

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday 19 February 2025

The Speaker (The Hon. Gregory Michael Piper) took the chair at 10:00.

The Speaker read the prayer and acknowledgement of country.

[Notices of motions given.]

Bills

CRIMES AMENDMENT (INCITING RACIAL HATRED) BILL 2025

Second Reading Debate

Debate resumed from 18 February 2025.

Mr ALISTER HENSKENS (Wahroonga) (10:20): It is unfortunate that debate on the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025 is happening in the context of a number of different circumstances. Last night in this House, the Labor Party voted down Coalition attempts to increase the maximum penalty for the public display of Nazi symbols from two years imprisonment to five years imprisonment. Last night the Labor Party, which introduced this bill, voted down Coalition attempts to criminalise the public display of terrorism symbols with the same penalty of five years imprisonment. Last night the Labor Party voted down an attempt to criminalise symbols that are deceptively similar to Nazi symbols, the public display of which would show a reasonable person that they were displayed to show sympathy for those abhorrent causes. Last night Labor voted down Coalition amendments that would have ensured that those matters involving more severe penalties would be heard in the District Court of New South Wales rather than in the Local Court. Labor last night voted down Coalition attempts to have those stronger penalties with a standard non-parole period of 18 months.

This debate also occurs in a context in which the Coalition last night tried to make amendments that would introduce new police powers to control people who disguise their identity in public assemblies, but Labor took a technical objection to those amendments and stopped them being voted on by this Parliament. Last night the Coalition also tried to introduce the capacity for decisions about authorised assemblies, under part 4 of the Summary Offences Act, to have a number of considerations, including whether the route was near a religious organisation or whether the attempted authorised assembly would have impacts on the economy, public safety and the like. Labor took a technical objection to those amendments, and they were not able to be voted on by this Parliament. Last night the Coalition also moved amendments that tried to enable some or all of the policing costs to be imposed on subsequent penalties after three protests within a 12-month period, a matter which the Premier himself raised in October of last year. Given that the protests being held in Sydney every Saturday are costing \$100,000 a day, the total cost up to October last year was \$5 million. Labor again took a technical objection, so those amendments to the legislation could not be voted on by this Parliament.

Last night, at about 10.30 p.m., the Leader of the House, representing the Minns Labor Government, moved a suspension of standing orders for this bill to be debated today at 10.15 a.m., rather than following the usual course where it would lay on the table until the next parliamentary sitting week so that members could hear the views of their communities and consider the legislation in far more detail than that allowed by the less than 12 hours' notice given for this debate. The question has to be asked: Why is this legislation being rushed on at such a pace? Could it be because the Law Reform Commission report on serious racial and religious vilification laws recommended against creating such an offence? Could it be that many religious groups in our community do not want this law? It is undesirable for difficult legislative reform of this kind to be rushed on in the way this bill has been presented to the Parliament.

It is all very well to say we have an antisemitism crisis—and we do—but, as my speeches to the Parliament yesterday made clear, this antisemitism crisis started on the steps of the Opera House in October 2023, and we have had 16 antisemitic attacks in our community since October. It does not seem that the Government has acted with haste in bringing forward this legislation, when this crisis has been in our community for many months. It is curious that it is being rushed through Parliament this week, in circumstances where those antisemitic attacks and the racism in our community have been longstanding. As the Law Reform Commission report makes clear, criminalising speech is an incredibly difficult area of law reform. We have an implied right to freedom of political

expression in our country, as recognised by the High Court of Australia, and any legislation needs to conform with that implied right. But this bill has been presented to Parliament with less than 12 hours notice for debate.

I hasten to add, the process involved no consultation with the Coalition and very limited and secretive public consultation. The Faith Affairs Council, as I understand it, was only presented with parts of the legislation last Thursday, and it was given 24 hours to comment. No vote was taken at the Faith Affairs Council, and there is significant opposition to these laws throughout a range of Christian, Hindu and Muslim faiths. Given this process and the fact that parliamentarians did need to sleep in the 12 hours between 10.30 p.m. last night, when notice was given that this would be rushed on for debate, and this morning, it is unsatisfactory that we are unable to fully discuss the bill, to listen to those groups' concerns and take them into account in our consideration of the bill. When the Law Reform Commission report says it is concerned about unintended consequences, it is really saying that legislation of this kind may actually achieve exactly the opposite of what it intended.

I will give the House a real-world example of what I am talking about. In 1944 my uncle was convicted of a hate crime. He lived in the Netherlands with my father. The Netherlands had been occupied by the Nazis since 1940. My father's favourite brother, Gerard Henskens, was on a train returning from work. It was like any other day except that an unsuccessful attempt had just been made upon the life of Adolf Hitler earlier that day, and everyone was talking about it. A discussion took place on the train between strangers. My uncle Gerard made some comments that were derogatory of Hitler. He said of the failed attempt on the life of the dictator, "You can never kill weeds." This is an old Dutch expression—the Dutch love their gardens.

When my uncle left the train, he was immediately arrested by a Gestapo agent who was on the train and had heard the conversation. During his interrogation and probable torture, my uncle Gerard denied the legitimacy of the occupying German force to detain him and said that Queen Wilhelmina was head of the sovereign government of the Netherlands. He was not charged with the expression of these challenges to the Nazi authority. Instead, he was charged with the more serious crime of "insulting the Führer". Within days he was prosecuted by a non-independent prosecutor and tried before a non-independent member of the judiciary. They were both puppets of the Nazi state. He was found guilty of the crime and sentenced to indefinite imprisonment in a concentration camp.

My uncle Gerard was only in his mid-twenties, but within a year of his arrest he would lose his life due to the deprivations of his punishing incarceration in German concentration camps. He died side-by-side with the mostly Jewish inhabitants of the concentration camp after they were forced on a long march in the middle of a harsh winter from Hamburg to the Ravensbrück concentration camp just north of Berlin. I visited the camp with my father many years later. Eighty per cent of the prisoners died on that march. My uncle Gerard survived the march, but he died about two weeks after he arrived.

Like my father, my uncle Gerard was in the Dutch resistance at the time he committed the crime. His brother, Leo, saved a Jewish family who hid in the attic of his house for 2½ years. If any of them had been caught, either as a member of the resistance or for harbouring Jews, they would have been killed almost instantly by the Nazis. Each of them risked their lives to help Jews and to fight what was probably the most oppressive regime in human history. The point to take from this family history is that the unintended consequence of passing these sorts of laws may be that you hurt the people who support you or whose values you support. You may actually achieve the opposite outcome from the one that you intend. That was the warning from the NSW Law Reform Commission, which is headed by the former Chief Justice of New South Wales.

We need to remember cases like my uncle Gerard's, where people are convicted of crimes for using words to incite hatred. Most people would agree with his decision to incite hatred against Adolf Hitler, but it is impossible to understand all the ramifications of criminalising the incitement of hatred. We have an implied right to freedom of expression in this country. People convicted under laws that we could pass in this House could go on to challenge and successfully overturn their conviction in the High Court of Australia. What sort of message will that send to the community about hate speech and antisemitism? This would give heroic status to the very people we do not want to be made heroes. Will they be martyred if they go to jail? Will the people who support evil words and expressions be roused by someone being criminally punished for using those words? These are all legitimate concerns about this area of endeavour.

