "help a firefighter" volunteer group in western Sydney. It has about 4,500 members across Australia and works particularly with the SES. It was supported by local residents, including the wonderful Mel from Jordan Springs, who is a very active member of our community. She runs the Mamalove Connect Foundation, and I have spoken about her previously in this House. She is due to have a baby very soon and she was there packing things for firefighters down south.

I am really proud of my community and the fact that they have given back. The captain of the Orchard Hills Rural Fire Brigade, Greg Speed, was also awarded an OAM in the Australia Day honours, and rightly so. I cannot imagine what it is like to be here this week representing a community that has been devastated. It is not something that anyone wants to experience. Our hearts go out to the communities that have experienced this and, to be honest, I question whether words really do anything. Hopefully, they give some comfort to people that we are thinking of them. Thoughts do one thing but we need to make sure that these people are supported on the ground to get their lives back together. That is what we are here to do: make decisions together to ensure that communities can be rebuilt. While I offer my thoughts, I know that does not really do anything. That is the truth of it. Government is here to make decisions. The Government and the Opposition need to find a way to work together to make sure that these communities can rebuild.

My community knows we were not impacted but we have done everything we can to try to do something for the people who have been. I have heard stories upon stories of people who feel so heartbroken, particularly about the South Coast. Western Sydney people go there on holiday because of its close proximity. It feels funny to say that because we only holiday there while some people who live there no longer have homes.

**Mrs Melinda Pavey:** There is a connection.

**Ms PRUE CAR:** There is a strong connection. It is an Australian thing to spend the school holidays at the beach. Those of us with young children do it so they can actually sleep at night. We are conscious of the fact that we are coming from a place where we want to say to the firefighters, "Thank you. We will do everything we can. If there is anything we can do materially, we will do it." My particular responsibility is to see whether there is anything I can do to aid communities to come back. That is what I see as my responsibility. I also thank colleagues who have given their own time, particularly those who have done so without advertising it. That is the best thing.

This is not about us at the moment. I cannot imagine what it is like to lose a home and for your children to have to go through this experience. We say the words but we hope we take the decisions to give people their lives back. I am very proud to be an Australian at the moment. I am proud to be a New South Wales resident. I am proud of my community and, most of all, I am proud of our firefighters—good, genuine people who do not seek praise. Hopefully we can talk constructively over the next few years to get affected communities up and running in every way possible by providing whatever support they need.

**Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) (10:07:45):** With Australia facing the threat of Japanese invasion in 1942 during World War II, one of our greatest Prime Ministers, John Curtin, said that the strength of a nation is measured by the character of its people. Nothing could be more true today when we consider what we have gone through over the past seven months. We think about the 25 lives lost and the more than 2,500 houses destroyed—124 in my electorate—which has severely impacted communities. The fires started in July last year and in my community—and I know the same applies to Madam Deputy Speaker's electorate of Port Macquarie—our fire crews have been fighting fires since then. I do not know whether the fire at Lindfield Park, Port Macquarie, has been put out yet.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Not quite.

**Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD:** Even today, in my electorate there is a fire near Bulahdelah and another one at Coolongolook. I have seen our communities pull together. I start with the fires crews and the Rural Fire Service and the outstanding work they have done. When the fires really took hold in the Myall Lakes electorate in October—and there were a number of crews out there—I saw the principal of Cundletown Public School and deputy captain of the Bonny Hills RFS brigade, Nigel Sherrard, who lives at Bonny Hills, down in Tuncurry supporting the fire efforts there. Crews came from all over New South Wales to help other communities. When the fires were burning in the north of the State—particularly during September, October, November and December last year—there were crews from across the State and interstate.

When the worst of it hit in my electorate in November I met crews from the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and South Australia. I did not meet the Tasmanians, but I am told there were Tasmanian crews there as well. RFS and Fire and Rescue crews from metropolitan areas, the Central Coast, Newcastle, the Hunter Valley and areas north of the Myall Lakes electorate all came together to lend their support. I take my hat off to all those volunteers. Some of those fires were the most intense blazes people had experienced in living memory. Decades ago we would not have witnessed those fires. We would have been sitting in our living rooms not realising what our fireys are facing when they go into a fire. But because of mobile phones and other devices we can now see what those firefighters are dealing with on the ground.

The work of our volunteers says something about the character of our people, particularly those in regional New South Wales, and the way we pull together. They do not do it for any reward or recognition; they do it to help their communities and other communities, knowing that at some point in the future their community will be in danger and the people they helped will come to their aid. In those times our fireys must confront 100-foot flames that are moving at 100 kilometres an hour. That is what they have to deal with. But they also get to look around and see that other fire brigades from other States are there with them. Then they look up in the sky and see the helicopters and planes. People have asked why we did not have the Defence Force out there. I can assure all members that the Defence Force was there. The South Australian crews were brought in by a C-130 Hercules. When we were out on the fireground there were Black Hawk helicopters in the sky doing their bit to help all the volunteers there.

During the fires people needed somewhere to go. In places such as Rainbow Flat people had lost their homes and the highway and local roads were cut. Where do they go? Rainbow Flat does not have a village or town; it is a rural area with residential and other rural properties. There were only two places they could go: the RFS station and the service station. They could not go to the RFS station because there were trucks everywhere and it was burnt. Imagine it—there were 100-foot flames and roaring winds. The only place they could go was the service station. There were petrol tanks and gas tanks and the flames surrounded them on three sides from across the road. There was no electricity and no light—only the light of the fire, the ember attacks and the RFS crews doing their best to look after people.

At the same time, people were going to Nabcac Showground, Taree Showground, Wingham Showground, Tuncurry Beach Bowling Club, Club Old Bar and Club Taree because they were the only places they could go. My electorate is made up of two major commercial centres and some 30 villages. In the outer villages, places like Bobin, warehouses and the school were lost. The only place that people could go was the weatherboard hall. Roads were cut, electricity was cut and there were no phones, so the people of that community huddled at the hall. If there is no power that means the pump does not work; if the pump does not work that means the toilets do not work. In the darkness, the only light is the light of the fires around them. That happened in many other places. The community banded together. While they were in the hall, RFS crews from all over the area were racing



around, trying to protect and save as many houses as possible. About 144 houses were lost in my electorate, but we must recognise that at least 1,000 houses were saved.

One life was lost in my area. Julie Fletcher lived in the Port Macquarie electorate at Johns River, but she was part of the Taree community. I pass on my condolences to her family. Horrifically, she was on the phone to her sister who lived about two kilometres away when the phone went dead. Her sister and brother-in-law and the RFS tried to get to her, but they could not reach her because the road was cut. There are so many stories of near misses. One life lost is one too many, but probably hundreds of lives were saved, and that is not talked about enough. People were in the showgrounds with their animals, pets and other possessions. It is fantastic that the Government just announced \$5,000 to help the showgrounds keep going. People in the community came together because the roads were cut and nobody could get to other places. Volunteers came from the community to help the over 1,000 people at the showground, and Club Taree was absolutely fantastic in helping some 1,700 people. There were so many people at each of those places.

In the days that followed, the local community looked after its community. I take my hat off to those people. The Lions Club, the Rotary Club, the Women in Dairy group and others came to help almost straightaway. When the highway was open a few days later we had donations of gifts, water, clothes, food and all sorts of things coming from Sydney and other places. It came to the point where an old closed down Masters building in Taree was used to store all the donations. Then they needed to get it out to the communities in the villages—Bobin, Marlee, Wherrol Flat—where a lot of it was needed. People volunteered their trailers and ferried donations from Taree to the mountains to get it to the places where it was needed.

BlazeAid opened up a camp at Wingham Showground. Everyone involved in BlazeAid is a volunteer; even the executives are volunteers. Every dollar donated goes to those who need it. Over 420 rural properties have registered for assistance in my area, which was more than BlazeAid has ever had to deal with. BlazeAid was at Wingham Showground and I thank MidCoast Council, the Wingham Show Society and the Wingham Showground Trust for looking after them. A lady at Killabakh who lost everything stayed on her rural property because she had stock. I am not sure how she was living there. BlazeAid quickly came to help put up fences to protect her stock because her property was on the main road. It was fairly obvious that some of her stock needed to be put down, but she stayed there to try to look after the remaining stock that had been burnt. A few days later it was obvious that the surviving and injured stock also needed to be put down. She had lost all her stock and her house was gone, but when BlazeAid came in to help she made honey sandwiches for the volunteers from a beehive she had found that was still okay. That shows the character of our people.

It will take time for us to recover, but I know that we can do it by working together and pulling together. People are still out there in rural areas. We talk about finding them somewhere to live, but if their stock has survived and they have pets, how can they move into town or some other place? Remember that these people were feeding their stock before the fires because of the drought so the stock still needs to be fed and looked after, and have water brought in because people were carting water. Some people are living in tents and caravans. They have had many offers of assistance to move to somewhere else, but they need to stay on their properties to look after their stock. That is where we as a Government and we as a Parliament need to be adaptive and say, "Our planning laws are really good planning laws for New South Wales"—maybe—"but in this time of crisis we need to be able to change."

People on the land need to stay on the land to feed stock and other things. If they get assistance from charities—if the money ever flows through to them—will they spend money on buying a caravan that will not be needed in two years' time? Or, can we change the laws to allow people to build a machinery shed and live in it temporarily for the year or two it takes to rebuild their house? Then at the end of it they would still have a machinery shed that they need, rather than wasting money on a caravan. If everyone buys a caravan—if 3,000 people buy caravans—the price of caravans will go up and in two years' time there will be a fire sale and no-one will want them. But the machinery shed will always be there. We must make those changes. Earlier I said that the Rotary and Lions clubs put up their hands straightaway to help out. Locally they raised just over \$500,000. I congratulate Maurie Stack and the Rotary club, which gave out cards with \$1,000 credit on them within a matter of weeks. They are now issuing another card with another \$1,000 credit.

The Lions Club has been doing things such as buying water tanks. Not all houses or sheds were lost, but lots of water tanks melted—I have never seen so many melted water tanks. Those people needed water straightaway so the Lions Club paid for water tanks to be installed and filled with water, as well as distributing donated goods. I thank Taree Lions Club President George Greaves and his members. They were supported by the Quota clubs, the Probus clubs and other service organisations in bringing those efforts together. So many things have happened in the past six months that it all blends together and I cannot remember which fire or which thing because there has just been so much.

In about the first week of December, I think it was, I took leave from Parliament to be in my electorate. On the Tuesday, just in my area, there were over 50 active fires, each of which at any other time of the year would have been declared a section 44 fire of State significance. They were all burning at the same time. Straight after that the service clubs got together to do things. In the first week of December I visited a few of the villages that had been impacted by the fires. People in Bobin had lost their homes—everything. They lost their school and were worried that their school would never open again. They were worried about what would happen if this were to occur again. Everything was fairly raw.

I met with the community at the Bobin Hall where only a week ago I took the Deputy Premier. When I met them I needed a scribe to take some notes of what the people's needs were so I took my wife, Sue, with me. One thing they said they needed was the community defibrillator, which was kept under cover just over the fence at the school, but the whole of the school had burnt down, apart from a historic building that I will talk about shortly. This was important to members of the community and they were agitated about it. I thought, "How can I gather \$2,500 to \$3,500 to get that defibrillator for them?" I rang George Reeves, the President of the Lyons Club, and I said, "George, that community needs a defibrillator."

The other day I went back there with the Deputy Premier and there was a big defibrillator in the foyer of the hall, so that is done. We talk about the Bobin Hall, the Marlee Hall, Wherrol Flat and Killabakh halls being the centre of those communities. There was no electricity, no communication, no water and therefore people had no capacity to help themselves. The Lions Club had constructed locally four trailers each with a 1,000 litre tank, a firefighter pump and two firefighter hoses to give to those halls to assist the community should they be in this position again. It was really good to be able to tell the Bobin community about that.

Only one building in the local school survived the fire and that is the original weatherboard building, which is the library and houses the school's musical instruments. The school has about 17 pupils. There is always pressure on those schools. I spoke with Minister Sarah Mitchell that same week to get reassurance that the school would be rebuilt. The Minister's commitment was that it would reopen on day one, term 1, and it was opened on day 1, term one. The deputy principal and the community are so happy to have their school and so happy about how good it is. I thought, "Why did the old historic weatherboard building, out of all those other buildings, survive?" The answer is that between it and the direction of the fire stood the amenities building, a big brick and concrete building. That is what saved that old building. [*Extension of time*]

As Sarah Parker, the deputy principal, and the previous principal said later, that old building was the heart of the school, and the heart of the school was saved. The students have new classrooms, interactive whiteboards, air conditioning and new turf. The turf was provided by Earls' Turf. Many local businesses and companies donated either money or other goods. As I said, Earl's Turf—a great local company in Taree—provided the turf. It also donated turf to the Tuncurry RFS station, which needed more area around it because of the increase in numbers of volunteers since the fires began in October. An area around the station was cleared and Earl's Turf donated the turf for it. That is a great story.

So many things have to happen during the recovery. Individuals have been getting mixed messages, so I am pleased that Service NSW is now a one-stop shop and a case manager assists every person on the road to recovery. Each individual has different needs. People who live in villages perhaps do not need as much as people who live on rural blocks and have stock and other things to look after. It is fantastic to have a case manager assist them through that. It is a huge weight off people's minds to know that contractors will be supplied to demolish buildings, clear land and remove rubble, and that it will be taken care of by the Government at no cost. I am looking forward to that starting; I think they will be doing that next week. Unfortunately, sometimes we get frustrated with these things. But the properties have to be inspected for asbestos and other dangerous goods, so we cannot just rip in and do it. I am pleased that it is all happening.

I talked about the RFS and Fire and Rescue being there during the fires. Fire and Rescue personnel looked after dwellings and buildings. They could not get into the bushfire areas because their trucks are not made to go too far off-road, but they did pump water into the RFS trucks so that they did not have to leave to find water. One of the biggest problems on a fireground is the time it takes to leave to go and get water. I congratulate and thank Fire and Rescue. During the fires, roads had to be closed and traffic had to be taken care of—and the police were there. Every member of the Manning-Great Lakes Police District volunteered to come back on duty. They closed roads, controlled traffic and got emergency vehicles such as ambulances through the roads that were blocked. MidCoast Council workers were out at three o'clock in the morning closing roads, manning the barricades and letting locals in all night. Forestry workers were also working during this period.

**Mrs Melinda Pavey:** And the contractors.

**Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD:** And the contractors. So many people were out there working during the fires. Again, that shows how the community can pull together and work together. Through this recovery period

there will be difficulties, but we must all work together for the common good and know that we all want to get things done and look after each other. As a community, we must appreciate that there is no deliberate hold-up of anything, and that we are trying to get the necessary services to the communities and the people that need them. I thank Superintendent Kam Baker, by way of example. By thanking him I am thanking all of the RFS volunteers. I also thank Superintendent Shane Cribb.

The night of the catastrophic fire the superintendent was there in the control centre, getting everything ready; when I was there the next morning, he had come back. People from the council, Family and Community Services, Local Land Services, Forestry Corporation, Essential Energy were all there, doing their thing to get things done for our community. When the fire went through—I think on Tuesday night—it cut the electricity to a pump station in the Kiwarra State Forest. If power was not restored within 48 hours, then about 30,000 people would be without water. Some RFS teams went with Essential Energy staff to cut their way through, put out the fires and keep the Essential Energy guys safe so they could provide electricity for the pumps.

Within 24 hours they had it all up and ready. I thank Superintendent Shane Cribb and, by singling him out, all the police at the centre. I have thanked the Rotary Club, the Lions Club and the other clubs that worked with them. I also thank the Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, and the Deputy Premier, John Barilaro, who is now the recovery officer, which is a really good thing. I also thank the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, David Elliott. When the roads were still cut and things were really happening in the evacuation centres, they came to the Taree evacuation centre. At that time there was only one they could get to, otherwise they would have been to others. It was great to have them and the Prime Minister there. We have really had that level of support. So many people contacted me during that time, including the Leader of the Opposition, Jodi McKay.

The Minister and the Premier contacted me to say that whatever our community needed would be supplied and that I should let them know. I let the superintendent know, who was calling the shots. I appreciate the support. I received messages from other members—I cannot remember who they all are now, but I appreciate it on behalf of the community. I send my condolences to all the families who have lost their loved ones, particularly the RFS volunteers and the flight crew. It is absolutely devastating for other crews around the State. The RFS, in a sense, is like a family. It is pretty devastating for everybody. I also commend the member for Prospect, Dr Hugh McDermott, for his service and acknowledge what he and his crew have gone through in the past few months.

**Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) (10:38:16):** The fires devastating our State since August have been nothing short of catastrophic: 25 lives lost, 2,176 homes destroyed, 5,200,000 hectares burnt and untold damage to our natural environment. The smoke, ash and dust have had lingering health impacts. The fires have shown the worst of what nature can throw at us. Thankfully, the Wallsend electorate avoided the worst of the fires. A small fire on the M1 posed a brief danger, but no homes and, more importantly, no lives were lost. But that has not stopped our Wallsend electorate community getting involved. People across the electorate willingly volunteered with the RFS and local brigades to help fight the fires. Loads of service organisations—Rotary, Lions, our local businesses, childcare centres, sporting clubs and the scouts—rallied to fundraise. We even had local residents like Harri, aged 7, and Emma, aged 10, collecting fruit, juicing it and selling it on the side of the road to raise money for the fire victims. How sweet they are. We are really grateful to them.

Fire and Rescue Station 337 Minmi, which is based in a historic little former mining town in my electorate, attended strike teams, while still staffing Minmi station. Thankfully for New South Wales, Minmi station had understanding employers who allowed them to undertake the dangerous, unpaid and vital work of fighting these fires. I take this opportunity to personally thank all our private enterprises for their understanding and support by allowing their workers to be available for firefighting.

Captain Evan Dowling and retained firefighter Mick Hodges attended Strike Team Charlie for five days in November, battling blazes around Wauchope, Port Macquarie and Nabad, in the electorates of the member for Myall Lakes and the member for Port Macquarie, who have spoken so eloquently. Retained firefighter Jeremy Ryan from Minmi attended Strike Team Tango from 15 November, joining crews at Wauchope and Port Macquarie. Captain Dowling and Mick Hodges were joined by retained Minmi firefighters Craig Allan, Graham Moore and Andrew Paoletti for Strike Team Mike on 30 November, which was deployed to Raymond Terrace.

Retained firefighter Daryl Howar, also from Minmi, went to Tahmoor as part of Strike Team India on 21 December, and Mick Hodges was there on 22 December. Just before Christmas, Captain Dowling and Craig Allan joined Strike Team Xray at Bulga-Milbrodale, and Captain Dowling, Deputy Captain Royce Pearce and retained firefighter Daryl Howard were back out at Bulga-Milbrodale on 27 December. On 4 January Jeremy Ryan went to Cessnock and Captain Dowling went to Doyalson-Bundanoon. Our local firefighters were everywhere. On 8 January Captain Dowling, Craig Allan and retained firefighter Joel Fisher joined Strike Team Charlie to help defend the Perisher Valley, Guthega and Thredbo. They were involved in protecting the Guthega power station and the hydroelectricity plants—vital New South Wales infrastructure.

My thanks go out to Captain Evan Dowling, Deputy Captain Royce Pearce and all the retained firefighters of Minmi 377, who continued to keep our local community safe while pitching in to help others around the State. The crew from Fire and Rescue Station 454 Tarro, in my electorate, led by Captain Ian Smith and Deputy Captain Scott Pine, also traversed the State, battling blazes on many fronts. Firefighters Brett Mate, Dean Higginbottom, Scott Ford, John Thorne, Jeff Allen, Brodie Verschoor, Gavin Hawes, James Twining, Andrew Webb and Adam Brown were all deployed to strike force teams across New South Wales. Those included strike force teams in Kempsey, Glen Innes, Bucketty, Broke, Wollombi, Central Mangrove, Port Macquarie, Taree and Old Bar. Many of the Tarro crew spent precious time away from their families and friends over the Christmas period. We thank them for their unwavering dedication.

The crew from Fire and Rescue Station 484 Wallsend also traversed the State, with firefighters attending a number of strike force and task force teams. Captain Robert Walker and firefighters Graham Thorpe, George Brown, father and son Rod and Dominic Cavallaro, Daniel Ogle, Al Witenden, Mark Dempsey, Elliott Woolford, Jason Bridge and Kerrin O'Malley all attended strike force teams in Casino, Lismore, Tenterfield, Port Macquarie, Taree, Charmhaven, Central Mangrove, Picton and south-west Sydney. Barry Magor, Steve Kirsopp, Daniel Macaree and Jai Pereira remained behind to help maintain a local presence to cover the Wallsend community. We thank the Wallsend crew for their dedicated service and for making many sacrifices to battle the fires. I thank the brave firefighters at Fire and Rescue NSW stations 357 Lambton and 251 Cardiff who covered all the local stations that had appliances and crews dispatched across the State. Your service ensured that local areas remained safe.

Every day as ash rained down across the electorate, my office was inundated with calls from people wanting to know how they could help those who were more directly impacted and where and what to donate—whether money, clothes or food. I am sure all members of this House join me in sincerely thanking all of those generous people. The Wallsend electorate never ceases to amaze me. You could not find a more giving, selfless bunch. All year long people have been fundraising or donating for various causes. As Christmas approached and the State burned, they dug deep and gave what they could. Professor Peter Gibson of the Hunter Medical Research Institute [HMRI] is a respiratory physician, clinical researcher and co-director of the HMRI Viruses, Infections/Immunity, Vaccines and Asthma Research Program. During the fires the ash, smoke and dust have posed difficulties for people who suffer from respiratory illness. Professor Gibson and his team have been working tirelessly to help health authorities coordinate management plans.

We still do not know the full extent of the fire damage. A full accounting must be done of the loss of lives and property and of the damage to the State's irreplaceable biodiversity. We need to know why the fires were so bad and the factors that have contributed to a longer and more dangerous bushfire season. We must be frank about what has happened and what we will do to prevent it from happening again. We will have a chance to do that in coming months. For now, let us be grateful to our volunteers and thankful for the lives and homes that were not lost.

**Mrs TANYA DAVIES (Mulgoa) (10:47:37):** The bushfire crisis is ongoing. A briefing this week advised that close to 63 fires are still burning, 25 of which are out of control. Hundreds of volunteers are still battling away on the firegrounds and in communities. The bushfire crisis began in August last year. For months on end many volunteers have been out in the field tirelessly defending lives, livestock and livelihoods. I thank those amazing volunteers—not only RFS volunteers but also those representing other institutions such as the SES, the NSW Police Force, the Forestry Corporation of NSW and the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. They are all doing an outstanding job in extremely difficult and unprecedented circumstances.

On behalf of the New South Wales Parliament I express our deepest appreciation and thanks for their courageous actions and selfless service over the past weeks and months. I am very grateful to contribute to the condolence motion moved by the Premier of New South Wales, Gladys Berejiklian. Many members of Parliament have revealed heartbreaking stories of loss, provided examples of the courageous actions of strangers, told stories of heartfelt generosity from the people of New South Wales to the people of New South Wales and recounted many more insights and revelations that have impacted us and moved us to tears. This is my reflection on what has happened in my community as a result of the bushfire crisis.

At 6.00 a.m. on Friday 20 December 2019, less than one week before Christmas, my mobile phone rang. When the phone rings at that time of the morning you prepare for either joyous or devastating news. Immediately I had a dreadful, sinking feeling. When I answered I heard the voice of David Elliott, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I knew that it would not be good news. He shared the news that no-one wants to hear: two brave, selfless RFS volunteers from one of my own RFS brigades had lost their lives the night before while they battled the Green Wattle Creek blaze that threatened homes in Buxton, south of Sydney. The devastating fires that destroyed wildlife and bushland across New South Wales led to the first deaths of our RFS volunteers. On Thursday 19 December 2019 those men, along with three other RFS colleagues, were in a truck that was impacted

by a tree that fell on their tanker, causing it to roll off the road. It was devastating to learn that those men were killed.

Firefighters Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer were not only from the Horsley Park RFS, they also lived in my electorate of Mulgoa. During that short phone call I instantly knew that the lives of two families in my electorate would be irrevocably altered. I will focus on these two men in my condolence contribution to give them the honour and place in the New South Wales Parliament's *Hansard* that their service and sacrifice deserves. When their children are older and they Google search their dads' names, this speech and the speeches of many other MPs in this place, along with newspaper articles and television stories, will enlighten them on how proud we all were of their daddies and how their daddies will never be forgotten. They live on in the lives of their children, Harvey and Charlotte.

In May 2018 Geoff and Andrew became fathers within two days of each other. Andrew's daughter, Charlotte, and Geoff's son, Harvey, were just 19 months old when this terrible tragedy happened. At Andrew's funeral it was heartbreaking to watch Charlotte walk around her daddy's casket wearing the bravery and service medal awarded to Andrew by the NSW RFS Commissioner, Shane Fitzsimmons. The image of little Harvey with his dummy in his mouth receiving the bravery and service medal for his dad, Geoff, was a tragic reminder of the devastation these fires have wrought across our State. Firefighter Geoffrey Keaton joined the service in 2006. He was the deputy captain of the Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade and a former member of the Plumpton brigade. His father, John, also a fellow firefighter, was out fighting the Gaspers Mountain fire on the night Geoff died. Geoff and his fiancée, Jess Hayes, had their first child together, little Harvey, in 2018.

Firefighter Andrew O'Dwyer joined the service in 2003 and was a member of the Horsley Park brigade. He grew up in Cecil Hills. Not long finishing at Cecil Hills High School in 1999 he became a volunteer firefighter. He married his wife, Melissa, in 2013 and together they have three children, two boys and little Charlotte. One of the hardest days I have ever experienced as the local member for Mulgoa—and I have been the member for Mulgoa for close to nine years—was saying goodbye to Andrew O'Dwyer. Over 1,000 people attended his funeral to pay their respects and show support for his family. His wife, Melissa, their children, Andrew's parents, Errol and Margaret O'Dwyer, and his sister Amanda with great dignity said farewell to a son, a brother, a husband and a dad. The funeral was also attended by hundreds of the broader RFS family, community members, leaders of other emergency services and political leaders.

When news broke of this tragedy many people took to social media to communicate their feelings and support to the Horsley Park RFS family and the families of Andrew and Geoff. Over the last few weeks following this tragedy I have been able to sit with the Horsley Park RFS and speak individually with members. I make mention of all those who serve in the Horsley Park RFS. I cannot comprehend the sorrow of losing a deputy captain, a colleague and a friend. As I was with the Horsley Park RFS I witnessed firsthand the love and the kindness of this brigade banding together as a family. The very next day after this tragedy they went back out to continue to fight those fires.

I commend Horsley Park RFS Captain Darren Nation for his leadership during this difficult time, especially for the difficult challenge he faced of speaking at Andrew's funeral. He did a remarkable job. I do not know how he was able to say the words he said when speaking about his closest friends. I thank every volunteer—and their families—who is part of the Horsley Park RFS. I thank them for their heroic service and for continuing to fight those fires knowing and living with the tragedy of losing Geoff and Andrew. I thank them for caring for each other in these difficult times. I also acknowledge the member for Prospect, Hugh McDermott, who is also a member of the Horsley Park RFS and who has compassionately shared his experience and knowledge of those two amazing gentlemen. My prayers are with each and every volunteer at the Horsley Park RFS.

When I visited and spent time with the Horsley Park RFS volunteers after hearing of the passing of Geoff and Andrew, they began to talk about their experiences with those two gentlemen. They said some funny things and reminisced about occasions they had had together. One comment I recall being shared was that Andrew was incredibly enthusiastic during brigade meetings. It was common—in fact, it happened every time—when Andrew was present at a brigade meeting that those meetings would go well over one hour in duration, such was his enthusiasm in identifying areas that needed fixing, repairs and painting and in putting forward ideas. But whenever Andrew was absent the brigade meetings would last 10 to 15 minutes. Such was Andrew's passion and determination to make improvements and to express his pride and his love for the RFS family. When I heard of his enthusiasm I made a small suggestion to the team members at Horsley Park RFS. I said that they could think about honouring Andrew's contribution by having as a standing agenda item at every meeting thereafter an issue that he was passionate about and had not yet been fixed. They could leave the agenda item in his name as a recognition of his passion in not only serving the RFS but also in reaching out and serving the broader community.

When I was writing this condolence motion words seemed powerless to express the grief, anguish and pain of losing Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer and the third RFS volunteer, Samuel McPaul, who perished

fighting the Green Valley bushfire on New Year's Eve. Words are powerless in the face of such tragedy that has occurred not only at our local Horsley Park RFS but also across the State to the families and communities and RFS brigades who have lost loved ones. Thoughts and prayers can seem insignificant in the face of such loss. Nothing we can say or do will bring those men back to us. But we can and do commit ourselves never to forget their courage, heroism and selflessness and the fighting spirit of those men and all RFS volunteers. To quote RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons at the funeral of Andrew O'Dwyer:

Charlotte should know her father was a selfless and special man, who only left because he was a hero.

That statement can be attributed to Harvey and to Samuel McPaul's unborn child. We have also been reminded of the eternal truth when the Minister for Police and Emergency Services posted on social media:

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

I confess that I was deeply troubled and emotionally distraught after leaving Andrew O'Dwyer's funeral. I rang my husband, I cried and told him I loved him. I hugged my kids when they got home and told them I loved them. I apologised for the times mummy had been stressed or cranky with them. I told them that I deeply love them all and that family is the most important thing in this world. I have been mindful to spend more time with my older parents, because one never knows the date or time that one will pass from this life into the next. The experience of seeing the human tragedy of the bushfire crisis has sharpened my focus to express my love and appreciation for family and friends while they are still with me. I know this crisis has affected and impacted thousands of us, and I hope that we will hold on to the change we have experienced within ourselves to be more compassionate, more kind, more forgiving, more patient and more selfless.

While bushfires have not physically impacted my electorate, my RFS brigade has been completely absorbed in fighting the fires elsewhere across the State. I thank the brigades and their families for continuing to serve our communities, despite suffering immeasurable fatigue, their willingness to be absent from family and friends celebrating Christmas and New Year, or for staying home to fight fires when their families went on holidays. I acknowledge Wallacia RFS Captain Jody Preston, Mulgoa RFS Captain Ian Walther, Horsley Park RFS Captain Darren Nation, Regentville RFS Captain Adam Fawcett, Kemps Creek RFS Captain David Edwards and Erskine Park RFS Captain Andrew McDermid.

After attending all the school presentation events in December—as local MPs do in their electorates—I popped into Wallacia RFS on my way home. I had been to the shops to buy drinks, water, lollies and chips and I was dropping them off to show that although I cannot physically fight fires, I wanted them to know I was thinking of them every step of the way. Wallacia RFS Captain Jody Preston was there. I have known Jody for many years but I was shocked when I saw him that day. I had never seen a man so exhausted and I knew the job was not over. My token was small, but when I walked into their facility I saw a table that was covered with all the other donations that had been flooding in from the local community.

The bushfire crisis has impacted us all in many different ways. I deeply felt for affected communities when I saw the images and heard the stories that were being shared by the media. It brought back to mind a time when I was a teenager and my parents were living at Wakefield, on the edge of Newcastle. Our property backed onto the mountains of the Watagans State forest. On coming home after a term at university in Sydney I came across a police blockade just before I turned the corner to head down the valley towards our property. I did not know what was happening. *[Extension of time]*

At that time there was no such thing as mobile phones—that is how old I am. I proceeded to the front of the queue and spoke to the police officer. He said, "You can't go down here. There's a fire on its way. You need to divert elsewhere." I said, "But my home is around the corner and down the hill. That's where my parents are. I'm travelling to see them." He asked to see my licence because he did not believe me. I showed him my licence and he said, "Okay, you need to go straight home then." He let me through. I remember as I turned the corner to head down the road into the small valley I could see this red blaze and smoke behind where my parents had worked for close to 15 years to build their dream country farmhouse. The ferocity and cruelty of the fire was alarming and absolutely shocking. That memory has stuck with me.

As I drove in and parked my car, my mum was very distraught. When I walked past the family car I saw it was loaded with all of our photo albums and the tapestries that my mum had spent years and years sewing to make our house a home. The car was loaded with all our personal possessions. My mum was in a state of distress I had never seen before because they were waiting for a message from the RFS. Did we need to evacuate and escape? I stood on the veranda and watched the fire crews drive to the back of our property. We had gates that opened onto the Rural Fire Service tracks, and that is what they were accessing—truck after truck after truck. Thankfully they were able to defend our home and eventually the crisis was over. As a young teenager, I did not fully appreciate the skills, training and sacrifice it took for volunteers to defend the lives and properties of people they did not even know. It truly was a remarkable experience.

In December 2001 and January 2002, my husband and I were living in the Blue Mountains. We lived there for about three years over the course of our early married life. During that time the Black Christmas fires hit the Blue Mountains. I was a Red Cross disaster relief volunteer and I remember just after New Year's Day I received the phone call to mobilise. I needed to go to the Springwood evacuation centre to coordinate people who were coming to that location because they were told to leave their homes. As I served in that capacity I remember feeling a sense of purpose because I knew I was doing something good for someone who was in need during a crisis. While my experience was short and lasted only a couple of days, it showed me the complexity of our community, the roles that people play and how so many different organisations come together when a crisis hits.

We are truly blessed not only in this State but also in this nation to have a community of people who will come together no matter what crisis hits. We will put aside differences during a crisis and we will work together to help one another. The spirit that truly unites us as Australians is knowing that no matter what crisis we will come together as one. When tragedy hits we see communities respond to help each other with abundant generosity, kindness and selflessness. The generosity expressed to the families of Andrew and Geoff has been overwhelming as has the outpouring of love. It has reminded me why I am so proud to be an Australian. The Regentville Public School has a painted sign on its front fence that states, "Thank you RFS. You are our heroes."

This weekend Club Marconi and Doltone House are putting on a fundraiser for the families of Andrew O'Dwyer and Geoffrey Keaton. When the fundraiser was announced, tickets for 50 tables of 10 seats were sold within 48 hours. I thank Ben Fordham for giving up his time to be the master of ceremonies at the event. Geoff, Andrew and Samuel left us as brave volunteers but they will always be remembered as heroes. We will never forget them. As I was leaving the Horsley Park RFS—and I acknowledge that the member for Prospect, Dr Hugh McDermott, is in the Chamber—I stopped to pay my respects at the memorial of flowers that had started to pile up next to the helmets of Andrew and Geoff and I noticed this beautiful poem that I would like to share with the House:

When I come to the end of the road  
And the sun has set for me  
I want no rites in a gloom filled room  
Why cry for a soul set free?  
Miss me a little, but not too long  
And not with your head bowed low  
Remember the love that we once shared  
Miss me, but let me go  
For this is a journey that we all must take  
And each must go alone  
It's all part of the Master's plan  
A step on the road to home  
When you are lonely and sick of heart  
Go to friends we know  
And bury your sorrows in doing good deeds  
Miss me, but let me go  
Forever in hearts, always in our memories.

I commend the motion to the House.

**Ms JULIA FINN (Granville) (11:12:13):** It is with a very heavy heart that I contribute to this condolence motion. All members in this place have been directly or indirectly affected by those horrific fires. I particularly thank the members for Blue Mountains, Prospect and Bega for sharing their deeply personal experiences of the fires. Their stories were not easy for them to talk about but they were important for us to hear. The fires did not directly affect residents in my suburban western Sydney electorate so we cannot comprehend the horror and the loss that other communities have experienced but we support them nonetheless.

At a time when our State and our country is still in so much pain, and still burning in parts, it is hard to talk about what has taken place over the past few months. New South Wales would rather forget this fire season. Although it has been utterly horrific and terrifying we have seen tremendous acts of bravery, kindness and generosity that, like those fires, is unprecedented. For that, all Australians can be really proud. Those fires burned on the coast and in the north, west and south of our State. Seemingly no community was spared. We experienced three state of emergency declarations and 59 days of total fire bans including 11 days of statewide bans. A local 25-year veteran firefighter from my electorate said:

It is a fire season unlike anything that I have seen before or hope to see again. It was impossible to stop. There were times when we had to make hard choices. Difficult choices, about whose homes to save, what buildings or pieces of infrastructure we could protect and what we couldn't. It was awful. In a typical year our cities and towns might be affected by the fire season only at the margins, but recently the presence of smoke was constantly hanging in the air, blanketing our streets and the smell was infiltrating every corner of our homes and lives. It was a situation

for which we were woefully unprepared. Air quality, which we take for granted, reached appalling, world-worst levels. The pollution reached its peak with an air quality index of 2,800 on 19 December in Sydney's south-west—more than 42 times what is considered to be good air quality. No matter where you were, you could not escape it. We had no objective criteria to respond to these challenges and very few air quality monitoring stations. Mostly, we have not needed them. As recently as last August, SafeWork NSW released its latest *Code of Practice: Managing the Work Environment and Facilities* with no mention of outdoor air quality and no advice for businesses or workers on how to respond to an air quality crisis. That needs to change urgently.

The fires burnt not only in our State, but also across our country, with the fire season starting in August and continuing even now. But, as we all know, New South Wales was the worst affected by far, and there are still more than 60 fires burning across the State, with 1,500 firefighters still deployed. Only last week we saw fires flare up around Canberra and Goulburn, threatening lives and homes, and the firefighters I have spoken to have stressed that this is still not over. Hopefully, the worst is behind us, but this fire season has the potential to continue for months to come. That is a terrifying prospect and, with the changes climate change is bringing to bear on our climate and rainfall patterns, I fear that fire seasons of this magnitude are set to become more common unless we take urgent and drastic action.

Over the past months a great many people have lost a great many things to these fires. They have lost their homes, their belongings and their livelihoods, and, tragically, far too many have also lost their lives. We lost 25 beloved members of our communities in New South Wales, and more lives in other States. These people were parents, children, friends and loved ones. Their loss is a wound that may never heal. Some died protecting their homes, some died safeguarding other people's homes and some died trying to find safety. All of them were taken too soon, leaving the rest of us to mourn the gaps they have left in our lives.

This was a tragedy on an immense scale, with 5.5 million hectares of land burnt, 2,500 homes lost, an estimated one billion animals wiped out and unique ecosystems destroyed, leaving in their place barren and decimated landscapes. In some places ecosystems that were many thousands of years old were decimated in moments, turned to ash. Sadly, some of them will never return. Rainforests—which almost never become dry enough to burn—were set alight. As I said, these fires took 25 people from us, including six who laid down their lives in the line of duty while helping to fight the fires. Those six people are heroes, and should be remembered as such.

Geoffrey Keaton, 32, and Andrew O'Dwyer, 35—mates and young fathers—sacrificed their lives while battling the Green Wattle Creek fire near Buxton alongside their fellow RFS volunteers from the Horsley Park brigade, including their friend and our colleague the member for Prospect. Father-to-be Samuel McPaul, 28, died when a freak fire tornado flipped his eight-tonne RFS truck at Jingellic, outside Albury. His daughter will grow up without a father, but will know that he died protecting others. All three of those RFS volunteers have been honoured with posthumous commendations, and rightly so. We owe them an enormous debt of gratitude for their sacrifice. Nor will we forget the sacrifice of the three American firefighters who were killed when their C-130 air tanker crashed. We owe a debt of gratitude to Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson and flight engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr. There are many more stories of people who died protecting other people's homes and their own. They will be remembered for their bravery.

This fire season has changed our State and our country forever. It has scarred the landscape and our national psyche. But it has also shown the best of us. This year there was no Christmas holiday for the men and women who belong to our volunteer and professional firefighting units. They worked—and some died—throughout the Christmas period, protecting life and property from the worst of nature. They were supported by Nationals Parks and Wildlife Service staff, Forestry Corporation workers, police, emergency services personnel and so many others. They just kept going for weeks and months on end. The Rural Fire Service is one of the world's largest volunteer organisations. What it does is nothing short of amazing.

My father was an RFS volunteer for many years, as were all the farmers who lived around us. It was just what people did: You would help your neighbours fight fires and they would help you if there was a fire on your property. Every year there were fires to fight and close calls, but people never left their jobs, farms and businesses for months on end to fight fires, as happened this year. They are volunteers. What has happened this summer is not what they expected when they volunteered, but they have all risen to the enormous challenge that was presented and they still keep going.

I acknowledge the brave men and women from my electorate of Granville, both volunteer and professional. Like firefighters all over the State, they gave up their holidays or walked away from their jobs for months at a time to fight these fires. The Merrylands Fire Station fireys gave up their summer to protect others. It is a part-time station and its members are called in and deployed to fight fires as the need arises. They take leave from their jobs to do this work. They, like many men and women in the New South Wales fire service and the



RFS, have been fighting fires since August across the State, sacrificing months of their lives and their time with family to help protect others. They told me how they fought fires in Port Macquarie and Glenn Innes, and the Gaspers Mountain fire in the Hawkesbury. The team spent three weeks in Katoomba fighting the massive blaze there. They fought in the Shoalhaven. They fought the Buxton Hilltop fire. In fact, in the past week they have helped save the historic village of Tharwa near Canberra, which was threatened by fire.

I spoke to Deputy Captain Warren Jones, and he said this was the longest and the most dangerous season he has ever lived through. He also said it is not over yet. He spoke about the members of his crew, how they were just doing their jobs and that they do not do it for accolades or thanks. But I think they deserve recognition. I thank Captain Eric Micheltore, Deputy Captain Warren Jones, Deputy Captain Jared O'Brian, firefighter Josh Crump, firefighter David Sherlock, firefighter Edmund Mayer, firefighter Tom Guthrie, firefighter Allias Tauka, firefighter Sillious Sarankos, firefighter Muhammad Shabaki and firefighter Christopher Cooper.