I now point out a couple of features of the bill. The Attorney General made clear that "hatred" is not defined in new section 93ZAA (1) (a). It will be up to the courts to determine what hatred means. In new section 93ZAA (1) (b) (ii), it is not clear whether a "person's safety" is confined to a person's physical safety only. There are also concerns about the meaning of "religious teaching" in new section 93ZAA (2). Is it to be construed narrowly as applying to people who are in a formal teaching position within a religion, or does it extend to religious discussion more broadly? It is important to note that, unlike the law of defamation, there is no defence of truth in new section 93ZAA (3) (a). The New South Wales statute books used to have a criminal offence of slander as opposed to the civil law of defamation. Truth was always a defence to criminal slander. There is no defence in

this bill of the kind contained within section 93ZA (3) of the Crimes Act, where it is a reasonable excuse to the crime if it was done reasonably and in good faith:

- (a) for an academic, artistic or educational purpose, or
- (b) for another purpose in the public interest.

It is also important to note that in new section 93ZAA (5) race has the same meaning as in section 93Z of the Crimes Act, where:

race includes colour, nationality, descent and ethnic, ethno-religious or national origin.

The bill includes a review under new section 93ZAB. Unfortunately, the amendments to section 93Z, which this Parliament passed at the end of 2023, were also the subject of a ministerial review of the kind set out in new section 93ZAB. The only problem is that the Attorney General never did the review within the 12 months that Parliament required. Having regard to the many concerns around the criminalisation of free speech, we encourage the Attorney General to ensure that he actually follows the direction of the Parliament and completes the statutory review that he is ordered to complete.

We have had an absolutely appalling period in the history of our State in recent months. I and most people cannot remember ever seeing in our lifetimes these sorts of horrible crimes being committed on such a regular basis. These crimes threaten the very feeling of security in our Jewish community in particular, and they have a much broader and more chilling impact in the areas in which they have been committed. It goes beyond the Jewish community. As I have already said in this House, attacks on one group within our community are an attack on every group in our community. If it is one group today, it could be another group tomorrow. We need to stamp out this sort of hatred. We need to double down on our efforts to not just criminalise these appalling acts but also work hard at social cohesion and challenge the ideas that give rise to this sort of social dislocation.

The criminal law cannot do it all. The NSW Law Reform Commission made that point very strongly in its report on a review led by chairperson and former Chief Justice of New South Wales the Hon. Tom Bathurst entitled *Serious racial and religious vilification*, dated September 2024. At paragraphs 1.42 and 1.43 the report said this:

There is no clear community consensus, even among religious and multicultural groups, that s 93Z requires reform in response to the issues raised by our terms of reference. Indeed, many cautioned against such reforms.

Expanded criminalisation comes with risks and is not always the best tool to achieve social policy aims. In particular, we are aware that extending the criminal law can have unintended consequences—

and I have given an example of that—

especially for those groups already overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Specific concerns were expressed about the potential impact on Aboriginal people.

Whether the 16 recent offences of antisemitism were the product of incitement of racial hatred—which this bill is directed towards—or whether they were caused by other factors all needs to be specifically considered in the review of this bill 12 months after its commencement as required under new section 93ZAB. It would be good if the Attorney General did this Parliament the courtesy of doing what this legislation will require him to do if it is passed, which he has not done with regard to section 93Z. It is not good enough for him to say, "Well, I sent it to the Law Reform Commission for report." That is not a statutory review. He ought to do what this Parliament requires him to do. He needs to understand that his responsibilities go beyond what Cabinet requires. When legislation is passed that requires reviews, he needs to conduct those reviews as Parliament has directed him to.

It is with those observations, and with less than 12 hours notice, that I make this contribution. Freedom of expression, even if it is expression that you do not like, is one of the great hallmarks of our freedoms in this country. In Australia, we do not have a first amendment right to freedom of speech like the Americans do. It is up to all of us to be vigilant protectors of these rights. I believe that it is for Parliament and the community, not for judges, to ultimately be the true guardians of these freedoms. We need to trespass upon them with great care, with great measure and with better process than rushing through legislation like the Government is doing in this case.

It would be a completely different thing if the Coalition and the community had been brought inside the tent and these laws had been open for discussion. They have not been. It is important that these laws are incredibly limited and focused on the current problem that our community is facing. They should be no broader than that because these are exceptional circumstances requiring exceptional measures. The current crisis should not be used as some sort of wedge to erode our freedoms even more than they have been. It is with those comments that I conclude my contribution to the debate.

Dr MARJORIE O'NEILL (Coogee) (10:47): At the outset of my contribution to debate on the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025, I have to say I am slightly confused by the contribution of the member for Wahroonga about whether he and the Opposition are or are not supporting the bill.

Mr Alister Henskens: It wouldn't be the first time you were confused.

Dr MARJORIE O'NEILL: It is not, because I remind Opposition members that they supported the suspension of standing orders motion last night. If they did not want to support the bill and had such visceral and strong views, why did they support the suspension of standing orders?

Mr Alister Henskens: We don't have the numbers.

Dr MARJORIE O'NEILL: Opposition's difficult, isn't it? I remind members that the core of this bill is about the fact that words matter. The words of the member for Wahroonga matter. What he says in this place matters. The hypocritical drivel in his contribution matters. The reality is that this is incredibly complicated legislation. I say from the outset that I wish I was not here. I take absolutely no joy in speaking to this legislation and seeing the absolute pain, anger and sadness that is ripping through my community. This bill is a direct response to the rising tide of racial hatred that we are seeing, particularly antisemitism.

I encourage those opposite to read the contribution of the Leader of the House to one of our crimes amendment bills that was debated yesterday. He is the only Jewish member of this Parliament and a friend of mine, whom I respect. He is at the coalface of this issue. I encourage all members of this House to read his contribution to debate from yesterday. There is a real need for us to take a nonpartisan approach to legislation. As I said at the outset, I take absolutely no joy in this debate. This bill takes a very narrow approach. Many people want a broader review to be done and the scope of the bill to be extended. The bill has been drafted to include only race, in direct response to the current issues in New South Wales. It is aimed at preventing hate-based conduct before it escalates into violence.

Many people want that to be extended, including the LGBTIQ+ community. The New South Wales Government acknowledges that hate speech based on other attributes occurs, and we condemn it. The Government is committed to looking at how laws in New South Wales can be improved to address hate speech based on other attributes and to promote social cohesion. Criminalising hate speech on the grounds of attributes that are often protected by civil vilification regimes is challenging and complex. That is why we have not included them in this bill. We do not want unintended consequences. Rather than waiting for those incredibly important issues to be worked out, we consider it important to respond to the immediate and pressing issue, in particular, of the rising incidence of antisemitism.

That is why we have committed to establishing a review into the criminal law protections against hatred introduced by the bill and, in particular, the sufficiency of protections against hatred for people in vulnerable communities in our State. We have made the commitment that the review will be done quickly. It will take into account important matters like the interactions between protections against hatred and implied freedom of communication and freedom of religion. It will be finalised in six months. I acknowledge the work of the member for Sydney in contributing to the bill, as well as Rainbow Labor for its contributions. It is a sad reality that the bill is necessary. The bill is in direct response to the rising tide of racial hatred that we are seeing, particularly the alarming surge in antisemitism we have witnessed in New South Wales and across Australia.

Within my community and my neighbouring communities of Maroubra, Vaucluse and Sydney, we are witnessing an unprecedented increase in antisemitic incidents. Sadly, antisemitism is not a new hate; it is actually the oldest hate. We see it from hate speech on social media to vandalism, harassment and even physical assaults targeting members of the Jewish community. In my community, kids from Jewish day schools in uniform have had Nazi symbols thrown at them in Westfield, and they have been screamed at and told, "You should have been gassed in the Holocaust." Those horrific things have happened in my own community and they have become worse.

This disturbing trend is not just a concern for Jewish Australians; it is a threat to the very fabric of our multicultural society. In no way, shape or form can we arrest our way out of this epidemic. Sadly, combating antisemitism is far more complex than that. I acknowledge the work of the Deputy Premier, and Minister for Education and Early Learning, who last year made Holocaust education mandatory. This bill is critical for us to send a message that inciting racial hatred is a crime that we take seriously in this State. The bill ensures that those who incite racial hatred, including antisemitism, face serious legal consequences. The bill makes clear that New South Wales will not tolerate hate, division or bigotry in any form. I make it clear that the scope of this legislation is incredibly narrow. It does not target speech that merely offends or insults; it targets speech that is so serious that violence is likely to follow.

The escalation of antisemitism in New South Wales is, sadly, undeniable. In my electorate now, whenever we do posts calling out antisemitic acts, we need to turn our comments off because of the sheer volume of vile comments, even denying that antisemitic acts are happening. Last year the number of reported antisemitic incidents increased dramatically, including graffiti and vandalism targeting Jewish schools, synagogues and businesses; hate speech online, with the extremist rhetoric spreading across social media; harassment and threats directed at Jewish Australians in public spaces; and disturbing antisemitic chants and slogans at protests and public gatherings. Those are not isolated events; they are a pattern of growing intolerance that demands a strong legislative response.

The Jewish community in New South Wales has long been an integral part of our State's cultural and economic success. I have spoken numerous times in this place and publicly about the long, rich history of Jewish contribution in my community in the eastern suburbs and in New South Wales. Jewish contribution to our State is something that I am incredibly proud of. The first member for Coogee, Hyman Goldstein, was a Jewish man. Jews should never have to fear for their safety or endure threats simply because of their identity. We must be absolutely clear: Antisemitism is racism. Antisemitism is hate. [*Extension of time*]

Antisemitism must never be tolerated in New South Wales. The bill ensures that individuals who incite antisemitic hatred, whether through speech writing or online platforms, can and will be held accountable. Again, I make clear the narrowness of the bill. It does not target speech that merely offends or insults but speech that is so serious that violence is likely to follow. For those with concerns about the bill, there is a 12-month statutory review built in. History has shown us the dangers of unchecked antisemitism. The world has witnessed where hatred can lead when left unchecked. I say that as someone who has visited the horrific sites of the Shoah in both Germany and Poland, places where some of the most awful things ever have happened. We do not need to look too far into the past to see the consequences.

When antisemitism rises, it is not just the Jewish community that suffers; our entire democracy is weakened. Hate-fuelled ideologies spread fear, division and violence, undermining the principles of equality, justice and respect that define us as Australians. If we allow the incitement of antisemitic hatred to continue without consequences, we risk normalising intolerance. We must act decisively to ensure that New South Wales remains a place where all people, regardless of their race or religion, feel safe, valued and respected.

I do want to address concerns regarding free speech. Freedom of speech is a fundamental right but it is not absolute. Freedom of speech has always been bound. We have laws against defamation, threats to public safety, discrimination and the incitement of terrorism and violence. We cannot allow speech that incites racial hatred, and that includes antisemitism. I believe that the bill strikes a careful balance. It protects free speech while ensuring that those who seek to spread hate face legal consequences. I commend the bill to the House.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Ms Donna Davis): It being 11.00 a.m., in accordance with standing and sessional orders, debate is interrupted for question time and the routine of business. I set down resumption of the debate as an order of the day for a later hour.

Visitors

VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I extend a warm welcome to former Manly Warringah Sea Eagles premiership player Mark Bryant, a guest of the member for Wakehurst. I acknowledge the legendary Councillor Phyllis Miller, Mayor of Forbes and President of Local Government NSW. I welcome representatives from NSW Young Farmers, who are guests of the President of the other place. I acknowledge guests of the member for Lake Macquarie, led by Dr John Hammond. I acknowledge Robert and Lee Keft, guests of the member for Camden. I also acknowledge Ethan Westwood and Daniel Host, guests of the member for Heathcote. It is a pleasure to welcome you all to the New South Wales Legislative Assembly for question time.

Announcements

EMERGENCY SERVICES DROP-IN SESSION

The SPEAKER: After question time today there will be an opportunity for members to learn about bushfire, flood and disaster preparedness and connect with representatives from the emergency services relating to their areas. The drop-in session with emergency services and disaster management organisations will be held from 12.30 p.m. to 1.30 p.m. in the Macquarie Room.

COMMUNITY RECOGNITION STATEMENTS

The SPEAKER (11:05): In relation to a matter that arose in the House last night regarding community recognition statements, I draw members' attention to the rules and practice of the House regarding the content of

such statements. It does not happen often but, when it does, the matter must be addressed urgently. Standing Order 108A states:

- (1) Community Recognition Statements must not contain:
 - (a) Matters of policy;
 - (b) Requests for the Government or the House, or another body to take some form of action or not; or
 - (c) Criticisms or negative reflections on any person, including Members, Office Holders, the Government, the Opposition or a third party.

Ms Felicity Wilson: What about when they are so bad?

The SPEAKER: I call the member for North Shore to order for the first time. Members will come to order. Community recognition statements are to be uncontroversial and used for purposes such as congratulating members of the community on their achievements, drawing attention to local events, recognising the work of community groups or individuals, or offering condolences to people in local communities. They are clearly not to be used to raise a matter of substantive policy or to criticise the Government, the Opposition or any third party. There are other forms members can use to do that, including notices of motions or private members' statements. Members will be more diligent in applying the rules and conventions of the House.

Members

REPRESENTATION OF MINISTERS ABSENT DURING QUESTIONS

Mr RON HOENIG: On behalf of Mr Chris Minns: I inform the House that the Minister for Families and Communities, and Minister for Disability Inclusion will answer questions today in the absence of the Minister for Women, Minister for Seniors, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault.

Question Time

RAIL, TRAM AND BUS UNION INDUSTRIAL ACTION

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla) (11:09): My question is directed to the Premier. Yesterday the Prime Minister ruled out taking section 431 action in relation to the rail chaos. Has the Premier ever bothered to ask the Prime Minister or the Federal Minister to look at taking action under section 431?

Mr CHRIS MINNS (Kogarah—Premier) (11:09): The Leader of the Opposition is misleading the House. The Prime Minister gave no assurance at all. I do not know what the Leader of the Opposition is referring to. Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition could tender a quote so that we can see what he is up to.

ENERGY NETWORK PRIVATISATION

Mr CLAYTON BARR (Cessnock) (11:10): My question is addressed to the Premier. Can the Premier please update the House on the impact of the former Liberal-Nationals Government decision to privatise much of the State's energy network?

The SPEAKER: The member for North Shore will come to order.

Mr CHRIS MINNS (Kogarah—Premier) (11:10): This is an important question. I remind the House that the former Chair of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission [ACCC], Rod Sims, said in July 2021:

Privatising assets without allowing for competition or regulation creates private monopolies that raise prices, reduce efficiency and harm the economy.