The Guildford Fire and Rescue team are permanent employees. They were also involved and continue to be involved. I also mention Sydney Helicopters, which is based very close to my electorate in Clyde. It operates joyrides but makes its helicopters available to the State Government for a wide range of uses, primarily fighting fires. That is what they have been doing this summer—week in, week out. They have flown 3,000 hours this season and dropped over 29 million litres of water onto fires. Some of the crew have only been home for three days these holidays. They have been involved in water bombing, winching, aerial incendiary work, infra-red, air attacks and powerline inspections. They have fought many of the huge fires, including at Gaspers Mountain, Green Wattle Creek, Grose River, Dunns Road, Long Gully, Bees Nest and Currowan.

Early on in the season they told me how the fire season is getting longer every year and they are being called in to assist with firefighting earlier every year. Undeniably climate change was a big factor in the severity of these fires but it is certainly not the only factor. The inquiry will consider all this, along with controlled burning, hazard reduction and, in some places, the mess left by forestry operations that added to fuel loads. Ross Garnaut warned 20 years ago that droughts would worsen and fires would be more common as our climate warms. Around 40 years ago the scientific community became widely aware of anthropogenic climate change and began to investigate how global warming might affect life on earth.

The evidence is clear: Temperatures have risen and Professor Garnaut's predictions are coming true. We are enduring a three-year drought. Our summers are longer, hotter and dryer, with more fires. Rainforests have burned. The fire season now starts in August, which used to be the best time of year for controlled burns because it was cold and dry. We need to look at cultural burning practices and learn from those traditions. I hope that, given they were cold burns, we have not lost too much winter to use those techniques effectively. I thank the community organisations and faith-based organisations that held countless fundraisers and drove trucks packed with essentials to fire-ravaged towns.

Situations like this show the best of humanity. Regardless of their background, people band together to help their fellow Australians and work together to lend a hand to people who have lost everything. I am so proud of them. I make particular mention of the local groups around my electorate that have organised fundraisers and assisted with recovery efforts: Sadat Welfare and Sports held a cricket day, the Merrylands RSL held a barbecue, the Auburn Gallipoli Mosque held a barbecue, the United Australian Lebanese Movement donated \$5,000 at its annual Australia Day awards, the Maltese Community Council donated \$500 at its Australia Day function and will be holding a fundraiser shortly, and the Tamil community contributed as well.

Ours is the most multicultural country on earth and the community I represent is one of the most multicultural in the country. That has not stopped us feeling a sense of unity and community with those who have lost so much this summer, and to giving to those in need. For that, I am incredibly proud. Although we live in a beautiful country, it has a terrible beauty and we have seen the full terror of that beauty this season. We have heard so many deeply personal stories of tragedy and miraculous escapes in this place; of the wonderful people who lost everything and the communities that have been destroyed; and of the rebuilding and recovery that has started and will continue for many years. As important as it is to hear those stories, it is just as important to listen in order to minimise the chances of these horrors being repeated.

**Mr LEE EVANS (Heathcote) (11:25:27):** During the years that I have been the member for Heathcote I have spoken about the impact of bushfires on my electorate and community. I feel for the communities that have been impacted. As the member for Heathcote and on behalf of the people in my electorate, I convey our heartfelt condolences for the 25 New South Wales and American lives lost to the recent fires. As someone who has, on several occasions, faced the unpredictable fire monster, I understand the anxiety, terror and confusion of the people of New South Wales about what, how and why this is happening. This will be discussed in the coming weeks, months and years. I note some of the statistics of these recent fires—although, as other members have mentioned, they have not yet finished. Some 2,418 family homes were destroyed; 261 public facilities destroyed; 5,289 outbuildings—farms, haystacks and sheds—destroyed; 178 schools assessed, with three schools destroyed

and 80 schools damaged; 800 kilometres of roads impacted; 177 hospitals and ambulance stations within the fire areas impacted; 14,000 kilometres of private land and Crown land fencing destroyed; and for telecommunications across communities, 216 asymmetric digital subscriber line—ADSL—services, 519 fixed lines and three 3G/4G mobile sites destroyed.

Those statistics are horrendous. When our communities are prepared for the repair and recovery it will be an opportunity to provide stimulus in the impacted firegrounds—not only for those affected but also for contract workers across the State and locally. I mention some local organisations that immediately sprang into action, fighting and supporting the South Coast and areas across the State: Stanwell Park Surf Life Saving Club, which went down to help its comrades on the South Coast, taking water and raising money; Rotary and Lions clubs; ClubsNSW; NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service; the councils that combined efforts, including the Sutherland Shire Council, which sent vehicles down to help with the clean-up; Fire and Rescue Sutherland, Engadine and Menai; Sutherland Shire Police Area Command; and SES Menai and Heathcote.

My family and I had planned a holiday to the South Coast and had only booked two nights accommodation because we thought we would freewheel it and go to drought-affected areas to spend some money and time. When the severity of the fires became apparent, we rang our accommodation to ask whether it was still open. They said, "Yes, please come down." It was in Mollymook, so they were not directly affected. We stayed the night and the next morning when I went to breakfast my local Anglican pastor was there providing pastoral care. She recognised me and came over and started to talk to me. One and a half hours later she was telling me stories that I was starting to get emotional about. One of the stories was of a young girl who had just got her L's and had only one driving lesson. Her parents said to her, "Get in the car with your young sister and go." She got in the car and drove, leaving her parents behind on the property. Obviously they drove along burning roads until eventually a tyre blew out, so they stopped. This 16- or 17-year-old girl did not know what to do.

Luckily a fellow in a souped-up V8 ute stopped—they do not know who he was or where he came from—and said, "Jump in the back." He put a canopy over them and drove like a bat out of hell. When he opened up the canopy they were at a recovery centre. They did not know whether their parents had survived, where they were going or what was happening with them. The pastor had spoken to them and tried to assure them that they would be able to find their parents. Obviously, they did not know which recovery centre they would go to. After a couple of days they eventually were reunited with their parents, but they lost all their property.

All their belongings had been burnt. Everything they knew is now incinerated. That family is completely homeless. The pastor was telling me story after story of sorrow. But the people of the South Coast are resilient and are now starting to come back. When we were going down there I rang the member for Bega, Andrew Constance, and said, "How are you? What's going on?" He said, "If you're down here, can you come to meet me tomorrow at a recovery centre?" So we went down to Bateman's Bay where the army had set up a supermarket for the impacted people. I met Andrew and his wife, Jenny—Jennifer—Minister Elliott and Commissioner of Police Mick Fuller.

There was a pall of smoke over Bateman's Bay, similar to what it was like in Sydney—it was a completely smoked environment. Walking around Bateman's Bay it was obvious that the shopkeepers were absolutely stunned. I said to my wife, "We need to spend some money." We went into a dress shop, but all of its dresses were smoke damaged. The shopkeeper was sitting behind the counter, sobbing. When her friend came in and said, "How are you, Alice?" she basically collapsed. The impact of the fires has made the community anxious. When we walked past the pub, which had only just opened that morning, it was full of blokes shouting each other beers and talking about their experiences. The pub was booming with people. It was like a centre of sorrow; people just talking about their experiences.

It brings the human condition to a point where you understand what our community is about. Many members have spoken about the Australian resilience, but this is beyond resilience. This is beyond what we have ever experienced. This is like we have been hit by an atomic bomb, and that's how I described it to Andrew. I said, "It's just like Armageddon here." Driving down there is eerie. In Bateman's Bay there are no sounds of birds or dogs barking. There is nothing. It is just silence. It is really quite eerie. When my wife and I went back to Mollymook to our accommodation all the birds and animals were congregated because of the trees and blossoms. Mollymook was pumping with the noise of birds, and all sorts of animals appeared.

It takes me back to 1964 when I was three years old. We were awoken at 2.00 a.m. by my father after he had been out on the fireground with his firefighting equipment and personal protective equipment. He had on a woollen jumper and carried a stick with a hessian bag at the end of it; that was his firefighting equipment. At 2.00 a.m. when he woke us up he said, "We're going to have to pack. We're going to have to move. The fire is coming." We lived right on the edge of the Royal National Park. At that stage there was no barrier between the Royal National Park and our home, except for one house behind us. I remember getting up that morning and going out our driveway, which was very steep. We went out to where our car was and there were goannas, snakes,

kangaroos, possums and every known animal coming through our property to get away from the fires. Some of them were singed; some of them were on fire.

To this day I remember the noise of the fire and the booming of the eucalyptus trees exploding. I hope the affected kids can get past it. It will need a lot of finessing to get them to understand that this will not necessarily affect them for the rest of their lives and that they must get over it. I know it sounds stupid and probably unrealistic, but kids who have been impacted must get back to normality and a realistic lifestyle as soon as possible. It is up to all of us as MPs to assist with that because their communities have been ruined and we must rebuild them.

I have been meeting with members representing the electorates of the South Coast and Bega. The member for Bega, Andrew Constance, was in a world of pain and probably still is. People are looking towards him as a leader in his community. That goes for all of us in times of fear and anxiety. All of us have to step up and Andrew has definitely done that. The Premier has also done a fantastic job. I was a bit concerned about her and texted her, asking, "When are you going to have a day off?" She said she will have a day off when the fires stop. I said, "That could be June". She has been an absolute rock and a tower of strength in this whole thing. I congratulate her and Minister Elliott.

I go back to my community. Everyone was involved, as they are in all of our communities. They come out of the woodwork when the chips are down. It is one of the great things about Australian communities. Some communities around the world do not do this and we find it probably a bit odd that it is not the norm. The Americans are quite puzzled at how people do it without being paid and what they are doing volunteering. They find it quite unusual that we have 70,000 volunteers. When things happen we just come out of the woodwork. I know the Muslim and Indian communities have been going to the recovery centres with food trucks and helping feed people. The day after the fire passed through they were there. So much food and clothing and stuff was collected that no more could be accepted.

As I said, we went to the South Coast after all the tourists and holiday-makers had been evacuated. Those towns and villages are really suffering. I ask all MPs to encourage people to go to not only the South Coast but also any fire-affected area. Spend some time and talk to people at the cafes and pubs. Spend some money and show them that we care. Things will not improve in the next couple of weeks or months; it will take the next couple of years. It will not be over in a short time.

I will mention some of my RFS teams that went to fight the fires. I have a long list of things that they have done, but I will be brief. The Bundeena RFS deployed a tanker and five local firefighters to Cooma, the Southern Highlands and Tallong. On 26 January they were also deployed in the Bundeena area, with other shire brigades assisting. Six firefighters were deployed to Mittagong. Crews were sent to Bermagui and Batemans Bay on the South Coast, and to Blaxland Ridge in the Hawksbury. They also went to the north and south west. The Engadine RFS pumper attended a fire at Warumbul Road. The Engadine crew extinguished illegal fires and responded to an illegal campfire at Wattamolla, which is in my electorate. Crews worked at Exeter, Green Wattle Creek and the western edge of the Good and Badja fires. Crews attended a single-vehicle accident at Waterfall.

Coming back to that, a few people were lighting fires. These clowns go out on days when the fire danger is rated high or extreme and they light fires. I spoke to the superintendent from Illawarra and he told me that the police had headed to the house of a fellow who was a known firebug and as they drove up to his house they saw him hiding behind a bush with a lit Bunsen burner. He has a mental illness so they just said, "What are you doing there, mate? Turn it off. Put it down. Come over and talk to us. We are just coming to see you. What are you doing?" The fellow said, "Nothing. I'm not doing anything." They put him in the back of the paddy wagon and took him down to the police station where they gave him some McDonald's and kept him there for 48 hours. They told his mum that he would not be home, that he was going to be kept there until the catastrophic fire had passed, because that is his thing—he lights fires when the fire danger is rated catastrophic.

Getting back to my RFS teams. Loftus and Engadine RFS teams were deployed to Bombala, Cooma, the Royal National Park, Moruya, Bodalla, Narooma, Potato Point, Green Wattle Creek, Cooma, Voyager Point, South Coast, Gaspers Mountain, Hilltop, Mount Wilson, The Oaks, Colo Heights and Yerranderie. Maianbar RFS had a strike team in Exeter and a crew working on property protection in Bundanoon, Penrose, Nowra and Kangaroo Valley. A crew was called to incidents of bonfires at Horderns and Jibbon beaches in the Royal National Park. A crew was deployed to Goulbourn, Orchard Hills and Hilltop on the South Coast.

Menai RFS crews were deployed to assist with fires in the Snowy Mountains area. A strike team from Sutherland South responded to fires in Michelago near Canberra, in the Southern Highlands on Australia Day, and in Mittagong. Crews were deployed to the Good Good fire and to fires at Aaminaby, Cooma, Batemans Bay, Lithgow and Hilltop on Boxing Day. Sutherland Strike Team Bravo assisted with the Grose Valley fire, the fires around Buxton, the Wattle Creek fire and many more.

Heathcote Headquarter RFS crew in Goulburn prepped for deployment to fires. Heavy Tankers and other tankers from Sutherland responded to fires on the Far South Coast. Sutherland tankers responded to fires in the Snowy Mountains and Narooma. Heathcote 1A responded to a fire at Hill Top in the Southern Highlands and Heathcote 1B responded to fires at Kurrajong and Darkes Forest. Illawarra Strike Team completed a back-burn on 30 January and Darkes Forest members, the Illawarra Strike Team crew and Forestry worked together to put in containment lines in the Clyde Mountain fire. Otford, which is a very small crew, went to Moruya for five days and another crew went to Tallong. Crews assisted in the Bega, Taralga and at Bundanoon areas. [*Extension of time*]

In early December, 11 Darkes Forest RFS members on two trucks were on the ground assisting with the Oakdale fire and on New Year's Eve Darkes Forest RFS members were on the ground at Nowra. Helensburgh RFS crew went to Bundanoon as part of the Illawarra Strike Team and responded several times to fires in the Wollondilly shire and in the Blue Mountains and they helped with property protection when the fire impacted Oakdale and Belimbla Park. As the member for Holsworthy has mentioned, Woronora is a water-based RFS, which is a little bit unusual. It has a new state-of-the-art boat, *Bravo*, which is absolutely fantastic. They have spent most of their time on the Warragamba Dam putting out fires. They have a pump on the boat that can reach 100 metres. It is so powerful that the boat goes backwards, so they have to have the engine on to keep it going. It is a fantastic piece of equipment. It spent most of its time at Warragamba Dam, but also helped at Voyager Point with a fire in the electorate of the member for Holsworthy. I have about three pages listing what those guys have done.

Waterfall RFS went to Tenterfield, Drake, Glen Innes, Hawkesbury, Queensland, Port Macquarie, Wauchope, Hilltop, Buxton, Lithgow, Balmoral, Batemans Bay, Hartley Vale, Bermagui, Kangaroo Valley and Cooma. Those people do a fantastic job, all on their own time. The Stanwell Park brigade responded to a fire at Michelago, together with a team from Queanbeyan. It also responded to fires at Fitzroy Falls, Kangaroo Valley and worked on the Green Wattle Creek fire. John, a member of the Stanwell Park brigade, told me he was almost a statistic: A gum tree fell on him but luckily he was positioned in the fork of the tree as it fell. He was knocked out and came within millimetres of being crushed. Thankfully John is still with us—he and his team fought fires throughout the Christmas break. The Scarborough brigade fought fires in the Shoalhaven area, responding to two houses under threat in Wandandian. It assisted in firefighting across New South Wales through December and January.

Close to Christmas on the day of the southerly change, I received an SMS through the Fires Near Me app, advising it was time to consider leaving our home. A fire was burning directly across from us in the Royal National Park. Our house was about 100 metres from the fire, which was moving in the opposite direction. Helicopters then began flying over our home. On a day of catastrophic fire danger, a lunatic wearing an RFS uniform that he purchased on eBay had gone into the bush and lit two separate fires, which eventually headed towards the suburb of Kirrawee. Residents there were also alerted. The fire front stopped there.

The bushfires have brought together the people of New South Wales and people across the country. We must think about the impact of the fires on all communities. The residents in my electorate of Heathcote have experienced anxiety due to the smoke and constant media attention. I encourage members to communicate with their communities and provide regular status reports on what is being done. People are still feeling significant angst—that will continue if they perceive that members are not doing the right thing. I thank all members who have contributed to the condolence motion. It has been a tough couple of days. The New South Wales Parliament owes a great debt of gratitude to our firefighters and all participating community organisations.

**Mr PHILIP DONATO (Orange) (11:47:18):** I make a contribution to debate on the condolence motion before the House. The summer of 2019-20 will go down in the State's history as one of the worst bushfire seasons ever experienced. Prolonged drought, combined with catastrophic fire conditions, led to an inferno the size of a European country. We have never seen its like before. The smell of smoke, which blanketed much of the State, and the red glow of the afternoon sun were constant reminders of the fires burning over the summer, even for those who were lucky enough to be many miles from the fire fronts. The impact of the fires on people's lives, communities, properties, families and, indeed, on the nation has been profound and will never be forgotten.

The condolence motion before the House is about recognising the brave men and women who fought the fires, protecting life and property on behalf of their communities, neighbours, fellow citizens and the State of New South Wales—especially those who paid the ultimate sacrifice and will not return home to their families or communities. They should be remembered as heroes, as people who stood up to serve and fight these terrifying fires—the worst in recent living memory. On behalf of my electorate of Orange, I extend my deepest condolences to the family, friends and communities of those who lost their lives during the bushfires. My electorate was fortunate to avoid the brunt of the fires but it is not immune to such events. Mount Canobolas was subject to bushfires as recently as 2018.

However, there are dozens of RFS brigades in my electorate. Many members of my community were involved in firefighting duties across much of the State. I spoke with brigade members who had been at Tenterfield, up on the North Coast and also down on the South Coast fighting fires on behalf of other communities to help keep them safe. Many people over the Christmas and new year period spent time away from their families and from work to put their lives on the line and protect others in need. I have read the contributions from the member for Bega, the member for Prospect and the member for Blue Mountains, and I have also heard other contributions from many members. These personal and private experiences and what members have directly witnessed provided a raw, emotional insight into the devastation of these fires in those areas.

One can only imagine the impact these fires have had on them and their communities. I acknowledge and thank our emergency service agencies, the New South Wales Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW, NSW Police Force, NSW Ambulance, NSW SES, NSW National Parks and Forestry Corporation of NSW for their diligent duty over the summer to keep us safe. However, I especially thank our volunteer members. As the member for Heathcote said, the RFS is the world's largest volunteer organisation and comprises the front line that fights these fires. Many people in my community are intergenerational members of their brigades. Fathers, grandfathers, uncles, aunts, cousins, sisters and brothers have been members of our brigades for many years.

As soon as that pager goes off, they willingly answer the call and spend time away from their families, not knowing what the situation may involve, whether they may respond to a motor vehicle accident or a serious bushfire. They may not know how long they will be away, which causes anxiety for family members who are at home waiting to hear from their loved ones and what the story is. These fires have been unprecedented in terms of their length, duration and severity. The families of those firefighters should be acknowledged, because they also sacrifice a lot to support family members who are on the front line fighting these fires. I commend the Premier on her continued support of the agencies and the communities affected over the Christmas and new year period. I watched the Premier on television every morning either at the RFS command centre or visiting local townships. I commend her on her leadership through this difficult time.

I thank the health Minister, Brad Hazzard, who personally called me over that period to offer his assistance, which was a very kind gesture. This bushfire season has left scars in the landscape and in the hearts and minds of many in our community. These scars will take a long time to heal—some may never. We must support and look out for each other during these difficult times. Many people in my community—and there are too many to name—have generously donated money, groceries, clothing, housing and various other items to support their local brigades. The generosity that is shown in times of need never ceases to amaze me. My community is extremely generous. Whether it is support for the ongoing drought or the bushfires, the strength, spirit, unity and resilience of the people of the electorate of Orange is truly amazing. Once again, I extend my deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones. Words cannot describe what they must be feeling. I commend the motion to the House.

**Mr JOHN SIDOTI (Drummoyne—Minister for Sport, Multiculturalism, Seniors and Veterans)**  
**(11:53:49):** I support the motion moved by the Premier and I echo the sentiments she made in the House on Tuesday. Over the past few days members of the House have expressed their condolences on behalf of their community. We have heard harrowing recounts of what members, volunteers and other people were subjected to over summer as they defended their homes, their land, their animals, their pets and, indeed, their communities. I share the sorrow expressed by my colleagues and those members who have already addressed this House. I take the opportunity to address the Parliament on behalf of my constituents of Drummoyne as their elected representative. We send our sincerest sympathies and condolences to the communities affected by these unprecedented bushfires in the 2019-20 season.

Whilst my community resides in the Sydney metropolitan area I highlight that we share in the anguish for our State—and, indeed, our country—and our brothers and sisters in rural and regional New South Wales. We mourn the 25 brave men and women who have tragically lost their lives. We are burdened by the sadness felt by the families, the loved ones, the friends and the communities of those who are no longer with us. As a father, the losses of the three RFS volunteers—Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer and Samuel McPaul—shake me to my core. All three were young fathers themselves.

The State memorial service will be held in Sydney Olympic Park, just outside my electorate. Many of my constituents have advised me that they will be attending the service to pay their respects. I also acknowledge the three American firefighters who left their families to come to the aid of our country during our time of need. Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr tragically lost their lives in a terrible accident whilst helping to fight the bushfires. On behalf of my electorate I send my deepest condolences to the loved ones of all those valiant heroes.

The bushfire season currently being experienced by New South Wales is unprecedented. Since the start of the season there have been over 11,000 bushfires and grassfires across the State. We have heard from our

Premier, Ministers, the Rural Fire Service and other government agencies that the season is far from over. I think I speak for all of us when I say that hearing this is extremely distressing. Approximately 5.5 million hectares of land in New South Wales has been burnt. The gravity of the bushfire is evident in the statistics that well over 11,000 homes have been affected. Around 2,400 homes have been completely destroyed and a further 945 have been damaged. A home is more than just four walls. A home is a place of love, fond memories, picture frames and family heirlooms. While we cannot replace these intangible things we will support our affected communities as they rebuild.

We also remember the voiceless victims: the pets, the working animals and the wildlife that succumbed to the bushfires. Whilst we may never know the exact number as it is difficult to quantify, we respect this great loss. I also acknowledge that the bushfires have ravaged communities that have been struggling in one of the worst droughts in living memory. It is yet another setback for our rural and regional communities, who have lost some 14,500 livestock and more than 600,000 hectares of valuable pasture as a result of the bushfires. My community acknowledges the 2.7 million hectares of national park that have been severely impacted by the fires.

It has been heartening to see that our natural environment has already started to slowly bounce back after such trauma but we understand it will take many years for the environment to regenerate and recover fully. Whilst most in my community have never found ourselves in a situation where bushfires are at our back door or where we need to decide whether to defend our threatened homes or to pack up and leave, this catastrophic bushfire season has affected us all emotionally. It is almost a feeling of guilt and immense heartbreak to see what has happened to our beautiful State, to see others suffer and hurting as a result of such grave losses. These bushfires have not divided our State by any means. Instead, city and country have been unified in grief and in support for those who have been affected by the catastrophic events of the last few months.

The process to recuperate and rebuild will take a long time. So I encourage my community of Drummoyne to make the commitment to visit our bushfire-affected communities and to buy from small businesses in these rural and regional areas whenever they get the opportunity. I acknowledge all of the community groups in the Drummoyne electorate that have come together to help those in need. They have acted swiftly and quickly to send relief to affected communities. For example, the Victoria Avenue Children's Centre in Concord West and Mortlake Public School organised trucks to visit the South Coast. Those trucks were filled with food and clothing to provide immediate assistance. The Rotary Club of Concord and the City of Canada Bay Men's Shed have initiated a tool donation appeal. Garden and construction tools will be sent to communities in the Picton, Balmoral and Buxton areas. Those tools will be given to families to fill the hundreds of home sheds that require rebuilding after the fires.

I have had conversations with many constituents who have been heartbroken and want to do something to help. Trivia nights and fundraisers have been held. Personal donations have also been made to various organisations and charities assisting with the bushfire recovery. This proves that volunteering and generosity is alive and well in our State. We may not know firsthand what our rural and regional communities ravaged by fire are going through, but these communities are in our thoughts, our hearts and our prayers. We will do our best to support them and help them in their time of need and immense pain.

I acknowledge the bravery of the firefighters at the Drummoyne fire station who assisted with firefighting operations. The firefighters at Drummoyne are kind and selfless people. I am proud that they are valued members of our community. I thank them for their service. I extend that same gratitude and thanks to all firefighters and volunteers of the Rural Fire Service for their selfless sacrifice and courage who put their lives on the line to assist others. Their efforts will never be forgotten. I acknowledge Premier Gladys Berejiklian for the remarkable leadership she has shown. She has proven her unwavering commitment to the people of New South Wales. She did not rest when times were tough and is doing her best to support communities affected by the fires. She has ensured recovery and assistance will continue and to be readily available for communities that now need to recover and rebuild.

Finally, on behalf of my community I acknowledge and thank the NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner, Mr Shane Fitzsimmons. In the press conferences over the summer he appeared to have the weight of the world on his shoulders, but he remained focussed and provided real leadership during the fires. An elected member feels a certain weight when his or her community is suffering. I know that many members of this House are incredibly emotional and are deeply affected by what has happened to their communities. I say to those members on both sides of the House that we will support you. My community will support you. You are not alone. We will work side by side with you to assist in the recovery from these fires.

**Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) (12:03:46):** Today I pay tribute to the men, women and children whose lives have been ravaged by the bushfires that have wrought havoc throughout New South Wales. The 2019-20 fire season started early in New South Wales because the vast majority of the State was drought affected. So residents braced themselves, but the conditions escalated well beyond the projected threshold anticipated by the

broadier community. Communities far and wide, including the North Coast, mid North Coast, Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Southern Highlands, South Coast, Riverina and Snowy Mountains, have felt the full force of Mother Nature—some areas hit far harder than others.

Words alone cannot do justice to the impact these fires have had on communities across New South Wales who have endured through insurmountable odds as fires spread across our lands. A state of emergency has been declared in New South Wales several times in recent months as fires ripped through more than five million hectares of land, destroying almost 2,500 homes. Sadly, 25 lives have been lost in New South Wales to date. Three of those lost were firefighting aviators who travelled from the United States of America to help their Australian brethren on the front line of these unprecedented, catastrophic weather conditions. To the families of Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, our hearts are heavy for your loss and we will be eternally grateful for the sacrifices made by those brave men who gave their all in the protection of our nation.

We also bear the loss of three local RFS volunteer firefighters who died while on the front lines protecting our community from harm. Together we mourn the loss of Samuel McPaul from the Morven Rural Fire Brigade and Andrew O'Dwyer and Geoffrey Keaton, both from the Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade. All of these men were instrumental to the firefighting efforts across the State. Their role in those efforts helped save countless lives and properties in the process. Throughout my tenure as the State member for Fairfield, I personally had the privilege of knowing Andrew and Geoffrey as representatives of our local RFS brigade at Horsley Park.

Over the years, too, I have gotten to know the O'Dwyer family through my church of St John the Baptist at Bonnyrigg Heights. To learn of the tragedy that befell our community that night hit home so very hard for many families in our local community. Families would be different from that day forward. The loss of our brave RFS volunteers has had a ripple effect that has resonated with individuals and families far and wide as we all mourn and grieve together during an incredibly difficult time. Speaking for the greater Fairfield community, we were shaken to the core by the loss of Andrew and Geoffrey, who were taken from us too soon, leaving behind their young families.

Geoff and his fiancée, Jess, have a handsome young boy named Harvey, whom Geoff loved so dearly. Andrew and his wife, Melissa, have a beautiful little girl named Charlotte. It was gut-wrenching to learn the fate of these two young men. To Jess, Harvey, Melissa and Charlotte, please know that Geoff and Andrew will be remembered from now until the end of time as heroes who never backed away when faced with adversity. These brave men fiercely protected their friends, family and community while confronting the perils that threatened the very existence of so many lives. They are heroes to us all.

It was fitting for Andrew and Geoff to be posthumously awarded the Commissioner's Commendation for Bravery and Service. Our community is indebted to these men for their efforts and I, for one, will never forget their sacrifice. I acknowledge and thank Premier Berejiklian, Commissioner Fitzsimmons, Minister Elliott and members of this Parliament who attended the service held in honour of these fallen heroes for supporting the families, friends and community who just lost a part of themselves. Together we farewelled two good mates, husbands, fathers and brothers to us all.

I commend each and every member who has given their all to assist and support their communities throughout this difficult time. These recent events go beyond politics and this week we have been afforded the opportunity to highlight the tremendous contributions of some extraordinary individuals while highlighting the impact of the loss and devastation brought upon our communities. One thing I can take away from the speeches I have heard from members in this House, is the power of the Australian spirit. The courage, fortitude, resilience and mateship that has been portrayed across our vast State is a true testament to the nature of Australians and the actions we take when the chips are down.

Communities from far and wide have given their support one to another to protect homes, communities and the lives of their fellow Australians and everything they hold dear. I am incredibly proud of my local community, which by the grace of God was thankfully spared from this wanton destruction. The community rallied behind their fellow brothers and sisters to do its part in supporting our neighbouring communities. Throughout the bushfires our multicultural community groups were incredibly active in our area raising awareness and giving financial support to those impacted communities in dire need of help.

For example, while out with the Vietnamese Community in Australia (VCA) in December, I was overcome with emotion at the kindness and generosity shown by so many passers-by in Freedom Plaza, Cabramatta. Many individuals—who did not have much themselves—generously gave all they could because they knew there were people out there in a worse position and they wanted to help make a difference. Although our community was not burned by the fires, our community was suffering alongside their countrymen and our hearts were heavy with the impact of these fires and the trauma it has inflicted on Australians. For a low-socioeconomic

community, it was incredible to see so many people rallying to provide financial aid and support to their fellow Australians. On that day, \$42,000 was raised by the VCA and its volunteers in conjunction with the Red Cross.

In recent months my office has also been a designated collection point for the local Fairfield City Salvation Army chapter, which has committed to attending to communities directly affected by the bushfires that are trying to recover and rebuild. I extend my sincerest appreciation and admiration to the local Salvo volunteers and to the members of the Fairfield community for their kindness and generosity during this time—especially to Community First Step and Barone's Pharmacy. They went above and beyond expectations, giving very generously to this fantastic initiative.

The loss of life across our State has been hard on us all but to the families of those we lost as a result of these tragic events I say, on behalf of all of those in this Parliament, we are sorry for your loss and we extend our sincerest condolences and sympathies during this difficult time. To the families of RFS volunteers who have taken the time to be present in the gallery during members' contributions, I thank you for coming here to show your support for these important contributions that aim to shed light on the plight of communities across the State and will hopefully allow some people to begin the healing process.

I also acknowledge and pay my respects to my colleagues in this place, especially the member for Prospect, Dr Hugh McDermott, who has been bravely combating these fires on the front line alongside his brethren from the Horsley Park RFS Brigade. I also commend the member for Blue Mountains, Ms Trish Doyle, who not only endured through this hardship with her own community but also as the shadow Minister for Emergency Services and the mum of a volunteer firefighter. Trish has always made herself available to support and prop up not only her family and local area but also communities across the State. I am incredibly thankful that we have such a dedicated and remarkable member with us in this Parliament. To my rural colleagues, many of whose communities have been devastated by these fires, you and your communities are in our hearts and prayers. As a Parliament, I have no doubt that each and every member of this place will do everything in our power throughout this time to assist and support you during the recovery process.

The message is clear: You are not alone. To every emergency service employee and volunteer, on behalf of the Parliament, I extend our sincerest admiration and appreciation for everything you have tirelessly given to support those in need throughout New South Wales. Without these brave men and women, we would have suffered enormously higher losses of life, property and land to the fires that have raged across the State. Lastly, I acknowledge and commend all government and non-government organisations that are presently out and about in communities affected by these bushfires, attempting to assist those in need during the recovery process. Whilst many families and communities have been displaced by these events, there are people on the front line ready to help them pick up the pieces.

**Ms FELICITY WILSON (North Shore) (12:14:36):** I support the motion of the Premier. The recent and unprecedented bushfires across the State have been devastating to families, communities, our wildlife and our natural environment. But in times of extreme adversity the very best of the Australian spirit shines through in our resilience and determination to overcome any challenge presented. And, as we know, these fires have been a monumental challenge for families and communities. We have all witnessed the incredible bravery of and sacrifices made by the volunteers of the NSW Rural Fire Service and all of our emergency service personnel, who gave up most of their Christmas and New Year holidays to be out on the front line fighting fires; protecting lives, property, livestock and wildlife; and commencing the recovery. They are still out there today.

The greatest tragedy of these bushfires has been the loss of life. I send my heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of the 25 people killed, including three Rural Fire Service volunteers lost while defending others and three United States aerial firefighters killed far from home while keeping us safe. Their sacrifices will never be forgotten. As the member for South Coast said in her contribution, when reflecting on the horrific damage and loss of lives and property, saying "thank you" does not seem to be enough, but they are the only words we have. I cannot begin to imagine what the affected families and communities are feeling as they come to terms with the terrible reality of losing loved ones, homes and livestock; the destruction of their towns and villages and all their history; and the loss of wildlife and habitat. It is truly devastating. The recovery and rebuild will be a long process but those of us living in metropolitan areas will stand shoulder to shoulder with all our fire affected communities on this journey.

The fire season still has months to go. The extreme weather conditions during the fires have made it immensely challenging for our fireys, who have had to overcome hot dry winds, soaring temperatures and unpredictable shifts in weather conditions. Across the country and the city we are all concerned that this fire season will be repeated in the future as the impact of climate change on weather conditions heightens the risk of catastrophic fires. We must act to limit climate change, mitigate its impacts and, where necessary, adapt. In Sydney we felt the palpable grief and trauma of those in our fire-affected regions. We had near daily reminders, with thick smoke blanketing the city—a mere glimpse of what was being faced up and down the coast of New South Wales.



I want those communities and my colleagues in this place to know that we do care and will do anything and everything we can to help. I know that my words convey the sentiment of the North Shore community.

We do not always know what to do but if our regional and rural communities tell us to visit the South Coast and bring an esky to support their businesses we will, and we are. If they tell us they need money, goods or helping hands we will offer them too. In my electorate of North Shore there has been an overwhelming response to the bushfire crisis. Following these disasters there has been a wonderful spirit of generosity and a desire to help those impacted. Over the past few months our local community has been passionate about donating to those affected by bushfires. Many locals have donated or set up fundraising drives. In particular, I acknowledge the work of Carlah Walton, who facilitated an overwhelming amount of donations for the bushfire relief effort for the mid North Coast and North Coast throughout November and December. Our local online community, Mosman Living, set up an online fundraiser for its 23,000 members to assist the devastated wildlife. Those funds were donated to organisations such as the Port Macquarie Koala Hospital.

Over the Christmas holidays my own family spent time up in Port Macquarie when we visited my in-laws in Taree. We saw the devastation in that area. On my daughter's first birthday we visited local wildlife and adopted a couple of the koalas to offer some support. Many members of our local State Emergency Service in North Sydney and Mosman have participated in the volunteer efforts. People such as Alan Price, who is also a member of the NSW RFS, have joined RFS volunteers on the ground to assist with the rescue and recovery operations. Whilst we acknowledge the work of the NSW RFS, I also thank Fire and Rescue NSW, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Forestry Corporation, NSW Ambulance, the NSW Police Force and the Australian Defence Force, who have all been working together to assist bushfire-affected communities across the State.

Regional communities also needed medical assistance during the fires. A large contingent of medical staff from the Northern Sydney Local Health District, in particular Royal North Shore Hospital, travelled to these communities as response teams to assist with the relief efforts. I acknowledge registered nurses Phillippa Weaver, Emily Cotterill, Tamara Sole, Rachel Grundy, Gemma Berriman, Jennifer Campbell and John Townsend. I also acknowledge social workers Sandra Barr-Lynch, Emily Mahony, Kate Galbraith, Helen Tonkin and Catherine Jones. Since the first response team joined the relief efforts, more than 50 staff from the Northern Sydney Local Health District have assisted the Murrumbidgee Local Health District and the Southern NSW Local Health District. I thank them for their efforts.

The Rotary Club of North Sydney has been proactive in raising awareness for drought- and bushfire-affected communities. It recently announced a donation of \$3,000 to the Rotary Australia World Community Service Bushfire appeal to provide support for families in need and to the volunteer firefighters. I thank the staff of North Sydney Council who travelled to the South Coast to assist Shoalhaven Council in its recovery efforts. I thank the North Sydney Community Centre which held a workshop to make pouches for animals injured or orphaned by the fires.

The Middle Harbour Yacht Club teamed up with Above and Beyond Boating to organise a day in March to take firefighting volunteers and their families out on the water for the day. As much as communities need our assistance in rebuilding their lost homes and livelihoods, it is also important that we think about the volunteers who have given up so much of their time, leaving their families and their work to fight these fires. The event organisers were seeking fifty boats to be donated for the day, however they received such an overwhelming response that they put a hold on registrations. Some 250 boats were donated across Middle Harbour Yacht Club and the Royal Motor Yacht Club in Pittwater. I thank the members of Middle Harbour Yacht Club who are donating their time and vessels to say thanks to our fireys.

The bushfires have been devastating to our native wildlife across New South Wales. It will be quite some time before we know the full impact. Thankfully the Taronga Zoo Wildlife Hospital in my electorate is providing rehabilitation and care for koalas, wombats, red-necked wallabies and grey-headed flying foxes that have been impacted by the bushfires. I was fortunate enough to join the staff at the wildlife hospital to see firsthand and discuss how they are assisting injured wildlife to get back on their feet. Unfortunately the fires in Kosciuszko National Park have damaged the habitat of the endangered southern corroboree frog and a number of frogs have perished. However, thanks to the continued work of Taronga Zoo, the species remains secure with captive populations continuing to thrive at Taronga.

Sadly, two members of the team at Taronga Zoo Wildlife Hospital have been impacted. One is from Mogo and the other, who is from the mid North Coast, lost her home last year. Yet they are still at work in Mosman, nursing and caring for the wildlife, which are in such desperate need of their nurturing. I thank all members of my community who have donated to or assisted with the bushfire recovery effort in any small way. Every little bit counts and it is vital that we continue to support our friends in regional and bushfire-affected communities as they begin to rebuild.

In considering how to put my condolences into words for this motion I reflected on my childhood in Cessnock on the day the Newcastle earthquake struck. I have few detailed memories from my childhood but I remember that day. I remember the confusion and disquiet when it hit us. I remember the fear and anxiety for information when we realised the epicentre was in Newcastle, where my mum was spending the day. I remember the aftermath and its impact on the psyche of Newcastle and the Hunter. I remember the shock that such a disaster could occur, the extent of its devastation, and the long and tiring work for first responders and rescue teams.

I will never know what those impacted by these bushfires are feeling. I can only commit myself to listening to what they need and providing support for as long as the recovery effort takes. I thank all the services that have provided so much support and continue to do so. I send my condolences to the families and friends of those we have lost, to those grieving the loss of property and livelihoods and to all those who have been impacted by the bushfires.

**Mr JIHAD DIB (Lakemba) (12:23:45):** This is a time that will be forever etched in our memories. It is a time we will look back on and know that at this critical juncture of our history we saw the very best of ourselves. We have seen what we can be when confronted with tragedy beyond imagination. I extend the deep condolences of my electorate of Lakemba to those who have lost loved ones in this awful time. This was a time when we put aside our politics and did the job that people expected of us, a time when we showed the leadership that was needed. Words will never be enough but they are all we have right now.

I am grateful for the opportunity to share my thoughts in this place. Over the past few days we have heard heart-wrenching contributions from members. At the outset I thank the members who represent the electorates of Bega, Blue Mountains and Prospect for sharing their most heartfelt thoughts and fears and revealing the rawness of their experiences. They brought us to tears and they have grown in our esteem. On behalf of my community, I thank them for everything they have done. I especially acknowledge the member for Bega. I hope he looks after himself through this very difficult time. The member for Prospect lost friends and the member for Blue Mountains thought for a few hours that she had lost her son. These are extraordinarily tragic circumstances and we must look after one another.

Many members shared the journeys of their communities, whether they fought the fires or were affected by them. Other members, whose communities, like mine, were not affected by the fires, shared their community's journey of supporting impacted communities. It is important to hear these stories about the situations that afflicted us. Too often in this place we witness the argy-bargy of the game of politics but this past summer, when we have seen human vulnerability at its most exposed, we have witnessed the spirit of togetherness, something that is often lacking in the public domain.

I hope that from this point we can be involved in a kinder, more compassionate and sincerer form of politics. As I have said many times before, we are but servants of the public. Over the past few days I have heard so many of my colleagues speak about humanity. While I understand the need for robust politics, I know that we are all better than the cheap and nasty politics that at times have played out in this place over the years. People hate it. When someone is going through the worst moments of their life they do not give a damn about it. They just want someone to be there; they want a post to lean on during their toughest times.

The statistics are horrific. New South Wales has been the worst affected State with 25 fatalities; nearly 2,500 homes lost, some of which were the homes of emergency service personnel—and we have heard so many stories of people who lost their homes while defending the homes of others—and five million hectares of land burnt. More than one billion animals have been lost. Let us not forget that the fires are still burning, people are still worried and firefighters are still very busy. It is not over yet. Like everyone else, I am praying as hard as I can for desperately needed, fire-extinguishing rain.

The loss of life is the most difficult thing to come to terms with. Some people perished defending their homes and others died defending the property of others. Australia can never repay the debt of gratitude they owe to the three brave Americans who died thousands of miles from their loved ones. Every single one of those lives is a scar that we carry deeply. Each and every person lost had a story, a family, dreams, hopes and aspirations for something better. It is our responsibility to honour them in the best way we can as we rebuild at this difficult time. I cannot fathom the ferocity of the bushfires or the moment a person feels their life and their life's possessions are in danger. I cannot imagine the grief of losing a loved one to a monster that burns everything in its path. But we all can make the promise to do everything in our collective power to overcome this disaster.

There are images that will never be erased from our memory: heroes in yellow suits, with blackened faces, confronting walls of flames; heroes collapsed from exhaustion; the heartbreaking funerals for perished souls; a young boy having a medal pinned to his chest by the commissioner; families huddling on beaches desperately trying to shelter from the flames; people sobbing uncontrollably in the arms of strangers; buildings burnt to the ground; and, one of the most haunting, a kangaroo burnt to death as it was caught in fencing wire. We

can never get these images out of our heads and we should not try to, for they will remind us of the struggle of the summer of 2019-20.

Much has been said and written about the worst fire season Australia has seen. Every State was struck but New South Wales was hardest hit. As smoke clogged our cities, in many regions the fires ripped through national parks, forests and towns where residents and firefighters fought bravely to save everything they could. The fire damage extended to communication and power services which isolated towns from much-needed resources. Australians responded in the only way they know how and that is to rally together. The true character of our nation is the strength of its people. We demonstrated that we are made of something that cannot be manufactured. It is found in our unbreakable spirit, in our DNA. It is what being Australian is all about. No matter who we are, what we believe in, the colour of our skin or whether we were born here, we all come together in the most adverse of circumstances.

It has been referred to as the summer that broke our hearts, the summer of darkness and the summer from hell. But I also see this as the summer of compassion. Many people across the State, including my electorate of Lakemba, conveyed a message of hope to those who suffered catastrophic losses during the bushfire season. We let them know through our actions that we stand united. Daily we were confronted with horrific news that fellow citizens were living in the fire path. They were in the depths of despair as they faced the relentless firestorms. Worrying reports about towns being surrounded and trapped by out-of-control fires filled our news broadcasts.

I experienced this ring of fire entrapment with my family as we holidayed on the beautiful South Coast, which is a place that holds many special memories for me, my wife and kids. Many communities felt overwhelming fear when they realised they would never recover from this devastation that surrounded their towns. I remember so vividly the conversations I had with locals and holiday-makers, witnessing the raw emotion, seeing the makeshift camps at Mollymook Beach and feeling their sense of helplessness when communications were lost. We were safe but not having access to fuel, food and a way out really brought home how vulnerable we all are. Eventually we left but I felt a sense of guilt knowing that I was sleeping in my own bed while others who had lost everything were at a loss. I think that is the driving force behind people deciding to do whatever they can to make things better for others.

We were still on the South Coast when news emerged of a tragic death and loss of properties at Conjola and Yatte Yattah. News was circulating that a friend and former teacher colleague had tragically lost her partner, Laurie Andrew, in the devastating fires. His death is a tragic reality of the impact of the uncontrollable firestorms. Maybe even more tragic is the fact that at that time he and Michelle had been planning their great retirement trip around Australia together. The son of dear friends of over 25 years, Glen and Nikky Royall, lost his home. He tried to defend it but thankfully left his home when he knew this was an unclimbable mountain. A few days later the fire attacked his parents' township. I remember Glen wanted to stay and defend his property but I said to him, "Mate, do not take any risks. We can build a home, we can replace a car, but we can't bring back a life." Thankfully their property survived but, more importantly, so did they.

The highway opened and we were told to evacuate. We followed instructions and went north. Having lived in Ulladulla for many years I have driven the stretch of road between Ulladulla and Nowra hundreds of times but it had never been this eerie. Normally the car would be filled with three noisy children, but we travelled this journey in absolute silence. Trees were smouldering, signs were destroyed, homes were burnt and there was a sense of desolation. We had never seen this scene before. It was so different to the beautiful South Coast that we knew.

As many people do, we stopped at McDonald's in South Nowra where we met fire crews from Heathcote and Bundeena who were on their way to support the community of Narooma, which was expected to be hit with catastrophic conditions the next day. We asked our kids to thank those heroes and all their peers for leaving their families to help others. We told them to look them in the eyes and to let them know that we are indebted to them. Saying thank you just did not feel as though it was enough. I have never seen war but those brave heroes reminded me of someone preparing for battle. There were nervous smiles but I could sense their need for service. There was recognition that they were walking into a firestorm that no-one could predict and that they may not make it home.

One of the firefighters kept hugging his children and that brought tears to my eyes. We owe these incredible volunteers so much. Words will never do them justice. As a community we watched in horror as our fellow citizens faced their darkest days. They were left bereft of the fruits of their labour. The mounting death toll and the images of the devastating destruction of our wildlife and natural environment reinforced the immense lasting impact of the fires. There were many instances when we received news of lives lost and of the immense dangers that our firefighters had faced while protecting entire towns from firestorms that raged out of control. When those firestorms destroyed towns, people around Australia and overseas watched in horror.

The true spirit of Australia came to the fore when local businesses, community groups and volunteers formed partnerships to bring much-needed relief to those left in dire conditions. We saw the strength of our nation and our people. It may not have changed anything but it was the first step in the healing process. In the electorate of Lakemba we dug deep into our pockets and resources to deliver essential items by the truckload and bring some relief to devastated communities. Volunteers spent countless hours packing an incredible number of items donated by locals, which included essentials such as sunblock, sanitary products, clothing, shoes, toiletries, bottled water, non-perishable food and other practical items. Although the community in my electorate could not be there to physically hold a hose and fight the fires, we rallied in the only way the human spirit knows how. You see, when one person hurts, we all hurt, and the tragic circumstances reverberated through the streets in my part of the world. We asked for donations and within two days we had filled three trucks and two vans with food and other essentials to take to Cobargo and Braidwood.

Today, I thank my electorate of Lakemba and many others for their camaraderie. I love my community and I saw their spirit when we stood side by side at collection points to pack items for distribution to fire-ravaged communities. My heart filled with pride to see the generosity of the people I am honoured to represent. They embodied the true spirit of this country, which is a place where we not only feel each other's pain but we also step up to do whatever we can to help when it is needed. I am proud of the way we rallied. Community groups, local businesses, mums and dads, pensioners, young kids and many others joined forces in support of their fellow citizens who lost more than just their homes and livestock; we know that they lost hope. It was our role to do anything possible to lift their spirits. We needed to show them that we felt their loss. As a community we did what we could to stand by their side as they faced horrific losses. We know the devastation goes beyond bricks and mortar. The pain and dislocation runs much deeper than that—it is etched into your soul.

There are so many stories about donations that I simply cannot do them all justice. Many people in our community know what it is like to go without. For some who have sought refuge in this beautiful nation of ours, this was the way they wanted to help. Not one of the businesses we approached for donations said no. Indeed, we had to ask people to stop bringing items because we simply could not fit any more into our storage facilities. Among the hundreds of inspiring events, two really stood out: an elderly lady came with a bag of goods from her pantry and apologised because she could not afford to buy any more; and three-year-old Zayde donated a scooter, still in its box, that was graciously received the following day by a young girl whose family had lost everything. It is inspiring to think that those communities, which were completely unknown to each other, will be intertwined forever.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge those who, despite their limited financial resources, found ways to support their fellow citizens. Sometimes it is the people who can least afford it who have the most generous spirit. That is the spirit I am proud of. It is those seemingly small things that provide the most support and comfort. Everybody jumped on board. The Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs gave the practical gift of portable phone chargers and the Greater Western Sydney Giants also made donations. The local chemist donated boxes and boxes of medical supplies, sunblock, clothing and everything we could imagine. Every supermarket donated pallets of water. The butcher gave us a thousand sausages without any question. The list goes on. We did not sit there wishing there was something we could do; we took action. That is why I love my community so much.

We may be maligned on occasion but my community never ceases to inspire me with its humanity. I will briefly mention a series of trips we made because the donations kept coming. We left Lakemba at 4.00 a.m. and went to Cobargo. I acknowledge Minister Constance and Shannon from his office, who was my point of contact. They are doing a great job. They are doing the best they can. The guys I was with had never been down south before so it was like giving them a history tour along the way as I was stopping and explaining things to them. It was devastating. We went to the camp. A group of people started cooking the sausages, others passed sweets around and the dopey ones such as us started unloading the trucks. I think a better idea would have been to start passing the sweets around! A lady came up to me, gave me a big hug and said, "I've never met a Muslim before." I said, "You can tick that off your bucket list now."

I acknowledge that government agencies were there doing what they could. The place was chaotic but in that chaos people were trying to rebuild their lives. Jim Molan had just arrived. I had a good chat with him. I have known him from the days of Kokoda. I do not know if I am misleading the House when I say that even Jim agreed that the sausages from Punchbowl were the best ones he has ever had. We then went to Braidwood. The Kings Highway was closed, so we arrived at the Braidwood BlazeAid camp about 10 o'clock that night to deliver what else we had left. We met some Tassie firefighters and people from all over the State who just wanted to say thank you. A few days later we went to Ettalong, because the donations kept coming. A BlazeAid camp was supporting people around Tumut. I thank my colleague the member for Wagga Wagga, Dr Joe McGirr, who met us there. He is a decent human being. I told him we were going to get there at seven o'clock but we got there at nine o'clock—I blame the M5 traffic. He helped us unload and someone took a photo of Joe carrying a box and I was standing around. I think that was really unfair and not right—Joe carried only one box. I also thank Mayor James Hayes.

Last week we did another run to Taree to support the community; we had been there before. Two kids stood out for me. It was the first day of school and they were in brand-new school uniforms. I acknowledge Wingham High and Wingham Brush Public School because those kids had lost their home and the school gave them uniforms, books and everything they needed. I think we do not give enough credit to schools and their sense of community. We must give them a lot more credit. From there we went to Purfleet to visit the Indigenous Biripi community. This is *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. Do not get caught up in this stuff. This is not real; people are real and stories are real. That is what humanity is. [*Extension of time*]

I put on record the groups because this is not a one-person show; this is our extraordinary community. I know all members here say that their community is the best but I would not want to represent any other community. I thank Human Appeal International Australia and the leadership that it has shown as one of our local charities. It not only helped us with donations but also organised trucks and buses and gave us a place to store things. It has given us additional money for the next lot of donations. I also thank the City of Canterbury Bankstown and, in particular, my good friend Deputy Mayor Bilal El-Hayek for his work. He also works with the PCYC—that is his job. There is also Lighthouse Community Support and a bloke called Gandhi Sin, whom I have mentioned before in the House. These are community heroes. There is the Lakemba Travel Centre and Amer, the Lebanese Muslim Association, the United Muslim Association, the Muslim Women's Association, the Bulldogs, the Giants, the community centres—and the list goes on. Every community group got involved.

I also thank my colleague the member for Canterbury, Sophie Cotsis, and my Federal colleague the member for Watson, Tony Burke. We have had so many contributions from our community that we have decided the three of us will combine resources. We have created a community group called Side-by-Side because we want to reflect on all the things that have been done. Our plan—I do not know whether I should give it away here—is to give some gifts to local community groups down the track because there is support now but we will still need it in two, three and fourth months. Side-by-Side is a portal that will give community organisations—often the silent heroes—a platform to track their contributions. We feel privileged to have added our support to this initiative. There has been so much support, including from the Lakemba and Punchbowl mosques, the Greek Orthodox Church, St Charbel's Monastery, Sydney Muslim Cyclists, the United Australian Lebanese Movement and the men's shed. I encourage people to visit that website.

We constantly hear stories of various cultural and religious groups—whether they are Sikh, Jewish, Christian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Greek, Maltese or any other group that constitutes our beautiful modern Australia—standing up. But with the indulgence of the House, I make specific mention of the Muslim community in Australia. I am so incredibly proud of their efforts. It seemed that everywhere I looked they were there. The donations and the contributions have been phenomenal in so many ways. As an often misunderstood and negatively judged community, through these actions their commitment to this country and to supporting one another was obvious. They did it for no reason other than as a human reaction to people's suffering. I hope that if there are new blooms across this parched land after these dark skies they remind us that, coming together as a nation, we all suffer and we should be judged by our actions and nothing else.

I especially acknowledge and thank the indefatigable RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons for his extraordinary leadership. He led the charge against one of the worst disasters we have ever experienced, leading one of the largest volunteer organisations in the world. Let us not forget also Fire and Rescue, the police, the Australian Defence Force, the ambos, the SES and everyone else who did their bit. My heartfelt thanks go to the many firefighters and volunteers who, in the face of catastrophic conditions, remained vigilant and went beyond the call of duty to save lives and to help others. I also express my gratitude to the many volunteers from other countries who left their homes and families to assist us in our time of need. Obviously politicians of all persuasions did their bit too, and I thank them. I also recognise the government organisations that are on the front line doing a really important job, as well as the non-government agencies.

I feel it is important to put on the public record the names of those who perished—those who will never again see a sunrise over the ocean or feel the hug of a loved one. We will not forget them. May they rest in peace. Those people who tragically lost their lives were: 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, Michael Clarke, and people unknown who have perished.

Finally, I convey my condolences to the families of the brave firefighters, both local and from overseas, who lost their lives while trying to save others. On Thursday 19 December we heard the devastating news that two New South Wales firefighters, Geoffrey Keaton and fellow firey Andrew O'Dwyer, had lost their lives when a burnt gum tree fell and crushed their fire truck, killing them instantly. These brave young men left behind young families who will have to continue their lives without them. Our nation mourns the loss of these young brave men, who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. On 23 January we were heartbroken when the news emerged

that three residents of the United States of America who were fire crew members on a Large Air Tanker flying over the Snowy Mountains had lost their lives.

These confronting tragedies are a sobering reminder of the inherent risks associated with firefighting, and this season we have experienced the loss of these brave professionals. These heroes deserve our highest praise and our deep appreciation for their dedicated community service. Over the past few months we have seen ordinary people do extraordinary things. We have seen the Australian spirit, the breaking of barriers and the building of new relationships. We have seen everyone doing their bit in their own way. People have contributed selflessly, whether by donating, volunteering, putting on a concert, knitting, repairing fences, cooking or doing any one of thousands of necessary tasks. That is Australia at its best, the Australia we should bottle and replicate over and over again. I thank every person who has done their bit and been their best self during this extraordinary time.

There will be a time to reflect and to assess where we can change our actions. We will hear the many untold stories of tragedy, heroism and Aussie spirit. We will rebuild and we will face more challenges. We will have an inquiry. However, for the moment, we must make that promise to do everything we can to help rebuild lives and communities. We will get through this. We will make this a better State. We will stand shoulder to shoulder—not only for the next week or month but also for the many years to come. Those who elect us to be their voices in this place deserve no less. I congratulate my colleagues on all they have done. I thank the Premier for moving this condolence motion and I commend it to the House.

**Mr STUART AYRES (Penrith—Minister for Jobs, Investment, Tourism and Western Sydney) (12:50:47):** Having listened to the contribution of the member for Lakemba, I say to him that the residents of his community are as green and gold as the rest of us. That is the message from my community as well. It is probably a reflection of the emotion in this Chamber that boxes of tissues are provided on both sides of the table. I have never seen that in the near 10 years I have been a member of this place. Undoubtedly over the past few months the people of this State have been through an extraordinary series of events—an experience that has drawn from our communities a response that, although cloaked in sadness, is nothing short of inspiring. In debate on this condolence motion it is important to recognise the people who have lost their lives in this tragedy, the heroes who have given up their lives while protecting the lives and property of their fellow citizens—some of whom travelled from faraway countries on the other side of the planet to help people whom they had never met. In essence, that is the basis of a condolence motion.

We have seen so much more than condolences in this Chamber over the past few days and in New South Wales over the past few months. In fact, it is a recognition of the strength of the character, the resilience and the spirit that exists in our local communities—the essence of what it means to be Australian. The very Australian term "mateship" is mostly defined as helping out someone when they need assistance, without them having to ask for it. Many members in this Chamber have related stories about their personal experiences, the commitments that have been made, the volunteer efforts and donations from their communities. They are a reminder of how fantastic and unbelievably strong our communities are.

Given what we have seen during the bushfires, that strength of character is absolutely needed now and well into the future. My community—the Penrith community of western Sydney—has seen RFS unit after RFS unit travel outside the area to fight fires and help people. Units from Regentville, Orchard Hills, Londonderry, Llandilo, Luddenham, Wallacia, Mulgoa, Mount Riverview, Castlereagh, Shanes Park, Blaxland, Warrimoo and Berkshire Park together with the Glenbrook-Lapstone RFS unit—the one unit that is in my electorate—have deployed to the four corners of New South Wales.

Like all the communities around New South Wales, my community is immensely proud of the work that our RFS units have done across the State. It is important to put on record my thanks to those RFS units for that work. The extraordinary efforts over the past few months by the broader RFS and emergency services family have shown us a way forward and exemplify how to live our lives. They have shown us what we are capable of doing when confronted by the most risky situations. The RFS is a modern-day collection of heroes. That is a word we will hear over and over again. Every time you mention the word to someone in the RFS, they instantly reject the concept of being a hero. We are going to keep saying it whether they like to hear it or not, so they had better get used to it for a little bit longer.

From local community groups to the highest offices in the land, we have seen demonstrations of leadership—whether it be from our political leaders, such as the Premier and the Prime Minister, or from our emergency services, particularly the fantastic and amazing work that has been done by Shane Fitzsimmons, a man of immense character whom I know from my time as emergency services Minister. He and the entire RFS team have carried the State on their shoulders during these traumatic months. Shane has done an exceptional job and the State owes him a significant debt of gratitude that I am not sure we will ever be able to repay. Individual community groups, local members, community organisations and people have demonstrated how they can have a positive influence on others. This is, by its very nature, the definition of leadership.

Before and during my time in Parliament I have constantly heard the question, "Is this generation as strong as the generation before it?" When the challenging day arrives, will we be able to step up to the plate and help each other out? Will we be able to show the same level of courage, resilience and commitment as the generations who fought in a war, survived a depression, established a country on the far side of the earth with little or no support or who walked this land for thousands of years? Is this generation strong enough; is it made of the right stuff? A lot of the time the community questioned whether we had it in us. There is no doubt about that any more. The past few months have shown that this generation of Australians has exactly the same character, strength and resilience as the generations before it.

While this is a condolence motion, we should gain confidence from what our community has been able to do in these trying months and from what we can achieve going forward. I have visited many locations around the State. Marise and I drove to the South Coast to look after my mate Andrew Constance, who was quite visibly concerned for his community. I spent a couple of days with him, driving him around, and helping him to work with and talk to people in his community. In the early days they were basic tasks like getting people to reconnect with each other, sharing the location of emergency and evacuation centres, and talking with family members and mates he had not been able to contact for hours or days. It was an extraordinary experience to be in the background helping out someone like him.

There were constant reminders of how fantastic the Australian community is. We went down to the Malua Bay surf club to have a beer with a few people who had just cleared out the club that had been used as an evacuation centre. They had been working for five days straight with almost no resources. We spoke with them about their experiences helping people. Business owners told us how we had helped them get their businesses back on their feet. We worked out how to move all the resources and donations that were coming in to where they needed to go. We saw how the presence of the Australian Defence Force changed the spirit of a community and gave it great confidence.

There was, however, one moment that stood out for me as I was driving around with Andrew and Marise. Andrew was getting to locations he had not been to. We turned down a street to look at an area that had been burnt out and we had to drive past the Malua Bay Bowling & Recreation Club. We got to the club on a Saturday afternoon and there was what was left of it—scorched, tattered, burnt out rubble on the top of a razed hill. It was completely gone. Right in front of it were three bowling greens with 40 blokes and a couple of women playing their Saturday match of bowls. For me it was the quintessential Australian image out of this bushfire. Somehow the fire did not burn the greens, so the only thing the members of this club were ever going to do was make sure on Saturday morning they took whatever water they could squeeze out of the RFS, water off the greens to give them a little bit of life and play their game of bowls.

We pulled up on the side of the road, leant over the fence and had a chat to a few of them. Their character, that larrikin nature that has often gotten us through the most trying of moments, was there on show. It was the first time I saw Andrew smile. I knew straightaway that this guy was going to be okay, that his community was going to be okay and that we would all be okay. It was another reminder for me that this is not about what individuals do; it is how we come together as a community that really gets us through these moments. I left the South Coast with the image of that burnt out bowling club way at the back of my mind because what was there in front of it was that group of people making sure they showed a level of defiance, courage and a bit of Aussie character to say, "I'm not going to let this beat me and if I can demonstrate it then I can give great confidence to people in my community as well."

If I think about where we go to from here there is a long recovery ahead of us beyond the clearing of a burnt-out house or the building or the reconstructing of a house. It will take a long time for businesses to come back and for us to restore confidence within our communities. It is critical that we all make a personal commitment to see it through to the end of that recovery, no matter how long it takes. We owe that to the people who have given their lives to make sure that this spirit and the community stay strong. It is not a short-term recovery. It is one that will have long, arduous and, without doubt, dark days ahead of it. But at the end of it will be a recognition that no matter what life throws at us, no matter what nature is capable of throwing at our community, no matter how terrible, dark or ferocious the fire is and no matter how lonely we might feel at times, that Australian character will continue to carry us through.

It is also a reminder that perhaps in this modern world we are a bit more isolated from each other—we do not communicate by talking to each other as much as we did before: We send text messages and we talk to each other over social media channels. That face-to-face community-based connection that has perhaps drifted away from being at the core of what it means to be an Australian has had a nice little boost over the past few months. The idea of meeting people you have never met before, the creating of communities, helping each other out, donating money, donating time, volunteering for something—the value of those things may have lost a bit of presence in the way we lived our lives. We all got busy with work and technology became more engaged in what

we do. This has been a fantastic reminder of how important those personal connections are and we should not lose that moment.

We have also seen a fantastic reminder that things like social media can be used for many positive things. The opportunity to move messages out quickly can be a positive thing. The opportunity to use social media to support people who need a bit of help can be a positive thing. One of the things that came out of this horrible few months was that we took it as a moment to pause and reflect on how we talk to and engage with each other, and we chose to be just a little bit more positive in the way we do that going forward. There is no doubt that there would be a significant dividend for our community.

I am immensely proud of what my community has been able to do to support those in need and what the emergency services family across New South Wales has been able to do. I look on in awe at the quality of the leadership that has been demonstrated by so many people. I am heartened by what I heard from my parliamentary colleagues over the past few days because it tells me that there is plenty of hope left in the way we lead and guide our communities, that beyond the relatively minor things that we disagree on, overwhelmingly we are one country, very strong and united and we agree on most things. When challenged, when presented with fire, flood, natural disaster, loss of a life, loss of a volunteer, this generation has demonstrated, like generations before it, that it has the character to step up to the plate to see its communities through. From Prime Ministers and Premiers to small children, we will not leave a single person behind. That is the lesson that has been learnt over these past few months. That is the bright future that is ahead of us.

If people drive around New South Wales over the next couple of months through the fire zones the most amazing thing will be seen: the regeneration of the bush and the green shoots. It is something that has been happening for thousands of years, but it is also a tangible reminder of how resilient this nation is, both its nature and its people. At the same time as those green shoots grow into new branches and new trees, our communities will have new buildings and the strength of those communities will be on show. This is a condolence motion in which we rightly recognise people who have lost their lives, but for me this motion is as much about the audacious nature of hope for the future that gives people so much confidence. I am making a choice to not see the sadness of what has happened over the past few months, but to take this moment and walk away from it, knowing that this country is as best prepared for the future as it has ever been. Every one of us should be very proud of what our communities have done in this desperate hour of need.

**Ms TAMARA SMITH (Ballina) (13:07:29):** I join my colleague the member for Balmain, Jamie Parker, who spoke on behalf of The Greens, in wholly supporting the motion and extend my deepest sympathies to the victims of the bushfires that swept through our State and our nation. I extend that sympathy and heartfelt sadness on behalf of my community to their families and loved ones. I thank the Premier for bringing this motion before the House and for her moving words of sympathy and commendation to all those affected by these tragic events. I also thank my colleagues who have spoken to the motion over the past three days.

It is with great sadness that I am here today to add my condolences to those already expressed in this place. Like many of us, I and my community were on high alert during this summer. My electorate was affected at the beginning of the season and it was extremely frightening. Summer is usually a time of rest, recovery and spending quality time with loved ones, but we were on high alert and anxious. So many were affected personally by the extreme weather events and the worst fires in living history, and everyone in the country and internationally was affected emotionally by the loss of life, the destruction of places we love, and the devastating loss of animals and biodiversity.

Fortunately, there was no loss of human life in my electorate. However, the communities either side of us were devastated. There is a kind of survivor's guilt, despite the fact that our frontline workers and communities performed unbelievably to support them. The scale of the loss at Mount Nardi is something that we are still getting our heads around. It has been an honour to participate in the bushfire recovery efforts along with colleagues from bushfire-affected areas and to take part in weekly check-ins with the commissioners and representatives from across government. I thank the Premier. I thought that the way she conducted herself and the way that the recovery support was offered were outstanding. All of my frontline workers, area commanders and fire chiefs have said to me that the communication was outstanding. It has been truly humbling to hear stories of families in neighbouring communities who lost everything, of children and teenagers who were displaced during their school holidays and of the emotional effects of such a protracted disaster period.

I thank everyone who worked tirelessly to keep us safe over this period. I formally acknowledge the frontline workers and emergency services personnel for their exemplary management of the emergency situations across the State and specifically in the Northern Rivers area. I also acknowledge personnel from the Ballina electorate, many of whom—as others have shared—left our community to defend the communities adjacent and across the State. No sooner were we out of the woods than they left to assist neighbouring communities. On



Australia Day in Ballina, we recognised some of the outstanding fire chiefs and saw how tired they were, because this has been a four- or five-month period for them.

I commend the activities of Brian Daley, NSW Rural Fire Service Operations Manager for Region North, for keeping community members informed of the bushfire situation as it developed. I acknowledge the zone commanders of the RFS: Superintendent Greg Lewis, Northern Rivers Zone Commander; Superintendent Michael Brett, Northern Rivers Zone Manager; Northern Zone Duty Inspector Les Gorey; and Northern Zone Duty Acting Inspector Glenn Willsallen. Further, I acknowledge the captains of each of the fire stations in the Ballina electorate: Alstonville Captain Jason Simpson, Ballina Captain Dennis Henry, Bangalow Captain Andrew Hill, Brunswick Heads Captain Graeme Wakely and Byron Bay Captain Gary Speers. There is not time today, but I will put on record the countless police and SES frontline staff—and even Marine Rescue NSW in my area—the Red Cross and, of course, Byron and Ballina councils, which were absolutely outstanding during this period.

Aside from the fact that this disaster has highlighted the need for our country to move to a low-carbon economy and reduce the impact that our activities have on the climate and environment, it has highlighted the need for us to build resilience in our communities. I know that "resilience" has become a bit of a buzzword of late, but the type of resilience I am talking about is not just an individual's ability to withstand stress, but also a community's ability to band together in times of crisis. We know that social infrastructure is key to that. I encourage all of us in this place to look at the social infrastructure in our communities and determine how we can support it to become stronger. I thank the House for the opportunity to speak in debate on this important motion. Again, I extend my deepest condolences to those who lost their lives, and to their families and loved ones. The onus is on all of us to honour the memory of those who have lost their lives or been affected by this tragedy by acting to prevent this from ever happening again.

**Debate interrupted.**

**TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Ms Felicity Wilson):** I will now leave the chair. The House will resume at 2.15 p.m.

*Visitors*

#### **VISITORS**

**The SPEAKER:** I extend a very warm welcome to Katrina and Tim Dowsett, guests of the Minister for Better Regulation and Innovation, and member for Tamworth. I also welcome to the Chamber Trevor Coomb, Badwi Sadek and Dianne Arthur, who are seated in the Speaker's Gallery, guests of the member for Myall Lakes. I acknowledge Christine Smith, wife of the member for Wollondilly, and his guests, Vivien Ellis and Stephen Bonnor. I also acknowledge Annas and Mariam Yaghmour, guests of the member for Lakemba. Finally, I acknowledge Brewarrina Mayor Phillip "Occa" O'Connor, Deputy Mayor Thomas "Tommy" Stanton and General Manager Jeff Sowiak, guests of the member for Barwon. We welcome you to the Chamber.

*Members*

#### **REPRESENTATION OF MINISTERS ABSENT DURING QUESTIONS**

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** On behalf of Ms Gladys Berejiklian: I inform the House that:

- (1) The Minister for Planning and Public Spaces will answer questions today in the absence of the Minister for Local Government.
- (2) The Minister for Regional Transport and Roads will answer questions today in the absence of the Minister for Transport and Roads.

#### **PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES**

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** On behalf of the Ms Gladys Berejiklian: I inform the House that on 20 December 2019 Adam Sibery Crouch, MP, was appointed Parliamentary Secretary for the Central Coast.

*Committees*

#### **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**

##### **Membership**

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** I move:

That pursuant to section 54 of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, Justin Paul Clancy be appointed to serve on the Public Accounts Committee in place of Adam Sibery Crouch.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Business of the House***SUSPENSION OF STANDING AND SESSIONAL ORDERS: ROUTINE OF BUSINESS**

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to provide for the following routine of business for the remainder of this sitting after the placing and disposal of business:

- (1) Consideration of the motion of condolence for the victims of the bushfires.
- (2) At 4.00 p.m., petition debate.
- (3) Consideration of the motion of condolence for the victims of the bushfires.
- (4) The House to adjourn without motion moved at the conclusion of the motion of condolence.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Question Time***INFRASTRUCTURE EXPENDITURE**

**Ms JODI McKAY (Strathfield) (14:18:10):** My question is directed to the Premier. Given the \$1.3 billion blowout on the light rail, the \$225 million blowout on the high-rise school, the \$100 million blowout on the stadium and now the \$4.3 billion blowout on the Sydney Metro, what was she thinking when she said dozens of times that her Government "always does its homework"?

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby—Premier) (14:18:50):** Mr Speaker—

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

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** Firstly, I am happy to respond to the Leader of the Opposition's question, but I do have to note for the record that I refute a number of claims that she passed as facts in her question. When we came to government the former Labor Government had promised the north west rail link, and we delivered it on time and \$1 billion under budget.

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

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** The former Labor Government failed to deliver the south west rail link. We came to government and delivered it \$300 million under budget.

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

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** As the member for Balmain knows, Labor promised the inner west light rail but never delivered it. We came to government and delivered it on time and on budget. In fact, we had to rip up the track work the former Labor Government did because it was wrong. We had to redo it. Then there is the wonderful Tcard, which the Labor Government tried to deliver for 15 years. We came to government and delivered the Opal card in the first term. Time will not allow me to go through all of the projects we have delivered on behalf of the people of New South Wales, but I am especially proud of the fact that our citizens know that when we say we are going to build something, we do it, whether it is difficult or not.

**Mr Chris Minns:** Like Parramatta Light Rail stage 2 or the Metro West?

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** The shadow transport Minister—who does not say much—mentioned the Parramatta Light Rail and Metro West. We are delivering the Parramatta Light Rail, which Labor did not even dream about.

**Mr Chris Minns:** Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. The Premier's argument seems to be that they can waste \$4 billion because of the Tcard. This is taxpayer money—

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. I call the member for Kogarah to order for the second time.

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** As transport Minister, Treasurer and Premier I have had to answer question after question about the blowout in the cost of the north west metro, but it came in \$1 billion under budget. And it is not only transport projects that we have delivered on behalf of our citizens; it is also schools, hospitals and the social infrastructure that many of our communities rely on.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I remind the member for Londonderry that she is on two calls to order. I will call her to order for the third time if she continues to interject.

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** I have never before faced an election campaign where the Opposition's policy was to cancel every single project. I have never before heard of a campaign like that. Labor wanted to cancel every single project, whether it was a bridge in the bush, a school in the city or a rail project. The only thing Labor said was, "Cancel, cancel, cancel." That is all it does.

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

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** I have been in public life for a considerable amount of time now, but I have never before heard of an opposition going into an election on a platform of cancelling project after project.

**Ms Jodie Harrison:** You're misleading the House.

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** It is true—name one project that you supported. The Opposition wanted to axe the south west metro. The Opposition wanted to axe every project we announced. On a serious note, the reason we have been able to deliver this infrastructure and the reason we have an infrastructure pipeline of nearly \$100 billion, which is the envy of the world, is that we have worked hard to have a strong budget.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Kogarah will be quiet.

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** The people of New South Wales know that when we set aside \$1 billion to rebuild the infrastructure destroyed by the bushfires we will meet our commitments.

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

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** I am used to hearing a lot of hot air from those opposite, but actions speak louder than words, and we are a government that acts on our promises.

#### FORESTRY CORPORATION

**Mr PAUL SCULLY (Wollongong) (14:23:53):** My question is directed to the Deputy Premier. Why has the Government's scoping study into the sale of the Forestry Corporation blown out by \$650,000 since October, meaning that the Government is paying consultants around \$10,000 a day to privatise State forests that have been destroyed?

**The SPEAKER:** Members will cease interjecting. I will give the Deputy Premier clear air. Members will remain silent. This is a serious question. The Deputy Premier deserves to be heard in silence.

**Mr JOHN BARILARO (Monaro—Minister for Regional New South Wales, Industry and Trade, and Deputy Premier) (14:24:40):** I thank the member for his question. It is a good question in relation to what is happening with our resources in forestry. The industry is on its knees right now. At this stage some 40 per cent of the pine plantation has been lost, which means that at some point in the future we are going to have a very serious issue with supply for the industry. Right now down on the border of New South Wales and Victoria we still have live fires. Bondi State Forest fire is under stress and pressure from those fires. Our fantastic emergency services personnel are fighting fires. It is not just the RFS and volunteers; our Forestry Corporation staff have been integral in providing assets across the fire fronts. It is easy to come into this place and try to play politics at a time when our communities are stressed.

**Mr Paul Scully:** Point of order: I ask the Deputy Premier to withdraw his comment. This is a serious question, which you acknowledged, Mr Speaker. He should get the answer.

**The SPEAKER:** While the Deputy Premier has been asked to withdraw his comment, he does not need to. There is no direction from me for him to do so.

**Mr JOHN BARILARO:** Those opposite are playing politics. If they genuinely cared about what is happening to forestry and its employees they would not cause greater anxiety for Forestry Corporation while the impact is still being assessed. Do not forget that a Labor Government shut down the forestry industry in this State. The Victorian Labor Government has already announced the end of native forestry in Victoria. I am not going to be lectured by those opposite about a future for forestry. The question should be asked: Will Labor members support the industry as it grows? Will they support the industry as it needs investment across both pine plantations and native forests? The answer is that they probably will not. It is clear: work is being done in relation to the scoping study. No decisions have ever been made about Forestry Corporation—just a scoping study.

That information will help us to make a decision for the future in relation to how we support the industry. The investment in the scoping study is just as important for the Government in relation to how it grows the industry for the future. There will be more to be said. We are still assessing the impact. Right now, today, there are mills across the State that have no supply. Therefore, it is important that we talk about a strong future for the industry in one way or another. I remind the House that the timber industry in Eden is so important to that community. It

is no different in my electorate at Dongwha Australia in Bombala. The industry is important to the future of that community. It is important that the Government talks up the industry, unlike some in our community and it shows. When the Eden chip mill was on fire and burning to the ground, to post on social media—

**Mr Paul Scully:** Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129. We asked about consultants. The Deputy Premier has indicated that the consultants are about regrowing it, but why is the scoping study on a sale continuing at \$10,000 a day?

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

**Mr JOHN BARILARO:** I said this earlier and the member should listen. The scoping study will lend itself to the future of Forestry Corporation. Trust me, we are going to have to be on a path of re-plantation. On average, we are planting near 4,000 pine trees but we will have to raise that to 17,000 or 18,000 hectares of pine trees. There is an opportunity for Forestry Corporation in that space. While the Eden chip mill was burning down, some people decided to take to social media and celebrate that it was burning down. They said words along the lines of, "Out of all of this fire disaster there is a ray of hope, which is watching the chip mill in Eden burn down." At some time in the future I will name those individuals in this place. They are a disgrace to the people of Eden and south-eastern New South Wales because of their view on timber and the industry. We are about to embark upon one of the largest and most significant rebuilds of communities and timber will be at the heart of that. The Forestry Corporation has a future, as does the timber industry across the board.

### BUSHFIRES

**Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes) (14:29:50):** My question is addressed to the Premier. Will the Premier update the House on how the Government is helping to rebuild communities so that they are stronger than ever before?

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby—Premier) (14:30:02):** I thank the member for Myall Lakes for his question. I acknowledge the impact of the bushfires in his community and members who heard his contribution to the condolence motion will appreciate the deep impact of those fires in his electorate. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge members from electorates in the Northern Rivers, northern New South Wales, the mid North Coast and the North Coast who are still reeling from the impact of the bushfires in their communities. Please note that whether you are in the north, the south or the central west, our Government appreciates the widespread devastation and will make sure that the rebuilding effort is done concurrently across the entire State—the entire length and breadth of those impacted communities. I thank the member for giving me the opportunity to talk about some of the infrastructure that has been impacted and some of the building processes that will take place.

Earlier this week I spoke about the scale of the fires, the recovery efforts led by the Deputy Premier and the emergency safeguards we have put in place for our residents. Today I acknowledge the impact on our infrastructure. From what we know from the assessments done to date—and I must qualify everything I say because some of the fires are still burning and, in some areas, it is very unsafe to go and make those assessments—at least 800 kilometres of road has been impacted and needs to be replaced, as well as 34 types of assets in our rail corridors. The Blue Mountains line has been severely impacted. Some 52 local bridges have been damaged or destroyed, along with 36 government radio network sites, which impacts telecommunications in various ways. Some 83 hospitals and 94 ambulance stations have been damaged. After assessing 178 schools, 80 needed some type of remediation work to repair existing assets to be ready for kids to go to school on day one and three schools were completely destroyed. Notwithstanding these facts, every child had a school to go to on day one, which we are proud of.

Some 490 historic assets were significantly impacted, including, as the member for Bathurst would know, the Zig Zag Railway near Lithgow. Unfortunately, 14,000 kilometres of fencing was significantly impacted. To give members some perspective, that is 3½ times the length of Australia from east to west. Some 24 aboriginal community sites were also impacted, as well as 500 Australian Museum field sites. That puts into perspective some of the infrastructure and damage that has been caused that we have not spoken about this week. That is why it is important for us to focus on recovery where it is possible and safe to do so. It is critical to not only have made assessments in these areas but also ensure that the \$1 billion goes to where it is needed most as soon as possible. Today I am pleased to report to the House that, through the support of all our agencies, including Fire and Rescue NSW, RFS, police, ambulance officers, the Australian Defence Force and everyone else involved, we have ensured the removal of nearly 2,500 trees that could have come down and been unsafe in those communities.

We have cleared nearly 2,000 kilometres of road—the exact figure I have is 1,960 kilometres. We have also cleared about 300 kilometres of fences, which is the distance between Sydney and Canberra, and we have supplied about 11,000 litres of diesel. That is just to touch the sides of what has been done to date. Please rest

assured that we know there is more work to do and we are up for the opportunity to not only rebuild destroyed assets but also improve those assets where possible, and to ensure communities get back on their feet. I reiterate that the Government was pleased to provide an initial \$1 billion, set aside specifically for this infrastructure rebuild. I stress that it all adds up to a considerable amount of money but the dollars do not matter. What matters is that we support those who need it the most. As the House was updated yesterday, we have in excess of 3,800 registrations through Service NSW and they will all be given the opportunity to have a single case manager. Some 580 of those came through our 42 mobile buses and more of those buses will be going to remote communities to make sure they have access to the services that other communities have. [*Extension of time*]

We know that communities are at different levels in the recovery phase. Some are still in the fighting fire stage and other members within communities are at different stages of shock and grief. But we also know as a Government that when communities are ready we have to go in and start the recovery rebuilding process—and that is what we are doing. I am pleased to say this Government is focussed on that task. I also hope that all members of this place, no matter where they live or to which party they belong, will speak up if they know their constituents and communities need something. I make it clear that the Government is here to support everybody. I appreciate that many members in this Chamber attended the briefing the other night. We need to make sure that the information is available to everyone.

In the coming weeks the biggest challenge will be to ensure that every citizen who needs help knows how to get that assistance and we will be relying on community leaders to provide that information to their constituents. We will do what we can to directly contact them but we will also be relying on local members to provide that vital information. As the Deputy Premier and our team have said, we know that the recovery will not happen overnight. We know that the recovery will be difficult and it will be challenging but everybody should know that our Government has put in the resources, the expertise and the right professionals. We have put together a very strong team across government agencies to make sure that we are on the ground as soon as possible. Whether it is to the north, the south or the central west of the State we will make sure that communities rebuild and make our State even stronger into the future.

#### **BUSHFIRES AND TRANSPORT CONNECTIVITY**

**Mr CHRISTOPHER GULAPTIS (Clarence) (14:36:41):** I address my question to the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads. Will the Minister update the House on the impact of the bushfires on roads and transport infrastructure?

**Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst—Minister for Regional Transport and Roads) (14:36:52):** I thank the member for Clarence and the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Roads for his question. He has seen the scars that have been left by the fires in his electorate. The Clarence was one of the first regions hit by fires late last year. Hundreds of homes have been lost and the community is still mourning the loss of two people from the Coongbar community. Recently the member for Clarence and I went to Jackadgery and had lunch with the transport teams. They have been working tirelessly around the clock to reopen the Gwydir Highway. They have been there for months and the scale of their task has been enormous—they have removed fallen trees, repaired guard rails, fixed damaged road surfaces—and the risk of landslides is still present today.

In this fire season we have had three very clear priorities: to keep people safe on our roads and transport network and to ensure that people could evacuate areas under threat; to restore connectivity as quickly as possible to allow much-needed supplies and support to flow back in; and to rebuild and future-proof our assets from future threats. I will take a moment to acknowledge the teams from Transport for NSW. They have worked tirelessly in their communities to support our bushfire response. They were embedded in incident control centres. They have supported passengers on our transport network whose journeys were interrupted by the fires. They have helped passengers get to their destinations and found them places to stay when necessary. They have worked with operators to put in place extra bus services to support locals affected by the fires. Some of those locals had lost everything, even the family car. They were there when the roads needed to be closed and were the first there to ensure that the roads could be re-opened to traffic.