In recent months, we saw an electricity outage for 36 hours in Broken Hill. The Mayor of Broken Hill was asked about this on radio on 23 October. The question was: "What do you think, Tom?"—Tom is the mayor—"What does this say about investment, or indeed disinvestment, in regional areas of Australia?" A fair question if your town is without electricity. Tom Kennedy replied, "Look, one of the problems with privatisation is when anything is privatised, a lot of companies look at their bottom line. Where they can save money, they will save money." What he was saying is, at the expense of the people of regional New South Wales. If we look at the privatisation record of the previous Government, it is shameful. Look at just the economics of it. We are led to believe there is some kind of economic theory or principle that is guiding these investment decisions, but it is just ideology.

Let me explain it to the House. Vales Point Power Station was sold by the previous Government for \$1 million. It was picked up by the new owner, who made \$350 million out of it, and then sold it for a further \$200 million. It was sold by the people of New South Wales for \$1 million. Eraring Power Station, which the New South Wales Government is keeping alive in order to keep the lights on, was sold by those opposite for \$50 million. We need the Eraring Power Station today, but they sold it off in 2013 for \$50 million.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition will come to order.

Mr CHRIS MINNS: He says, "You sold the Gentrader." The Gentrader was sold; therefore, it justified them selling the asset. Is that the argument the Opposition is putting to the Parliament? Give me a break. I sold nothing. We ran it in election after election, saying that prices would go up as a result of the privatisations. Guess what has happened? Prices have gone through the roof, and it is not just electricity assets. Time and time again: ports sold off, prices through the roof; electricity sold off, prices through the roof; our toll roads sold off, prices through the roof.

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

Mr CHRIS MINNS: I love hearing from the member for North Shore. What are you saying?

The SPEAKER: The Premier will come to order. I call the member for North Shore to order for the third time.

Mr Clayton Barr: I seek further information.

The SPEAKER: An additional two minutes is granted.

Mr CHRIS MINNS: If selling off government electricity assets is such a great idea, can someone explain to me why the Federal Opposition is pursuing a \$350 billion government-owned nuclear power system? For 10 years we heard we had to sell it all off. Now it has been sold off, we have to build it again. That is what the Federal Opposition is saying to us in the election campaign—\$350 billion of government funds to build a government-owned nuclear power station. That is what we are expected to believe. We have to forget everything the Coalition said for 10 years about selling it off, efficiencies, prices coming down, and let the markets run, let the markets rip. When a Federal election is imminent and prices are going through the roof, the Coalition's solution to the problem is government-owned, government-built nuclear power stations.

I try to read a bit. I have a book here entitled *Markets & Prosperity*. One of the august contributors of a chapter stated: "The New South Wales Government should consider leasing or selling the remaining 51 per cent of the State's electricity network. That means 100 per cent of Essential Energy and 49 per cent of Ausgrid and Endeavour." Who wrote that chapter? Chris Rath from the upper House. This is supposed to be the journal of the Liberal Party where ideas germinate. We not only have to deal with the privatisation of government assets and prices going through the roof, but their secret plan—their secret agenda—to flog off the rest as well. When will they learn?

RAIL, TRAM AND BUS UNION INDUSTRIAL ACTION

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal) (11:15): My question is directed to the Minister for Industrial Relations. Murray Watt said he spent many hours in discussions with the Government and the unions over the trains crisis. What requests has the Minister personally made to the Federal Minister this year?

Ms SOPHIE COTSIS (Canterbury—Minister for Industrial Relations, and Minister for Work Health and Safety) (11:16): Those opposite know that, as Ministers, we have ministerial councils and of course we deal with our Federal counterparts, regardless of their political persuasion. With respect to the question asked by the member for Terrigal, at this very moment while we are in this Chamber, there are proceedings in the Fair Work Commission. I very much respect those proceedings. We all should respect those proceedings in the Fair Work Commission. I will not provide a running commentary as we have both parties before the full bench of the Fair Work Commission. Our side absolutely respects the institution of the Fair Work Commission, and I hope the Coalition side does as well. We await the commission's decision.

Mr Mark Speakman: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: The Minister has concluded her answer.

RURAL AND REGIONAL PUBLIC EDUCATION

Ms JANELLE SAFFIN (Lismore) (11:17): My question is addressed to the Deputy Premier, and Minister for Education and Early Learning. Can the Deputy Premier please update the House on the Minns Labor Government's work to rebuild public education across rural and regional New South Wales?

Ms PRUE CAR (Londonderry—Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Early Learning, and Minister for Western Sydney) (11:17): I thank the one and only member for Lismore for that important question. More than most, the member for Lismore knows the importance of investment in public education in regional New South Wales. Since coming to government, I am reliably told that vacancies in the Lismore electorate are down 56 per cent and across regional New South Wales they are down 47 per cent. That is good news because,

upon coming to government, we knew that teacher vacancies in traditionally harder-to-staff locations in rural and regional New South Wales were particularly acute.

It is important that the member for Lismore has asked this question because, as we well know, the member for Lismore's community has been through quite a lot in recent times. Putting aside the struggle that the member for Lismore has been front and centre in guiding her community through—rebuilding following serious natural disasters—they also had foisted upon them, in the dying days of the previous Government, an ill-considered plan to merge four public schools into one in Murwillumbah to create some sort of weird mega-school consisting of two high schools and two primary schools, without any consultation with the community at all. The previous Government promised upgrades to several schools. Instead of doing the upgrades, they just put them all together in one.

We went to the election saying that, if elected, we would demerge those schools and give those local primary and high schools back to their communities. The Minns Labor Government has now proudly delivered on that election commitment. Members opposite do not like hearing it, but I am so proud that on day one, term 1, students were able to walk back into their local schools in Murwillumbah. The member for Lismore and I went to see the recent upgrades at Murwillumbah High School. It is probably one of the oldest schools in the area: It is more than 100 years old. We made such huge upgrades to the school that it almost looks brand new while preserving its historic nature. I am really proud of what we have done: refurbished classrooms, created better spaces for the kids and, most importantly, listened to the community to deliver what they actually wanted, especially when they never asked for a mega-school in the first place. [*Extension of time*]

While I was on the North Coast, I was happy to visit the Mid North Coast to announce \$38 million of school maintenance across the district. I was also happy to see the completion of \$70 million in upgrades to Hastings Secondary College in Port Macquarie. That was promised three years ago, but of course members opposite stuffed that right up. I was really happy to see that up and running.

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

Ms PRUE CAR: While I was in Port Macquarie looking at the incredible investment in Hastings Secondary College, the Nats were also in town making sure they were in competition with the Liberals.

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

Ms PRUE CAR: According to the Leader of The Nationals, The Nationals are the only trusted voice for Port Macquarie—once they figure out who the candidate is, that is!

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

Ms PRUE CAR: They even had a photo to go with it. Look at this: Barnaby Joyce and the member for Dubbo with the Hon. Wes Fang. It looks like a scene out of *The Hangover*.

Mr Alister Henskens: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: The Minister will resume her seat. The Clerk will stop the clock. Members will come to order. I will hear from the Manager of Opposition Business on a point of order.

Mr Alister Henskens: My point of order has two parts. The first is about the use of props. The second goes to relevance: The question is about Lismore, not Port Macquarie.

The SPEAKER: I uphold the first part of the point of order in relation to props, but I believe the prop has now been appropriately put away. The Minister will continue.

Ms PRUE CAR: In answer to the question about investment in regional New South Wales, if members think that photo was a hot mess, they should look at what happened in Jindabyne. The Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education knows what was promised so many times, so long ago, and the Government has actually finally delivered it. The Nats were going to deliver a school without a road to get to it, which is a just small detail. It took two elections and three members for Monaro but, with the current member for Monaro, this Government finally opened the Jindabyne Education Campus, because this Government is committed to building and rebuilding public education in regional New South Wales.