On New Year's Eve three members of one of our transport crews were in Cobargo managing road closures. While they were doing that the winds changed and the fires turned back toward the town. Our workers took shelter with locals until the fire passed. After that, they picked up some garden hoses and stood side by side with the community to fight spot fires. Our rail emergency response unit was also out actively fighting fires on the Main Western line. In the days before Christmas, fire wreaked havoc along a 25-kilometre section of the rail corridor between Mount Victoria and Lithgow. It wiped out thousands of kilometres of communication, electrical and signal wiring which will have to be rebuilt from scratch.

A week later, when the fires were contained, we had an opportunity to go with the crews to inspect the damage. Even a week after the fires had gone through, you could still see the trees smouldering. Initial assessments

said it would take well over a month before there would be any connectivity restored in the area; however, our teams worked around the clock and were able to ensure that we now have some limited passenger train services and freight movements. In the interim, we have done our very best to find alternative pathways for affected services, with trains replacing coaches in some areas and freight being rerouted. We know that there is still a lot of work to do. We know that it will be an enormous job to get services back to full capacity.

On the South Coast and in the Southern Highlands we saw some of the worst damage to our road network. Communities were cut off and there were long diversions for motorists trying to get out. In those darkest days at the start of the year, we had teams working around the clock to ensure that we could reopen the Princes Highway and evacuate visitors from those South Coast communities. They had to work around active fires, fallen power lines and hundreds of fallen trees. Ultimately, they made sure we could move 15,000 vehicles north within a 24-hour period. Fires also closed the Kings Highway, which is an essential route in and out of the South Coast and is the key corridor between Canberra and Batemans Bay. [*Extension of time*]

We had to move fast to restore that vital connection. That is why, from the time it was deemed safe to go in, up to 70 workers were on site every day to start the recovery. Many of those people came back from their Christmas holidays to assist. I will give members who may not be familiar with the highway a sense of the scale of the damage. A 43-kilometre section was damaged, which is equivalent to the distance from this Chamber to Campbelltown. So when I report that crews have worked around the clock since the recovery effort started on 6 January and that the road reopened just eight days later, members will understand what a mammoth task they had. We had teams of 40 arborists who removed over 1,200 hazardous trees, replaced more than 60 signs, removed 43 damaged guardrails and replaced more than 500 cat's eye reflectors.

Reopening these roads is critical to the support of recovery efforts, the movement of supplies in the regions and the return of visitors to the area. So far, we have calculated that more than 800 kilometres of State roads have been significantly affected by the bushfires. They include the Princes, Pacific, Gwydir, Oxley, Castlereagh and Snowy Mountains highways. That is in addition to the thousands of kilometres of council-managed roads that have been damaged or destroyed by fires. It has also been reported that 34 road bridges have been destroyed and another 17 have been damaged.

We have already worked closely with councils across the State to assess the damage and develop a response plan for communities. We recognise that there is still much to be done to restore our road and rail network, but we are working hard and we will continue to work with those communities. We want to restore tourism, grow local economies, make our roads safe again, and make our road and transport network more resilient for the future. But, most of all, we want to help our bushfire-impacted communities to get back on their feet as quickly as possible.

### WILLOW GROVE HERITAGE BUILDING

**Ms KATE WASHINGTON (Port Stephens) (14:43:59):** My question is directed to the Premier. Given that the beautiful heritage home Willow Grove is being destroyed by her Government, why did the Premier tell the people of New South Wales at last year's election, "We've never said it will go as part of the Powerhouse Museum. We've always said of course our intention is to save it."?

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby—Premier) (14:44:26):** I am not suggesting this is not an important issue but it is not exactly one of the most important issues in New South Wales.

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

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** For members the opposite, I repeat that I do not believe it is one of the most important issues facing New South Wales. But I stand by my comments because in the tender documents every organisation that showed an interest in building the Powerhouse Museum was asked, on behalf of the citizens, to consider protecting Willow Grove. Unfortunately, the proposals—

**The SPEAKER:** Opposition members will remain silent.

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** Our intention always was that if we could save that historic house we would.

**Ms Jodi McKay:** You still can save it.

**The SPEAKER:** I just asked members to remain silent, and that includes the Leader of the Opposition. I will call the member to order if she interrupts again.

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** On behalf of our citizens we asked every single person who bid for the project to put forward a proposal that protected that heritage house. Unfortunately, that was not able to occur.

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

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** I do not understand why those opposite do not think western Sydney deserves a cultural institution. They do not believe western Sydney—

**Ms Kate Washington:** Yes, we do.

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** You don't.

**The SPEAKER:** I call the member for Port Stephens to order for the third time. The member has ignored my direction. I call the member for Swansea to order for the first time.

**Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN:** I think I have said enough on this question. I will not say anything more.

### **BUSHFIRES AND HEALTH FACILITIES**

**Mr JUSTIN CLANCY (Albury) (14:46:41):** My question is addressed to the Minister for Health and Medical Research. Will the Minister update the House on the impact on our healthcare system as a result of the bushfires?

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst—Minister for Health and Medical Research) (14:47:05):** I thank the member for Albury for his question reflecting on the impact of the bushfires on the health system. Before I address it, I acknowledge that just last week I was with the member for Albury visiting a number of areas in his community. I saw how he is working with the community and ensuring that people are getting all the support they need, particularly at this challenging time. I was also pleased to be there with the Victorian Minister to announce \$36 million for the upgrade of the Albury-Wodonga hospital facilities.

The past couple of months have been tough for everybody. I acknowledge that MPs in this place also have found it pretty tough. We have seen the impact on the member for Bega, Andrew Constance, who has spoken out for his community. In January or so I talked to about 24 of our colleagues. I will not refer to them by their electorates because what I heard was people talking to me about the issues before their communities. I acknowledge that a number of them gave me excellent advice. I acknowledge Joe McGirr, who gave me a lot of information about what was needed in his electorate of Wagga Wagga. I just referred to Justin Clancy and Andrew Constance. I also spoke to Shelley Hancock. What Shelley said was amazing and considered but she also was able to share the words of how the people in the local electorate were feeling.

I thank Anna Watson for the work she did on behalf of her community. I thank Jenny Aitchison for her work, not specifically in what was going on in the last month but in the previous couple of months. Janelle Saffin is not here today but she gave me some interesting insights into what services would be necessary after the fires passed. She gave me some advice about what the Australian Defence Force could do to support the recovery. I thank Kate Washington and Mel Pavey and I also thank Wendy Tuckerman for helping me. At times like this we all pull together extremely well and I thank each and every MP who spoke to me in that period. Gareth Ward obviously made sure that I was very aware of the issues going on in the South Coast.

The people of our health system were impacted because they were part of the local communities affected. We should reflect on the fact that so many of our health staff were impacted as they tried to support the communities. I spoke today to Jill Ludford, the Chief Executive of Murrumbidgee Local Health District. In the last month the fires have principally been in areas around the Murrumbidgee and Southern NSW local health districts. She told me how it all started for them. She said the fires started on 29 December, that it happened very quickly and that suddenly there was the need to address what they would do with patients in places like Tumut, Batlow and Tumbarumba. She said they never quite knew what would happen and that it was having an impact on the health staff just as it was on the residents. Were the fires going to come to their homes? Were the fires going to come to the hospitals?

In the end Batlow hospital was told that they had to leave early but staff there did not know what to do because they were trying to look after both their patients and their families. Then the hospital staff were told they might have to stay inside the health facilities. At the same time their families were being told to leave their homes. I reflect on that and say thank you to all the health staff in those areas who struggled to try and strike that balance—looking after the patients but also looking after their families and their homes. In the end Tumut hospital was evacuated except for patients at a high acuity emergency level. So, again, we had to keep the hospital open. It meant some staff had to stay at the hospital while their families were fighting fires to protect their homes.  
[Extension of time]

People were coming into the emergency department at Tumut hospital and, for that reason, it was necessary to keep staff at the hospital, even though we were trying to protect our staff. Despite their homes being

at risk, many of the staff stayed at the hospital. I thank other local health districts, particularly Northern Sydney Local Health District. I was told that, despite the fires, staff from Royal North Shore Hospital went down to support staff at Tumut. Small villages like Talbingo and Adelong had to be evacuated because I am told that even when the fires were not burning there it was very smoky and there were embers and ash in the air. There was no way people could feel comfortable with what was going on; it was dangerous. I acknowledge the Australian Defence Force [ADF]. At Tumbarumba the ADF was the only major service there to support the patients and it set up a whole medical camp in the park. Those colleagues working with us cannot be underestimated.

I thank the clinicians who have stepped up now at a time when we are particularly worried about mental health issues. Five mental health staff from Royal Prince Alfred Hospital have been deployed to work in our mobile health clinics. I understand, from talking to locals, that they are very much appreciated in the small villages they are travelling to. In places like Batlow and Tumbarumba we have got permanent staff—social workers and psychologists. I may talk about this some other time but I want to emphasise that this was not a time when we could have possibly understood what was going to happen. In talking to Jill Ludford the clear message from her was that staff and patients have been traumatised. I thank each and every one of the staff. I am running out of time; I ask the House for its indulgence. I quote two staff who literally lost everything. One of them said:

I have lost everything—just walked out with the clothes I was wearing. Work provides some normality and I was grateful that my workmates gave me clothes to sleep in.

Another staff member said:

I have had the most frightening time of my life, as I had 15 minutes to leave our property, not expecting to have anything when we returned. I find the supports at work helping me settle.

I thank all NSW Health staff who are supporting their colleagues and who have looked after patients and will continue to do so for many months to come.

#### **GREATER SYDNEY SPORTS FACILITY FUND**

**Ms LYNDIA VOLTZ (Auburn) (14:54:59):** My question is directed to the Minister for Jobs, Investment, Tourism and Western Sydney. Will the Minister give the House a rock-solid guarantee that neither he nor his office played any role, other than to approve the list provided by the Office of Sport, in allocating grants under round one of the Greater Sydney Sports Facility Fund prior to the 2019 election?

**Mr STUART AYRES (Penrith—Minister for Jobs, Investment, Tourism and Western Sydney) (14:55:24):** For starters, there was a round two, which was the shortlist. I am sure members opposite will ask many more questions about this matter. I followed the recommendations and engaged with the Office of Sport, as I would expect any other Minister in this place to do.

#### **BUSHFIRES AND ENERGY SUPPLY**

**Mr LEE EVANS (Heathcote) (14:55:47):** My question is addressed to the Minister for Energy and Environment. Will the Minister update the House on the impact of the bushfires on energy supply and the environment?

**Mr MATT KEAN (Hornsby—Minister for Energy and Environment) (14:56:06):** I thank the member for Heathcote for his question. In particular, I thank him for his support in raising awareness of electricity usage in his community over summer. I recognise the impact of the bushfires on communities right across New South Wales. The fires are unprecedented in scale, intensity and duration. Many people are going through a difficult time and our thoughts are with the families and communities hit by these fires. I put on record my appreciation for the work our firefighters are doing.

**The SPEAKER:** There is too much audible conversation coming from the front benches. Members will remain silent.

**Mr MATT KEAN:** The RFS volunteers have done an amazing job during this period, as have the firefighters in the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. Bushfires have caused localised electricity outages in the regions. I thank the community for its patience as we replace damaged infrastructure. At the height of the fires more than 57,000 customers were without power in the Essential Energy and Endeavour Energy regions. Crews are in the process of replacing 4,300 burnt and damaged power poles.

As of this Monday network repairs and power restoration have been completed in the Riverina area, specifically Tumut, Tumbarumba and surrounding areas. Many crews who assisted with that work are now helping on the South Coast. Essential Energy has maintained contact with customers whom it has been unable to reconnect, assisting them with loans of portable generators and fuel vouchers. I put on record my appreciation for the outstanding work of the repair and restoration crews. I acknowledge the leadership of Essential Energy CEO



John Cleland, who is always available and willing to personally assist in finding solutions to individual problems raised with him.

This summer has seen more than localised impacts. I will update the House on the extent of the challenges we faced and the steps taken to ensure that we stabilised the grid. Since the beginning of summer, the independent Australian Energy Market Operator [AEMO] has issued four Lack of Reserve Level 2 notices. AEMO issues those notices when available energy reserves are lower than the largest single generator in New South Wales—that is, if we lost a generating unit at Eraring Power Station, the State would be at risk of load shedding. Causes included bushfire damage to critical interconnectors that allow electricity sharing between States—

**Mr Clayton Barr:** Point of order—

**The SPEAKER:** I want to hear a point of order from the member for Cessnock, not a quip.

**Mr Clayton Barr:** My point of order is taken under Standing Order 52. The Deputy Premier should cease talking and listen to the Minister's answer.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Cessnock will resume his seat.

**Mr MATT KEAN:** The cause of these situations included the damage from bushfires to critical interconnectors that allow us to share electricity between States and other key electricity assets, including substations and transmission lines; extreme weather events that saw huge increases in demand above 13,000 megawatts, as we experienced last Saturday with the highest weekend demand in the past 10 years; and mechanical problems at coal-fired power stations causing unplanned outages. Last Friday we saw unplanned mechanical problems at Bayswater, Liddell and Mt Piper, which meant they were unable to provide electricity when we needed it most. The reality of our current grid is that older equipment is becoming less reliable.

On each of the occasions that we lacked reserves, the New South Wales Government relied on the expert advice of AEMO. In particular, I thank Audrey Zibleman and her brilliant team which pulled out all the stops to protect the interests of our State. On each occasion the Government activated its demand response measures, asking consumers to reduce their energy usage during peak times by turning off pool pumps, switching off non-essential appliances, avoiding the use of dishwashers and dryers and turning up air conditioners to 24 degrees. I thank all consumers who heeded that call.

**The SPEAKER:** I remind the member for Canterbury she is on three calls to order.

**Mr MATT KEAN:** Those steps may seem small, but past experience suggests that they can reduce demand by up to 200 megawatts, which in those situations could mean the difference between load shedding or not. AEMO also activated its Reliability and Emergency Reserve Trader arrangements, otherwise known as RERT. Large electricity users were contracted by AEMO to either use less energy or generate power from their own sources.

**Mr Lee Evans:** I could not hear the Minister's response. I ask that he be given an extension of two minutes.

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Heathcote makes a good point, as did the member for Cessnock. Members will show more respect to the Minister. An extension of two minutes is granted.

**Mr MATT KEAN:** On 23 January the New South Wales Government activated its energy action response protocol. Government agencies were instructed to switch off non-essential appliances and computers and increase the temperatures of their air conditioners. Despite these significant challenges, and thanks to the outstanding work of the Government's electricity supply emergency team led by Cameron O'Reilly and Andrew Lewis, I am pleased to say that New South Wales was able to achieve its objective of keeping the system going. Despite our electricity system coming through this very difficult period, it highlights the need to modernise the grid in a way that not only drives down prices and but also keeps the lights on. This is exactly what the Government is focused on doing.

#### DROUGHT ASSISTANCE

**Mr ROY BUTLER (Barwon) (15:02:52):** I direct my question to the Minister for Agriculture and Western New South Wales. This drought and the eventual recovery is unprecedented. The Minister has heard firsthand how desperate people are. Now that a mechanism has been established through Service NSW to use State funds to offset the cost of local government rates, will the Minister and his country colleagues insist that the Government introduce a local rates subsidy to drought-affected areas?

**Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands—Minister for Agriculture and Western New South Wales) (15:03:27):** I thank the member for Barwon for his question and for the genuine and sincere way

in which he goes about his work in this place to represent constituents in his electorate, particularly the farmers. I have enjoyed multiple opportunities to speak with the member for Barwon and to visit his community on many occasions to talk to his councils about the drought, which has no precedent, as he correctly says. This week in Parliament much of the focus and attention of the Government and the media, quite rightly, has been on the devastating bushfires.

As we have heard from all members of this House in the condolence motion debate, the impact that has had is the likes of which we have never seen before and we all hope, I am sure, to never have to see again. I assure the member for Barwon, as I assure every member of this House, that no member of this Government, least of all me, has taken their eye off the ball in terms of what is happening with drought and dealing with the impacts of drought. We are supporting primary producers, communities and small businesses in those communities to get through drought by putting them in as strong a position as possible to make a fast recovery when conditions begin to turn around.

Just this week the latest NSW Department of Primary Industries Combined Drought Indicator shows that the drought is continuing to worsen. No doubt the bushfires have been a catalyst for some of those areas that were not in drought to move into that drought category. One hundred per cent of the State is now in drought but, most disturbingly, over 55 per cent of this State is now in the severe drought category—the absolute top drought category—and that area continues to grow. In response, the Government has put on the table a \$3.9 billion drought relief and water security program to provide immediate relief to farmers, families, towns and businesses to deal with drought. The Government continues to revise all of those programs. It has made a number of changes since the drought started and it will continue to do so.

The Government is considering a range of additional measures to respond to the ongoing drought crisis. I am sure the member will be keen to hear those announcements in due course. I appreciate the fact that the member continues to have constructive dialogue with me and other Government members. I assure him that his suggestions as well as those of his councils and other members of this House are being considered at this moment by the Government in response to the ongoing drought. To keep him and other members of this House informed, I will share some statistics about the assistance and the number of primary producers that have accessed that assistance.

The drought transport subsidy is probably one of the most popular assistance measures of that \$3.9 billion package. That is the 50 per cent subsidy that farmers can obtain on transporting fodder to farm or stock on agistment. It is pretty much any farm input or output on and off their property. As of this morning 15,692 farmers have accessed that form of assistance and \$192 million has gone into farmers' pockets. The water infrastructure rebate, which provides a rebate to farmers sinking bores or water infrastructure on their property, has been accessed by 2,816 farmers. Zero and no interest loans through the Farm Innovation Fund have been accessed by 2,794 farmers. The Drought Assistance Fund, which is the \$50,000 interest free loan, has been accessed by 2,453 farmers. All told, nearly half a billion dollars has been taken up through those two funds.

The class 1A registration waiver has been taken up by 6,336 farmers, which means those farmers get their class 1A agricultural vehicles for free. The Government made the decision to waive Local Land Services [LLS] rates. For those members of the House who are not aware, they are rates that are levied by Local Land Services on landowners that have holdings of 10 hectares or more across the State. Approximately 145,000 LLS ratepayers just got their rates bill in the mail with a zero figure. That was paid again by the Government for this calendar year. A number of ratepayers in the member for Barwon's electorate pay local council rates and LLS rates as well as a wild dog fee to maintain the wild dog fence. That has been waived again this calendar year. I again thank the member for Barwon. I assure him his suggestions as well as others are being considered by the Government as it continues to respond to this drought.

### BUSHFIRES AND TOURISM

**Mrs WENDY TUCKERMAN (Goulburn) (15:08:43):** My question is addressed to the Minister for Jobs, Investment, Tourism and Western Sydney. Will the Minister update the House on the impacts on tourism as a result of the bushfires?

**Mr STUART AYRES (Penrith—Minister for Jobs, Investment, Tourism and Western Sydney) (15:08:59):** I thank the member for Goulburn for her question. Recently I was in her electorate at Berrima visiting Carol and Mrs Oldbucks Pantry to talk about not only the impacts of the bushfires and drought but also what will be the emerging impacts of the coronavirus on the New South Wales tourism industry. Over the past few months the bushfires have represented a tragic blow to New South Wales, but behind the affected buildings, the lost homes and the loss of life is a substantial, if not devastating, impact to our economy, particularly the visitor economy. Unlike the visible impacts that exist when a building is destroyed, a lot of tourism businesses are still standing. They are still opening their doors every day but the customers and visitors are not on the ground. That impact is

going to be significant and long-lasting. Over the coming months, and I dare say years, we have to work with our tourism industry to make sure it can recover lost revenue.

Recently I held a roundtable workshop with tourism industry representatives and particularly our Destination Networks. I thought it would be appropriate to share with the House some of the data that was revealed by the Destination Networks. Cameron Arnold from Destination North Coast spoke about Port Macquarie, Taree and other places all the way to the Queensland border. Between October and January revenue drops of over 50 per cent were reported. The areas immediately to our north have not been impacted by fires but Glenn Caldwell from Destination Sydney Surrounds North advised they have drop-offs of revenue around 20 per cent. I have seen reports from the Hunter Valley wine industry indicating revenue drop-offs as much as 45 per cent across the area.

Lucy White from Destination Country and Outback NSW said that in and around the Northern Tablelands there has been a 40 per cent drop in revenue. Recently I was talking with the member for Albury about the impacts on his community. The fires in New South Wales and Victoria have had a detrimental impact on businesses across the Riverina-Murray community. Many of the small towns have had a drop-off in revenue as much as 50 per cent. Sydney Surrounds South have had annual drop-offs between 30 per cent and 50 per cent, which is particularly impacting areas around the Southern Highlands, not just places like Berrima but also the fire-impacted zones. The number of daytrippers is not increasing either. Richard Beere from Destination Southern NSW reported the same figures. In fact, in many cases he said there was a 90 per cent revenue drop over the most important earning part of the year. He also said:

The challenges exist both as community issues and business issues. Do we want visitors back? Of course we do, but not every location is ready.

This is an important point to make to all members in the House and also the wider community. The variation of impacts experienced across the State is dramatic. Some areas are just not ready to receive tourists, but plenty of areas are open for business. It is important that as we talk about the tourism industry recovering we get the message right. We must listen to what industry is saying and take those communities with us on that journey. A lot of good things are already happening. For instance cruise ships have already returned to Eden on the South Coast and I was there when the first cruise ship returned to port. Two thousand passengers got off the Norwegian Jewel for daytrips to Eden. That was the first time that coffee shops, retailers, hotels, tour guides and fishing trip operators in that region had seen any form of large-scale business. It was a godsend for those businesses and it kept them going for a week.

We have already seen partnership marketing programs start to work with Core and TripAdvisor. We are also correcting misinformation about which communities and businesses are open and providing that information in conjunction with the RFS and through organisations such as Destination NSW. We are also supporting small businesses to make sure they have access to web-based platforms so they can talk to people about their businesses being open. [*Extension of time*]

This is called the Get Connected program and is run by Destination NSW. It is a free service that is paid for by the New South Wales Government and allows any small business or tourism operator across the State to register with the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse. It allows their material to be uploaded to a number of websites, including visitnsw.com, sydney.com and australia.com. I encourage all members across the Chamber to get out to their tourism-related businesses and make sure they have utilised the Get Connected program. It is a free service that will get them among the 1.7 million website visitations made every single month.

The Commonwealth has recognised the impact on the tourism economy and has announced a \$76 million tourism package right across the country. That is fantastic. It is the first time that the Commonwealth Government has invested directly in domestic activity, and we should say thank you. We have all seen the Holiday Here This Year campaign. All the State tourism bodies will start rolling out their marketing activities to complement that campaign. It is critical that we get the timing of those campaigns right and that they reflect a retail nature, not just a brand-positioning nature.

We also want to make sure we give the organic activity that is happening on social media, particularly, an opportunity to keep breathing—things like the Empty Esky campaign. The New South Wales Government will be very focused on more user-generated activity on social media to showcase tourism opportunities. I know that many members have raised concerns about the long-term recovery. I say to tourism operators right across the State: We are not going to walk away from you. We will be with you every single step of the way. This is not a short-term recovery process. We will work with you to return those revenues, get the visitors back into your communities and make sure that the New South Wales tourism industry remains strong for many, many years to come.

*Petitions***PETITIONS RECEIVED**

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

**Sydney Bus Services**

Petition calling on the Government to stop bus privatisation and focus on better bus services, received from **Mr Chris Minns**.

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

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

**Barwon-Darling River System**

Petition calling on the Government to conduct a special commission of inquiry into the Barwon-Darling river system and to address the health of the river system, received from **Ms Jo Haylen**.

**Beekeeping Industry**

Petition calling on the Government to support amateur beekeepers by abandoning hive registration fees and allocating more resources to assist amateur and commercial apiarists to maintain a disease-free and sustainable hive network, received from **Ms Jo Haylen**.

**Plastic Bags**

Petition requesting the banning of single-use plastic bags in New South Wales, received from **Ms Jo Haylen**.

**Route 413 Bus Services**

Petition requesting additional services to the 413 bus route, received from **Ms Jo Haylen**.

**Yasmar Estate**

Petition requesting that the Government renovate Yasmar Estate and allow it to continue to be maintained by Crown Lands to protect the estate and encourage community access and use, received from **Ms Jo Haylen**.

**Petersham Public School Pedestrian Safety**

Petition requesting improved pedestrian safety measures at the intersection of West Street and Railway Terrace, Petersham, received from **Ms Jo Haylen**.

**Drug Summit**

Petition calling on the Government to convene a drug summit to investigate the use of drug detection dogs, the introduction of pill testing at music festivals and the decriminalising of drug use, received from **Ms Jo Haylen**.

**No-fault Eviction**

Petition requesting the Government to end no-fault eviction and to act to make tenancies more secure, received from **Ms Jo Haylen**.

**Climate Change Legislation**

Petition requesting the introduction of a Climate Change Act which would mandate renewable energy sources, received from **Ms Jo Haylen**.

**Sydenham Railway Station Cycleway**

Petition calling on the Government to reallocate a lane of Railway Parade adjacent to Sydenham Railway Station to be used as a separated cycle path, received from **Ms Jo Haylen**.

*Motions***BUSHFIRES**

**Debate resumed from an earlier hour.**

**Mr MICHAEL DALEY (Maroubra) (15:17:37):** I make a brief contribution to debate on this motion, and I thank the Government and members of the House for introducing it. My electorate has suffered some tragedies over the past couple of decades—the hailstorm in 1999 remains the most expensive natural disaster in the history of Australia. I hope that, when all is said and done, these bushfires will not eclipse it. In addition, we remember—with very raw emotions still—the Bali bombing of 2002. What we have all learned from these tragic events, and what I have witnessed as a local representative, is that the more people get the opportunity to discuss these things, the more they get to lay bare their emotions. That lends itself to healing—and there is a lot of healing to be done after these horrendous bushfires. All of us in this place hope that the discussions that have taken place over the past three days will play a small part in contributing to the healing, which has a long way to go.

I speak on behalf of the people of Maroubra, which is a coastal, urban locality a long way from the bushfires. But, like all people in New South Wales and indeed Australia and perhaps even around the world, even those of us not directly affected by these tragic events watched with the full gamut of emotions as they unfolded and wreaked their destruction in New South Wales. Primarily, on behalf of my electorate, I offer our condolences to the friends and families—particularly the families—of those who lost people in these fires. I am very fortunate in my life still to have mum and dad alive—they are in their 80s—four kids, a wife, brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews. They are all healthy. As you get older, you realise that your loved ones are the most valuable things in your life and to lose them under any circumstances rips a hole in your heart. But to lose them in the circumstances we have witnessed with these bushfires is just unspeakable.

Adding to the tragedy is seeing people who are related—fathers and sons—perishing in the same truck. Mates who were married and had their first children within a month of each other perished. That just makes it all the more tragic. On behalf of the people of my electorate, I say to the families, friends and communities in Australia and internationally of those who lost loved ones that our hearts go out to you. Nothing we say can make up for your loss, but we do now and will always value the fact that they were defending our community. It was not necessarily the people of Maroubra, but in defending one community of brothers and sisters they defended us all.

I mentioned the hailstorm in 1999. I remember how it swept through very quickly, causing unspeakable damage to thousands of houses along the east coast of New South Wales. In the middle of the night, as the rain poured down, the SES turned up—the angels in orange—to assist families whose homes had been obliterated by hailstones that were almost as big as house bricks. And so it was with these bushfires. The angels in orange descended again—the RFS—accompanied by angels in blue and green and red for the Red Cross and many other colours. On behalf of the people of my electorate, I thank all those who fought the fires and put themselves in peril.

Regardless of the rain in recent days, it is clear that without all those who came to combat the fires New South Wales would have still been significantly ablaze and that, by the time those blazes were extinguished, would have been comprehensively damaged. It is significantly damaged now but it would have been comprehensively damaged if not for the bravery and expertise of the people who fought those fires. The word "hero" is bandied about so often that its currency is sometimes devalued. We refer to rugby league players, tennis players and others as "heroes", but they are not. The heroes are the people whom we witnessed over the summer fighting these fires. They are definitely heroes.

We all sat and watched as beautiful areas were damaged, beautiful people were hurt and killed, beautiful locations were annihilated, and beautiful animals and habitats were destroyed. Collectively, we now wish for the quickest possible recovery. We know that when it comes to this recovery—whether it be families, buildings or communities, facilities, infrastructure, animals, habitat and all the other things that were destroyed—it will take a very long time. But we do know that the people of New South Wales—all of them, no matter where they live—stand ready to help however they can. We will help the people in affected communities and help our environment, our plants, our animals and our State to recover.

It is true that the darkest events often bring out the best in people, and in the past few months we have seen the best of human behaviour. I will conclude with a couple of comments about climate change. I mentioned climate change in my first speech in this place in 2005, long before it was fashionable. In the years since much has been said about climate change in social, political and media discourse, but it disappoints me greatly that the subject has been treated with great polarisation and, even worse, has become a trench on a political battlefield. Today, parties and segments of parties line up on either side of that trench with great polarity. That is a disaster for this subject. We should not and cannot allow that.

As a State, a nation and a species—the only species that can save this planet from the destruction that we have wrought upon it—we cannot continue to allow polarisation in this debate. We need a sensible debate based on evidence, good faith and goodwill. Without those things, we are in deep trouble. For the first time in my political life, I am fearful for the world we are leaving our children—not our grandchildren; our children. In my

lifetime it may come to pass that there is no ice on the Arctic polar ice cap. What a disaster! We cannot have polarisation and battlelines around climate change. I hope we can all do better. But that is a discussion for another day. I finish where I started and offer my condolences to the families and loved ones of the people who were lost and thank everyone who has done their bit—large and small—to help those in need.

**Mr MATT KEAN (Hornsby—Minister for Energy and Environment) (15:26:38):** I add my name to this motion of condolence. The *Bible* says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." The fallen firefighters we honour and remember today laid down their lives for the communities they loved. Scientists will tell you that the impulse to run from fire and flee the wall of smoke and flame is one of the most deeply ingrained of all human instincts. To run towards a fire to fight and defeat it, and then stay on for the long war of attrition against the risk of resignation, takes true courage. Deputy Captain Geoffrey Keaton and firefighter Andrew O'Dwyer of the Horsley Park Rural Fire Brigade, and firefighter Samuel McPaul of the Morven brigade, served with love for their communities and courage in their hearts. They worked to keep their communities safe. I mourn their deaths and acknowledge the sorrow and suffering of their families.

The sense of community for the three members of the American aerial firefighting crew who were killed when their tanker crashed to the west of Cooma reached across the ocean, from their country to ours. Members of the RFS often refer to each other as "family", and First Officer Paul Hudson, flight engineer Rick DeMorgan and Captain Ian McBeth will forever be part of our New South Wales firefighting family. We stand in solidarity with their grieving family and friends. We also stand united in sorrow with the loved ones of all our citizens who perished in the firestorms. Their communities remain in mourning, deeply traumatised. The blackened remains of burnt-out homes are a daily reminder of the suffering of their friends and neighbours. There have been 2,400 homes lost, and a deeply personal tragedy lies behind every one. I acknowledge also the firefighters who have been injured, many of them seriously, while they did everything they could to help during this nightmare summer. For many of them, the road to recovery is likely to be a long one, and some will bear the scars of their service for the rest of their lives.

I take this opportunity to thank them for their service and pledge to do all I can to support them as they recover. The Chamber has heard a lot of talk about leadership over the years, but this summer we witnessed true leadership by the Premier and NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons. As the city choked on ash and smoke and we watched horrified as our beautiful State caught fire, Shane Fitzsimmons has been a steadfast presence leading the greatest volunteer firefighting force in the world through the most difficult and dangerous bushfire season in history. I am proud to count Shane Fitzsimmons as a friend and as a member of my Hornsby community. He understands the strength of the RFS lies in its volunteers. Since he joined the service at 15 years of age he has fought fires on the ground in almost every corner of our State. He understands that firefighting is a dangerous business because he lost his own dad, George, to a prescribed burn that went tragically wrong. His dedication to the welfare and safety of RFS volunteers is the stuff of legend.

As harrowing as it is to acknowledge the deaths we mark and mourn today, we must also acknowledge that the toll would be far higher were it not for the leadership shown by Shane Fitzsimmons, which was emulated brigade by brigade down the line, and the teamwork between the RFS, NSW Fire and Rescue, the National Parks and Wildlife Service [NPWS] and all our New South Wales agencies. As the Minister for Energy and Environment, I acknowledge in particular the service of the National Parks and Wildlife Service whose frontline firefighters have played an irreplaceable role in fighting fires inside and outside our national parks. The National Parks and Wildlife Service has typically had more than 300 staff every day dedicated to responding to the fires, from firefighters to members of incident management teams. In total this fire season, the NPWS has contributed more than 40,000 staff days to fighting the fires. I thank NPWS members for all they have done, and are continuing to do, in partnership with the RFS, NSW Fire and Rescue and other agencies to stem the risk to life and property. The need for that teamwork has never been stronger with this longest and hottest of summers still not at an end.

My community of Hornsby has thankfully been spared so far, but we are no strangers to bushfires and our local RFS is incredibly strong. I have spoken in the Chamber about the incredible work Hornsby crews have done throughout the State this fire season. I take the opportunity to thank them again for their service. Because the RFS is such an important part of the Hornsby community, the deaths of firefighters and people defending their homes have struck hard. I have lost track of the number of locals who have approached me in person, in writing or via email. They are deeply distressed by the deaths, worried for those who have lost their homes and profoundly concerned for the injured. The Hornsby community has responded to this catastrophe with incredible generosity. I acknowledge their unstinting support for the Government's recovery efforts. On behalf of the Hornsby community, I extend our sincere sympathies to the families and friends of everyone who has lost their lives to fire this season. In their memory, I pledge to work tirelessly alongside the Premier and every member of the Government and Parliament to support the recovery of our New South Wales community. I pledge to do all I can to minimize the threat of bushfire into the future.

**Ms LIESL TESCH (Gosford) (15:33:35):** It with incredible sadness that I offer my condolences in the people's Parliament today to all those who have been impacted by fires in New South Wales and up and down the Great Dividing Range. We stand with you. We stand beside those who mourn losses of mums, dads, wives, husbands, sisters, brothers, grandparents, neighbours, mates, friends, lovers, comrades, community leaders, volunteers and fire fighters. Lifetimes of hopes and dreams have been lost this summer. Lifetimes of hopes and dreams have been lost this summer.

At the far end of town  
where the Grickle-grass grows  
and the wind smells slow-and-sour when it blows  
and no birds ever sing excepting old crows ...  
is the Street of the Lifted Lorax.  
And deep in the Grickle-grass, some people say,  
if you look deep enough you can still see, today,  
where the Lorax once stood  
just as long as it could  
before somebody lifted the Lorax away.

Today we celebrate the life of our Rural Fire Service men and women. We honour our colleague in this place Hugh McDermott and his Horsley Park brigade. We remember Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer, who passed near Buxton. We remember Sam McCall, who passed in a crazy fire tornado east of Albury and off-duty volunteer firefighter Colin Burns, who passed on his property near Cobargo on New Year's Eve. We also honour the American air crew, Captain Ian McBeth, first officer Paul Hudson and flight engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr. Fire, smoke, ash—people's lives are intact thanks to our firefighters. To all the brigades on the Central Coast and our communities who support those brigades, to our emergency management centre, the Brisbane Waters RFS, Calga/Mt White RFS, Kariong RFS, Mangrove Mountain RFS, Mooney Mooney RFS, Narara RFS, Patonga Beach RFS, Pearl Beach RFS, Somersby RFS and Spencer RFS, I say: Words cannot thank you for the work you have done up and down the coast. Long before the fires hit the Central Coast they worked to protect us on the North Coast. Along with the weather, they kept us safe. I know now that their trucks are still down on the South Coast.

What *was* the Lorax?  
And why was it there?  
And why was it lifted and taken somewhere  
from the far end of town where the Grickle-grass grows?  
The old Once-ler still lives here.  
Ask him. *He* knows.  
Down slumps the Whisper-ma-Phone to your ear  
and the old Once-ler's whispers are not very clear,  
...  
"Now I'll tell you," he says, with his teeth sounding gray,  
"how the Lorax got lifted and taken away ...  
It all started way back ...  
such a long, long time back. ...

Over the summer I read my university geography notes from 1987. Today I am privileged to read *The Lorax*, published in 1971, in the New South Wales Parliament. Back then Dr Seuss and my science degree notes spoke of times to come and the steps we could have taken as a community, as a society and as a planet. Unfortunately, we did not see it as a crisis back then, but maybe we do now with the things that the climate change kids are talking about. Greta Thunberg will potentially win a Noble Prize. Many members may be in this place today because they were climate change kids back then and cared.

Way back in the days when the grass was still green  
and the pond was still wet  
and the clouds were still clean,  
and the song of the Swomee-Swans rang out in space ...  
one morning, I came to this glorious place.  
And I first saw the trees!  
The Truffula Trees!  
The bright-colored tufts of the Truffula Trees!  
Mile after mile in the fresh morning breeze.  
And, under the trees, I saw Brown Bar-ba-loots  
frisking about in their Bar-ba-loot suits  
as they played in the shade and ate Truffula Fruits.  
From the rippulous pond  
came the comfortable sound  
of the Humming-Fish humming  
while splashing around.

Koalas and oysters, perhaps.

But those *trees*! Those *trees*!  
*Those Truffula Trees*!  
All my life I'd been searching  
for trees such as these.

...

I felt a great leaping  
of joy in my heart.  
I knew just what I'd do!  
I unloaded my cart.  
In no time at all, I had built a small shop.  
And I chop down a Truffula Tree with one chop.  
And with great skillful skill and with great speedy speed,  
I took the soft tuft. And I knitted a Thneed!  
The instant I'd finished, I heard a *ga-Zump!*  
I looked.  
I saw something pop out of a stump  
of the tree I'd chopped down. It was sort of a man.  
Describe him? ... That's hard. I don't know if I can.  
He was shortish. And oldish.  
And brownish. And mossy.  
And he spoke with a voice  
that was sharpish and bossy.

From the Gosford electorate we watched the Gaspers Mountain fire become the world's largest fire, ignited from one spot in the Blue Mountains world heritage area. We watched it grow on the app, thanks to the RFS tech team. We back-burnt to protect us on the coast and yet lightning and sparks ignited us. Viki Campbell was our Australia Day Central Coast ambassador. It is a hardly a recognition for the leadership she showed in the Central Coast and Lake Macquarie RFS crews, supplemented by other crews, as they contained the fires in our community. The back-burning—I learnt so much about all the equipment, the incendiaries from the chopper, the timing that went on to protect communities home by home across the top of the coast and the minimal damage we sustained is an absolute commendation to the incredible work of the teams who know our community so well, and who have given so much.

I thank the teams north into Bucketty, south to Spencer and Gunderman and west aligned with St Albans. I also thank the National Parks and Wildlife Service, our townies, our police, emergency services, ambulance and a massive thank you to the Central Coast crews who worked tirelessly in the background to keep roads and properties cleared to allow access. I thank the emergency service personnel who knocked door after door in the community to check on people's fire plans, the water sources in the community and priority properties across the mountain district.

"Mister!" he said with a sawdusty sneeze,  
"I am the Lorax. I speak for the trees.  
I speak for the trees, for the trees have no tongues.  
And I'm asking you, sir, at the top of my lungs"—  
he was very upset as he shouted and puffed—  
"*What's that THING you've made out of my Truffula tuft?*"

...

The Lorax said,  
"Sir! You are crazy with greed.  
There is no one on earth  
who would buy that fool Thneed.  
But the very next minute I proved he was wrong.  
For, just at that minute, a chap came along,  
and he thought that the Thneed I had knitted was great.  
He happily bought it for three ninety-eight.  
I laughed at the Lorax, "You poor stupid guy!  
You never can tell what some people will buy."

I thank the Central Coast catering teams at Gosford and Charmhaven. They made sandwiches morning after morning and distributed them. I also thank the Salvos team who joined our caterers to feed the troupes and all the generous coasties who dropped off food at the member of Parliament's office along the coast. I thank everyone who manned our evacuation centres. I thank the CWA, the Lyons, the Rotary, every single community group, schools, families, friends and the kids who sold lemonade. I thank them for their ideas. We saw the awakening of the true Aussie spirit and generosity that we need to capture, hold onto and keep alive. The fire then came east towards a denser population on the coast. On Tuesday people complained of the smoke. Mother Nature held that temperature and the population of Sydney at bay in that smoke but it meant that the nor'-wester kept the fire west of George Downes Drive and our community could rest for Christmas. We were so very lucky.

"I repeat," cried the Lorax,  
"I speak for the trees!"  
"I'm busy," I told him.  
"Shut up, if you please."

...

And, in no time at all,  
in the factory I built,  
the whole Once-ler Family  
was working full tilt.



We were all knitting Thneeds just as busy as bees, to the sound of the chopping of Truffula Trees.  
 Then ... Oh Baby! Oh!  
 How my business did grow!  
 Now, chopping one tree at a time was too slow.  
 So I quickly invented my Super-Axe-Hacker  
 which whacked off four Truffula Trees at one smacker.  
 We were making Thneeds  
 four times as fast as before!  
 And that Lorax? ...  
*He* didn't show up any more.

Huddled in the darkness on the beach at Lake Conjola, strangers moving together to escape the intense heat and falling embers under the fire storm at the Cobargo showgrounds, trees burst in tornadoes above our heads, unprecedented, leaving when the heat was too intense, shooting our cattle. "We've lost our beautiful town." "Woman saves a scorched and screaming koala with the shirt off her own back." Unfortunately we don't allow pets in evacuation centres. One billion animals wiped out. "I stand by the smouldering ruins of my beautiful home on the South Coast." I just don't know what to save and what to remove amongst the PVA glue-like asbestos encapsulated remnants of our family home, the old grapevine, the pavers. Aftershock is palpable. "There is no scale for grief", each is unique, each is lived, felt—the loss, the anxiety, not knowing about loved ones, about home, animals. Mental health will not go away on its own. As a community this is our shared experience. We are swept into uncertainty.

But the next week  
 he knocked  
 on my new office door.  
 He snapped, "I'm the Lorax who speaks for the trees  
 which you seem to be chopping as fast as you please.  
 But I'm *also* in charge of the Brown Bar-ba-loots  
 who played in the shade in their Bar-ba-loot suits  
 and happily lived, eating Truffula Fruits.  
 "NOW ... thanks to your hacking my trees to the ground,  
 there's not enough Truffula Fruit to go 'round.  
 And my poor Bar-ba-loots are all getting the crummies  
 because they have gas, and no food, in their tummies!  
 "They loved living here. But I can't let them stay.  
 They'll have to find food. And I hope that they may.  
 Good luck, boys," he cried. And he sent them away.

Thanks to the ABC Radio, ever-present with bushfire information—road closed, leave now, too late to leave, fire level warnings. Our vital ABC.

I meant no harm. I most truly did not.  
 But I had to grow bigger. So bigger I got.  
 I biggered my factory. I biggered my roads.  
 I biggered my wagons. I biggered the loads ...

I went right on biggering ... selling more Thneeds.  
 And I biggered my money, which everyone needs.

Then *again* he came back! I was fixing some pipes  
 when that old-nuisance Lorax came back with *more* gripes.

"I am the Lorax," he coughed and he whiffed.  
 He sneezed and he snuffled. He snarggled. He sniffed.  
 "Once-ler!" he cried with a crufulous croak.  
 "Once-ler! You're making such smogulous smoke!  
 My poor Swomee-Swans ... why, they can't sing a note!  
 No one can sing who has smog in his throat.

"And so," said the Lorax,  
 "—please pardon my cough—  
 they cannot live here.  
 So I'm sending them off.

"Where will they go? ...  
 I don't hopefully know.

They may have to fly for a month ... or a year ...  
 To escape from the smog you've smogged-up around here.

We honour and recognise the individuals who lost their lives in the fire: Robert and Gwenda, Vivian and George, Julie, Barry, Chris, Russell, Robert and Patrick—who were dad and son—Laurie and John, Michael, John, David, Ross, Michael, and others whose names we do not even know. We send love from this Parliament to your families and to your communities and wish you healing in the life beyond your own family members that are no longer with you.

And then I got mad.

I got terribly mad.  
 I yelled at the Lorax, "Now listen here, Dad!  
 All you do is yap-yap and say 'Bad! Bad! Bad! Bad!'  
 Well, I have my rights, sir, and I'm telling *you*  
 I intend to go on doing just what I do!  
 And, for your information, you Lorax, I'm figgering  
 on biggering  
     and BIGGERING  
         and BIGGERING  
             and BIGGERING  
 turning MORE Truffula Trees into Thneeds  
 which everyone, EVERYONE, *EVERYONE* needs!"  
 And at that very moment, we heard a loud whack!  
 From outside in the fields came a sickening smack  
 of an axe on a tree. Then we heard the tree fall.  
*The very last Truffula Tree of them all!*

The one who reaches out and gently touches—who is present with you in your loss, your silence, your vacant stare, your story which needs telling. The evacuation and community centres of love, support and hope. The kindness, humanity—such love, such camaraderie. True human spirit. Courage. Mateship. Unparalleled acts of love and selflessness and sacrifice. Kindness. Reflections from the heart on what is truly important.

Now all that was left 'neath the bad-smelling sky  
 was my big empty factory ...  
 the Lorax ...  
 and I.

The Lorax said nothing. Just gave me a glance ...  
 just gave me a very sad, sad backward glance ...  
 as he lifted himself by the seat of his pants.  
 And I'll never forget the grim look on his face  
 when he heisted himself and took leave of this place,  
 through a hole in the smog, without leaving a trace.

So many Facebook and online communities of love and support continue to grow. Thanks to our Central Coast Disaster Relief community, Tradies for Fire Affected Communities and Find A Bed Australia. To the innovative Aussies who thought up and activate and continue to administer these sites: Thank you. The real-world benefits of the online relationships are profound and will continue long after this summer is over. This is about incredibly generous Aussies opening up their hearts, homes and families—their resources, skills and talents they did not even know they had—to support their families, neighbours, friends, and strangers. Thank you.

That was long, long ago.  
 But each day since that day  
 I've sat here and worried  
 and worried away.  
 Through the years, while my buildings  
 have fallen apart,  
 I've worried about it  
 with all of my heart.

"But *now*," says the Once-ler,  
 "Now that *you're* here,  
 the word of the Lorax seems perfectly clear.  
 UNLESS someone like you  
 cares a whole awful lot,  
 nothing is going to get better.  
 It's not.

"SO ...  
 Catch!" calls the Once-ler.  
 He lets something fall.  
 "It's a Truffula Seed.  
 It's the last one of all!  
 You're in charge of the last of the Truffula Seeds.  
 And Truffula Trees are what everyone needs.  
 Plant a new Truffula. Treat it with care.  
 Give it clean water. And feed it fresh air.  
 Grow a forest. Protect it from axes that hack.  
 Then the Lorax  
 and all of his friends may come back."

Thank you to Firesticks cultural burning who visited us at Parliament House yesterday. We look forward to walking beside those with true knowledge of this country and our Mother Earth. If we had listened with our hearts to our Aboriginal brothers and sisters and how they have managed the land for over 70,000 years before whitefella

arrived, and how the Yolngu and others manage the land in the Northern Territory and care for country, would we have had this crisis today? What would our trajectory as a nation be?

Thank you for this condolence motion opportunity today. Simultaneously we have seen one billion animals killed and 5.5 million hectares of New South Wales burnt, alongside millions of hectares of Queensland and Victoria. Today I offer condolences as we have seen the worst possible display of unethical behaviour in our Federal Parliament. What part of all of this is most devastating? We have clowns in the positions of leadership in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. The powerful, unbalanced media in western democracies, on which Australia continues to model itself, is pushing untruths and social divide. Continue to speak the truth journalists, please; do not be silent. Do everything you can, and do it loud and clear because we need you.

This condolence motion is absolutely about the heroes we lost in this fire; it is absolutely about the civilians killed. It is about the future of this planet and the seed that we must sow in unity for a future in which humanity can survive. It is about authentic leadership stepping up now to take the lead to rebuild destroyed communities, support those who are living authentically and rebuild a strong, ethical social fabric in a global climate crisis where Australian political leadership has been embarrassed in the spotlight of the world.

It was a "merry crisis"—thanks, Scottie Marsh. It is still an absolute—excuse my language—fucking crisis. Australia stood behind the RFS volunteer who yelled at our Prime Minister. The world saw Australia not want to shake his hand. It was crisis in November, when a woman up the North Coast, who had lost everything, yelled at Janelle Saffin, one of the most gentle and dignified members in this place, not understanding who is who in government and how the government of this nation works.

We see in this Chamber a leader on the South Coast who is broken, criticising his own Government, alongside charities that wrap their loving arms around Australians year in and year out, forever battling to pick up the fragmented humans that fall through the cracks. We absolutely must care for Andrew Constance and his community. Please stay true to your own integrity, Andrew. Let us care for Shelley Hancock, an experienced member in this place who is lost for words. I beg you, Shelley, to stay authentic to who you really are, not what politics has made you become. Do not revert to those old behaviours. Move forward in this place in love and a different future.

Let us care for our colleague Trish Doyle, who for a while believed she had lost one of her own children fighting the fire. Let us care for our friend Hugh McDermott, a hero and our symbol in the Chamber of the mighty, generous RFS. The clarity in which Hugh sees the world right now is so important. I encourage him to hold on to it. The entire Great Dividing Range has been impacted, far beyond government-imposed State borders. We represent communities that are suffering not just because of the destruction by the fire. This is symbolic of so much more. The Wildlife Information Rescue and Education Service and Wildlife A.R.C. volunteers are caring for creatures as though our planet and our country depend on it.

The fires are symbolic of the current political structure failing the people of New South Wales and Australia. We are waking up. I thank the Premier for being there the whole time. We need her to step up and support the environment Minister, who just spoke. He knows the truth, despite being stymied and ridiculed by his own party. We are seeing the beginning of a social revolution where the people will step up and say this is not okay. We will fight in here and we will fight out there for a better future for all of us. [*Extension of time*]

Yesterday a slow-burning cultural practitioner from Firesticks visited the Parliament—an important part of learning how our Aboriginal brothers and sisters lived with Mother Earth for over 70,000 years. We as a government need to start to talk with urgency about population, water supply, food supply and about saving this planet on another level. The seeds of the truffula trees are in our hands right now. The climate change kids—Greta Thunberg, Audrey, all our kids, grandkids, great-grandkids—and the koalas deserve to live a life with truffula trees.

The climate change kids should keep talking to us honestly, authentically and passionately. They should learn how politics work and they should continue to be educated and intelligent, and to rise up and shout. Thank you to everyone for the generosity of opening up our hearts and sharing love and for the opportunity to speak in this condolence motion in this Parliament. Australia, we are a beautiful nation. The world knows it and it is watching us and supporting us. We can and we must together be so much more. Condolences, energy, love, healing and gratitude.

**Debate interrupted.**

*Documents***LAW ENFORCEMENT CONDUCT COMMISSION****Reports**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** In accordance with Standing Order 265, I table the following documents:

- (1) Letter from Mr Bruce McClintock, Inspector of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission, to the Presiding Officers regarding his report on dealing with a complaint by the Commissioner for Oversight of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission against the Chief Commissioner, dated 6 February 2020.
- (2) Report of the Inspector of the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission 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***COMMERCIAL FISHING INDUSTRY**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Before we commence the debate, and for the benefit of those in the public gallery, whom I welcome, I take this opportunity to explain the process and rationale behind this unique debate, which enables members of the public to bring their concerns directly to the attention of the House. The intent of the procedure is that the petition debate will start with a speech from a member, which in most cases will be the member who lodged the petition; followed by up to four other members; followed by a Minister in response. To conclude the debate, the first member will speak in reply. After all members have spoken, the House will vote on the question that the House take note of the petition. This question will, in most cases, be determined on the voices and will be passed. However, if this is challenged by a member, it may proceed to a division, in which case the bells will be rung and members will vote on the question to take note of the petition by sitting on the appropriate side of the House.

The question is that the House take note of the petition.

**Mr PHILIP DONATO (Orange) (15:57:15):** This petition is imperative to the people who provide this country with the incredibly high standard of seafood we all enjoy. Some of those people are in the gallery, and I thank them for being here today. We are here to let this Government know that we are onto them. We know its dodgy dealings and we will not stand by and let it get away with it. The Government's commercial fishing reform process has been a disgrace. The confusing and covert way in which the share trading scheme was conducted beggars belief. Commercial fishers all along our coastline have been devastated and without incomes, whilst those with the right connections have managed to accumulate shares from afar.

Reform should not leave an industry completely decimated after it. So what has gone wrong? Let us begin with the probity assessment, labelled by the Auditor-General as "not following policy or procedure". The probity assessment was managed by the same firm that had a hand in shutting down the greyhound industry—the same company that said former mining Minister Ian McDonald "acted within his powers" when he granted one of his mates a mining exploration licence.

A second opinion on the assessment found it "deficient in several significant respects ... specifically, it did not adequately review the conduct of the Minister". The particular probity officer who engaged with the assessment was already engaged in multiple New South Wales Government projects with former Minister Niall Blair and other bureaucrats. The probity officer went on to provide multiple cover-ups for the Minister and his bureaucratic mates throughout the entire assessment.

All the documents reviewed for the assessment were deemed appropriate by the assessor, which was incredibly confusing for participants. There were multiple documents, all with the same name, all containing different information. In probity assessments like these, the officer should have been specific as to which documents were being relied upon. I am confused by how the assessor could have deemed appropriate any part of the process: No minutes of meetings were taken and no meeting outlines were prepared. Attendees were not even recorded. It defies belief that a government agency could conduct a large-scale reform process with nobody taking minutes or recording attendees. Participants were told that three rounds of a practice share trading market preview would be held where they would get information about the price and availability of shares in the preview market. Fishers went into the real share trading market blind as to what they should be bidding and what they could bid on.

The Department of Primary Industries [DPI] offered participants the opportunity to report any incidents of actual or suspected unethical or anti-competitive behaviour during the share trading. It would have been inundated with complaints as the entire process was unethical from day one. However, the results were not

published until the end of the second round of share trading. It ignored a basic conflict of interest register that is necessary for projects of such high interest. Instead, it relied on its DPI codes of conduct. A lack of privacy and confidentiality in dealing with individuals' information and documentation was even mentioned. We know why—the Government was making bids for fishing shares itself. Over \$1 million was spent on buying four commercial fishing businesses—none with share deficits.

How were fishermen able to compete with government coffers in a bidding scheme? The truth is they were not: The deals had already been done. Prior to the first round of share trading all the mud crab shares had been sold. Fishermen who wanted to increase their shareholding and continue fishing at existing levels could not bid for shares. They were booted out of business. Who got the shares? I wish we could access minutes from those meetings and see who attended—that would be interesting. The whole thing does not sound at all legitimate.

At the very least we need an independent and transparent inquiry. The member for Clarence, who is in the Chamber, has given an undertaking to the fishers in his electorate that he will support any fisher who lost value in their business as a consequence of the restructure. During a candidate's breakfast the member for Myall Lakes promised that he would hold the Minister to account if Wallis Lakes fishers were impacted. Well, they have been, so I call on members to support this petition. The Minister for Agriculture and Western New South Wales must now do the right thing, support the petition and initiate an independent inquiry if he is to restore any credibility with the commercial fishing industry.

**Mr CHRISTOPHER GULAPTIS (Clarence) (16:02:22):** I acknowledge the fishers in the gallery and I recognise the value of their industry and their product to the State. I oppose the petition before the House. The fishing industry is complex—over 1,000 fishers with multiple endorsements compete for the same resource. A number of industry bodies represent the fishers. Some belong to the Professional Fisher's Association [PFA], some to the Wild Caught Fishers Coalition and others to co-ops. Some fishers are totally independent. Clearly there is no one-size-fits-all scenario to satisfy all fishers.

I have lived in Maclean for 40 years. I know the importance of the fishing industry to regional communities. The Clarence region is a combination of estuary and ocean trawl fishers. I know how complex it is to manage the industry in the Clarence to satisfy all fishers. Having met with the PFA, representatives from the Wild Caught Fishers Coalition, co-ops and individual fishers, I know that there are multiple views on the restructure. As with all restructures there are winners and losers, but I can assure you the New South Wales Government is committed to delivering a sustainable, viable and prosperous seafood industry.

For many years, the State's commercial fishing industry sent the New South Wales Government a strong message that action had to be taken to make the industry more viable and secure—that is exactly what the Government has done. I know that the reform process was not easy—there is no denying that it was challenging for many fishers—but it absolutely had to happen. It is a complex industry. As I have said before, no one size fits all.

The Government ensured that assistance measures were in place to help fishers adjust. It provided professional legal and financial advice, grants, low interest rate loans, retraining assistance grants of up to \$10,000 and a \$16 million adjustment subsidy program. This program provided for voluntary fishing business buyouts and voluntary participation in a government-funded, subsidised share trading market. I accept that the share trading was complex and convoluted. But let us remember that the New South Wales Government invested \$14 million directly into the fishing industry. That is more than the Opposition ever did for the industry. They gave us Eddie Obeid and Ian McDonald as fishing Ministers.

Fishermen's cooperatives have been assisted through one-off payments of up to \$30,000 for specialist business advice. In the case of cooperatives based on Crown land, they have been provided with standard long-term leases and rent subsidies. The Commercial Fisheries Business Adjustment Program has been fully implemented and the industry reforms have been tried and tested over and over again. This is all on the public record. Not only was this process subject to probity advisers at every step, in late 2016 and early 2017 the General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5 conducted a thorough inquiry into the reforms. I believe Robert Brown from the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party chaired the committee and endorsed the reform process. In fact, the opening line of the chair's foreword is:

This Committee acknowledged in its 2017 Commercial fishing in New South Wales report that reform of the commercial fishing industry was needed.

The inquiry recognised the importance of reforming the industry and recommended that the reforms proceed without delay. In addition, in late 2017 proceedings were lodged in the Supreme Court, which ruled that the New South Wales Government had executed its reforms legally and correctly. The Court of Appeal upheld this judgment and the reforms were legal and could proceed unchanged. Having put important structural changes in

place, the New South Wales Government is now getting on with ensuring fisheries can do what they do best, that is, catch fish.

The priority for this Government is to remove outdated red tape and regulations that get in the way of fishers' business viability. In my electorate of Clarence, the Government is currently consulting on crab trapping in the Clarence River. The use of crab traps is prohibited in the Clarence River upstream from the boat ramp adjacent to the Maclean Court House even though mud and blue swimmer crabs are under a quota management system. This means that even though the quantity and size of crabs that can be caught as well as the type of gear that can be used to catch them are restricted, there are still restrictions on where traps can be used along the river. My constituents have indicated that this has impacted the viability of their businesses. That is why I support the Government's move to seek stakeholder feedback on this issue. That is what the Government is doing: meeting with stakeholders and discussing the issue further. *[Time expired.]*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I remind members that a number of them are on calls to order. The member for Canterbury and the member for Port Stephens are already on three calls to order.

**Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland) (16:07:45):** Labor supports the more than 10,000 citizens who have signed this petition. We have worked with the commercial fishing industry and commercial fishers, many of whom are in the gallery today—people like Bob and Heather Elliott, their son Dean, Hayley, Mary Howard and Cliff, who has flown in from Ballina. What a kick in the guts the Government's response has been to them. These people's livelihoods have been wrecked by this Government. All they have asked for is a full, public and independent inquiry into the New South Wales Commercial Fishing Business Adjustment Program—not something where the Government can fiddle with its numbers in the upper House and get the results it wants.

The contribution of the member for Clarence was all about divide and conquer. He talked about the PFA, Wild Caught Fishers Coalition and independent fishers. The whole process has been an attempt to wreck the industry from the very start—smash it up and let the fishers fight each other just to survive. The Government is making them fight over the crumbs. This is not the loaves and fishes. You are not Jesus. You cannot actually make it go around.

**Mr Christopher Gulaptis:** You might be Judas.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I call the member for Clarence to order for the first time. The member for Maitland will direct her comments through the Chair.

**Ms JENNY AITCHISON:** I cannot believe that this Government, which professes to be a friend to business, would kick fifth-generation family businesses in the guts with such ferocity. The Deputy Premier knew that—before he was the Deputy Premier when he was the Minister for Small Business. He said to me, "Jenny, I can't see how this makes sense." But do you know what happened? The Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party—in fact, Mr Philip Donato—won the seat of Orange. Then what happened? He became the Deputy Premier.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I again ask the member for Maitland to direct her comments through the Chair.

**Ms JENNY AITCHISON:** Yes, I am, through you, Madam Deputy Speaker. He became the Deputy Premier and suddenly he forgot all about fairness and equity because there was something else. There was this ability to sit next to the Premier and do over the industry. I heard firsthand from many people across this State just last week about the terrible impacts this is having on people's mental health, their physical health and their finances. People are hitting the wall because this Government does not care about our community. And it is not just the fishers. It is the co-ops. It is the communities. It is the restaurants. I have seen fisher after fisher forced to leave the industry. The member for Clarence does not care if there are winners and losers because he is never going to be on the loser's side, is he? Well, I will tell you what. You should watch your seat—through you, Madam Deputy Speaker. He should watch his seat to see what happens in Clarence because that is a real problem.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Clarence will come to order.

**Ms JENNY AITCHISON:** When I asked the new Minister about this he did not even know he was the Minister for fishers. His office said, "No, not me. That is somewhere else." Then he realised. "Mate, you got the short straw." That is what the Premier said. "You've got this." So he said no-one was supposed to be worse off under these reforms and that the Share Appeal Panel had been set up to investigate on a case-by-case basis. I have natural hair but it would have gone grey waiting for that share panel. It is at a cost of \$2,900 per share class, not the total cost as those opposite tried to say at estimates last year before we corrected them.

For every share class held by a fisher they had to pay nearly \$3,000 to get an appeal. How long did they wait? It was nine months before they even put the committee together and more than a year before some of those fishers have been heard. It is a disgrace. And what could they do in the meantime? Zip, zilch, nought, because

they had to wait. Maybe the Government wanted them to miss out because it knew people could not put their lives on hold for a year while the Minister sat on his hands. And it is not the only issue about which he is sitting on his hands.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I call the member for Clarence to order for the second time. The member for North Shore will come to order.

**Ms JENNY AITCHISON:** There is a little organisation call CommFish, the Commercial Fishing NSW Advisory Council. It is constituted by the agriculture Minister. There are 13 people on that council. They are supposed to provide him with advice—when he works out he is the Minister. It has had seven vacancies since May last year. They have not been filled for nine months. According to the website the council has not met since 6 March last year—before the election, before the Minister was even appointed to this role. They have not met, they do not care, they do not listen. They simply do not care. Members should be going out to their communities and telling them what a disgrace this is. The fact is those opposite do not even want to support an inquiry. If they were proud of it they would allow the inquiry. [*Time expired.*]

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I remind the member for Clarence that he is on two calls to order.

**Mr GURMESH SINGH (Coffs Harbour) (16:13:16):** I acknowledge today the presence of members of the fishing industry in the gallery. As the member for Clarence has already detailed, the business adjustment program, while challenging for many, has already had its fair share of independent scrutiny. The business adjustment program was the subject of a parliamentary inquiry in 2016 and was challenged in the Supreme Court of New South Wales and the Court of Appeal. In all cases the New South Wales Government was given the green light to proceed. So, instead of wasting time with yet another costly inquiry, would it not be better to focus our efforts on supporting the hardworking men and women of our fishing industry, including those in my electorate of Coffs Harbour?

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I remind the member for Gosford that she is already on a call to order.

**Mr GURMESH SINGH:** This is an industry that works around the clock to supply some of the world's finest seafood to the people of New South Wales and it is an industry that this Government is very proud to support. I did not enter this place to waste time debating the past. Instead, on this side of the Chamber we are committed to supporting the future profitability of our fishers. That is why the New South Wales Government launched a Supporting Seafood Future grants program to build marketing and promotion capability within the seafood industry through small- and large-scale grants.

The Professional Fishermen's Association, which is based in the Coffs Harbour electorate, has been the recipient of some of these grants to implement programs such as the production of videos focusing on values held in common between the industry and the community; a social media campaign on topics such as under-utilised New South Wales species; local markets and co-ops; local seafood festivals and events; school excursions to educate school students about their local seafood producers and seafood safety and quality; producing a point-of-sale winter recipes for seafood retailers as part of their Love Australian Prawns campaign; and the Seafood Escape media campaign, consisting of four 30-minute television episodes.

The New South Wales Government also expanded the Young Farmer Business Program to include young fishers aged 18 to 35 years. The two core components of the program include grants for groups who support young farmers and fishers to deliver training for their members and a coaching course to help young fishers grow their businesses and to improve their confidence to make strong business decisions. Commercial fishers and aquaculture farmers in New South Wales also have access to the Seafood Innovation Fund. The fund delivers low interest loans up to half a million dollars to help seafood businesses increase their long-term productivity and sustainability. This is assisting seafood businesses to modernise and build resilience, to ensure that equipment has minimal impact on the environment and to increase focus on replacement of unsafe or inefficient assets.

Previous speakers have already detailed the scrutiny these reforms have been through. However, so that we are all very clear, the process has had probity advisers at every step of the way. It has been the subject of an upper House inquiry lead by the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party. It was tested in the New South Wales Supreme Court, which ruled that the New South Wales Government had executed its reforms legally and correctly, a ruling that was upheld in the Court of Appeal. The reforms have been implemented and it is about time we let the fishers get on with the job.

**Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) (16:16:34):** I speak in support of the petition and the 10,000 constituents of New South Wales who have signed it. I thank the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party member for Orange, Philip Donato, for presenting the petition to the House. I also thank the members for their contributions to the discussion. Before I speak to the petition I must declare one thing. I have declared it before but I will declare it again. I am the grandson and the son of former fishermen. Our family history in this State

started in 1948 with my maternal grandfather trawling the waters of Sydney Harbour. This ended in 2018 with my father, who is now in his mid-seventies, having to get out of an industry that has supported not only me but also my mum, my family and my three siblings.

The way in which this has happened has ripped apart my family. It has had a massive impact on the mental and physical health of my father. Members have to understand one thing about fishermen: They work seven days a week. They do not work from nine to five. They work when the moon is out, when the sun is up, when the tide is high and when the tide is low. They do not work from apps or from reports. The Government has decimated this industry. The former fisheries Minister is nowhere to be seen and he has left the current Minister with an absolute shambles of an industry. I note that the member for Clarence laughs. But he does not know what it is like.

**Mr Christopher Gulaptis:** I do.

**Mr GUY ZANGARI:** You do not know what it is like to have a father who is suffering from mental illness as a result of your Government's neglect of fishermen.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The member for Clarence will come to order. The member for Fairfield will direct his comments through the Chair.

**Mr GUY ZANGARI:** I will direct my remarks through the Chair. He does not understand how it is affecting the fishermen, who have given this State, country and the world the best produce. We are going through a perfect storm at the moment: coronavirus, drought, you name it. Now the fishermen who are left behind to pick up the pieces simply cannot offload their produce. Members should go to their local fishmonger where they will see that there is hardly any produce there and what is there is priced so high that our constituents cannot afford to buy it.

The Minister has been left with an industry that has been decimated. I say to the Minister: You would not know the difference between a mud crab and a sand crab even if it bit you on the aft of your rubber duckie. Google that and see what it means. At the next Liberals and Nationals conference, when the members opposite are eating beautiful salt and pepper calamari, it will not have come from New South Wales. It will have come from an estuary in some foreign country that does not have the manual handling and food-safe practices that we have here in New South Wales, which are the best in the world. That is why other countries come here for our produce. It is as simple as that.

Basically this Government has said to the fisher, "Here you go. You can buy back into your industry. You can buy back into something that you have been in for 60 years." Guess what? No TAFE—oh, TAFE does not exist, I forgot that—would be able to deliver the skills and knowledge that those fishermen have. You cannot read it in a book and you certainly cannot google it. It needs to be passed on. You pass it on to your son, you pass it on to your neighbour or you pass it on to the lucky person who has been privileged to get into that industry. All of the rural members here will be able to attest to this. Once upon a time those of us in the city would be able to go up and down the coast and take a lovely photo at a wharf with beautiful fishing boats in the background. Guess what? That does not exist anymore because there is no industry, none at all.

Shame on this Government for what it has done. It is an absolute disgrace. That is why the NSW Labor Opposition went to the 2019 election with a policy to have a full and independent review of what this Government has done to the fishing industry. It has not just affected the fishing industry; it has affected the diesel mechanics, the marine mechanics, the auto electricians, the net salespeople, the co-ops and the workers in the takeaway shops. It relates to an entire industry and for some rural and regional communities that is the bottom line. This Government has taken it away from them. Shame on you.

**Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands—Minister for Agriculture and Western New South Wales) (16:21:57):** I acknowledge all the representatives and members of the fishing community who have joined us for the petition discussion this afternoon. I thank the member for Orange for bringing this petition to the House today for discussion. The petition calls for an immediate, full and independent inquiry into various aspects of the New South Wales commercial fishing industry. Specifically it relates to the structural adjustment component—the business adjustment program—which commenced, as we all know, in 2017. The text of the petition makes a number of claims of hidden documents, redacted reports and even deliberate maladministration by this Government. Those claims, it pains me to say, are just ridiculous.

I am not denying for a moment that the industry reform process was incredibly challenging for many commercial fishers in this State. Reform on this scale was needed, as was found by the parliamentary inquiry chaired by the Hon. Robert Brown, a member of Mr Philip Donato's party. The reform was required but a reform of this scale would challenge any industry in the agricultural sector. I wish to be very clear: The reforms were



necessary and this Government went to enormous lengths to ensure procedural fairness, transparency and confidentiality throughout the process.

In designing the program the Government sought independent expert advice and industry feedback every step of the way. Before the Government had even developed the subsidised share trading market, the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries engaged an independent probity adviser to oversee the process. The Government took the industry reforms incredibly seriously and the process had been tried and tested on multiple occasions. We have heard from previous speakers that it was challenged in the Supreme Court and was upheld. When appealed in the Court of Appeal, that decision was upheld as well.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I call the member for Maitland to order for the first time.

**Mr ADAM MARSHALL:** The Commercial Fisheries Business Adjustment Program has now been fully implemented. While it has been a challenging time for the industry, I will not send the industry into further unrest by putting on hold the thousands of quota shares that have been issued and are now being successfully used and traded by commercial fishers all over the State so that some members—just some members—of this House can indulge their conspiracy theories. Since becoming the Minister responsible for this portfolio I have announced and commenced an independent assessment of the socio-economic impacts of the Commercial Fisheries Business Adjustment Program and I look forward to receiving those findings from Professor Kate Barclay very shortly. I will make further decisions if necessary on the basis of that report and the feedback I continue to get. Lastly, as the member for Maitland mentioned, all members of the Fishing Advisory Committees have been appointed, all positions on CommFish have been appointed and they will be meeting on 25 and 26 February.

**Mr PHILIP DONATO (Orange) (16:25:14):** In reply: I thank all the members who spoke to the discussion on this petition: the member for Clarence, the member for Maitland, the member for Coffs Harbour, the member for Fairfield and of course the Minister. The member for Clarence spoke about winners and losers. The commercial fishing industry has been decimated from 1,000 commercial fishers down to 600. I have seen an email that the member for Clarence sent to Bruce Neevelt—a constituent of his, I guess—on 2 June 2017 in which he said:

I will support any full time fisher who has lost value in his business as a consequence of the restructure.

Today the member says, well, it is bad luck, there are going to be winners and losers, that is just the process. You cannot say one thing in your electorate and another thing in the Chamber. The member for Maitland gave a terrific speech, touching on the mental and physical health components and the anxiety and angst this has caused to those employed in the fishing industry. The member for Fairfield, whose father and grandfather were both fishermen in this very town decades and decades ago and who has a wealth of experience and knowledge, gave a terrific insight into the reasons why we need a full independent inquiry to get the answers to these questions. It is not a conspiracy theory, not at all. These are legitimate questions. Livelihoods have been decimated and affected and we need a proper, independent full analysis to get to the bottom of this bungling bureaucratic process that has totally decimated this industry. We seek a full independent inquiry. I ask the House to support the petition.

**Petition noted.**

#### *Motions*

### **BUSHFIRES**

**Debate resumed from an earlier hour.**

**Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) (16:28:20):** It has indeed been the summer of heartache for the people of New South Wales. It has been a summer of unprecedented bushfire emergency and of catastrophic loss. I speak here on behalf of every Lake Macquarie resident to pay tribute to those who have lost their lives to the fires that have ravaged so much of this State over the past few months. We stand with all those who have lost their homes. We stand in complete solidarity with our firefighters and other emergency services personnel, who have put their lives on hold and often on the line every day for months to save us from what has been an unimaginable horror.

On behalf of everyone in Lake Macquarie, I extend my deepest condolences to the families and local communities of the 25 victims of those fires. We remember Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer, Samuel McPaul, Colin Burns, Robert Lindsay, 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 as well as the three American crew members killed in the Snowy Monaro region: Ian McBeth, Paul Hudson and Rick DeMorgan Jr. We also remember the 56-year-old man yet to be formally identified who died in the Cobargo fire. Those 25 lives touched so many and our thoughts remain with them, their families and their communities.

As devastating as that loss of life is, we are grateful for the many thousands of lives that were saved by the selfless and heroic efforts of our firefighters and emergency services personnel. More than 5.5 million hectares of land were destroyed by bushfire this fire season. As previous members have mentioned, 2,432 homes were destroyed and another 1,021 were damaged. In total, almost 11,000 buildings and structures were destroyed or damaged, including three schools that were destroyed and another 80 that were damaged. Between half a billion and one billion native animals have perished as well as 14,500 livestock. Areas that had already been ravaged by the worst drought in living memory have now lost more than 600,000 hectares of valuable pastoral land. The loss of native insects and biota is unquantifiable, but their loss will have a real impact on the recovery of affected ecosystems. The loss of honey bees and foraging habitat will also impact native vegetation and agriculture, not to mention the beekeepers who rely on them for a living.

At home in Lake Macquarie, we were spared the worst of this summer's fires. We spent a month watching the Gospers Mountain mega fire in the south-west as it crept closer to our door, as well as other major fires to the west in the Hunter Valley. On New Year's Eve the most dangerous fire for us broke out when arcing powerlines are believed to have started a blaze west of Wangi Wangi. That blaze came at a time when a major fire on the Central Coast was turned around by a strong southerly wind, which pushed the inferno towards the small town of Wyee in the south of my electorate. Those areas are highly vulnerable to fire. Like most of my electorate, they are small suburbs that sit on the western side of the lake. To their west is miles and miles of national park and bushland. Once fires take hold of those areas they become highly vulnerable, as we saw about two decades ago when fires raged from the west into towns such as Woodrising, Fassifern, Wangi Wangi and Toronto.

By New Year's Day the fire that was sparked west of Wangi had raced quickly towards the populated townships of Wangi Wangi, Arcadia Vale, Eraring and Awaba. Eraring is home to Eraring Power Station, which provides 25 per cent of the State's power supply. As the Minister mentioned in response to a question today, if it was damaged the State would have faced a much deeper crisis. It took 10 brigades almost three days to bring the fire under control in extremely difficult conditions. The fire was skilfully managed around the power station and incredibly not a single life or home was lost. We also saw, as we have seen throughout the State for many months, an incredible display of support for those fighting the monster fires on the front line. Residents of Wangi Wangi, Arcadia Vale and neighbouring suburbs began flooding the command post with support for our local fireys. The Wangi Men's Shed and Wangi Lions Club led the charge, with a host of others, including Westlakes Netball Association, the local rugby club. Lake Macquarie City Council helped to coordinate the effort.

Donations of water, drinks, biscuits, cakes and other substantial food offerings began arriving by the carload to keep our RFS and Fire and Rescue crews hydrated, fed and feeling comfortable. I spent a lot of time on the ground there and I know how much the effort meant not just to the firefighters but also to those who wanted to help in some way. I watched children bring in cakes and biscuits that they had baked for the local firefighters. Older people, obviously suffering from the extreme conditions, still turned up to offer what support they could. It was the worst that nature could throw at us but our best was being put in its path.

This fire came at a time of extreme weather conditions in our region, which led to the opening of our emergency operations centre and an evacuation centre at Avondale University College at Cooranbong. It was manned by Family and Community Services staff and coordinated by our local police Chief Superintendent Danny Sullivan. Danny lives in the local area and showed outstanding leadership in our district's time of need. The Lake Macquarie electorate is home to 10 RFS brigades made up of teams of men and women who volunteer their time to protect their local communities. They are at Wyee, Wyee Point, Awaba, Killingworth, Wakefield, Cooranbong, Martinsville, Mandalong, Dora Creek and the Morisset peninsula.

The crews have battled dozens of significant blazes locally this fire season and have also joined efforts at all major blazes throughout the State over the past five months. They have travelled to the South Coast and joined firefighting efforts at Moruya, Bredbo, Cobargo and Queanbeyan. They have travelled to the North Coast and of course to the Gospers Mountain mega fire, which had raged for several months to our south-west. They have joined special strike force efforts and have provided invaluable expertise to those efforts. I am incredibly proud of them and so are the communities they protect and represent.

On behalf of the Lake Macquarie community, I salute the RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons and Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers. There is not a single person who could not acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of these two men and the 70,000-plus volunteers they lead. For months they have backed up day after day and have been on the front line of our fight against these catastrophic events. They have led by example, co-ordinating the extraordinary efforts needed to save thousands of lives and providing the expert advice our communities needed. More than anything, they have provided us with reassurance that we were in good hands. We owe them and their crews a debt of gratitude.

I acknowledge Fire and Rescue NSW, the NSW Police Force, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Forestry Corporation, NSW Ambulance, the SES and the countless other agencies that have supported the

efforts so far this season. We have seen extraordinary efforts from members of this House and in recent days we have heard harrowing stories from a number of members. I particularly note the contributions of the members representing the electorates of Bega, South Coast, Blue Mountains, Prospect, Myall Lakes, Wollondilly, Wagga Wagga, Port Macquarie, Mulgoa, Lismore and Clarence. It is somewhat ironic, though very welcome, that rain is now falling on many of our communities and that the bureau is predicting significant falls over the next few days. We are indeed a land of extremes and a land that will be particularly vulnerable to the extremes of climate change.

The scars of this bushfire season will remain, especially for those who have lost loved ones or have lost their home or their pets. However, the veil of sadness that has been so evident across the State and was palpable in this Chamber this week will lift, particularly as we see tangible action to rebuild and see green shoots emerge again in our bushland, forests and pastures. We need to make sure that those shoots of renewal do not make us complacent to the challenges ahead and changes that we must make. We need to keep looking after one another physically and emotionally and with an understanding that the impact on mental health can and will run deep. In closing, I join the chorus of voices commending the Premier and her Ministers who have been at the front of this crisis from the outset. The Premier has inspired confidence and brought some solace to impacted communities. The Premier rose to the occasion and it has been greatly appreciated. I commend the motion to the House.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Under Standing Order 271 the Minister for Counter Terrorism and Corrections, and member for Lane Cove, has sought to include a list of names for incorporation into *Hansard*. The Speaker has given leave for that material to be incorporated into *Hansard* at the member's request.

**Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS (Lane Cove—Minister for Counter Terrorism and Corrections) (16:39:38):** Today I pay my respects to the 25 lives lost in the devastating bushfires that have ravaged our State. Firstly, I acknowledge those who lost their lives in the line of duty defending the lives of others and protecting properties in New South Wales. On the evening of Thursday 19 December RFS volunteers Geoffrey Keaton and Andrew O'Dwyer were killed in Buxton in south-western Sydney. On the evening of Monday 30 December RFS volunteer Samuel McPaul was killed at Jingellic, east of Albury. On Tuesday 31 December off-duty volunteer firefighter Colin Burns was killed on his property in Belowra, near Cobargo. On Thursday 23 January Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson and Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr were killed when their C-130 air tanker crashed in the Snowy Monaro region. On behalf of the New South Wales Parliament, I thank each of them for their service and the ultimate sacrifice they made.

I also pay my respects to the other 18 lives that were tragically lost in the bushfires. Today we extend our heartfelt sympathies to their families and the communities that have been impacted by their deaths. On 9 October Robert Lindsey and Gwenda Hyde were killed while defending their property at Coongbar in northern New South Wales. On 8 November Vivian Chaplain and George Nole were killed in their home town of Wyaliba, near Glen Innes. On 8 November Julie Fletcher died in her home at St John's River, near Taree, and Barry Parsons died on his Willawarrin property north-west of Kempsey. On 9 November Chris Savva died on his property at South Arm, near Nambucca Heads. On 29 December Russell Bratby died in Royal North Shore Hospital, six weeks after sustaining severe burns from defending a property at Yarrowitch, west of Port Macquarie. On 30 December Robert Salway and his son Patrick Salway died defending their family property at Wandella, near Cobargo.

On 31 December Laurie Andrew died on his property in Yatte Yattah, near Lake Conjola; John Butler was killed on his property in Yatte Yattah; John Smith was killed defending his property in Nerrigundah, inland of Bodalla; a 56-year-old man who has not been formally identified was killed outside a home in Coolagolite, near Cobargo; and Michael Campbell was killed in his car at Sussex Inlet on the South Coast. On 4 January David Harrison died defending his friend's property in Batlow in southern New South Wales. On 18 January Ross Rixon died after sustaining critical burns defending his property at Cobargo. On 23 January Michael Clarke died on his property at Bodalla, near Moruya. We will remember each and every one of them.

New South Wales has faced one of the darkest periods in its history. I am thankful that we have had such a strong leader through those unprecedented events and hardship. I take this opportunity to thank Premier Gladys Berejiklian for her outstanding leadership. There is a long road to recovery ahead as well as ongoing threats of further fires burning across New South Wales. I am confident that our Premier will leave no stone unturned in making sure that this Government responds quickly, directly and appropriately in rebuilding this great State. The bushfires that have ravaged New South Wales are unprecedented. They have been burning for 190 consecutive days. I put on record the amazing effort of the Hon. David Elliott, Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and thank him for his leadership and unwavering support of the more than 70,000 hardworking and dedicated professionals and volunteers of the NSW Rural Fire Service, NSW Police Force and all of the emergency service agencies.

There is another hardworking professional public servant who cannot go without recognition. I am in awe of his knowledge, professionalism, dedication and calm presence in the face of such adversity. That is, of course, NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons. I thank him for all his work and dedication in defending our great State through such a challenging time. I also thank Deputy Commissioner Rob Rogers and all members and volunteers of the NSW Rural Fire Service who have endangered and sacrificed their lives while saving others in fighting the horrific fires across New South Wales. As Minister for Counter Terrorism and Corrections, I could not be prouder of the bravery and remarkable actions of Corrections staff during this fire season.