ROZELLE INTERCHANGE NOISE MITIGATION

Ms KOBI SHETTY (Balmain) (11:23): My question is directed to the Premier. Since the opening of the Rozelle interchange, traffic noise is being experienced at extraordinary levels at a number of properties along and behind Railway Parade in Annandale. It seems clear that existing acoustic barriers are not up to the job. What is the Government doing to provide relief to residents along the corridor and to install a fit-for-purpose noise wall?

Mr CHRIS MINNS (Kogarah—Premier) (11:23): I acknowledge the concerns of the member for Balmain. I previously reported to the House that we were made aware that the previous Government was told of concerns about the final design and completion of the Rozelle interchange, but buried the reports or de-prioritised the changes in the run-up to the election campaign. Part of that would be noise mitigation as well. As a result, we have to play catch-up. We have to make sure that local residents' lives, amenities and enjoyment of their community is not adversely affected. With that in mind, and having spoken with the local member, we are working on a noise compliance report, which we expect to be completed in the next few months. If that report finds that noise levels are two decibels higher, we will have to take corrective action. We are committed to doing that.

We are waiting for the report because the noise monitoring obviously needs to take place. But I can inform the House that there were two weeks of noise monitoring in Annandale in October 2024. We have installed additional noise monitors at four complainant properties, so we are taking them seriously. We have completed repairs to the noise wall on the City West Link. And, speaking directly to residents over this period, we want to make sure that we do everything we can to mitigate noise. We cannot do so completely, but there are bands that indicate the effects on local residents' amenity in the community. We will take those corrective actions when the report is public. I give the commitment that we will share that with the local member as well.

KNIFE CRIME

Mr STEPHEN BALI (Blacktown) (11:25): My question is addressed to the Minister for Police and Counter-terrorism. Will the Minister please update the House on the Minns Government's work to create a safer New South Wales by cracking down on knife crime?

Ms YASMIN CATLEY (Swansea—Minister for Police and Counter-terrorism, and Minister for the Hunter) (11:26): I thank the member for Bankstown for his question.

Opposition members: Blacktown!

Ms YASMIN CATLEY: He is a well-known figure in his local area, and a true champion for the people of Blacktown. Recent tragic events have shown us how devastating crime can be.

The SPEAKER: The member for Oatley will come to order. Members will come to order. The Clerk will stop the clock. The member for Oatley and the member for Rockdale will stop debating across the Chamber. It is totally inappropriate and disrespectful to the Minister, who is trying to answer an important question. Members will not debate whether the question was asked by the member from Bankstown or Blacktown. The Minister has corrected herself. The Minister has the call.

Ms YASMIN CATLEY: The Minns Labor Government has taken action to send a clear message that New South Wales does not tolerate knife crime. We have given extra powers to police to keep knives off our streets, and we have brought in restrictions that make it difficult to sell knives to children. Everybody deserves to feel safe in public, and it is clear that these laws are making a difference. Knife crime is not a new issue. Unfortunately, members opposite acted like children instead of tackling the issue head on when they had the opportunity. Their legacy was to leave the NSW Police Force short-staffed by hundreds of thousands. The unfinished business of members opposite has left it up to us to clean up their mess. This Government has taken decisive action through legislative change to prevent further horrific knife crimes on our streets.

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

Ms YASMIN CATLEY: Since 9 December 2024 the NSW Police Force has been able to use new powers to detect knives and other dangerous weapons, modelled on those already in place in Queensland. Those new powers allow the NSW Police Force to use handheld scanners or electronic metal-detecting wands to stop and scan individuals without a warrant in shopping centres, sporting events and at transport venues.

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

Ms YASMIN CATLEY: Since the legislation was operationalised a total of 24 declarations have been made, including Sydney CBD, Newcastle, Blacktown, Wollongong, Dubbo, Parramatta, Campbelltown, Coffs Harbour, Wagga Wagga and Mount Druitt. So far, a total of 2,737 persons have been scanned, and 70 unlawful weapons have been seized. That is 70 more off our streets. Additionally, 42 persons have been charged with weapons offences. But we are not just seizing knives; we are also using the wandering powers to target the possession of other weapons in public places across the State through these operations. I am pleased to report to the House that Operation Foil, which ran from 19 December to 21 December last year, resulted in the seizure of 65 knives and six firearms and 350 charges being laid.

The SPEAKER: The conversation between the member for Oxley and the member for North Shore across the member for Lane Cove is keeping him awake. I do not believe that is reasonable. The member for North Shore

will come to order. The member for Oxley will come to order. The member for Blacktown—we have decided that that is his electorate—is seeking the call.

Mr Stephen Bali: I seek further information.

The SPEAKER: An additional two minutes is granted.

Ms YASMIN CATLEY: We are not stopping at enforcement. New South Wales police are heavily engaged in crime prevention activities across the State, particularly with young people in schools and through partnerships with organisations such as the PCYC. Just this week I was at Daceyville PCYC for the HOGS ride, an annual charity fundraiser led by NRL star Brad Fittler. The HOGS ride team visits regional towns, stopping in at PCYCs with the NSW Police Force Youth Command to engage thousands of young people in Fit For Life programs. On Monday dozens of kids from around Sydney participated in boxing sessions and saw off the riders, who will travel to Shoalhaven, Wagga Wagga, Albury, Eden and Narooma. They will be visiting PCYCs along the way and engaging with kids. They have already seen thousands of children up and down the eastern seaboard.

The PCYC is working with New South Wales police to empower young people through sport to give them a positive outlet and outlook. The youth command is also working with the Jack Beasley Foundation, which has been funded by the New South Wales State Government to coordinate and deliver a presentation on the new laws to approximately 20 New South Wales schools in terms 1 and 2 of this year. Further, in 2024 alone, 430 school presentations were delivered to almost 27,000 students in New South Wales. I thank the New South Wales police for the work they do on our streets to keep every one of us safe. They put great effort into our young people to keep them out of the justice system and give them a positive outlook.

RAIL, TRAM AND BUS UNION

Mr ALISTER HENSKENS (Wahroonga) (11:32): My question is directed to the Premier. In December the Rail, Tram and Bus Union [RTBU] suspended payments to NSW Labor. Does the Premier support NSW Labor refusing any payments from the rail union in the future?

Mr CHRIS MINNS (Kogarah—Premier) (11:32): Most of the payments to NSW Labor are affiliation fees to be members of the Labor Party. They are recorded in the financial declarations of the Labor Party as donations, but that is a technical definition.

Mr Tim James: So you're still taking the money?

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

Mr CHRIS MINNS: Would it be better if they were members but we did not take their money and let them in for free?

The SPEAKER: Members, including Government members, will come to order.

Mr CHRIS MINNS: I am not indifferent to the point implied by the member for Wahroonga, but I point to the Government's record throughout this entire dispute.

Mr Mark Speakman: Backflip a lot.

Mr CHRIS MINNS: On what?

The SPEAKER: I call the Leader of the Opposition to order for the first time. The Premier and the Leader of the Opposition will cease debating across the Chamber.

Mr CHRIS MINNS: Any objective person would look at the Government's behaviour throughout the rail dispute and say that on each and every occasion we have taken the side of the commuter and the taxpayers of New South Wales.