I place on record the stories, actions, loss and professionalism of Corrective Services NSW staff and inmates. The recent bushfires presented a major challenge for the State's prison network. New South Wales has almost 14,000 inmates in 39 prisons spread across the State. Many of those prisons are in remote locations and close to fire areas. Of course, the State's prisons have been here for quite a while. Indeed, corrections is just about our oldest profession. As one might expect, we have experienced fires before and we are ready. We have professional fire experts and emergency plans detailing how to respond. But we have never had to respond to anything like these most recent fires before.

Corrective Services NSW evacuated three prisons, all minimum security facilities. It is worth noting that a maximum security prison is actually one of the safest places to be during a major fire. These prisons are built of concrete and steel. They are equipped with firefighting equipment and generators, and surrounded by tracts of cleared land. Their staff are trained and well equipped for emergencies. Best of all, they are surrounded by very high—and fireproof—walls. The real threats were to our more open prisons that run in a line just west of the Great Divide, from Glen Innes in the north to Tumbarumba in the south. Those prisons, due to their construction and design, are very different to maximum security prisons. They are the places inmates go when they are near the end of their sentence and do not pose much risk. Their purpose is to prepare inmates for freedom, which means they are not surrounded by high concrete walls.

On Friday 8 November Glen Innes Correctional Centre staff evacuated 165 inmates to Grafton Correctional Centre on hired buses. It is believed to be the State's first full prison emergency evacuation, certainly for a natural disaster. At 8.30 a.m. the centre was given the all clear from fires in the area but two hours later police ordered the evacuation of the centre. It was a dramatic reversal in just a few hours. This was just one example of the sort of abrupt fire turnaround that thousands of people in New South Wales have experienced in recent months—all too sadly and, in some cases, all too tragically. Staff were called on to help move case and warrant files; the Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network was consulted on medications that had to be evacuated with inmates.

Among those who stayed to protect the prison from trespassers and fires were staff who are also volunteers with the NSW Rural Fire Service. They stayed until fires threatened their own and others' homes. In the middle of the night a convoy of buses and staff vehicles made their way to Grafton as fires lashed both sides of the Gwydir Highway. Inmates were bedded down in Grafton prison's hall. Arrangements were made for mattresses, linen and prison greens to be brought up from the Mid North Coast Correctional Centre, where supplies were readily available from a soon-to-be opened new medium security wing. The stay lasted a week, during which time Glen Innes staff, with the assistance of their Grafton colleagues, fell into a semblance of all-important routine, arranging secure accommodation, work placements, income for prison buy-ups and family visits. Prison life went on.

On Monday 11 November, three days after the evacuation, the New South Wales Premier called a state of emergency ahead of another day of catastrophic fire danger. A Corrective Services command post was launched, staffed by a combination of the fire safety and environmental risk management unit, security and intelligence, Justice Health and Youth Justice. They worked around the clock over the next 48 hours. Elsewhere in the State, Community Corrections offices and parole units began evacuating due to out-of-control fires. The safety and wellbeing of staff and their families was a primary concern. Staff still insisted on keeping offices open, holding out for as long as they could. Ultimately, some staff were cut off from returning home due to sudden road closures. Other prisons where the fires came close before Christmas were the Mid North Coast centre near Kempsey, Cessnock, Kariong on the Central Coast, Lithgow and the South Coast Correctional Centre near Nowra.

Our staff worked tirelessly to protect the safety and security of colleagues, inmates and the community as the fires worsened. But still the infernos raged, and so we evacuated more prisons. On 10 December we removed 121 inmates from Oberon Correctional Centre to prisons at Lithgow and Bathurst. On 2 January the Mannus Correctional Centre at Tumbarumba evacuated 149 inmates to Juncie Correctional Centre when it found itself caught between two ferocious approaching fires. Fortunately, as part of its \$3.8 billion Prison Bed Capacity Program, the Government had recently opened another 500 beds at Juncie Correctional Centre, not too far away. We were able to place 149 inmates from Mannus safely there.

Sadly, the fires have directly touched our staff and inmates. We had to tell one inmate that his foster mother had perished in the fires. At least two of our staff lost their homes, while many others saw the destruction of fences and other property. One staff member has told of the distress of losing her home in Wingecarribee. She emerged from an RFS safety centre to find her 120-year-old home destroyed, along with her belongings and precious reminders of her late husband. She later shared:

That night, I lost my house, my home, and everything of my late husband and my life with him.

Meanwhile, around one-fifth of our Community Corrections offices across the State were forced to close or operate with skeleton staff. Many staff have been on the front line as volunteers with the NSW Rural Fire Service and State Emergency Service or working as retained Fire and Rescue NSW firefighters. Others were part of the call-up of the Army Reserve. Other staff worked with the Office of Emergency Management to help set up evacuation centres. Over recent weeks staff have come forward to tell of their efforts to fight the fires. A brave Community Corrections field officer and retained firefighter related the terrifying minutes when a fire wall overran his pumper with three crew members on board, including a fellow Corrections colleague. The video captured the world's attention and was shared on social media more than 20 million times. He stated:

A kilometre down the track we had a full-on ember attack. We could hardly see anything for smoke and fire. Visibility was 2 metres and you just had to trust your judgment. We put the blankets up for protection—if the windows cracked we'd be incinerated. Just before the blankets went up you can hear me say, 'Oh no!' as the fire front went across.

He continued:

I made the decision to retreat. I had to protect the crew. It was 700-degree heat and we were in an urban pumper which was not built to withstand such conditions. Just as we arrived at a safe zone our brakes failed.

"It was just a miracle that we got out," he later shared. Across the State, Corrective Services NSW staff have been contributing generously to help victims. Staff at the John Morony Correctional Complex, consisting of the Outer Metropolitan Multi-Purpose, Dillwynia and John Morony correctional centres, organised a collection for the fire-ravaged Lake Conjola. A call was put out to all staff to contribute essential items, food and water. Within a week they had gathered almost 2,000 bottles of water, blankets, nappies, baby formula, toiletries, pet food and staples such as tea, coffee and long-life milk. A staff member's two young daughters donated their toys and books and made a card for the fire-affected children. Seven staff then set off for Lake Conjola on 9 January, with no idea of the devastation and sadness they would encounter. One member said:

It hit home as we travelled along, seeing burned trees, homes and fields covered in debris and ash, and the lingering smell of fires which I will never forget ... We will never forget this little community.

Other fundraisers have included food collections, donations of water, a workplace guessing competition and an indoor rowing competition, which simulated rowing across the English Channel and raised \$3,500. Staff at Balund-a on the far North Coast organised a three-day benefit concert at Ewingar. Other workplaces have set up adoptions for injured wildlife. Commissioner Peter Severin established an arrangement for staff to easily donate to a dedicated recovery fund. As has been so consistently demonstrated by staff, when there is a need or a cause to support, Corrective Services staff band together, giving up their time, resources and finances to help those in need.

In 2019 they responded to the drought emergency, combining resources with the broader Justice organisation to raise more than \$50,000 for drought-affected farmers and communities, many of whom are also members of Corrective Services. Such generosity of spirit was underscored by the recent 2020 National Corrections Day, when the theme was "We are family". Events were held in workplaces around the State to raise funds for fire victims. Staff have continually come to the rescue of their colleagues. Over and over, those facing challenges have commented on the tremendous support that has been forthcoming. One victim said:

I cannot explain in words how grateful I am to my community, neighbours, family and friends and my extended CSNSW family for all the love and support.

Another added:

I take comfort in knowing Corrective Services staff across all divisions pull together and support each other in times of need.

Altogether, there has been an outpouring of generosity, resilience and leadership by staff that is far too great for me to mention here. But to the hundreds of individuals involved, I thank you all. This is public service at its best. Even our offenders have been involved. Those doing community work at Tamworth helped make up ration packs for RFS volunteers. Up north, inmates are regenerating bushland and planting a eucalyptus forest to ensure a future food supply for koalas ravaged by the drought and now the bushfires. In the south, inmates are helping repair the Dingo Sanctuary Bargo and even now are working on a refuge for wombats. I thank the Commissioner of Corrective Services NSW, his staff and the inmates too for the way they have dealt with the extraordinary events of recent months. As mentioned before, with the indulgence of the Speaker, I seek leave to incorporate in *Hansard* a list of names of key personnel from various agencies who assisted with State operations during the

recent bushfires so that their names may be included on the permanent record of this Parliament. I thank them all for their important contributions to the State operations.

**Leave granted.**

**Acknowledgement of Key Personnel assisting State Operations during the 2019/2020 NSW Bushfires**

<b>External Agency</b>	<b>Key Personnel</b>
NSW Rural Fire Service State Operations	Comm Shane Fitzsimmons, Deputy Comm Rob Rogers, Natalie Leonard, Greg Walker, Owen Marshall, Brett Hagan, Brent Webster, Sean Greenwood, Matt Atkins, Samira Jones, Merryn Campbell, Linden Drysbrough, Prashaant Maharaj, Kate Wharton, Amanda Kennedy, Glenda Baker
NSW Rural Fire Service Fire Investigation	Mark Fullagar, Angus Bullough
NSW Rural Fire Service Interstate Liaison Unit	Claire Humberstone, Kerry Suhrbier, Cheryl Cook, Jane Hollier, Janelle Clark, Steve Yorke, Jeff Lucas, John Parnaby, Melissa Baker, Samantha Holland, Lauren Hottes, Chelsea Varga
NSW Rural Fire Service Aviation	Bernie O'Rourke, Sam Crothers, Simon Pogoriutchnig, Michelle Jenkins, Keith Mackay, David Jones
NSW Rural Fire Service Logistics	Wendy Buckett, Natalie Cassone, Debbie Byrnes, Sav Wazir, Anne Moio
NSW Rural Fire Service Regions	Nick Turner, Paul Whiteley, Tim Butcher, Craig Geddes
NSW Rural Fire Service Media and Public Information	Anthony Clark, Ben Shepherd, Anthony Bradstreet, Greg Allan, James Morris, Angela Burford, Jess Thompson, Jacqueline Murphy, Donna Bruce
NSW Rural Fire Service Predictive Services	Simon Heemstra, Laurence McCoy, David Field
NSW Rural Fire Service Search & Rescue	Simon Topp, Gavin Costello, Sharon Saunders
NSW Rural Fire Service Operational Mitigation Support	Phil Brockett, Sandra Huer, Matt Kelly, Kelwyn White, Danny Busch
NSW Rural Fire Service Communications	Graeme Smart, Matt White
NSW Rural Fire Service GIS	Warwick Hehir, Nicholas Sharp, Jessica Campbell, Tracy Blackney, Jurgen Achilles
NSW Rural Fire Service ICT	Brad Sorenson, Aaron Tran, Vin Verma
NSW Rural Fire Service Building Impact Assessment	Melissa O'Hallaron, Lloyd Van Der Wallen
Fire Rescue NSW	David Felton, David Tchappat, Bryce Jonas
NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service	James Lonergan, Natalie Middleton, Matthew Ford, Glen Crombie
Forestry Corporation NSW	Ross Dickson, Tim McGuffog, Mike Sutton
NSW Ambulance	Nathan Sheraton, Giles Buchanan, Cameron Edgar
NSW Corrective Services	Glen Barlow, Brett Bracken, Kevin Corcoran
NSW Police Force	Gary Worboys, Jeff Loy, Stuart Gordon, Aimee Templeman, Matt Bennett, Stuart Adams, Phil Brooks
NSW Sheriff	Tracey Hall, Daniel Gordon
NSW State Emergency Service	Matthew Kirby, Tom Alexander, Peter Cinque, Elliott Simmons
NSW Volunteer Rescue Association	Mark Gibson, Wayne Dreghorn
Animal & Agriculture Services Functional Area	Simon Oliver, David Gorman, Leeanne Raines
Education Functional Area	Marnie O'Brien, Trish Van Tussenbroek, Georgie Foot
Energy & Utilities Functional Area	Joshua Weston
Engineering Services Functional Area	Martin Dwyer
Environment Services Functional Area	Rhian Tough, Robyn Smith, Jillian Gallagher, Sharon Owens
Health Services Functional Area	Linda Wynn, Allan Anderson
Marine Rescue NSW	Dean Storey, Andrew Cribb
Office of Emergency Management	Cameron Spring, Edward Higgins, Katerina Checherya
St Johns Ambulance	Benjamin Scott, Wayde Walker
Surf Lifesaving NSW	Joel Wiseman, Max Moon, Kane Hughes, Brett Richardson

Telecommunications Functional Area	Simon Freund, Nicole Best, Jeremy Thearle, Christopher Fredes
Transport Services Functional Area	Paul Hogan, Alison Moad, Bruno Montelone
Welfare Services Functional Area	Samantha Colwell, Matthew MacFarlane, Sonya Ramke
Australian Defence Force	Michael Garraway, Tim Rudd, Ivan Yeo, Emma Watson
Emergency Management Australia	Ereni Weber, James Drummond, Rebecca Hosking, Roger Lye
National Resource Sharing Centre	Gary Gifford, Kaylene Jones, Graeme Wynwood, Gregg Paterson, Kerry Wells
Bureau of Meteorology	Zac Porter, Katarina Kovacevic

**Mr CHRIS MINNS (Kogarah) (16:54:44):** I have delayed my contribution to this debate until the near end. The fires did not explode in Kogarah and our communities, industries and homes were not destroyed. However, I am not reluctant to speak to this condolence motion because I know that the people of St George would expect me to associate our community with the people of regional New South Wales and the Blue Mountains. At some points over the previous three days I confess I have stayed away from this Chamber and turned off my office television in an attempt to shield myself from the pain that others have experienced over the past three months. If it has been difficult to listen to the testimony of lives upturned and communities destroyed, I can only imagine what it has been like for firefighters, National Parks and Wildlife Service rangers, police, council workers, mayors, doctors and, of course, members of Parliament to have witnessed it up close.

I have found that witnessing death brought about by tragedy is a hard thing to wipe from one's memory. There are no such things as "preordained coincidences", but we could be forgiven for believing there is an unseen, wicked hand in this summer of tragedy, especially considering the summer was punctuated by the events of last week, with the shocking tragedy of the Abdallah family losing their three beautiful children and their cousin. At times the news has simply been impossible to watch. Many of us pray for better days when joyous summers, beaches and barbeques will replace burnt bush, evacuations and funerals.

On Tuesday MPs were given a briefing on this horrific fire season. Deputy Commissioner Bob Rogers told assembled MPs that it was the worst fire season he had seen in over 40 years as an active firefighter, with 5.46 million hectares burnt out, 2,432 homes destroyed and 25 lives lost. Just 10 years after the conclusion of the millennium drought we are in a deeper, harsher drought than the one before. At the time, scientists told us that the millennium drought was itself the worst drought to hit Australia since European settlement, 232 years earlier. I am worried for our rural communities that climate change and the threat of a rapidly changing environment will mean that we are back in this Chamber every four years, or every two years, or every 12 months with the same or a similar condolence motion.

We will cry, we will mourn the dead and we will talk about coming together. But because of the repeated tragedies piling on themselves, season after season, summer after summer, we will—as all humans would—gradually become inured to the tragedy until we decide that we cannot do anything to stop the disasters. In 2020 we do have a brief, small window to do something about climate change and we owe it to our emergency services personnel to make the difficult decisions now to protect them in the future. Notwithstanding the obvious tragedies the State has witnessed, I suspect that this has been a summer of near misses and lucky escapes. Hearing the communication between my colleague the member for Blue Mountains and her son as his truck was engulfed by flames reminds me how tenuous the string is between the joy of a mother reuniting with her son and a family mourning their father.

That is a testament to the professionalism and leadership of RFS Commissioner Fitzsimmons and Fire and Rescue commissioner Paul Baxter. Of course, not all firefighters returned home to their families. I can only imagine the unspeakable pain that must accompany the sudden passing of your partner, particularly after you had both so recently celebrated the joy of children. Nothing will bring full restitution for that loss. But that loss, of course, was accompanied by the circumstances of the death, for nothing will ever change the simple fact that the final act on this earth of Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer, Samuel McPaul, Ian McBeth, Paul Hudson and Rick DeMorgan was to die in the service of someone else. In tragedy we can turn to Shakespeare. In *Julius Caesar*, Caesar's wife, Calpurnia, says:

When beggars die, there are no comets seen; The heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes.

Caesar then says:

Cowards die many times before their deaths; The valiant never taste of death but once.

**Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama—Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services) (16:59:37):** Courage is being afraid but persisting in the face of fear. Courage is stepping up when others stand back. Courage is not only a virtue but also the basis of every virtue when tested. Courage is not the absence of

fear but the resistance and mastery of fear itself. Since August our State has faced not only a disaster but also a harrowing and unrelenting battle. Fire is a terrible enemy. It has no terms to negotiate. It has no cause or reason. There are no warning shots, no rules of engagement. Its veracity and raw brutality are Mother Nature's nuclear weapon, leaving a trail of inexplicable devastation, chaos and anguish.

There are no words. What do you say to someone who clings to you and cries? Unless you have walked in their shoes how can you possibly understand the pain of losing a loved one under such terrible circumstances? During our State's bushfire season, 25 courageous sons and daughters lost their lives. Behind each of them is a family, a story—a life tragically taken from us. Our State is united in its grief for those we have lost—not only are we thinking of you but also we are here for you. What do you say to someone who has lost everything—special memories, family photos, awards, trophies, ribbons, letters from grandchildren, postcards from friends, the favourite teddy bear that keeps you safe or that favourite musical instrument you learned and loved? They are just some of the things that have been taken from families in my community and communities right across the state.

On 4 January I was in the emergency services headquarters in Nowra. I could feel the heat in the air. As the evening southerly careered up the coast, the smoke loomed. The sky was like a kaleidoscope of orange, red and ash. It happened so quickly. The air stirred, the force was powerful. The sky groaned into a darkness, dotted and whisked with embers that dived and flickered through the confluence of climatic conditions. This would be the night that many had feared—the fire would jump the Shoalhaven River. Our region has faced fire before. We have also faced drought and flood. Our region possesses both beauty and terror, as Dorothea Mackellar described. However, it is home for me, my family and our community, and we would not want to live anywhere else.

Although the Shoalhaven area of my electorate has experienced loss, I recognise the extraordinary stories of courage, mateship and bravery that have emerged, not only in my electorate and region but also right across our great State and, indeed, this great nation of ours. As the State's volunteering Minister I cannot tell you how humbling it is to hear the extraordinary stories of generosity, kindness and charity from so many in support of the thousands of victims of this event. Indeed, often we had to turn donations away because there was simply no more room to store them. I acknowledge the efforts of the emergency services volunteers who have been involved in fighting the fires. In particular, I acknowledge the NSW Rural Fire Service. Many of our RFS brigades have been fighting the fires for weeks and months. Each and every one of our RFS volunteers is a hero. I acknowledge all the brigades in my electorate that have made such an extraordinary contribution: West Nowra, Cambewarra, Shoalhaven Heads, Kangaroo Valley, Broughton Vale, Foxground, Gerringong, Calderwood, Albion Park, Jamberoo, Carrington Falls, Dunmore and Beaumont.

The fires are an opportunity to acknowledge and recognise the incredible efforts of the Rural Fire Service. However, many people may not realise that volunteer brigades are busy all year round, attending motor vehicle accidents and house fires, and completing essential training to combat fire and its hazardous conditions. In the lead-up to the fires one respected figure who led the preparation efforts in the Shoalhaven stood above everyone else. That figure, who loomed large, was Shoalhaven local area RFS controller Mark Williams. Words cannot express how thankful and grateful our community is for Mark's strong leadership, skill and expertise during this difficult time. I have no doubt that our community would have faced a much greater loss if it was not for Mark's capacity and ability to respond. On behalf of our grateful community I thank Mark. Watching and listening to the way he managed the response was like nothing I had ever seen before. In spite of the immense pressure at that time, Mark always seemed remarkably well composed.

During these times the best thing a local politician can do is stay out of the way and let the experts do their job, but they can also play a role in keeping the community informed. I did my utmost to respond to many questions from locals, particularly via social media, which played a major role in updating the community during this event. I stayed at the emergency services management centre until late, monitoring the fires and updating people on how the effort to protect life and property was progressing. I thank all the agencies that were stationed at that emergency services centre, including members from my own department, the Department of Communities and Justice, along with the police, every volunteer organisation you could think of, Shoalhaven City Council, Shoalhaven Water and its General Manager, Stephen Dunshea, who was ensconced at the centre during the time this fire took place. As the State's Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services, my agency was responsible for establishing the 88 evacuation centres that swung into action over the bushfire season, supporting almost 27,000 people.

I thank my wonderful colleagues at the Department of Communities and Justice who stepped up to man these centres and support communities in need. Indeed, staff travelled from right around the State to support communities, to find people housing supports, sustenance, mental health services and other necessities of life that were required in the immediate aftermath. The first evacuation centre I visited was in my own backyard at the



Bomaderry Bowling Club, which became a home to many people and their animals. I thank Gary Wilbraham, the Secretary and Manager of the Bomaderry Bowling Club, and all of his wonderful staff for supporting people in need. I visited the centre on several occasions and I pay particular tribute to all the businesses that delivered food and products to support people during this difficult time, as well as the locals who gave so generously.

Another frequent visitor to evacuation centres was my neighbour, friend and colleague, the member for South Coast, Shelley Hancock. Shelley and I have felt the impact of these fires on our community very deeply. Indeed, Shelley and Ossie experienced the impact of this fire firsthand. Their property at Lake Conjola was affected by these fires. Shelley has been a tower of strength for her community throughout these fires and I pay special tribute to her for her compassion and dedication. We established an evacuation centre at the Shoalhaven Indoor Sports Centre in Bomaderry when the Bomaderry Bowling Club reached capacity. I visited this evacuation centre during the overflow period. We also established an evacuation centre at the Kiama Leagues Club. I thank the staff at the club for their support.

I visited the team at The Country Club St Georges Basin and spent time speaking with people about their experiences, as I did at other centres. I spoke with a group of people who were visiting our region on holiday. In spite of their experience they were keen to return to the South Coast once the fires and the smoke had passed. Just as I passed through Milton the police closed the Princes Highway because of safety concerns. Knowing it was going to be a while before I got home, I spent time at the centre talking with various agencies and with the people who had arrived at the evacuation centre, which had been set up at Ulladulla Civic Centre. I then headed to Moruya to visit the evacuation centre at Hanging Rock Sports Club Function Centre. The drive there was smoky, and as I headed further south the extraordinary impact of the fires became more evident.

When I arrived at the centre I was pleased and relieved to see my friend and colleague Andrew Constance, along with his wonderful wife, Jen, and the Eurobodalla Mayor, Liz Innes. We discussed the centre's immediate needs and how my department could help. I have known Andrew Constance since I was 18. I know that much has been said about him during his time in politics. What we have seen from the member for Bega during this crisis is raw and it is real. Andrew and Jen care deeply for their local community; it is their home. I know that an incredible weight has fallen on Andrew's shoulders. His decision to step away from his Cabinet post to help his community recover is a testament to his character. Andrew Constance is a good and decent human being and I am proud to call him a friend. I trust members of this place now know that our Parliament is better for having him amongst our number.

I would return to the Bega electorate on two further occasions in following weeks and visit evacuation centres in Cobar and Bega. I thank those at Bega council for their wonderful efforts and make particular mention of my friend Councillor Mitch Nadin for introducing me to so many people, particularly businesspeople, who have been affected by these fires. I also acknowledge the wonderful efforts of Councillor Tony Allen, who I caught up with in Cobargo. As I mentioned in this House yesterday during question time, Councillor Allen opened his home to those who had literally lost everything. I know his community was very appreciative of his leadership and his efforts.

I travelled to Albury and spent time with my friend and colleague Justin Clancy as well as with staff manning the Albury evacuation centre. Justin is an outstanding and hardworking local MP. As I mentioned in question time yesterday I appreciated the opportunity to spend time meeting services that have been a huge support to the most vulnerable during this difficult time. Indeed it is the most vulnerable people in our communities who often experience the full brunt of these circumstances. Again I mention FoodShare and Carevan for their wonderful work during this time.

From Albury I travelled to Wagga Wagga and visited evacuation centres with local MP Dr Joe McGirr and local upper House MP Wes Fang. We spent time with staff and people registering for support. At every centre I visited I met people who were at their lowest ebb. It is confronting to have people you have never met come up to you and burst into tears, to hold you and cry because of the emotion and the power of the circumstances. But every one of those people I had the privilege of speaking with would say that in spite of their loss, anxiety and hopelessness they were in some way grateful that there were people there with an open heart and a hand of friendship at this most difficult time. That is a basic and common element of humanity and I am pleased and humbled that I had the opportunity to be there at this important time to offer some support in the smallest way I could.

Out of this most extraordinary event came equally extraordinary stories. Gerringong RFS captain Andrew Downes was recently acknowledged for his years of service to the RFS when he was named as Kiama municipality's Citizen of the Year. But his heroism and that of his colleagues were on display during this crisis. Along with his Gerringong RFS colleagues Greg Ball, Samantha Millen and Annette Wright he worked to protect properties in Balmoral in the Southern Highlands. Gerringong RFS was tasked with the job of clearing fire trails. During this work the fire took a run that no-one was expecting it to that day.

The RFS pulled up at a house that did not have a fire trail and it became evident within minutes the fire was going to hit and it was going to hit very hard—worse than Andrew Downes had ever seen. It was within only minutes from pulling up that the ferocious flames were licking their truck. The crew was fighting flames that were as high as 30 metres. The crew jumped into the truck, and deployed safety and protection measures. The truck was heavily damaged by the fire. The plastic melted out of the doors. It was dark and there was smoke in the cabin. I have no idea what was going through their minds when this was coming over them and their truck. I do not know what they were thinking, but their courage and dedication should be noted, recognised and celebrated.

Another story involved the Dunmore RFS brigade. On 4 January the Dunmore RFS was sent to Turpentine Road in Tomerong in the Shoalhaven about half an hour before the fire was expected to hit. They were tasked to protect properties. The southerly came through 10 minutes earlier than anyone had expected and within 70 seconds the wind speed went from zero to 104 kilometres per hour. Greg Hardy, the captain, Les Millier, the senior deputy captain, Tim Anderson, Daryl Kimmins and Cameron Chisholm were on the ground on the fire front. This is a very experienced crew with 80 years of experience between its members. Speaking with Greg after the event he was rightfully proud of his team and the way they responded to the flames that ripped up through Tomerong.

Greg has been in the RFS for 25 years. While speaking with him about this event afterwards he remarked that he had never gone through anything like this. He said the same was true for all his crew. Greg is not one to question himself during these times. There was always the opportunity to jump in the truck, but Greg and his team were determined to press on and they defended the homes successfully. I pay tribute to Greg Wardle, the Illawarra RFS controller, who made a considerable contribution to the fire effort not only across our region but also in the Shoalhaven and across the State. The Illawarra RFS district has seen more than 140 strike teams deployed and has supported over 3,000 volunteer movements. At the height of the situation in the Shoalhaven there were 32 trucks from the Illawarra region assisting the Shoalhaven.

Answering the call were men and women, not just from my community but from right around the State, to fight a fire that was not endangering their homes, families or businesses. But come they did, putting their own lives at risk and tragically losing their own lives in some incredibly heart-wrenching cases that make me tear up every time I think about the children who will never know their brave and courageous fathers. Australians have often fought wars along battle lines drawn over conflicts in a world away from our own. This time this battle threatened our people, properties and communities.

What struck me everywhere I went during this recent fire was the number of people who wanted to help but did not know how. They wanted to fight fires but they did not have the skills required. They wanted to support the efforts but they were not accredited, trained or uniformed. Often these events bring out the best in our community. If only a tragedy were not required for Australian spirit to shine more brightly than ever. If people truly want to help their willingness needs to start now. If anything can come from these fires it should be a clarion call to join a volunteer organisation. More and more we rely on the older demographic to support volunteer efforts. Younger people are more likely to cut a cheque than saddle up with a volunteer commitment. Do not get me wrong, there are a lot of young people working tirelessly in volunteer organisations, but from the Rural Fire Service to church groups, today's citizen soldiers are much older than ever before.

Whatever the reason may be for finding an excuse, it did not stop the 2019 New South Wales Volunteer of the Year, Robert Fitzgerald, who has seven children, works as a full-time police officer and volunteers for countless organisations and charities in western Sydney. Like all of us, Robert's most valuable asset is his time but he finds the time to help, as did thousands of volunteers during this most recent crisis, particularly the Rural Fire Service, also assisted by the State Emergency Service. There has been a slow but noticeable culture slide away from volunteer efforts being a part of everyday life in this country. If we want to live in a kind and caring society that is able and willing to help each other, the effort needs to start well before a problem or crisis occurs. Our community needs citizen soldiers in a constant state of readiness, and there is no time like the present to sign up. Churchill was right, citizen soldiers—those passionate volunteers, just like our Rural Fire Service and State Emergency Service—were and are twice the citizen.

I want to reflect on the fervent and strong leadership of our RFS Commissioner, Shane Fitzsimmons; our Premier, Gladys Berejiklian; and our Deputy Premier, John Barilaro. The day after the fire passed through our community both the commissioner and the Premier visited our evacuation centre in Bomaderry and our emergency services management centre in West Nowra. They came without cameras, without fanfare, simply to say thank you. Indeed, one media organisation attacked them for not notifying them of their visit. Without naming that organisation—it is not about you, it is about the people that were impacted in this particular circumstance. I think it goes to their character that they were there for the people and not for publicity. It is a shame that not every leader could say the same. Suffice to say they received a rock star welcome everywhere they went, a sign of deep appreciation in our community and certainly the depth of feeling our community had for their efforts.

A number of people lost their lives during this tragedy and I will read some of their names on to the record. Robert, or Bob, Lindsey, 77, and his wife Gwen Hyde died in a bushfire on their rural property at Deadman Creek Road about 50 kilometres south-west of Byron Bay in northern New South Wales. Their bodies were discovered in their home on 9 October, the day after the fire event went through. They had been married for three years and both left behind children from previous marriages. Bob had opened a service station before retiring. Gwen Hyde died with her husband. Gwen's friend Carol Dillon told *The Australian* that Gwen had called her asking advice about the fire only hours before. She said:

Gwen rang me to see if I had the phone number for the fire brigade as she was getting spot fires in her orchard and wanted to know what to do. She was a strong woman who died protecting the home and animals she loved.

On 8 November Vivian Chapman, 69, was critically injured trying to defend her home at Wyaliba, 40 kilometres east of Glenn Innes in northern New South Wales. She died in hospital the next day. She is survived by her two children and six grandchildren. She was remembered by her daughter-in-law as a strong woman who died protecting the home and animals she loved. She was a former director of Wyaliba village and was described by a friend as "relentlessly wonderful". George Nole, 85, of Glen Innes died in his car in the Kangawalla fire on 8 November. He was described by residents of Wyaliba as "a true gentleman". The Glen Innes Examiner reported that Nole was born in Greece and worked as an electrician on NASA's Apollo program. He moved to Wyaliba in the 1980s, when the community was largely populated—[*Extension of time*]

A friend, Philip Hine, described Nole as a "reclusive" individual and a man who moved to an isolated village to be himself. He had been diagnosed with leukaemia in 2014 and wanted to die at home. The body of Julie Fletcher, 63, was found in a burnt-out building at Johns River, 20 kilometres south of Port Macquarie, the day after the 8 November bushfire crisis in New South Wales. A neighbour, Russel Souter, described her as a quality person whose family had lived in the region for several generations. Barry Parsons, 58, is assumed to have also died in the 8 November fires that raged across northern New South Wales. He lived alone in a shed at Willawarrin, 60 kilometres west of Port Macquarie. His body was found not far from that shed on 13 November but he had not been heard of since the morning of 8 November, when he posted on social media:

Seriously looks and sounds like [the apocalypse] out there.

Gerard Wade, captain of the Bellbrook fire brigade, told *The Australian* that Parsons was quite well known in the region and his death will touch the lives of so many. Others described him as a lovely and gentle guy. Chris Savva, 64, of South Arm near Nambucca Heads died on 9 November when his SUV rolled down an embankment after the route out of the fire zone was blocked by a burnt-out bridge. Savva had spent the previous day fighting to save his house. Savva's neighbour, Petra Campbell, told *The Sydney Morning Herald* her partner, Mandy, and her son had found Savva in his upturned car. Campbell said:

He was pretty shy, but he was part of a very tight-knit rural community.

Geoffrey Keaton, 32, and Andrew O'Dwyer, 36—both fathers to young children—died when a tree fell in the path of their truck near Buxton. Geoffrey Keaton was the deputy captain of the Horsley Park volunteer brigade, whose members were in the gallery yesterday. He and fellow volunteer Andrew O'Dwyer died when a tree fell near their truck. They were travelling in a convoy after fighting the Green Wattle Creek fire near Balmoral. Keaton's father was fighting the Gaspers Mountain fire at the time. Keaton was given an honour guard at his funeral on 2 January and Commissioner Fitzsimmons presented his young son, Harvey, with a posthumous commendation for bravery and service. He is survived by Harvey and by his fiancée, and Harvey's mother, Jess Hayes.

Andrew O'Dwyer, 36, died late on the night of 19 December when the fire truck he was travelling in veered off the road and rolled. He was a volunteer with the Horsley Park RFS and died alongside fellow volunteer Geoffrey Keaton. They were travelling in a convoy after fighting the Green Wattle Creek fire. He is survived by his wife, Melissa, and daughter, Charlotte. Volunteer firefighter Samuel McPaul, 28, died when the fire truck he was travelling in flipped into a fire tornado at Jingellic, 110 kilometres east of Albury, on 30 December. He and his wife, Megan, were expecting their first child in May. He attended school at Broulee on the New South Wales South Coast and studied animal science at Charles Sturt University at Wagga Wagga. He was also a basketball coach in Holbrook and worked as a mechanic. A spokesman for the NSW Rural Fire Service said McPaul "did everything for the right reasons" and always put the community first. He was the third Rural Fire Service volunteer to die this season.

Robert Salway, 63, and his son Patrick, 29, died while attempting to defend the family property at Wandella, 10 kilometres north-west of Cobargo, from the Badja Forest Road fire on 30 December. Their bodies were discovered by Robert's wife—Patrick's mother—on 31 December. They were described by friends as "one of the tightest, close-knit families you'll ever come across". Robert was a well-known dairy farmer in the Bega region. Patrick and his wife of five years, Renee, were expecting their second child. In a tribute to Patrick on social media, Renee wrote:

I will see you again Patrick, my best friend. We are broken.

Patrick also worked in the dairy industry providing specialist engineering services and ran a performance horse business with his wife. He was also a rodeo rider. Of course, American lives were lost too. The American aerial firefighters Ian McBeth, 45, Paul Clyde Hudson, 43, and Rick DeMorgan Jr, 44, were killed in the Snowy Mountains crash. Captain McBeth, from Great Falls in Montana, was a highly qualified and respected C-130 pilot with many years of firefighting experience both in the military and in aviation. He served with the Wyoming Air National Guard and was a member of the Montana Air National Guard. He was a qualified instructor and pilot and spent his entire career flying C-130s. Ian McBeth is survived by his wife, Bowdie, his three children, Abigail, Calvin and Ella, his parents, William and Anneliese, and their three siblings.

First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson, 43, from 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 retiring and working for Coulson Aviation. Paul Hudson is survived by his wife, Noreen. Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr from Navarre, Florida, served as a flight engineer on the C-130 in the United States Air Force for 18 years. He had more than 4,000 hours as a flight engineer, including 2,000 in a combat environment. He is survived by his children, Lucas and Logan, his parents, Rick and Linda, and his sister, Virginia.

Those are the stories of just some of the people who perished in the fires. But, as I said earlier, as someone whose electorate has been impacted, some of the most uplifting stories have come out of the service and sacrifice of so many. I thank all members of the House who have reached out to other members who have been impacted. Even though the table in this Chamber divides us, we are certainly stronger because of the things that unite us. When events like this happen it reminds me that the biggest gap in the world today is the difference between the magnitude of our problems and the smallness of our politics.

These were extraordinary events. The word "unprecedented" has been bandied around a lot, but it was the largest humanitarian and environmental crisis ever to beset our State. Homes and properties have been lost in my electorate but there are others worst affected than us. I send not only my own thoughts and prayers but also the thoughts and prayers of my whole community to everyone in the State who was impacted. I look forward to seeing the recovery effort and the response. It is appropriate that there is an inquiry to look into what more can be done and to review what worked and how the response occurred.

I am absolutely appreciative of the appointment of a Minister for Disaster Recovery and a shadow and I think John Barilaro is absolutely the right person to lead the response. I have been impressed with his response for small business and his acknowledgement that these devastating fires have impacted communities. I encourage members to tell their communities to come back, to spend money and to make sure that businesses can get through. Many of them will not be able to survive until April, particularly tourism businesses; they rely on this really important period to get through. I know many people who are struggling, facing financial loss or indeed the loss of their business. I do not want to see that happen.

I appreciate the bipartisan offerings. I mentioned in question time yesterday that when I established the Bushfire Housing Assistance Service I asked my shadow and my friend and colleague, Ryan Park, to come and see how that service was operating. That service has received more than 5,318 calls. My agency has housed more than 7,000 people in temporary accommodation. I have appreciated the decency of the shadow Minister, who has been keen to be updated but also to see for himself the way that the agency is responding. That is appropriate. It reminds me that when these events occur, there is not a Liberal thing to do or a Labor thing to do: there is a right thing to do.

I have been appreciative of the support, encouragement and assistance from all sides, the leadership of local members and the leadership that the Premier in particular has provided. I hope those who had not made their mind up about Gladys Berejiklian certainly have now. She has a quiet humility, confidence and professionalism of which everyone in this State can be proud. I again acknowledge every volunteer and contributor and thank them for their service. As a State, as a Parliament and as a people we are united in our gratitude for the help, support, care and love shown to those who have been impacted by these extraordinary events. We will rise again and we will be a strong State again. These events have tried us, but they will not destroy us.

**Mr STEPHEN KAMPER (Rockdale) (17:29:50):** I thank the Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services, and member for Kiama, for his comprehensive and heartfelt contribution to this motion. Some positives have come out of these bushfires, and it is clear that the Kiama electorate has a great representative. They could not wish for a stronger, more positive member of Parliament. I wish him all the best. I speak to this motion on behalf of the people of Rockdale and share our heartfelt sympathies with all those suffering across the State right now. The community of Rockdale has not been ravaged by the devastating bushfires that have been going on since August, but we have watched in horror as the fires have spread across the State. We have seen the

fires take lives and livelihoods and destroy communities and towns. Our hearts bleed for our brothers and sisters in regional and rural New South Wales.

From the North Coast to the South Coast and from the Blue Mountains to the Snowy Mountains, communities across this State have lost everything. Entire towns were forced to evacuate, uproot their families and leave everything behind at a moment's notice because it was too dangerous for them to stay and defend their homes. It is incomprehensible. We have also witnessed what is perhaps the largest destruction of our native flora and fauna in the history of human habitation of Australia. It is hard to comprehend what it means for more than one billion animals to have been killed so far during the fire season. Australia is the custodian of so many unique animal species that are not found anywhere else on earth. It is heartbreaking to know that we are probably watching the end of some of our biodiversity right now. Not many things are more closely associated with Australia than the koala and it is likely, with the pressures already on wild koala populations in New South Wales, they will never recover from the losses suffered in the last few months. Some things will never recover from this bushfire season.

Each and every person in Rockdale mourns with those who have lost loved ones. I have been heartened by the rallying of support among the people of our State. The number of people who have given their time and money to support bushfire-ravaged communities, along with the community groups who are organising charity appeals or travelling out to support affected communities on the ground, and the love we are showing one another is absolutely inspirational. We owe so much to the incredible men and women who are fighting the fires—the thousands of members of the Rural Fire Service, the Fire and Rescue NSW staff, volunteers from interstate and overseas who came to help us, members of the military and the other public service and non-government organisation workers who have been on the front lines. We can never repay those who made the ultimate sacrifice, but we will always remember them.

During this bushfire season it has become clear that politicians have many lessons to learn—and that goes for all of us. We need to maintain awareness about the ongoing impacts of this bushfire season and remember that it will not take weeks or months, but years, to bring these communities back to where they were. The fires will eventually cease, but there is no telling how long the pain and suffering will continue or how long the trauma caused will bubble under the surface. We need to maintain ongoing support. We need a bipartisan effort. Our response to this crisis has to be above politics. We must learn from this experience and take action to mitigate the damage of natural disasters in the future. It is not good enough for us to say that responding to the risk of climate change and natural disasters is too expensive. As temperatures continue to rise we need to acknowledge that what we have experienced this summer is likely already the new normal, and that if we are not lucky things will get much worse.

The people of New South Wales should be able to trust that in future natural disasters their government could not have done more. We need to wake up to the fact that the climate is changing, the changes are here to stay and if we do not act quickly on a global scale it will get much worse. It is a no brainer that it should be the job of this place to do whatever it can to slow and stop continuing temperature rises, as well as building practical resilience measures so that the people of New South Wales never have to suffer this badly again.

**Mr MARK COURE (Oatley) (17:35:08):** While I thank the Premier and the Deputy Premier for the opportunity to contribute to this condolence motion, I feel a sense of helplessness in doing so. Helplessness because the words said in this House mean little to the brave 25 men and women who lost their lives this summer. Helplessness because these condolences will not rebuild the 2,400 homes lost and nor will the wildlife and livestock be brought back to life. Helplessness because they will not properly convey the extreme gratitude that the people in my electorate of Oatley and I have for the heroic career and volunteer firefighters who sacrificed so much for us. However, it is my hope that my words will play a small part in honouring the lives lost throughout this terrible tragedy.