Mr Alister Henskens: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: The Clerk will stop the clock. I will hear the point of order from the member for Wahroonga.

Mr Alister Henskens: My point of order goes to direct relevance. The question was about whether the Premier supports refusing payments. He has not answered it.

The SPEAKER: I believe the Premier has answered the question. The question was itself questionable under Standing Order 128 (2) (h), which states that questions should not contain hypothetical material. If the question had been challenged, I would have ruled it out of order. There is no point of order.

Mr CHRIS MINNS: There is no question that there has been friction between the Government and the rail union. That is regrettable. We want to get this sorted. Unfortunately, we had to draw a big, bright line to protect the New South Wales travelling public. We regarded the union's activities as unreasonable. That has not always been the case. On 16 August 2022 *The Daily Telegraph* published an opinion piece by Joe Hildebrand titled "A not-so-odd couple: Elliot and Claassens form a new alliance". Claassens was the former head of the RTBU. The opinion piece states:

David Elliott and Alex Claassens prove that a Liberal minister and a union boss can be productive allies—and they prefer each other over Treasurer Matt Kean.

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

Mr CHRIS MINNS: We need Matt back to bring love between the unions and the Government. They had a common enemy

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

Mr CHRIS MINNS: I have another interesting quote—I have been going through back issues of *The Daily Telegraph* in my spare time.

Mr Mark Speakman: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: The Clerk will stop the clock. I will hear the point of order from the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Mark Speakman: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129 and goes to direct relevance. The Premier has strayed well away from the question. Will the Premier accept donations?

The SPEAKER: I would love to uphold the point of order from the Leader of the Opposition, but I cannot. I have made it very clear that the question could have been ruled out of order. It was not ruled out of order, but the nature of the question means I will be more lenient regarding relevance. The Premier has the call.

Mr CHRIS MINNS: A 28 January 2018 article published in *The Daily Telegraph* states, "One right-faction Government source noted last week that Berejiklian's taming of the union was a factor in the faction endorsing her as Premier." The source goes on to say, "Gladys and Alex were so close I wouldn't have been surprised if they attended each other's birthday parties." Then the source says, "It's one of the reasons we backed her in as Premier when the job came up." The relationship between Gladys and the union was why the Coalition picked her as the Premier. I wish I had known that. I ran for leader three times. That is all I had to do to get the backing of those opposite. For God's sake!

REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICES

Dr MICHAEL HOLLAND (Bega) (11:36): My question is addressed to the Minister for Health, and Minister for Regional Health. Will the Minister please update the House on the Minns Labor Government's work to rebuild the health workforce while investing in essential healthcare infrastructure across regional communities?

Mr RYAN PARK (Keira—Minister for Health, Minister for Regional Health, and Minister for the Illawarra and the South Coast) (11:37): I acknowledge the hardworking Parliamentary Secretary, and member for Bega. With the Government fully behind him, he is making great progress with the level 4 hospital at Eurobodalla. Regional health is an important issue. Today, as we move towards two years in government, I outline some of the initiatives that are underway and how they are improving health services on the ground. One of the Government's first actions was the removal of the wages cap. Visitors in the public gallery may or may not realise that, if the Coalition is elected at the next election, it will bring the wages cap back. That is an important distinction to make.

The Government has invested in regional health services through the rural and regional incentive scheme, which has supported approximately 2,100 individual healthcare workers. It has also helped retain healthcare workers. The Government has commenced the rollout of 500 regional and rural paramedics, with 125 already in place across regional, rural and remote New South Wales. I have spoken directly with many of them and they are extremely supportive of that initiative and the improvements it is delivering on the ground. The regional GP payroll tax scheme also helps regional GPs. Approximately \$41 million has been committed as part of that program, which was designed to address an issue that was first raised with the former Government back in 2018.

Over the past 18 months Minister Houssos and I have worked tirelessly to do our bit as a State government to keep GPs in regional, rural and remote communities—which should not really be our responsibility—provided they bulk-bill at a high level. That is working right now. We have rolled out study subsidies that will help over 12,000 individual students and will help retain and support those already in the system. They will have a five-year commitment back to NSW Health and hospital facilities as a part of those study subsidies. That important initiative

is designed primarily to keep healthcare workers moving into those hard-to-fill areas. We are also investing significantly in the regional and rural nursing workforce. [*Extension of time*]

Before coming to office, we were not made aware that over 1,100 nurses were due to have their employment terminated. In some health districts it was over 100 nurses. When members say certain things to certain groups in their communities, it is always important to be careful. Those 1,100 nurses would not have had employment if members opposite had been elected to government. I know members opposite oppose this and I accept that, but we have commenced the rollout of ratios across our hospitals. There is still a long way to go but we have commenced that rollout. I know that members opposite do not support ratios, as they did not support removing the wages cap. I get it.

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

Mr RYAN PARK: In terms of the hard infrastructure, particularly around housing, we are investing over \$200 million into key worker housing in places like Coffs Harbour, Albury and Tibooburra.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Coffs Harbour to order for the first time. I call the member for Coffs Harbour to order for the second time.

Mr RYAN PARK: We are making that investment right across regional and rural areas because, when we get housing there, we also get healthcare workers there. When we solve that puzzle, we can also take pressure off our local health and hospital facilities. Nurses like Sally in Tumut are benefiting from that investment right now. She is able to take her dog, live close to where she works in a fantastic regional and rural community in the electorate of the member for Wagga Wagga, and make an investment into our health and hospital services. We will continue to do that. We have a lot more work to do but we are starting to see progress on the ground.

REGIONAL YOUTH CRIME

Mr BRENDAN MOYLAN (Northern Tablelands) (11:42): My question is directed to the Premier. Under the common law in New South Wales, a 13-year-old can commit numerous break-and-enter offences, be charged by the police and then have the charges dismissed under *doli incapax*. When will the Government legislate to protect regional communities from that outdated system?

Mr CHRIS MINNS (Kogarah—Premier) (11:42): I must inform the House that we inherited the system from the previous Attorney General, who is now the Leader of the Opposition. He held the Attorney General's portfolio for the majority of his time in Parliament.

Mr Kevin Anderson: Change it.

Mr CHRIS MINNS: I understand what you are saying, but you would appreciate that crime did not begin on 28 March 2023.

Mr Kevin Anderson: It doesn't matter.

Mr CHRIS MINNS: Members will note the member for Tamworth said that it does not matter. Why would that be relevant?

The SPEAKER: Members will come to order.

Mr CHRIS MINNS: I am looking at the laws. We have made changes and are prepared to make further changes. Part of it will be the judicial response; that is the truth. I have had a long conversation with the Attorney General and the police Minister. I am not prepared to speculate in Parliament today on those proposed changes, but we are looking at legislative change. Part of it is also the recruitment and retention of police officers in regional New South Wales.

We cannot have one without the other, and any objective analysis would show that the Government has been able to arrest the slide in recruitment for New South Wales police. We have a full police academy at Goulburn now, largely because we now pay for police officers to train there. We have removed the wages cap and as a result can keep experienced police officers for longer, particularly in regional New South Wales. That should not be blithely dismissed by members opposite. We believe it will make a major change.

I acknowledge that in some instances the police arrest the same person over and over again, and we cannot have that situation because it is dangerous for that young person to be repeatedly sent back out into the community after committing what in many cases are violent offences. I will not speculate on the Government's next step, but anyone would accept that over the past two years we have taken steps. When we see that there is a gap in the law, we can improve community safety, clamp down on crime and act in the best interests of young people.