We must never forget Laurie Andrew, Russell Bratby, Colin Burns, John Butler, Michael Campbell, Vivian Chaplain, Michael Clarke, Flight Engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr, Julie Fletcher, David Harrison, First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson, Gwenda Hyde, Geoffrey Keaton, Robert Lindsay, Captain Ian McBeth, Samuel McPaul, George Nole, Andrew O'Dwyer, Barry Parsons, Ross Rixon, Patrick Salway, Chris Savva, John Smith and a man aged 56 who is yet to be identified. Those people represent so much more than just a statistic. They leave thousands of friends and loved ones behind them. They leave behind empty chairs at a dinner table, empty desks at work and empty hearts among many.

I echo the words of many previous speakers in acknowledging many of the communities they have left behind, such as Buxton, Jingellic, Albury, Cobargo, Wyaliba, Glen Innes, Kangawalla, Johns River, Taree, Willawarrin, South Arm, Nambucca Heads, Port Macquarie, Yatte Yattah, Milton, Sussex Inlet, Batlow, Bodalla, Kangaroo Valley, Mogo and Lake Conjola. Over the break it was heartwarming to visit Port Macquarie—as my

family and I do every summer—and I checked in with my dear friend Leslie Williams. I say to Leslie and all affected members that I am always here to support you or to just have a chat.

In acknowledging these communities, I thank Andrew Constance for his vulnerability and transparency during this time. Andrew is one of our great leaders in this place. He has shed light on the mental toll these fires have had not only on his life but also on the people he represents. I thank Shelley Hancock for showing healthy grief and encouraging others to grieve. I can only begin to imagine the heartbreak those two members must feel in watching the communities they have represented for so long suffer. I offer my deepest condolences to their communities. Premier Gladys Berejiklian has once again shown that she is one of the best leaders we have seen. She has been dedicated to visiting as many people in fire-affected communities across New South Wales to hear directly about the impact of the fires and to be a source of support. Her tireless efforts have been nothing short of inspiring.

New South Wales Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons has mirrored the Premier's dedication. He is a true Australian hero. Indeed, the Premier and the commissioner have given us hope and direction in this most hopeless and directionless time. I also thank my good friend Matt Kean, whose leadership in protecting wildlife encouraged my family to adopt a koala on our recent trip to Port Macquarie. The toll that this bushfire has had on our wildlife is heartbreaking and I thank Matt and organisations such as the NSW Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service for their ongoing support and advocacy for our treasured wildlife. I thank the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, David Elliot, for his continual briefs and updates, which have been instrumental not only in communities directly affected but also across New South Wales. I thank the Treasurer, whose strong economic management has led the financial recovery.

Finally, I thank my great friends in this House, particularly Gareth Ward, Lee Evans, Mel Gibbons and Shelley Hancock, whose electorates have been directly impacted. We are thinking of and praying for them. I am always here should they or their electorates ever need me. I encourage the people of New South Wales to visit these areas, particularly the South Coast, to help rebuild economies and communities and to also offer a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on. The word of the summer in Australia has been "unprecedented"—and for good reason. The fires are unlike anything we have ever seen before. The mass-scale response of the Australian people and the spirit they have shown is also unprecedented. Unprecedented, but not unexpected. It is estimated that donations to bushfire fighting and relief have surpassed half a billion dollars. While we rightfully celebrate the enormous donations of billionaires and celebrities, it is the combined effort of regular people that makes this story so special.

I congratulate organisations such as Foodbank, The Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul and the Australian Red Cross for their efforts in supporting bushfire-affected communities. The Australian spirit has shone through, and is more powerful than any fire. In my local community, the spirit of generosity has been just as strong. I thank the Oatley and Lugarno Lions clubs, which launched their bushfire relief initiatives and gave locals an opportunity to contribute. I will highlight one particular initiative that typifies the inspiring approach that has captured the hearts of local residents. I was delighted to hear of the combined effort between local small businesses Mortdale Wholesalers, Mortdale Fruit Box Market and IGA Mortdale to provide much-needed goods and food to affected communities. Through working together they were able to get multiple truckloads of food, water and sanitary items to areas that needed them most, such as Batemans Bay and Mogo. Looking locally, I also thank the people in our fire stations, who have been based in rural New South Wales all summer, including Mortdale, Hurstville, Riverwood and Kogarah fire stations, amongst others.

This bushfire season is not over and our response as leaders will challenge us. No matter what side of politics we are on, we are now tasked with the thorough investigation of how to best ensure fires of this scale never occur again. But for now, let us give thanks to those who have given so much and honour those who have given their lives. I also acknowledge staff in the electorate offices across the State who have been directly impacted. They have continued to support their communities and, for many of them, their bosses. Their hard work does not go unnoticed and, again, I am always here if they need to reach out. I conclude with one of the most articulate and emotional poems I have ever read. Just before Christmas last year, members of my local community 11-year-old Hailee and Casey of Riverwood captured the hearts of New South Wales with this beautiful piece:

It's Christmas in Australia  
And we're ready for the heat  
It's backyard cricket and swimming pools  
And it really can't be beat!  
But this year feels a bit different, I'm only 11 yet I know,  
Our country is on fire And this drought? It just won't go There's smoke and ash and burning leaves  
That cover our Aussie sky.  
Our wildlife, bush and property,  
Incinerating before our eyes.  
  
Our farmers are losing their cattle,  
Our country businesses going broke.

Yet our Aussie spirit of helping another,  
Has not gone up in smoke.

We're not in a movie, a book or TV,  
Not a bat phone or signal in sight.  
But a bonded group of heroes we have,  
On the fire front they fight.

No super speed, no flash costume,  
No cape attached on their back.  
Just kilograms of equipment, a truck,  
And a will that knows no slack.

It's yellow suits and helmets,  
It's dragging a heavy hose.  
It's facing a wall of fire,  
Guessing which way the wind might blow.

They have a heart that pumps for this country,  
A strength that's rarely seen.  
It's a selfless act to put your life  
On the line, as we've all seen.

They won't be home for Christmas,  
They won't get the family feed.  
No break, no rest, no knock off time,  
They won't leave til they succeed.

They will fight to save OUR Christmas,  
Our homes, our lives, our land.  
While losing their own properties,  
They continue to take a stand.

These heroes that I mention,  
The ones that fight for us,  
They're our NSW Fire and Rescue  
And our volunteer RFS.

So this Christmas please remember,  
While we are in celebration,  
To maybe pop in and say thank you  
To the heroes at your local fire station.

I commend the motion to the House.

**Dr MARJORIE O'NEILL (Coogee) (17:46:08):** I support the motion moved by the Premier and I thank her for moving it. I acknowledge all the contributions of the previous speakers; each contribution was heartfelt in its own unique and personal way. I acknowledge also the trauma that some of our colleagues in this place have experienced through the bushfires. The bushfire crisis we have witnessed in New South Wales and across the country over the past five months has been unprecedented and devastating. People have lost homes and livelihoods and, most distressingly, people have lost their lives and their loved ones. On behalf of the electorate of Coogee I extend my most heartfelt condolences to the friends, family and communities of the 25 people who have experienced the ultimate loss during this horrific bushfire crisis. Twenty-five precious lives have been lost in New South Wales, including six brave responders who made the ultimate sacrifice. This sacrifice will never be forgotten.

A State memorial for those impacted by the recent bushfires will take place on Sunday 23 February at the Qudos Bank Arena at Sydney Olympic Park. I encourage everyone to attend. Almost 2,500 homes have been destroyed and 5.5 million hectares obliterated and more than one billion animals have been lost. The past few months have been absolutely devastating. Not only is our country hurting but its people are in mourning. Burnt skies and the smell of smoke have become an almost daily reminder to people in electorates like mine, far removed from the fires of the horrors unfolding across our State and across our country. To all those affected by this unprecedented crisis I want you to know that in the Parliament of New South Wales we hear you and we will not stop working to ensure you all receive the support you need from this Parliament.

I join with my colleagues on both sides of the House and with all Australians in paying tribute to the thousands of professional and volunteer firefighters from across the State and the country and from overseas, many of whom have been working since September to contain countless bushfire emergencies. Commissioner Fitzsimmons, thank you. You have and continue to work tirelessly leading the RFS with clarity and empathy. The RFS has been ably supported and assisted by other emergency service workers, including police and paramedics, as well as countless community groups and volunteers who have provided invaluable support to fire-ravaged communities. These people together have saved countless lives and properties, they have made life easier for those

who have lost homes and loved ones and they have cared for those who have been injured or displaced during these fires. We owe these brave volunteers and professionals a huge debt of gratitude.

Long after the media has returned to metropolitan Sydney, long after the smoke has left Sydney skies, there will be hundreds of people in regional and rural towns across the State who are doing the hard work of bushfire disaster recovery. My commitment is to work with all of my colleagues in this Parliament to continue to invest in these communities as they bring themselves back from this unprecedented disaster. I take this opportunity to pay particular tribute to my colleague and friend Hugh McDermott, the member for Prospect. Hugh's account of his experiences as an RFS volunteer firefighter on the morning of 19 December was harrowing. His crew, the Horsley Park 1 Alpha brigade, represents the best that humanity has to offer. I thank Hugh for volunteering to help keep our communities safe and for sharing his experience with us here. His story will stay with me forever.

I also acknowledge the heartfelt and raw emotion shown by the member for Bega, Andrew Constance, who bravely defended his home and who has been standing strong with his community throughout this tragic period. In recent days he has raised some critical points about the lasting and devastating mental health impacts of bushfire disaster, which remain well beyond the time when the fires have passed. I also acknowledge the member for Blue Mountains, Trish Doyle, who told this House about her son who volunteers with Fire and Rescue NSW. I thank Trish for sharing her deeply personal story with us. It shone a light on how people were affected by this crisis and reminded us of the importance of taking appropriate steps to avoid such catastrophes in the future.

In the face of tragedy, we have seen the best of people in our communities. They have shown so much generosity, love and compassion. This tragedy has brought out the best in my community. I am incredibly proud of the electorate of Coogee and of everyone who has banded together to fundraise and help people, many of whom they will never meet. I especially thank the Randwick and Waverley-Woollahra SES units that have worked non-stop since October last year in support of both their regional SES colleagues and the RFS. Both units have sent strike groups of volunteers to fire-affected areas across the State. Those volunteers have been part of the frontline roster, spending up to five days at a time away from home assisting with the defence of people and properties and with the clean-up. Those units also provided volunteers to staff the phones for the Bush Fire Information Line. I mention Peter Struck and Kim Edwards, the managers of Randwick and Waverley-Woollahra units respectively, who have gone above and beyond during the bushfire crisis, both as individual volunteers and as unit commanders. I thank them both, and I thank all the volunteers in their units for the incredible work they have been doing.

I acknowledge the staff at both Waverley and Randwick local councils, who have been working overtime to provide as much support and assistance as possible. I thank Mayor Paula Masselos and Mayor Danny Said, as well as general managers Ross McLeod and Therese Manns, for offering up their staff and services and contributing everything they could. Both councils have provided extra support staff to council offices in fire-affected areas. They have also waived fees for function spaces and public spaces used for fundraising activities, and Randwick Council used the Coogee Sparkles event to directly fundraise for the RFS. Waverley Council waived parking fees for the people who sought refuge in the local government area during this disaster.

I also acknowledge Our Big Kitchen, which is a community-run industrial kitchen where meals are prepared for distribution to needy people across Sydney. During the bushfire crisis, Our Big Kitchen organised for extra food to be prepared and distributed to those who volunteered on the front line of the fires and who supported locals in those communities. The food was delivered with handwritten and heartfelt thankyou notes from members of the community. Our Big Kitchen is one of many charities and not-for-profit organisations that have lent a hand during these tough times. To each organisation and to every volunteer I say: Thank you for giving your time, expertise and effort over the past few months to support people who are enduring the toughest of times.

Unfortunately, we know that we are not out of the dark; bushfire season is going to continue for months to come. We also know without a doubt that the nature of bushfires in Australia has changed. Bushfire conditions are clearly more dangerous than they have been in the past and the risk to people and property has increased. I therefore welcome and strongly support the review by Mary O'Kane and David Owens that the New South Wales Government has commissioned. Let now be the time that we make significant and fundamental changes to the way we approach our summer season. We must do our best to prepare our State for the future and to tackle and address the challenges of climate change. If we cannot do these things, we are doomed to see a repeat of the tragic summer we have just witnessed.

Finally, I encourage all those who can to head to the regional communities affected by this crisis. I encourage them to stay at their hotels, eat at their cafes, buy from their shops and help those communities get back to business as usual. I thank the Premier for giving every member of the House an opportunity to offer their condolences to those who were lost in these fires and their thanks to those who served New South Wales at one of our darkest moments. I commend the motion to the House.



**Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) (17:54:04):** Over the past months we have witnessed scenes of unprecedented destruction and devastation across the State as hot and dry weather, in combination with severe drought conditions, saw our fire season commence in August, two months earlier than usual. Communities across New South Wales have been ravaged by fire during what has been the longest and most severe bushfire period that our State has endured in living memory. The catastrophic fires, which continue to burn across the State, have already consumed more than five million hectares of bush, destroyed over 2,000 homes and tragically have claimed 25 lives—18 civilians, four Australian firefighters and three firefighters from the United States, who had come to our aid. The selfless and brave acts of those firefighters will always be honoured and remembered. Our sympathies are with those left behind as they come to terms with the incomprehensible loss.

On behalf of my electorate of Bankstown, I would like to express my most sincere and heartfelt condolences to the families and loved ones of those who have tragically lost their lives while fighting the fires. Our thoughts and prayers are with you. We are immensely sorry for your loss and we share your sadness and grief. I also pay tribute to the many other brave and courageous firefighters, who continue to put themselves in harm's way to preserve the homes and lives of others. Our thoughts are also with the countless families and individuals who fled their homes in fear and have now been rendered homeless by the fires. Many witnessed the air filled with smoke and the sky turn black. We can only imagine their terror and panic. The lives of so many have been affected by the catastrophe.

Over the weekend of 4 and 5 January my electorate of Bankstown experienced three separate fires, including a fire that destroyed a section of the Crest Reserve, a local sporting field. I thank the NSW Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW firefighters, the local Bankstown police and volunteers who attended these fires and who work tirelessly to ensure that our communities and our loved ones are protected. Fire has torn through large portions of the State and the destruction of bushland has been widespread. It has also taken a devastating toll on our fauna. The natural habitat of countless animals has been wiped out and many helpless creatures have perished. The sheer number of wildlife that has died from the fires has been estimated to be over one billion nationally, which is very much a shock to each of us. The support through charitable donations for our wildlife has been extraordinary but it will take many years for their numbers to recover.

The most devastating aspect of the fires has been the human toll. However, in the midst of the terrible tragedy the best in human nature has emerged. Many communities have come together with acts of enormous generosity and compassion. Communities across the State, including from many areas unaffected by the fires, have responded to the emergency by donating food and other essential items and raising large sums of money to assist the countless fire victims whose lives have been shattered. In my electorate of Bankstown many individuals, schools, businesses, community organisations and sporting groups have shown a sense of community spirit, helping raise thousands of dollars towards bushfire recovery efforts. The contribution from the communities has been significant.

I have been touched by the many stories of kindness, compassion and generosity from the Bankstown community, which has responded instantly to lend a helping hand to those affected by the emergency. I share with the House some wonderful efforts and generous contributions that those from the Bankstown electorate have made and the heartwarming generosity extended to those in need. Bankstown Sports Club has donated \$100,000 to fire-affected areas and has established cash donation points at every cash register across the club, where customers are able to add a contribution to their transactions. One hundred per cent of donations will go to the fire relief effort.

Two siblings who attend Bankstown West Public School, Katie and Brandon Ly, initiated a wonderful fundraiser after asking their mother, Mrs Kim Ly, why the sky was so full of smoke. Having been told about the fires raging across the State, the kindergarten and year one students wrote to their school principal, Ms Nicole Benson, asking if the school could raise money to help volunteer firefighters by holding a mufti day. The children came to school wearing a superhero outfit as a tribute to the heroic efforts of the real superheroes, the brave men and women risking their lives at the fire fronts. The school responded positively to the request, holding a "Help Our Heroes Day" in November last year, with all proceeds donated to the NSW Rural Fire Service. The school's principal, Mrs Benson, said the school aims to foster a sense of community. She also said:

While the little ones don't understand the magnitude of the fires, we talk to our students about volunteering and how they can give back to the community.

It is all tied into creating a culture of working together, being kind, being compassionate and being thoughtful.

Their mother, Mrs Kim Ly, said that it was important that children be able to contribute and feel empowered. She said:

I think it is really important to show them that even though they are really young, if they stand up their voices can make a difference.

It ties in with what the school is already teaching them, that you are never too young to be vocal about what concerns you.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the Vietnamese Australian Medical Association and its president Dr Vinh Binh Lieu, who held a fundraiser on 22 December in Bankstown to raise much-needed funds for the bushfire relief. I acknowledge the many doctors and the many Vietnamese community members who were present at that fundraiser and also the large number of medical professionals who came across from Bankstown and from the wider community to attend. I thank Dr Vinh Binh Lieu for his efforts. It is not easy to hold a fundraiser on 22 December, being close to Christmas, but many people attended and they were able to raise much-needed funds.

I also acknowledge the members of Yaadein Vision Australia, the Bankstown arm of the Fijian Indian community. The group gathered items such as food hampers, fresh water and breathing masks and travelled to areas such as Picton, Balmoral, Hill Top and Wollondilly to hand those items over to fire stations and to many local families. Yaadein Vision also raised money from a community barbeque and ensured that their community members were supporting families in need. Mr Mishra, the group representative, told the *Canterbury Bankstown Express*:

We handed over 150 food packs, 1000 water bottles, 540 breathing masks and also donated \$1000 to the Rural Fire Services,

I acknowledge the Bankstown Women's Health Centre, which has generously offered emergency support to women who have been displaced or have been directly affected by the fires. The centre manager said that the organisation felt that it had an obligation to reach out to help women, particularly women who are in need, and she encouraged women to contact the centre. I congratulate Mary Murad and the Bankstown Women's Health Centre on their work in supporting women affected by the fires. The Bankstown PCYC, Lighthouse Community Support, Human Appeal Australia and Wiley Park Public School came together and in less than 48 hours they managed to collect three truckloads and two vans full of food, personal hygiene items and children's items from hundreds of generous locals. They also volunteered their time to donate directly to areas across New South Wales including Taree and Wingham.

I also acknowledge Bankstown Central shopping centre, which donated \$250,000 to the Salvation Army and the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal. It acted as a vicinity centre throughout this period as well. It continues to match the donations that are being made by its employees and, in addition, it has offered community space at over 60 of their centres to community groups involved in coordinating a response to the fire crisis, including free digital advertising to help raise awareness of the bushfire appeals. It is also working together to establish mobile blood units at some of its centres to assist in the collection of blood for bushfire victims.

Lastly, I acknowledge the Bankstown City Unity Bank, which donated \$10,000 to the NSW Rural Fire Service and the Victorian Country Fire Association to help the brave volunteers on the front line. The bank also donated \$3,000 to the Rural Fire Shed of Bathurst LGA Rural Fire Service for the purchase of items outside the scope of what the State Government provides. These are just a handful of examples of some of the acts of generosity and kindness of the Bankstown community. I know there are many more examples from my local community. Other schools, church groups and community groups have also generously donated. It shows how our community comes together in such a difficult time of need.

I praise my Bankstown constituents for what they have managed to achieve during this period. At the worst of times often you see the best of people. I have been heartened to see the people of Bankstown respond in true Australian spirit to those in need. They have displayed wonderful community spirit in the face of tragedy, which is a sentiment that has been shared across the State. From our emergency services personnel, who put their lives on the line, to the local communities, who have provided food, housing and other resources to fire-affected residents, they embody the Australian spirit.

I honour those who have lost their lives while trying to save the lives of others. We have heard horrific stories in this Chamber, particularly from members who were close to the firegrounds and whose electorates were significantly impacted by the disaster. We have heard many heartfelt speeches. Irrespective of political allegiance, one can only feel compassion for the members who were directly affected by the fires and saw their communities so horribly affected. I pay tribute to all volunteers across the State. I thank them for their bravery and compassion. The bushfire season is far from over and the recovery process is in its early stages. However, I know that the community will continue to unite to overcome this tragedy and rebuild our great State.

**Mrs LESLIE WILLIAMS (Port Macquarie) (18:05:57):** I join with the Premier and my colleagues in this House to express my deepest condolences to the families and friends of the 25 men and women who died in the bushfires that have ravaged so many communities across New South Wales over the past months. On 17 November there were 17 fires at emergency level across the State. It felt as if no region, no community was safe from the destruction of the flames. No-one could have imagined then that the fires would tighten their stranglehold even further in the weeks ahead as the blazes stretched from the Shoalhaven, Cobargo and Bodalla in the south to the Blue Mountains and Lithgow in the west and Willawarrin and Wyaliba in the north.

As the media revealed the devastation to the world and updated us on the rising tally of hectares destroyed and lives and homes lost, every person in our State was impacted by the fires. I acknowledge the members who have shared with us their personal stories of heartache, anguish and fear as they literally stood with their communities watching the bushfire nightmare unfold. I say to each of those members who were so burdened by the scale of those unprecedented blazes, please know that although I may not have spoken directly to you at the time, my mid North Coast community and I thought of you during those dark hours. We continue to hold you in our thoughts.

Sadly, the electorate of Port Macquarie, like so many others, has been scarred by the ferocious bushfires. The scale of the damage and ruin was not as extensive as in other parts of the State. That was not due to good luck but to the incredible efforts of our RFS volunteers and emergency personnel. They saved our towns, they saved our homes and they saved our lives. In Lake Cathie where I live we saw firsthand how the flames came right to the back fences. People in parts of Thrumster, Sancrox, Lake Innes and Crestwood had the same experience. Time and again the RFS returned to our streets. As the days and weeks passed they continued to surround us, putting out spot fires to ensure we were safe.

Tragically, such close calls were not the outcome at Johns River, a village to the south of Port Macquarie on the Pacific Highway. The aftermath of the fires that tormented that community was the loss of one of their own—Julie Fletcher. I did not have the privilege of knowing Julie but I know her sister and fellow Johns River resident Daintry Gerrand. Daintry has kindly provided me with the following words so that I may honour her sister Julie: Julie was a much loved member of the Fletcher family which has had and continues to have a strong association with the Johns River area over four generations. Julie will be sadly missed.

Her parents were Brian and Athelie (nee Litchfield) Fletcher who raised their three daughters Robin, Julie and Daintry on the family dairy farm at Passionfruit Creek, Johns River. Julie's parents and her eldest sister Robin are all deceased.

Julie was a caring and compassionate family orientated individual who loved her nieces and nephews—Tess and Fletcher, Justin, Olivia and Julia.

She had a strong work ethic and was a valued team member through her roles with the Commonwealth Bank, NSW Maritime and most recently TAFE NSW.

TAFE NSW have extended their condolences with this comment, "Julie was not only a team member, she was a friend, a colleague and a mentor to so many members. Her presence, insight and wisdom will be missed."

The farm, owned by her father since 1974, was Julie's peaceful space. Family and friends, past and present, enjoyed this tranquil tidal reach of the Stewarts River, the finger of agricultural land bounded by river, by lake and national park estate.

The farm was managed to complement the biodiversity values of Crowdy Bay National Park with initiatives undertaken to preserve water quality and nesting habitat for threatened species such as the Osprey.

Julie's death was a traumatic event—she lost her life to an apocalyptic combination of fire and wind at 11 pm on the 8th of November when a sudden southerly change hit the flank of Bills Crossing fire burning within Crowdy Bay National Park and Johns River State Forest.

We are no doubt in unprecedented times of drought—forage and water shortages, associated low humidity and related fire—which will change the way we all will live in our region, our state and the world as we have known it.

This is a matter not for recovery, but for preparedness and adaptation and renewal to cope with extreme events and the uncertainties ahead with our changing climate.

As individuals and leaders we need to focus on planning and resourcing to protect our natural landscape diversity, our farming lands and our communities. This is a time for proactive, precautionary and collaborative action to minimise the impacts of climate change.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the NSW Police and the Rural Fire Service and importantly the volunteer fire fighters who assisted us along Wharf Rd—Johns River, Hannam Vale, Kundle/Moto, Sancrox/Thrumster, Wootton, Camden Haven & Harrington. \$1950 was donated at Julie's Requiem Mass in Taree in December and will be shared amongst these Brigades on behalf of Julie and her family.

I thank Daintry for allowing me to share her words with the House this evening. Johns River is a very close-knit, caring and generous community. The events of those terrifying days in November left them numb, and the pain will stay with them for a long time to come. But they will wrap their arms around each other and be there for their friends and family, providing the support they will need in the days, weeks and months ahead. Following the initial fires and when it was safe to travel on the highway, my husband and I were driving to the village to offer our support when we received a phone call from a local RFS volunteer, Chris Bawn, who was anxious and stressed. He told us to turn around and go home as a second wave of fires had descended on the village. To witness how quickly the fire spread and the sky blacken with smoke was frightening. I could not begin to imagine the terror of the people who were in Johns River at the time.

Like many communities touched by the devastating fires, the residents of Johns River will fight back and rebuild their lives. They are working to do that as I speak. In mid-December I attended the Johns River Public School's presentation day in the village community hall. Normally this would be held at the school but it was

decided that it would be a great opportunity to bring the community together to share the students' creativity with more than just parents and friends. The afternoon was filled with joy and laughter as the students presented their play. It was lovely to see smiles on the faces of those in the audience, despite the troubling circumstances and the enormous impact of the fires so recently.

Over the past six months we have seen significant fire activity across the Mid Coast and Port Macquarie-Hastings local government areas [LGAs]. Our first fire started on 18 July at Lindfield Park in Port Macquarie. There have been significant challenges with this fire alone as it is burning in a saline wetland and peat. A strategy was implemented in August to rehydrate the wetland. The process is ongoing and, to date, over 42 megalitres have been pumped into the wetland to attempt to extinguish the peat fire. There have been two section 44 declarations, the first commencing on 21 August and concluding 20 September—a duration of 40 days—and the second commencing on 26 October and concluding on 21 January 2020, a duration of 88 days. This represents a total of 122 days under section 44 declarations in the past six months alone. There have been 3,124 incident calls since 26 October, which equates to 35 incident calls a day.

During the past six months there have been 58 fires of over five hectares in size. These fires have burnt a total of 420,000 hectares of bushland, representing over 30 per cent of the total LGAs. During the peak of the fires in November, 150 homes, nine facilities and 303 outbuildings were destroyed, with 68 homes, 16 facilities and 139 outbuildings damaged. However, 2,325 homes, facilities and outbuildings in the path of those fires were saved. It is therefore absolutely fitting that each of us in this House—and I have heard the stories and commendations from others—honour those hundreds of RFS volunteers, who for days and nights on end put their lives on the line to fight these fires and try to save as many homes as possible on the mid North Coast and around the State. I personally thank our local Rural Fire Service commander, Kam Baker, for his leadership, his courage and his ongoing stoic presentation to our community. He made us feel safe.

I also personally acknowledge the following RFS captains: Bruce Dudley from Johns River—what an enormous task he had during those devastating days in November—Michael Cleland from Harrington; Chris Brown from Lake Cathie, my own community, who I know left his own business for weeks on end so that he could keep us safe and we are forever grateful; Glen Dunn from Bonny Hills; Ron Morris from the Camden Haven; Kyle Goodsell from Lake Innes; Matthew Vanderlay from Sancro; Jim Greave from Telegraph Point; James Lonergan from King Creek; Bruce Everingham from Lansdowne; Sherrie Gaul from Coopernook—she is an amazing young woman who leads that brigade and has worked tirelessly for literally months; the brigade must be enormously proud—Stewart Waugh from Moorland; Graham Earle from Hannam Vale; and Kingsley Searle, my friend from North Shore RFS.

These outstanding captains and their mighty RFS crews fought tooth and nail to protect our communities up and down the coast, and for that we are eternally grateful. I also mention the firefighters who came from everywhere—from New Zealand, Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria, the Australian Capital Territory and Canada—to support the firefighting efforts on the mid North Coast. The word "hero" can often get overused but in this case I think it is absolutely spot-on. Who else walks towards a fire to fight when people's natural instinct is to run away? I visited the RFS headquarters in Wauchope on a number of occasions, trying to keep out of the way but at the same time seeking fire updates so I could report back to my community. The personnel at the command centre worked seamlessly as each and every member of the emergency response team went about their duties supporting the work of those amazing RFS volunteers.

I have already mentioned RFS Superintendent Kam Baker but I also acknowledge and thank on behalf of my community Shane Robinson from National Parks, Kathy Lyon from Forestry Corporation NSW, Tony Day from the RFS, Ken Murphy from Fire and Rescue NSW and Mid North Coast Police Superintendent Paul Fehon. Each of their team members is also to be thanked from the bottom of our hearts for the vital work they undertook during the fires. While I was at the Wauchope RFS Fire Control Centre I was impressed by how absolutely seamlessly these people came together to make sure that the fires did not take hold and that they minimised the damage, the lives lost and the houses gone.

As other members have done, I too would like to show my gratitude and offer my condolences to the families of the three firefighters from the United States of America who died helping to attack the fires from the air in the Snowy-Monaro region. Captain Ian McBeth, First Officer Paul Clyde Hudson and flight engineer Rick DeMorgan Jr lost their lives trying to save ours. They paid the ultimate price while helping others. The bond between Australia and our oldest ally, the United States of America, has grown even stronger. Whilst obviously the focus of this condolence motion centres on the fires in New South Wales, we must not forget that fires know no borders and our thoughts and prayers also go to the communities in Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and South Australia who have also suffered as a result of these terrible blazes.

Many in this House will know that I grew up on Kangaroo Island. It is my home town, and I also feel the pain of what these fires have done. I spoke again this morning with Mayor Michael Pengilly, and I acknowledge

his leadership during this extremely chaotic time. The tragedy took two lives. Over half of the island is burnt. It is hard to imagine. Many of the soldier settler farms are gone. The forests are gone. One hundred thousand sheep and almost 3,000 cattle are gone, and thousands of kilometres of fencing now have to be rebuilt. That community, like ours, is suffering. It is a community that is also underpinned by tourism and agriculture. Michael was telling me this morning about the ongoing issues involved in cleaning up. It is going to be a long road and of course, like on the mid North Coast, the wildlife that has been lost is unbelievable. On Kangaroo Island it is estimated that 40,000 koalas are gone. But there is good news. Mayor Michael told me that the bush is regenerating, the green grass is coming back. It is such a strong community and, with his leadership, it will be even stronger in the future.

I acknowledge the work that was carried out on the ground to fight the fires. As many in this House have done, I also thank the enormous number of service organisations such as Rotary, Lions and members of our community who have been supporting our firefighters and those impacted. In early November the Crowdy Bay National Park fire forced an evacuation centre to be established at the Laurieton United Services Club. The outstanding community hospitality offered to those evacuees by club manager Rob Dwyer and his staff and volunteers was typical of the kind, heartwarming generosity of my community. That same level of generosity was replicated across my electorate by the Camden Haven Show Society, which threw open the gates of the Kendall Showgrounds as a safe haven for displaced residents, as well as animals, offering food, shelter and protection.

I also mention Charles Sturt University [CSU], which from November to January housed 250 firefighters from Australia, Canberra, Queanbeyan and Sydney, with staff and students supplying breakfast and dinner for the firefighters. Of course, they were also well supported by local Lions Club members and by so many others from the community who put up their hand to help out. On Saturday afternoon I am attending a thankyou barefoot bowls and barbecue function—let's hope we get rained out!—to show our appreciation of CSU and its staff, students and volunteers who looked after those dedicated firefighters. The impact of the fires has also been felt by the business and tourism community in Port Macquarie and surrounding towns. With the 24-hour news cycle bombarding people with images of the fire and with roads and highways closed, it was understandable that people stayed home during the fire season and the weeks and months that followed. With holidays being cancelled and people not spending in shops, restaurants and cafes, we now have to turn our attention to supporting businesses that have been indirectly impacted by the fires.

The Liberal-Nationals State Government, along with the Australian Government, has a suite of funding packages available for bushfire recovery. I commend the swiftness with which that has been provided to our communities. I know members are making sure that their communities know exactly what funding is available. Tourism Minister Stuart Ayres has kindly offered to visit Port Macquarie and Camden Haven next Tuesday so that he can listen to business owners and tourism organisations and hear their concerns firsthand, as well as offering support to my electorate more broadly. Minister Ayres will visit the iconic Port Macquarie Koala Hospital, which has had huge public support as its staff and volunteers work tirelessly to look after those iconic and very endangered koalas that were burnt and injured during the fires. [*Extension of time*]

My staff and I also volunteered to help out at the koala hospital on a number of occasions because it was inundated with offers of support and with people wanting to adopt koalas. With that comes much paperwork and certificates to be sent out. It was interesting to see that people had sent adoption requests and funds from literally all over the world. We packed so many adoption packs for people from Switzerland, Germany, America—you name it—supporting our koala hospital and its work. I conclude my contribution to this debate with some messages of support that were sent to me from residents in the Port Macquarie electorate. My office has collated these messages and I will be presenting them in book form to each of our local RFS brigades.

Helen at Harrington wrote, "Thank you to our courageous Rural Fire Service volunteers." Marie and Terry from Lakewood wrote, "The word 'thanks' seems small for what you have done and continue to do." Lorraine and Geoff from Port Macquarie wrote, "Just thank you for keeping us safe." Betty at West Haven wrote, "You are a wonderful group of men and women and we will always appreciate what you are prepared to do for us." Maryanne at Laurieton wrote, "Thank you for your bravery and compassion." Christine at Port Macquarie wrote, "Thank you for your dedication and selfless service to keep us safe and save our homes. We are forever in your debt." Finally, Bob in Port Macquarie wrote, "Bless you all. You do a magnificent job."

Those few messages out of the more than 200 that I have received say it all during what has been a devastating bushfire season. As Australians, we have been dealt a very tough hand by Mother Nature, but it has allowed us to show what we, as a community, are made of. We have demonstrated that, as always, when we are knocked down we just get back up. We dust ourselves off and, like a phoenix, we rise from the ashes to rebuild our homes, our shops and our lives with the outpouring of love and support we receive from the communities we all serve.

**Mr CLAYTON BARR (Cessnock) (18:28:45):** It is a pleasure to follow the good member for Port Macquarie's wonderful contribution to this motion of condolence and to hear her talk about her community

with such passion, pride and humility, as she always does. I too support the motion that recognises the bushfire season of 2019-20, albeit that the season is most certainly not over just yet. Most importantly, at the outset of my contribution I wish to name and honour the RFS volunteers who tragically died in this particular fire season: Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer and Samuel McPaul. I also acknowledge and recognise our friends from the United States who were here to help and support us during the fire season and who also tragically died during their efforts to support and protect our communities. I speak of Ian McBeth, Paul Hudson and Rick DeMorgan Jr.

The reality is that New South Wales has had an unprecedented fire season. A number of political commentators have tried to dress it up as something other than that but I repeat: It is an unprecedented fire season. As members of Parliament, on Tuesday afternoon we had the opportunity to hear directly from a number of emergency services organisations. They had absolutely no hesitation in referring to the bushfire season as an unprecedented fire season. We discussed the statistics, facts and figures to establish why that is the case. It is irrefutable to refer to the bushfire season we have just experienced as unprecedented.

With regard to specifics, statistics and details, two contributions to the motion—one by the Leader of the Opposition and one by the Premier—perfectly, succinctly and immediately outlined exactly where this State is placed as a result of the bushfire season. I encourage people who read my speech or who are interested in the broader range of contributions to ensure they do not pass up the opportunity to read those two speeches. In the same vein I refer people to some other contributions that paint the picture of the bushfire experiences from the perspective of a local member of Parliament. I refer to the speech made by the member for Prospect, Hugh McDermott, who was out there on the fire front. He described in fantastic and vivid detail for the benefit of all members of this House what it is like to put on the orange suit of the RFS and to stand in front of a fire that is coming towards you. His account certainly made the hair on the back of my neck stand up.

The wonderful member for Bega and the wonderful member for Blue Mountains spoke about their personal experiences during the bushfire season that included their near-death experiences or the near-death experiences of family members. It is through the personal experiences conveyed in this House by the member for Port Macquarie and other members that we better understand what it is like to live through such an experience. Because Australia is the land of droughts, floods and fires, the reality is that people go through those experiences at different times. The impacts are significant, emotional, challenging and heartbreaking and, as other members have said, they bring out the best in us. Those experiences bring out the greatness of our wonderful human spirit. In that context I acknowledge and recognise the wonderful community work in the Cessnock electorate, which I have the great pleasure to represent.

Late in December extreme fire events came through the Wollombi and Laguna villages in the south-west of my electorate. The Cessnock electorate is fortunate to have the great beauty of being surrounded and full of State forests and national parks. The reality is that there is not a summer season when my electorate does not have significant fire events, but previous fires were nothing like the fires that we had this year. Relative to other towns and villages in my electorate, the Wollombi and Laguna villages are quite remote and consequently telecommunications, mobile phones, CB radios and handsets, et cetera, do not operate because of the hills, valleys and nature of the topography. A number of small communities in my electorate are completely isolated and are without telecommunication facilities. For the reason that the RFS does not have connectivity with the command centre and the base there, RFS members simply are not allowed to go there.

In terms of the remoteness of some of those communities, frankly we are lucky that lives were not lost, although property was. Those villages were settled 60,000 years ago by our Indigenous people. Mount Yengo is one of the most significant Indigenous places on the east coast. Some of our local Aboriginal communities refer to Mount Yengo as the east coast Uluru, so that gives members a sense of how important it is. When the early white settlers arrived here and they tried to head north out of Sydney they could not get over the Hawkesbury so, of course, they had to go around it.

When they came around the Hawkesbury, they came into the bottom of the Wollombi-Laguna Valley where the very early settlements were based. Fortunately, at the time, the farmers settled down on the flat land beside the river because that was how they would go about their farming, and raising a crop, sheep and cattle. Fortunately, when this fire event went through and tore through the mountain ranges, and the higher parts of the hills and mountains, the greater part of the community and the population were down on the flats. That was where our courageous RFS volunteers and community members and property owners met the fire. Because it was on the downhill run—or on the flats and the grasses—they were able to save the great majority of buildings, property and people.

Our fire went through in a period of about 48 hours. It was extreme and it lingered for some months after that, but it lingered over in the back hills and the back valleys. It is almost impossible territory for our firefighters to access in any shape or form to fight those fronts, so it still burns away today. But the worst of it and the closest of it—with regard to our towns and villages—has come and it has passed. We had communities up in Paynes

Crossing that were also spared by the RFS and again down on the flats—having cleared the land around the farmhouses, the residential properties and tourist facilities—we were able to defeat those fires.

Further west in the electorate of Cessnock, we have Putty. The Putty Road runs from Sydney at the southern end up to Singleton at the northern end. One gentleman left his house at Putty to come down to Sydney for a doctor's appointment. Unfortunately, when he tried to get back he could not get through because the road had been blocked by the fire and emergency services because the fire was going through that village. We took a number of phone calls from that gentleman over the following week to 10 days. His experience was terrible. He had animals at his property. He was a single man. He had CCTV cameras set up, but he simply could not get in.

Over the ensuing days, sadly, he watched the demise of his animals through CCTV on his mobile phone because they did not have food and water. His property survived, but the roads in and out were impassable. His story is just one of those that demonstrates how the electorate office of an MP supports its communities during these times. Certainly when the fires were going through Wollombi and Laguna the electorate office took many calls from people in significant distress, still in their homes and properties at Wollombi and Laguna, watching the fire come towards them using the wonderful app called Fires Near Me. Heaven only knows what we did before that. They did not know what was happening and the great concern was—going back to the topography and geography—they were tucked around a corner of a valley or they were down a dirt road somewhere and their concern was that there were no emergency services responding to their desperate calls and pleas.

When I made inquiries of the Minister's office—and a shout out to Don Bodnar in the office who did a wonderful job keeping us up to date—I was told there were 96 trucks on the ground and a couple of aircrews fighting the fires. But that was the nature of the fire. I had people ringing me in great distress, telling me this was the last phone call they were ever going to make and that I was not doing enough as the local MP to get them the support services they needed. But the reality was we had every man and woman in an orange suit that was available out there fighting the fires. They might not have been at the bottom of that particular driveway, but they were certainly at the bottom of driveways somewhere else in that area. They were quite distressing phone calls for an MP's office to take. I applaud and recognise my wonderful electorate office staff who took the great brunt of those particular phone calls. I say "brunt" because I could see and hear in the voices of my staff members how distressing those phone calls had been; I had taken a number of those phone calls myself. Those two days in the electorate office were really tough.

That brings me to the point about the leadership role we have as MPs. While I am sure we all felt that we wanted to stay completely out of the way of the work of the RFS, we also needed the information. The member for Port Macquarie mentioned going to one of her RFS stations and trying to stay out of the way, but needing that information so that she could share it with the community through her Facebook page and the phone calls she took. I apologise on behalf of us all if any MPs got in the way of our RFS brigades going about their work. However, we were really just trying to help our communities with the communication, recognising that RFS firefighters were the experts and would do the right thing. We just needed a little bit of information so that we could support your cause and do the little that we could.

I went to one of my RFS stations after the worst of it had been through. The crew members were working on their trucks and making some small repairs. They explained to me that they need to do that on a regular basis and that there were some other bits and pieces they were currently raising money for—even just the water, which I am sure we have all heard about—so that they have that as they go about their business during the normal course of the year. These are all great things for us as MPs to hear and learn about so that we can better understand the nature of the volunteerism. It is not just about the firefighting but also about raising money as they have always done—that is not a criticism of the government of the day; it is historically what the RFS brigades have had to do.