REGIONAL RAIL SERVICES

Mr DAVID MEHAN (The Entrance) (11:44): My question is addressed to the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads. Will the Minister update the House on the Minns Labor Government's plan for the State's fleet of regional long-distance XPT trains?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland—Minister for Regional Transport and Roads) (11:45): It is great to get a question from the member for The Entrance. He is a very passionate advocate for public transport in his community. He is one of those really great members in this place who, when they see an issue or hear somebody ask a question, actually comes to the Minister to ask them. They ask a question of the relevant Minister, unlike members opposite, who are too scared to ask me a question on those topics. Some of them have never raised their questions with me before they bring them to the House. But we are the party of the bush, and we want outcomes for our communities.

I acknowledge a really strong advocate for the bush who is in the gallery, the new president of Local Government NSW, Phyllis Miller. I am meeting with her later today and am very pleased to see her in the gallery. Our party is pulling from the fire the ridiculous state of public transport under members opposite, particularly in regional New South Wales. Why are we updating the XPT trains? Why are we spending \$40 million to make them fit for service? In 2015 The Nationals said they would update the regional rail fleet, but in their next eight years in government they failed to get one train built here. They went offshore, got into a public-private partnership and did all the things that they do every time to ruin projects. They kill local regional manufacturing. People in the Hunter know how important that is.

Mrs Sally Quinnell: Illawarra, Nowra.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Yes, Nowra. I acknowledge the interjection. We are rebuilding what members opposite have destroyed. Those trains ran three years overdue and \$1 billion over budget. We have had to pull it out of the fire because they could not deliver anything. They have the hide to talk about the Government suspending a service. I love the good people of Grafton. I used to go to Grafton all the time when I was a tour operator, and there are six rail services there today. We have to use two of those services to enable them to continue to have a choice of trains as well as a premium, wheelchair-accessible coach service. I have given Transport the direction that I want the best one in the business. It will be a direct service to Sydney. For some of them it will be easier to get there, and we are still offering them the choice. [*Extension of time*]

We are giving them a refurbished rail option, for people who love trains, but also the option to catch a coach directly. Obviously we need to fix the mechanical issues. Some of the trains are 43 years old; they need to be improved so we can get that efficiency on the network. But we are not just doing that; we are also looking after the passengers with things like upgraded toilet amenities, seating and carpet. There will be some pain, but there will also be gain for all passengers on the network when those trains are restored. I am frankly a bit sick of the National Party on regional transport and trains.

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

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: We put out a call for consultation on TrainLink enhancements to coach services. That is adding more coach services. The Hon. Aileen MacDonald in the other place has asked questions like "How many are you going to cut?" We are not making cuts; we are trying to improve services in regional New South Wales. That is not in the DNA of members opposite—it is not something they would do—so I understand why they would jump to cuts. But the fact of the matter is that they are scaring their communities for no reason. The member for Clarence said, "The Government will not pay the drivers. Can you guarantee they are not going to be worse off when there are buses replacing the rail?" Of course the Government will work with the union and the workers to ensure they are not worse off. The member had not even raised the issue with me before asking the question. Now Opposition members are talking about 50 cent fares—I heard the member for Tweed say that.

Mr Paul Scully: He is on the Seniors Card. He's fine.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I want the member for Dubbo to confirm whether that is now National Party policy. Should we expect to see that in the Parliamentary Budget Office costings? No, because Opposition members say brave things and pretend for their communities, but they never, ever deliver.

The SPEAKER: I remind the member for Wollongong that when he alludes to the age of the member for Tweed, he also implicates me and the Leader of the House. That is dangerous territory.

RAIL WORKERS

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla) (11:50): My question is directed to the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads, representing the interim Minister for Transport. Commuters were left stranded on a Sydney train line after a guard refused to continue the service because she had not eaten in more than six hours. How does the Minister explain a train guard walking off the job after six hours without a break, leaving passengers stranded?

Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland—Minister for Regional Transport and Roads) (11:51): I thank the member for the question. It is good to see that Opposition members have changed their tactics. Today they are actually asking Ministers questions that are within their portfolios.

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

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Of course, the shadow Minister for Transport is not asking questions about regional transport, but whatever. There is no question that the wages dispute is having a big impact on the city, and it is not fair. People have had a gutful. I think this relates back to the previous question. Members opposite are having these discussions in the House. Members on this side, including the Premier, the former Minister for Transport and the current Minister for Transport, are all working to resolve the dispute. We are not making hay out of the discomfort to commuters. We are getting on with the job of making a deal with the union that is fair to commuters, sustainable, and also fair to taxpayers. We need to make sure that while we—

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Oxley to order for the second time. The Minister will be heard in silence.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: What does the member want to talk about? There is a strategy—

Mr Mark Speakman: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: The member for Rockdale is not assisting the Chair. The Minister will resume her seat. The Leader of the Opposition rises on a point of order.

Mr Mark Speakman: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, direct relevance. The Minister has gone nowhere near trying to explain that shocking incident.

The SPEAKER: I uphold the point of order. The Minister will be directly relevant to the question, which relates to an incident. I am not aware of where the incident was reported, but if the Minister cannot answer the question then that is the answer.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: That is the real issue. It is great for their optics when Opposition members have a spat in the Chamber about whatever issues they have heard about, but they should come to the Minister to ask the question.

The SPEAKER: Members will come to order.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The Premier has been clear. Government members have all been clear. We want rail workers at work doing their jobs to the best of their ability. We are grateful to those rail workers who are doing that. Where people have not behaved appropriately, those instances will be investigated. That is always the case. After 20 years working in public transport, I have a very strong commitment to excellence in customer service. If there is a case where excellent customer service has not happened, we want to hear about it and we will act on it. That is what members do on this side of the House, not inane pointscore and trying to— [*Time expired.*]

NSW SKILLS PLAN

Ms LYNDA VOLTZ (Auburn) (11:54): My question is addressed to the Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education. Will the Minister update the House on the Minns Labor Government's plan to strengthen the State's skilled workforce with the first New South Wales skills plan in over 15 years?

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education) (11:54): I thank the member for the question. I note that she has always been a terrific advocate for TAFE, particularly the TAFE at Lidcombe. She speaks to me about it regularly. It is a great TAFE that provides facilities for glazing and timber trades and a range of really important skills that that area of Sydney requires. I have spoken before about the 12 long years of neglect that the vocational education and training system suffered under the former Coalition Government. I am pleased to report that even over the past 12 weeks, there has been action that shows up the 12 years of inaction from the previous Government.

Since the previous session of Parliament, a range of things have been announced for the skills system and TAFE in New South Wales. We are rebuilding the skills system to provide the sorts of skills we need for the workforce of the future. This is what the Government has been doing. On 30 November last year we delivered the

first skills plan in over 15 years. Even though Opposition members are talking about the things that they say they did, they had no plan for skills development. They had no plan for nearly 16 years. As I have said before, a failure to plan is a plan to fail. On 4 February this year, the Government delivered the new TAFE NSW Charter, which sets out the role that TAFE plays as the core of the vocational training system in New South Wales.

The SPEAKER: I call the member for Wahrenoonga to order for the third time.

Mr STEVE WHAN: Just last week I was very pleased to announce that we delivered a multi-year pay deal with the NSW Teachers Federation, which nearly 93 per cent of staff voted for. That goes with the fact that under the leadership of the Minister for Industrial Relations, who was very unfairly maligned in this place last night, but who has been so active in achieving wage agreements with the vast bulk of the New South Wales workforce—

The SPEAKER: Members will come to order.