I think that this particular fire season causes us all to pause and consider whether we might need to rethink the funding for our Rural Fire Service going forward. I was watching *Q+A* on Monday night, which featured a climate change expert. One of the questions that came from the young people in the audience was, "Is this the new norm?" To paraphrase, the response was essentially, "No, this might not be the new norm." I thought, oh good, we are not going to see more of this. He went on to say, "This could just be the start of where it ends up." This could be mild compared to what might be the future as the climate changes.

When you think about the season we have had, that is extremely sobering. As members of this Parliament, as the 93 elected representatives from all across the State with all our political colours and stripes, we have to deal with that going forward. I think the sentiment that has been expressed in this Chamber this week indicates that all members are willing to have that conversation in a very mature and respectful way. We will make sure that we do what we need to do in here to make sure that our communities are kept safe and, in particular, that our volunteers are recognised.

Finally, I recognise the work of the Premier, the emergency services Minister and the elected leaders in our various communities who have done incredibly well during this difficult time. I also commend the work of RFS leader Shane Fitzsimmons and his team out there. As described by the member for Port Macquarie, you saw them in front of the TV camera and thought, well, while ever they are in charge I feel just a bit safer. That sort of presence and demeanour is quite a quality to have. It has been wonderful to see the support for these people from the community at large. It has been wonderful to watch everyone chip in and lend a hand—making donations, making sandwiches, getting on the end of a pair of tongs, going to the local supermarket to get a pallet of water and making sure it gets out to the fires.

In particular, during that severe 48-hour period I had fire trucks from all over the State in my electorate. I could not pronounce some of the names on the sides of the trucks, but I knew they had left their families to come to support the people of the community at that moment—just as our American, Canadian and New Zealand friends had come to help and support us at that time. Those actions are the best of what makes us human. We just have to help those who need it. I mean that on every single front; not just the fire front. I am talking about the aid that we send after tsunamis or earthquakes. I recently went on a journey around the South Pacific and I saw schools that were built with funding and support from Australia, Japan, China and the United States.

The best thing about humans is that we support others when they need our help. We have seen that intensely over the past three months in New South Wales and Australia. Hopefully that will continue over the coming decades where and when it is needed, and in the volume and with the compassion that is needed. When I wake up in the morning and look at my children it is those acts of support that make me proud to be alive on this earth at this time and in this place. I am proud that my children will see the best of us. I commend the motion to the House.

**Ms JENNY LEONG (Newtown) (18:45:16):** I support the motion and add my voice and the voices of those living in the electorate of Newtown to the collective sorrow members have expressed at the tragic loss of life as a result of the bushfires over the past months. In her contribution the Premier paid individual tribute to those who died and put on the record their names, stories and circumstances, as well as the incomprehensible reality faced by their loved ones left behind. I do not intend to repeat their names, tell their stories, reflect on their contributions or pretend to have known them. Those words are better expressed by those who know them, who love them and who continue to mourn them. I can, however, offer my heartfelt sympathy to the loved ones, families and friends who have lost someone dear to them. I offer strength to their arms and courage in their hearts to be able to continue to breathe, function and exist in a world that no longer includes someone who they hold so dear.

It is clear that the trauma and devastation of these fires has impacted so many in this place and it is also clear that the collective spirit, compassion and care of individuals and communities has been a powerful force. It has been a truly awful summer, and nearly everyone I know has been impacted in one way or another. A small example—which is by no means comparable to the damage and devastation faced by so many communities—of how these events have touched so many is that three of the four Newtown electorate office staff had family members in different parts of the State who, at different times, had to evacuate their homes. When you consider how many people across the State would have been checking and closely watching the Fires Near Me app for alerts and you consider the stress and anxiety so many people felt you get a sense of the collective impact these fires have had on our community. That trauma will live on for many people.

Along with many others, I extend my thanks to the RFS, the SES, Fire and Rescue NSW and all the other emergency responders. In particular, I thank the people who continued to fulfil their roles despite their own homes and communities being under threat. Their work on the front lines—whether it was the preparation, the containment lines built, the back burning performed or the advice given—saved many people's lives and homes, at considerable risk to themselves. These volunteers helped people up and supported them when they were fallen and broken by the devastation. Our people understood the likely fire spread for the coming days and had a plan A to contain the fire and a plan B for evacuation. Those plans were extraordinarily helpful for people who needed to make decisions about when to leave. Many people did leave, and many lives were saved as a result.

I put on record and acknowledge the work of ABC Radio—our national broadcaster—and thank those who worked around the clock to bring people the most up-to-date information. When massive blackouts and communications outages affected huge swathes of the fire-affected areas, people could still listen to ABC Radio, which provided lifesaving information such as which towns were impacted by fire, whether people could buy petrol, where EFTPOS machines were working and if any food shops were functioning. I acknowledge the work of local council representatives and mayors who worked collaboratively and collectively to support their communities.

I echo my colleague Jamie Parker, who spoke first to the condolence motion on behalf of The Greens in recognising their efforts. It is clear from the sympathies offered, the stories shared and the tone of the contributions



that those of us who occupy the usually rowdy Chamber colloquially known as "the bearpit" are feeling overwhelmed. We perhaps feel a little less combative than usual in the face of the disastrous and tragic summer that we have all experienced. It is my genuine hope that when the dust settles and the smoke finally clears, we put our political pointscoring and our political posturing aside and listen to the science. After all, it is our collective failure and the failure of those able to make decisions to heed the warnings that has got us to this point. Twelve years ago, in 2008, economist Ross Garnaut predicted that climate change would fuel more intense fire seasons. He said that projections:

... suggest that fire seasons will start earlier, end slightly later, and generally be more intense ... This effect increases over time, but should be directly observable by 2020.

The fire chiefs, scientists and experts have told us that climate change is making the fire season longer and harder to manage. We owe it to those who have lost their lives and who have suffered trauma as a result of this devastating summer not to return to business as usual. For so many, this summer has changed everything and, in turn, everything must change. We must come together in honour of those who lost their lives and agree collectively to act. We must make the tough decisions needed to prevent loss of life should the climate crisis continue to escalate. My final words are to those who have lost loved ones, whose lives will never be the same. I share with them a quote that someone recently shared with me in very different circumstances. It reads:

Grief, I've learned, is really just love. It's all the love you want to give, but cannot. All that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go.

**Mr GREG WARREN (Campbelltown) (18:51:58):** It is with reservation and humility—yet a great privilege—that I contribute to the condolence motion. I begin by acknowledging those who have lost their lives and their loved ones across the nation. Some 33 people have lost their lives during this tragic season—25 of them from New South Wales. With the indulgence of the House, I will name them: Geoffrey Keaton, Andrew O'Dwyer, Samuel McPaul, Colin Burns, Robert Lindsay, Gwenda Hyde, Vivian Chaplain, George Nole, Julie Fletcher, Barry Parson, Chris Savva, Russell Bratby, Robert Salway, Laurie Andrew, John Butler, John Smith, Michael Campbell, an unidentified 56-year-old man from Coolagolite, David Harrison from Batlow, Ross Rixon in Cobargo, Michael Clarke, and Americans Ian McBeth, Paul Clyde Hudson and Rick DeMorgan Jr, who came over to help. I acknowledge all others who have experienced hardship and loss. I thank my colleagues who have made contributions in this place to this important condolence motion.

I particularly acknowledge the members who shared their personal stories and experienced the impact of the bushfires more than the people in my electorate of Campbelltown. I make my contribution tonight on behalf of those people, who I know share the deepest sympathies and condolences for those who have suffered during what has been nothing less than a catastrophe. For sharing their stories, I thank Andrew Constance, Shelley Hancock, Trish Doyle, Hugh McDermott, Adam Marshall and others. Hearing those stories displays the true humanity of our profession. It is all too often forgotten that whilst we are politicians—and proudly so—with the privilege of serving the people we seek to represent, we are also people who live in communities and care about them. I have no doubt that each and every one of my colleagues in this place feels that way.

During the catastrophic circumstances that prevailed around the State I, like many of us, thought about my own family and loved ones and cannot begin to imagine what those people who have been impacted have gone through. I again offer my personal condolences and those of my electorate. Almost 2,500 homes have been lost and thousands were damaged. However, nearly 15,000 homes were saved and it is a credit to those who contributed and served to save those homes. Almost 5½ million hectares of land was burnt in New South Wales alone, which is a tragedy in many ways, none more so than the loss felt by those who were affected. Almost one billion wildlife were lost and there have been reports that some of those animals may be extinct. We are yet to evaluate that. More than 277,000 firefighters have been deployed around the State at varying times to defend and protect communities in every way they can. On behalf of the people of Campbelltown, I say to them: Thank you.

I acknowledge Minister Shelley Hancock and her staff for keeping me appropriately well informed when required. They reached out to me and I made the appropriate representations as an outcome. Many communities and councils were impacted and I had the privilege to visit and say "g'day" to those communities and I thank them for that. The purpose of my visit was nothing more than to turn up and provide the comfort that I felt they needed and to hear their stories so that we could come back into this place and exercise the instruments of the Parliament to collaborate in a bipartisan manner—all of us, including the crossbench members—to do what we must in this time of crisis. Ultimately, that is our role. Yes, this place is robust at times, but now is not that time.

Councils impacted by the fires include Armidale, Ballina, Bega Valley, Bellingen, Blue Mountains, Byron, Central Coast, Cessnock, Clarence Valley, Coffs Harbour, Eurobodalla, Glen Innes, Hawkesbury, Inverell, Kempsey, Kyogle, Lismore, Lithgow, MidCoast, Mid-Western, Nambucca, Port Macquarie-Hastings, Queanbeyan-Palerang, Richmond Valley, Shoalhaven, Singleton, Snowy Monaro, Snowy Valleys, Tenterfield,

Tweed, Walcha, Wingecarribee and, close to my heart and home, the people of Wollondilly around Buxton and those other affected areas. I thank the members of those local communities who welcomed me. Understandably, they did not have a lot to say as they were shell-shocked. It was time to listen and comfort rather than talk.

The recovery effort is so important. Communities around our State are doing everything they can to get back on their feet. Our children went back to school last week. I know that everyone has been working really hard to ensure that every opportunity has been taken to minimise the impact on the mental health of those students in communities affected by bushfire. The Government's rate subsidy for the next two quarters was a welcomed announcement. It will ease the financial burden and pressures on families or ratepayers when they need it most. I cannot begin to imagine how it would feel to receive a rate notice for a house that no longer exists.

I also acknowledge the mayors of councils that were not affected who offered support to councils in the affected areas. In the face of adversity I believe that the true strength of our character and our proud people comes together to provide when needed. This tragedy put on show some terrible things but it also showed how we come together. The greatest character of our nation is that we stand by and look after each other. That has been displayed throughout the history of New South Wales and this country.

Since 5 September 2019 members from local brigades in Campbelltown have been deployed to various areas around the State, including the Northern Rivers, Glen Innes, Tamworth, Armidale, Narrabri, Port Macquarie-Hastings, Hawkesbury, Wollondilly, Wingecarribee, Upper Lachlan, Upper Hunter, Goulburn and Nowra. I thank and pay homage to them and to every other volunteer who has contributed to do everything they could to help others in their time of need. Local incident management team specialists from Macarthur have also been deployed to all of the places I mentioned.

Finally, I thank the State Emergency Service, NSW Rural Fire Service, Fire & Rescue NSW, departmental staff and our workers who have given so much. They have taken time off work and spent time away from their families to help other people. I also thank our council staff, police, paramedics, health staff and all of our service organisations who have provided food, shelter, support—and even given up their homes. It has been a truly humbling experience to see the good nature of our people come to light during this storm of a tragedy that has seen these fires destroy the lives of so many people. We will recover and move forward but we can never forget those who lost their lives, as well as their suffering and the suffering of their loved ones.

It is my belief that as a Parliament it is bestowed upon us to make any and every representation required to ensure the sustainability of our future and to have the appropriate protection measures in place. We rely on government to do that. As a Labor Opposition we will never stand in the way of something that is good for each of our communities in our great State. I thank members for their contributions to this motion. I also thank the movers of this condolence motion for the opportunity to express my gratitude, condolences and thanks.

**Debate adjourned.**

#### *Community Recognition Statements*

#### **GEORGIA CUMMINS**

**Mr CHRISTOPHER GULAPTIS (Clarence)**—I offer my congratulations to Georgia Cummins of Winegrove who is a young musician who travelled to Tamworth to perform in this year's Country Music Festival. Georgia participated in the Toyota Country Music Busking Championships 2020 and was placed third in the competition out of 400 buskers. The buskers put in plenty of hours during the competition with them performing for 7 to 8 hours a day across the 10 day event. Georgia hopes that this result will allow her to release an album later this year. I wish Georgia every success with her career.

#### **MULGOA PUBLIC SCHOOL'S MOONLIGHT MARKET**

**Mrs TANYA DAVIES (Mulgoa)**—Congratulations to Mulgoa Public School on their successful Moonlight Market held in October 2019. In the past, the school has hosted some fantastic market days, but this year's Moonlight Market was the first of its kind. The market was the school's major fundraising event for 2019. With the funds raised, the P&C are hoping to further develop the school's outdoor learning area and update the resources under their brand new COLA. The Moonlight market was proudly sponsored by local businesses, Glenmore Park Dental and Bespoke Realty Group who helped make the night possible.

The night was a resounding success with people from all over the community coming out in support of the school. A large selection of food, drinks, market stalls and entertainment were all on offer throughout the night. Over 40 artisan vendors were carefully selected by the P&C market committee to create a unique shopping experience all whilst being serenaded by local musicians and singers. What an incredibly successful night and a wonderful opportunity for the community to support and celebrate its local school. Well done Mulgoa Public School!

### LINDFIELD LEARNING VILLAGE

**Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson)**—I am pleased that another improvement has been delivered for Lindfield Learning Village, with the introduction of additional bus services in 2020 following an increase in school capacity. The school will ultimately accommodate around 2000 students from years K-12 after it is completed in 2022, including additional new permanent classrooms and high-quality technical spaces for science, engineering, hospitality, visual and performing arts, music and film. Assisting the school community in 2020, an additional bus service will be available to students in the morning and afternoon, the 565 route bus. Greater frequency of bus services should help service the increasing numbers of students at the school. Many local families share my excitement with the progress happening at Lindfield Learning Village, which offers high-quality school resources for students to succeed. I commend all concerned with its success.

### DARRYL BROHMAN, OAM

**Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Attorney General, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence)**—I congratulate Cronulla resident Darryl Brohman on being awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) in the Australia Day Honours list, for service to rugby league. Most of us know Darryl, "The Big Man", as a sports commentator and media personality. Throughout his career he has worked for the Nine Network and radio stations 2GB, 2UE, 2SM and the ABC. He was a host on the NRL Footy Show from 2010 to 2018. He is a well-known member of the Continuous Call Team on 2GB. Darryl has been involved in rugby league since he was 11 years old. He played for the Penrith Panthers and the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs, winning a premiership with the Bulldogs in 1984. Darryl has also played in two State of Origins for Queensland in 1983 and 1986. After retiring from playing, Darryl has coached rugby league. He has been an ambassador for the Starlight Foundation since 2013.

### KIRSTY ROSE—WARANARA SCHOOL

**Ms JO HAYLEN (Summer Hill)**—Kirsty Rose has been assisting vulnerable young people in our education system for over 21 years. For the past five of those, she has served as Principal of Waranara School in Marrickville. The Waranara School was founded by Good Shepard in 2015 and provides a supportive education environment for young people aged 14-18 who are experiencing mental health issues and significant life challenges that make it difficult for them to engage with school. Kirsty first started working for Good Shepard Australia and New Zealand in 1998 as a social worker. Since then, Kirsty has helped hundreds of young people finish school, providing them with the tools and backing to achieve their full educational potential. The Waranara School would not be the same without Kirsty. She was instrumental in the school's establishment and in the school's ongoing success. Her warmth, dedication and leadership will be missed by all those in the Good Shepherd and Waranara school community and I join them in thanking Kirsty for all she has done for Waranara and for the kids of the inner west, and in wishing Kirsty the very best for her future.

### WALLSEND TOUCH ASSOCIATION GALA DAY

**Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend)**—Congratulations to the Wallsend Touch Football Association on their recent successful junior representative gala day, held on Sunday 19 January, 2020. More than 90 teams from across the Hunter and Sydney attended with teams from Newcastle, Port Stephens, Hunter, Lake Macquarie, Central Coast, Northern Beaches and the Hills District taking part. The hard working volunteers and committee members toiled through difficult weather conditions to put on a successful gala day.

A day like this is not possible without the parents, friends, uncles and aunties of the Wallsend rep players, who helped in the canteen, cooked the barbecue, cleaned the toilets and picked up rubbish around the grounds. A huge thank you also to the referees and officials for their efforts. Congratulations to the committee members and volunteers that assisted with making the gala day such a success. Well done Natalie Little, Rochelle Stevens, Linley Kenny, Mel Allen, Kristen Chippendale, Richard Chippendale, Sam Shoulders, Lisa Daley, Tina Wilson, Judy Madden, Grant Kenny, Glen Graham, Joe Caruso, Lee Stevens, Belinda Caruso, Justin Shoulders, Liberty Little, Scott Allan, Mel Graham, Scott Oliver, Leah Cambourn, Blake Brown, Cameron Maxwell, Grace Outram, Kellie Johnston.

### PRINCESS GARDENS RETIREMENT VILLAGE, ROSE BAY

**Ms GABRIELLE UPTON (Vaucluse)**—On Friday 13 December 2019, I visited the community at the Princess Gardens B'nai B'rith Retirement Village in Rose Bay, where I was joined by 30 local Jewish seniors including the Chairman Len Mahemoff OAM. In August 2019, Len wrote to me requesting that a damaged bench outside their residence be replaced by a new compliant bench. Residents wanted a safe place to sit while they waited for their transport to pick them up. I was able to organise a new bench to be installed and it was wonderful to see what a difference it was making to their quality of life. They deserve the best! I commend the Princess

Gardens residents for their strong community spirit and making me always feel welcome when I visit to share their fellowship.

#### **PINO SGAMBELLONE**

**Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool)**—I am pleased to be able to recognise Pino Sgambellone. I've known Pino for three decades. I'm delighted to acknowledge that he is the recipient of Liverpool's 2020 Macquarie Award. This is an award issued annually by Liverpool City Council, chosen by the Mayor. It is awarded to an individual or group that has made a significant contribution to Liverpool. Mayor Waller announced the award to Pino at the Australia Day ceremony held by Liverpool Council at the Casula Powerhouse. Pino has been an involved community member for many years. He's been Secretary of Liverpool's Sister City Program with the region of Calabria in Italy since 1995. He's been quite involved with a range of committees involved with the Italian Catholic and business community. He was a board member of the Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre between 2000 and 2005 and has been a strong supporter of cultural and art programs especially those celebrating Italian culture.

#### **AUSTRALIA DAY AWARDS—OAMS FOR TWO ELECTORATE MEMBERS**

**Ms TAMARA SMITH (Ballina)**—I congratulate two of my electorate member's acknowledgment in the Australia Day honours listing: Robyn Gray received an Order of Australia Medal for her service to community history. The Eureka resident has given years of selfless service to the Brunswick valley Historical Society, of which she was a founding president in 1982. She has been the author and editor of countless historical publications in that time. Robyn has been awarded a Bicentennial Medallion for Contribution to the bicentenary celebrations of European settlement in 1988 and was recognised by the Royal Australian Historical Society in 1994 with a Certificate of Achievement.

Catherine 'Claire' Oelrichs's service to wildlife conservation in Indonesia was recognised with an Order of Australia Medal. Claire founded the Save Indonesian Endangered Species Fund, where she has been president since 2006. She was the conservation co-ordinator of training and welfare improvements at Way Kambas Elephant Conservation Centre from 2007 to 2019. Claire has also been a Southern Cross University scientific leader of the New Colombo Scholarships in Indonesia since 2014.

#### **MR PATRICK BARTOLO, OAM, JP**

**Mr MARK TAYLOR (Seven Hills)**—It is with pleasure that I acknowledge a local Seven Hills electorate constituent awarded the Order of Australia Medal in the General Division on the Australia Day 2020 honours list. Mr Patrick Bartolo OAM, JP of Toongabbie has consistently represented his community and the State through his involvement in many local organisation and service as a Justice of the Peace. Mr Bartolo has served numerous local Catholic Churches, Schools and Parishes with his talents. This includes St Anthony of Padua Catholic Church, Toongabbie, Patrician Brothers College, Blacktown and the St Matthews Catholic Church Choir. Additionally, Mr Bartolo supports a range of local Maltese community groups such as his membership to the Returned and Services League of Australia Maltese Sub-Branch and his service on the Maltese Cultural Council of NSW. Mr Bartolo has earned this prestigious title and I am proud to acknowledge and congratulate him on this accomplishment today.

#### **JILL EMBERSON**

**Ms JODIE HARRISON (Charlestown)**—I feel privileged to recognise the extraordinary and influential life of ABC Newcastle broadcaster Jill Emberson who died on 12th December at the age of 60 after a four-year battle with ovarian cancer. Jill was the first voice that many of the people of my electorate of Charlestown heard in the mornings, as she presented the ABC Newcastle's Morning program for seven years from 2009, before she was diagnosed with terminal ovarian cancer in 2016. Her passion for telling the stories of Indigenous people led to the creation of a podcast, entitled 'Meet the Mob', and she was a Walkley Award finalist for her radio series 'Hooked on Heroin' about the heroin crisis in the Hunter. After undergoing two years of gruelling treatment, Jill returned to work in 2018 to create the award-winning podcast, 'Still Jill', a raw and unflinching look behind the scenes of her cancer journey. Jill Emberson was a fierce campaigner for issues such as indigenous rights, drug awareness and women's equality. She was also a passionate and successful fighter for ovarian cancer research funding. The community gathered in Newcastle City Hall on 23rd January 2020 to remember this remarkable woman.

#### **JAMES GILL 99 ATAR**

**Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland)**—I would like to acknowledge eighteen-year-old Hunter Valley Grammar school student James Gill for achieving an ATAR of 99 in the HSC. The local student was named as an All Rounder on the 2019 Honour Roll, after scoring in the top band for 10 units of his subjects. James achieved band six results in Chemistry, Economics, Mathematics, Mathematics Extension 1, Physics and Science

Extension. It is wonderful to see so many Maitland Students over-achieving in the HSC. His success according to him, was put down to his consistent studying rather than cramming at the last minute, I wish him all the best in his future studies and on his well-earned break before university starts. It is the result of preparation, hard work and learning from failure.

#### **VALE BARRY COLLINS, OAM**

**Dr MARJORIE O'NEILL (Coogee)**—I rise today to honour the memory of Barry Collins OAM. Barry was born in Randwick in 1934, and was a long-time resident of the Eastern Suburbs. Barry has a passion for his community, for our community, serving as a police officer for nearly 15 years. Barry's commitment to our community spanned decades and all different areas of interest, from serving as the President of the Horticultural Society and a senior judge at the Royal Easter Show, to serving as the president of the Coogee Randwick Clovelly RSL sub-branch, to serving as a treasurer, board member, and president of the City of Sydney Basketball Association. Barry's achievements and service to the community were so significant that awarded an OAM for his services to sport and horticulture in Australia. He was a strong, respected, and well-liked, and now, he will be deeply missed. It is people like Barry who make a community special. My thoughts, and the thoughts of so many, are with Barry's friends and family during this time.

#### **CASS CHINESE SCHOOL END OF YEAR CONCERT**

**Mr CHRIS MINNS (Kogarah)**—I would like to recognise the wonderful of End-of-Year Concert of the CASS Chinese School in Kogarah, which I was fortunate enough to attend last year. With more than 400 performers and an audience of 800, the concert was a celebration of the achievements of the CASS Group and its students. It was a magnificent event and showcased the achievements of the students as well as the hard work and dedication of the teaching staff. The CASS Chinese School is an important part of our community in Kogarah. The school encourages and promotes the learning of Chinese language, but importantly it gives students an understanding of Chinese cultures and traditions.

The school teaches the use of Pinyin, simplified Chinese characters as well as spoken Mandarin in line with the curriculum set by the NSW Department of Education. The leadership of CASS deserve recognition for their efforts, in particular: Dr Bo Zhou, Chairperson of the Board of Directors; Henry Nan Hung Pan, OAM, Honorary Executive Director; Dr Leng Tan, Emeritus Chairperson. And I pay special tribute to the parents who take the time to ensure their children attend the classes offered by CASS. These parents should feel proud that they are giving their children a tremendous gift and a great head start in life. So congratulations to the CASS Chinese School on another successful year and to the amazing students who performed in the End-of-Year concert.

#### **ABLA TOHAMY KADOUS**

**Mr JIHAD DIB (Lakemba)**—Abla Tohamy Kadous is a prolific 70 year old volunteer, an outstanding advocate and role model for Islamic women from all nationalities and recipient of the 2019 NSW Senior Volunteer of the Year award. Ms Kadous began volunteering 35 years ago, when she established the Muslim Women's Association before going on to set up the Islamic Women's Welfare Association (IWWA). IWWA runs programs and services that cater for 1,500 members. Ms Kadous helps to provide practical support for Islamic women to assist them feel welcome and participate in their local communities. She organises anti-discrimination forums, school readiness programs, youth camps, cooking and sewing classes, and events for elderly people.

Ms Kadous has helped bridge the gap between people from different religions by organising a number of inter-faith forums in Western Sydney. Ms Kadous' volunteer work is based on the principles of tolerance, understanding and empowering women in the Islamic community. On behalf of the Lakemba community, I congratulate Ms Kadous on receiving the 2019 NSW Senior Volunteer of the Year award. I am proud of the work she does and the impact she has on the lives of some of our most vulnerable members of the community.

#### **BUSHFIRE BENEFIT AT LORD WOLSELEY HOTEL**

**Mr JAMIE PARKER (Balmain)**—Today I recognise the organisers of a fantastic fundraiser held at the Lord Wolseley Hotel in Ultimo on Saturday 1 Feb. Raising money for the Rural Fire Service, their Bushfire Benefit featured live music by the Lord Wolseley Jazz Band and Reg Mombassa and Peter O'Doherty of Dog Trumpet. The event raised \$4209 for the Rural Fire Service. What a remarkable effort! Thank you to the crowds of residents from Ultimo and beyond who braved stifling heat on the day to enjoy exceptional music under the trees in front of the pub. I want to acknowledge the Lord Wolseley team - Errol, Danny and Ted Sullivan, who organised the whole event, their hardworking bar and administrative staff, the musicians who gave their time and talent at no cost. Thanks also to Reverend David Gore of the Mustard Seed Church and Oscar Sanchez of the Harris Community Centre who lent equipment and resources. Thank you also to Friends of Ultimo for spreading

the word and making sure this event was a success. Fundraisers like this are a reminder of the beautiful giving spirit that makes our community in Ultimo so special.

#### **BEN JOHNSTONE**

**Mrs HELEN DALTON (Murray)**—It is an absolute privilege for me today to recognise an outstanding and inspiring young member of the community of Balranald – 14 year old Ben Johnstone. Ben was recently re-elected as deputy mayor for the Balranald Youth Council. Last year Ben was also selected out of more than 300 children in the State to represent his region in the 18 strong team that makes up the NSW Regional Youth Taskforce. The work Ben is undertaking within this taskforce by voicing his concerns and contributing to the discussions will go to advising the NSW Government on the issues affecting the young people living in regional NSW. Children are our future and they should have a say in the decision which will affect their futures. Congratulations Ben on your recent re-election. The work you have done at the local level with the Balranald Youth Council and state level through the NSW Government Regional Youth Taskforce is phenomenal!

#### **HEATHCOTE STUDENTS 2019 PARLIAMENTARY AWARDS**

**Mr LEE EVANS (Heathcote)**—I was honoured to host the successful "2019 Heathcote Parliamentary Award" students in Parliament House for a morning tea and tour with their families to celebrate their achievements and provide some insight into NSW Parliament. Students are selected for this award by their school, recognising them for their outstanding efforts. Congratulations to the 2019 Heathcote Parliamentary Award recipients: Nathan Coughlan, Bangor Primary School; Tarleigh Grief, Engadine High School; Kalin Stortz, Engadine Public School; Kyan Morrissey, Engadine West Public School; Sophie Harrison, Heathcote East Public School; Cristen Smith, Heathcote High School; Skye Eshman, Heathcote Public School; Tahleigh Shoemark, Helensburgh Public School; Jamie Brewer, Holy Cross Catholic Parish Primary School; Emily Caspersonn, Inaburra School; Georgie Lauxmann, Loftus Public School; Zoe King, Marton Public School; Madison Jewiss, Menai Public School; Mikayla Graham, Minerva School; Soraya Rustom Treble, Otford Public School; Lilly Callaghan, Scarborough Public School; Jessica Harris, St. John Bosco Catholic Primary School; Olivia Mustapic, St. Patrick's Primary School, Sutherland; Owen Pedersen, Stanwell Park Public School; Malcolm Smith, Sutherland North Primary School; Claudia Brown, Sutherland Public School; Laura Thorn, Waterfall Public School; Matilda Campbell, Woronora River Public School.

#### **PETER THEO OAM MEMORIAL**

**Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown)**—It was an honour and privilege to recently attend Saint Euphemia Greek Orthodox Church of Bankstown for a service to remember the Late Mr Peter Theo OAM, a pioneer of the local Greek community, who sadly passed away in 2017. It was fitting that Mr Theo's memorial was officiated by the newly enthroned Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Australia, His Eminence, Archbishop Makarios, who attended St Euphemia Church Bankstown for the first time since his enthronement in June 2019. The ceremony was attended by Mr Peter Theo's family, including Mr Theo's wife Mrs Christine Theophilou, daughter Ms Cynthia Harpas, son-in-law Mr Demetri Harpas and granddaughter Ms Helena Harpas, along with many students, teachers and parents of St Euphemia College, and members of the local community. I would like to acknowledge St Euphemia's Board President Mr Christos Spiropolous and all the other board members, as well as Church Parish Priest Father Panagiotis Protosaltis and new College Principal Father Peter Mavrommatis, and I thank them for their kind invitation and for organising the memorial service, honouring the legacy of Mr Peter Theo OAM.

#### **REBUILDING THE BUSH FUNDRAISER**

**Ms ELENI PETINOS (Miranda)**—I acknowledge Amanda Toone of Oyster Bay for her organisation of the Rebuilding the Bush fundraiser. Held at Tradies Gympie last Friday night, the event was attended by 120 people and raised a \$13,812 for bushfire recovery. Amanda secured sponsorship from a number of generous local businesses in order to cover the cost of venue hire and food so that all proceeds could go to charity. From the Miranda electorate, I acknowledge Ben Lawson of Shane's Trees, who were a major sponsor on the evening. Amanda utilised her skills as an event planner to raise funds for the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal. The Foundation strengthens rural, regional and remote communities by providing support to fatigued volunteer leaders, repairing vital community infrastructure, supporting the capacity of local not-for-profit organisations, or ensuring psychological support. I commend Amanda for her initiative and support of communities rebuilding their lives in the wake of the devastating bushfire season.

#### **CHRISTMAS IN PYRMONT**

**Mr ALEX GREENWICH (Sydney)**—On behalf of the Sydney Electorate, I commend the amazing community building and fundraising achievements of the annual Christmas in Pyrmont celebration. Christmas in Pyrmont celebrates the season and promotes community, local groups and businesses, and raises vital funds for

local charities. The November fair is the culmination of a year of fundraising events like trivia nights, wine and cheese tasting and raffles. The 2019 events helped Barnardos Aboriginal Early Years Service, Pyrmont Cares, Ultimo Public School Learning Support Officers and the Uniting Harris Centre & Mustard Seed with a total of \$80,000 raised. Since 2013 Christmas in Pyrmont has donated \$512,400 to different local charities.

I thank the many volunteers who plan, organise and make these events happen – they set a great example of a caring community. Thanks also to the City of Sydney for support. Christmas in Pyrmont creates opportunities to get to know your neighbours and support your local economy, while also making sure that vulnerable and disadvantaged community members are included and looked after. I will continue to support and promote the events and encourage other residents to also get involved in this inspirational community.

#### **SISTER DOROTHY DOLAHENTY**

**Mr MICHAEL JOHNSEN (Upper Hunter)**—I would like to congratulate Sister Dorothy Dolahenty of Muswellbrook who commemorated her 60th Anniversary of her religious profession earlier this month. Sister Dolahenty entered the convent at Lochinvar in 1957. She has served her parishioners in Muswellbrook for the last three decades. It was only last year she retired as a piano teacher. Again Congratulations to Sister Dorothy Dolahenty on this wonderful achievement and I thank her for her service to the community of Muswellbrook.

#### **WINGHAM SPINNERS LIFE MEMBERSHIP TO LYN HULL**

**Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD (Myall Lakes)**—I wish to inform the house of the recent award of a life membership to Lyn Hull of the Wingham Spinners. For the Wingham Spinners life membership is considered an appreciation of the hard work, dedication and selflessness that an individual has put toward the group. For their end of year celebration the members usually buy Secret Santa gifts for each other. Last year the group elected to forego the gift giving, and instead put the monetary value in a collection box. As a result they raised \$586 for the Taree Lions Club Fire Appeal. The group added an additional \$500 taking the donation up to \$1086 for over the season. Thank you Lyn and the Wingham spinners for all the work you do.

#### **16TH ANNUAL STARR PARTNERS TROLLEY DRIVE**

**Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield)**—On the morning of December 6th 2019, the city of Fairfield once again sprung to life as local residents, schools, community groups, associations and businesses all came together as one to generously donate and celebrate the 16th Annual Starr Partners Fairfield Trolley Drive. The annual Starr Partners Trolley Drive is a fantastic initiative inceptioned by Raj and Tom at Starr Partners which raises funds and collects much needed non-perishable food to support Fairfield's Uniting Church Diner throughout the festive season and beyond. This support provided by great cause goes a long way and enables the local Uniting Church Diner to serve up approximately 30,000 meals to those in need throughout our community, each and every year.

On behalf of the Fairfield Electorate, I would like to extend our sincerest appreciation and admiration to Mr Tom Murphy and Raj Bhandari of Starr Partners for making the Christmas Trolley Drive possible each and every year. To all the local schools, community groups, businesses and emergency services personnel, thank you so much for your contributions this year and for helping to spread the Christmas joy and spirit of giving during the 2019 Starr Partners Trolley Drive.

#### **ROYAL NORTH SHORE HOSPITAL'S YOUNGEST VOLUNTEER**

**Ms FELICITY WILSON (North Shore)**—Royal North Shore Hospital has a wealth of volunteers across sixty different volunteer programs that are in place. Today I'd like to acknowledge one volunteer in particular, Sam Kordi, who is the Hospital's youngest volunteer. Sam is following in the footsteps of her mum, Royal North Shore Hospital nurse Macy Panah, and while Macy supervises patient discharges and has had a varied nursing career, Sam has her sights set firmly on working as an Emergency Department nurse. As a Royal North Shore Hospital volunteer, Sam has joined over five hundred and fifty men and women who give up their time to help patients, visitors and staff. Sam has contributed to assisting so many at Royal North Shore Hospital, all while studying for her HSC exams last year. I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers at Royal North Shore Hospital for continuing to provide much needed assistance to patients and their families. I was able to join a handful of these volunteers at a morning tea last year, and hear firsthand how much they contribute to the staff and patients on a daily basis.

#### **SUPPORT FOR EVACUEES OF THE DUNNS ROAD FIRE**

**Dr JOE MCGIRR (Wagga Wagga)**—Among the devastation I witnessed from the Dunns Road Fire, that swept across my electorate, I was also humbled by the compassion, solidarity and generosity that was on display for those evacuated. Donna Argus, from the Welfare Functional Area Coordination Department of Communities and Justice reported more than 1200 people had registered as evacuees at the Equex Centre in Wagga

City. Individuals, groups, businesses, services and entire communities across my electorate banded together, providing relief to strangers from fire-ravaged neighbourhoods of the Snowy Valleys.

While there are too many people to name here today, I can honestly say I have been blown away by the selflessness and kindness of everyone involved in the response efforts to date. To name a few, this list includes members and volunteers from Red Cross, Anglicare, Salvation Army, Pastoral Care and Counselling Services, Communities and Justice Disaster Welfare sector, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Department of Primary Industries and Local Land Services, Charles Sturt University, Health staff from MLHD and mental health nurses who came from Sydney, Kildare Catholic College - Karen Murray and her team of volunteers. Thank you to all.

#### **TAHLIA CONSTANCE**

**Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands—Minister for Agriculture and Western New South Wales)**—I congratulate Armidale's Tahlia Constance, Meg Lye, Lily Neilson and Nathan Czinner for their incredible performances at the Indoor Hockey Festival. Tahlia Constance is set to don the green and gold after being named in the Australian under-21s women's team to tour Europe later in the year and Meg Lye, Lily Neilson and Nathan Czinner have been selected in the Australian women's and men's under-18's squads to attend a training camp later in the year. I congratulate Tahlia Constance, Meg Lye, Lily Neilson and Nathan Czinner on their well-deserved achievements. I wish them all every success on their future events.

#### **MONEY FOR A MATE**

**Mrs LESLIE WILLIAMS (Port Macquarie)**—It comes as no surprise to me that the Lord Howe Island community went straight to work raising funds as soon as the news spread about the devastating fires on the Mid North Coast. I commend the efforts of Event Coordinator Lossy Thompson and her amazing team of volunteers - Ashley Hooper, LHIB CEO Peter Adams, Jenenie Adams, Blake Thompson, Bec Shelley, Deb Thompson, Darcelle Nobbs, MC Mark Nichols and Chrissy Thompson. I acknowledge the Islanders and visitors that supported the 'Money for a Mate' fundraiser, the local businesses and individuals who donated over \$17,500 in prizes to complement the charity concert.

The concert program featured live entertainment, food stalls, auctions, haircuts and face painting, as visitors and locals dug deep to raise an astonishing \$28,946 on the day to support the Australian Red Cross and the Port Macquarie Koala Hospital. It is an enormous privilege to have a world class island destination on my doorstep and to represent them in this place and I feel enormously proud of the most recent demonstration of the Islander's goodwill, kind-heartedness and generosity. On behalf of the Port Macquarie community I say thank you!

#### **COMPLETION OF CASTLE TOWERS UNDERPASS**

**Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Castle Hill)**—It was a great pleasure to recently represent the Premier at the opening of the new Castle Towers Underpass. This is an exciting new opportunity for the 70,000 daily users of the recently completed Sydney Metro NorthWest, to visit the Castle Towers Complex via the tunnel now connecting Castle Hill Station with the new \$180 million refurbished section of the Shopping Centre, the first stage of a \$2 billion upgrade. This is just another example of the Hills being a commercial destination for Sydney, with the newly afforded interconnectivity brought about by the Metro allowing for more people to live, work and play in this wonderful part of Sydney.

It was good to be joined on the day by Dr Michelle Byrne - Mayor of the Hills Shire Council, Michael O'Brien - QIC Global Real Estate Managing Director, and Rebecca McPhee - Deputy CEO of Transport for NSW. I would like to thank all three groups for their continued dedication to ensuring the Hills remains as connected and as convenient a place to visit as possible. I look forward to seeing the continued evolution of our part of Sydney on the back of their sustained hard work.

#### **CASULA RFS BRIGADE**

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS (Holsworthy)**—I would like to thank the members of the Casula RFS Brigade who have been fighting fires or supporting the firefighting effort across NSW. These members include: David Collins (Snr); Tony Agius; Jaime Marquez; John Pisani; Wayne Hayward; Aaron Tran; Alex Takache; Alexander Wilkins; Anamaria Soric; Andrew Rakuljic; Benjamin Graham; Benjamin McCarthy; Bradley Dwyer; Bradley Power; Caitlin Davidson; Christopher Zarpas; Connor Lambert; Craig Potts; Danny Nguyen; David Collins (Jnr); David Longmore; Dragana Lucic-Jozak; Dustin Humbley; Fadi Beshara; Fernando Cerbelli; Gail Schmidt; Garth Eggleston; Harpal Singh; James Randall; James Krishna; James Meechan; Jason Sharpe; Josh Caruana; Karen Randall; Karl Penny; Kristina Savic; Liam Goodall; Lisa Lowe; Majd Eskeif; Massimo Lucas; Michael Manning; Nicholas Howell-Zarpas; Nicole Tortora; Nigel Smith; Norman Sinclair; Peter White; Rabih Tabbah; Ranesh Kumar; Rebecca Fitzgibbins; Richard Tabbah; Richard Goncalves; Shane Thompson; Simon



Batge; Simone Flynn; Sinisa Mrdalj; and Umesh Kulkarni. The NSW Government, the NSW community as a whole, and I thank you whole heartedly for the months of service you have given to keeping communities safe across our State. Your service, dedication and passion is second to none. Thank you.

#### **AUSTRALIA DAY HONOURS**

**Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET (Epping—Treasurer)**—I would like to recognise and congratulate two of my constituents named in the Australia Day Honours List. This Australia Day, David Leece of Beecroft became a Member of the Order of Australia for his significant service to the environment and defence studies. David was a member of the Australian Army and served our country in uniform for 37 years. After receiving his PhD in Phytophysiology, he established the discipline of ecotoxicology and served as chief scientist at the NSW Environmental Protection Authority, a Deputy Commissioner of the Murray Darling Basin Commission, and Assistant Commissioner of the Natural Resources Commission of NSW. Phillip Ng of Epping received his Medal of the Order of Australia for his service to Chinese language education and the community. Born in Hong Kong, and arriving in Australia as a young teenager, Phillip's is an Australian migration success story. He started his own seafood business and was a founding member of the not-for-profit Dundas Chinese School which he describes as his proudest achievement. David Leece AM and Phillip Ng OAM are extraordinary Australians who have gone above and beyond for their communities and in their various endeavours. Congratulations to you both.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to resolution, at 19:07 until  
Tuesday 25 February 2020 at 12:00.**