Mr STEVE WHAN: We are also reversing the trend of TAFE teacher casualisation that began under the former Government. Now more than 1,700 staff who were casual or temporary teachers are permanent TAFE teachers. That is a very important achievement. It means stability, peace of mind and job security for the teachers. It also means that they have more time to work on class preparation, and more time to assist in reducing the administrative workload across the rest of the teaching workforce. The Government has committed to a key recommendation of the vocational education and training review, which was to remove TAFE from the contestable market. [*Extension of time*]

The contestable market was introduced by the previous Government so that TAFE had to contest with private providers for what amounted to about 30 per cent of its funding. Getting that 30 per cent in funding required a huge administrative workload that tied up head teachers and stopped them from delivering teaching and learning to young people and those wanting vocational training. The Government has committed to meeting that key recommendation over the next year. The Government is committed to skills development. There are 1,000 trainees working in areas such as the police, essential energy, parks, health and the education department. The Minister for Local Government has delivered 1,300 new trainees and apprenticeships across local government. That is a really important boost to local government employment to help in overcoming a number of skills shortages across the State.

The Deputy Premier has been working amazingly hard on the skills plan and linking schools with vocational training. This morning I was lucky to have Weld Australia talk to me about its world-leading course with virtual reality welding, which is helping high school students link into the welding space. Members will be interested to know that I was told that we need around 70,000 welders in New South Wales. That is a direct result of the failure of those opposite to deliver those skills. As the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads mentioned, the offshoring of so much manufacturing has meant we have dropped the workforce in that area. We have the job of making up for that—a job we are taking on and will complete.

BUSHFIRES AND PLANNING POLICY

Mr MICHAEL REGAN (Wakehurst) (11:59): My question is directed to the Minister for Emergency Services. In the middle of winter, the Los Angeles fires destroyed more than 10,000 houses, with losses estimated at over US\$250 billion. Experts tell us it is only a matter of time before a similar tragedy happens in Australia. How is the New South Wales Government ensuring that rezoning proposals on bushfire-prone land are assessed to protect future residents from risk to life and property and potential financial ruin through unattainable insurance, as well as protecting future governments from massive financial and moral liability for reckless decision-making, just as it has for flood-prone land?

Mr JIHAD DIB (Bankstown—Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Youth Justice) (12:00): I thank the member for Wakehurst for his question. We have spoken about that topic previously and I appreciate that it is close to his heart and pertinent to his electorate. Like the rest of the world, New South Wales watched in absolute horror what unfolded in Los Angeles and the way that fires engulfed different parts of that city. Like everybody here, my heart goes out to those who lost their loved ones, their homes and their livelihoods. We know that climate change is increasing the frequency and the intensity of fires. Los Angeles experienced those fires in the middle of winter. New South Wales fire seasons are becoming more prolonged, frequent and extreme. We are also seeing an overlap of traditional fire seasons in the Northern Hemisphere and the Southern Hemisphere.

How New South Wales prepares for the broader risks associated with bushfires is a responsibility that touches multiple portfolios. With the indulgence of the House and the Minister, I will speak today about the role that our emergency services play, particularly in bushfire preparedness. There are important distinctions between our State and the circumstances preceding the Los Angeles fires. In New South Wales we have lived through and

learned from our fair share of fire seasons. We have only recently commemorated the fifth anniversary of the Black Summer fires of 2019-20. Since the Sydney bushfires in the early 2000s, controls have been in place for various stages of the planning process, including during the preparation of local environment plans, subdivision design and building construction. Controls developed with the Rural Fire Service include land use planning, vegetation management, water supply provision and building construction requirements. The 2001 guidance has had several iterations, including 2006 and 2019.

After the Black Summer fires, the final report of the New South Wales bushfire inquiry contained 76 recommendations on how New South Wales plans, prepares for and responds to bushfires. As part of recommendation 27, the RFS and the department of planning committed to designing and establishing a new bushfire planning framework that moves to a risk-based strategic planning approach when planning for bushfires. The department of planning exhibited the draft Bush Fire Prone Land Package from last July. It includes a new draft Bush Fire Policy for Land Use Planning, an updated Local Planning Direction 4.3, Planning for Bushfire Protection, and an updated bushfire planning system circular. The RFS treats its responsibility for ensuring the safety of development planned on bushfire-prone land with the utmost seriousness. *[Extension of time]*

Appropriate development that complies with rigorous safety standards, along with a well-prepared community, are vital in helping our firefighters combat bushfires that threaten lives and property. The RFS has a statutory obligation to assess development applications on or near bushfire-prone land. Developments are assessed using a matrix of factors, including the proximity of fuels and slope that will influence fire behaviour to determine bushfire protection measures. Any home built in a bushfire-prone area must consider appropriate bushfire protection measures, such as access, water and utilities, a cleared space around the home known as an asset protection zone, construction standards and landscape maintenance.

Councils can also refer development applications for higher risk properties to the NSW Rural Fire Service for review. Ultimately, these processes are about ensuring people build homes in safer areas. Risk mitigation factors are a key component. However, even with all of those considerations, as Los Angeles experienced, the best planning cannot always stop bushfires. When it comes to fighting bushfires, our RFS is one of the finest agencies in the world. It manages the largest aerial firefighting fleet in Australia, with 13 aircraft. New South Wales is the only State with its own permanent large air tanker and heavy Chinook helicopter. New South Wales also has access to 22 contracted aircraft through the National Aerial Firefighting Centre. The RFS is an early adopter of artificial intelligence to predict fire patterns and impact using fire simulation.

I reiterate my thanks to the member, who has raised this issue very respectfully and worked with the agencies. It comes from a good place. There are measures in place to ensure that homes are built in safe places. We can acknowledge the State Disaster Mitigation Plan for the work we do during floods. The same would have to ring true for fires. I remind people of our emergency services drop-in session in the Macquarie Room.

FREEDOM RIDE SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Mr GREG WARREN (Campbelltown) (12:06): My question is addressed to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty. Will the Minister advise the House of the lasting legacy of the 1965 Freedom Ride?

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang—Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty, Minister for Gaming and Racing, Minister for Veterans, Minister for Medical Research, and Minister for the Central Coast) (12:06): I thank the member for Campbelltown for his question about one of those events in history that can change the path of a nation. The 1965 Freedom Ride stands out as one of the amazing, brave, courageous events that galvanised the country, and two years later, in the 1967 referendum, Aboriginal people were for the first time recognised and counted in the census. Thinking back to 1965, those young students aged 18, 19 or in their 20s, spurred on by the civil rights movement happening in the United States, decided to board a bus and travel throughout regional New South Wales. Originally a fact-finding mission, it turned into a protest against the unfair discriminatory practices that were occurring in communities across New South Wales.

It was amazing to meet some of those people—who are now not so young—who took the risk to confront those terrible practices. Ann Curthoys, Aidan Foy, Chris Page, Alex Mills and Beth Hansen were part of the celebrations in Walgett on Monday that Minister Sharpe and I were able to attend, together with representatives of the member for Barwon and the mayor. The whole Walgett community joined together to pay tribute to the people who made that journey. In my speech I said, particularly to the school kids who were there, that superheroes do not always wear capes. We sometimes talk about our emergency services personnel in that sense. Those young people boarded the bus. Ironically, one of them said they had to buy a ticket to get on the bus. He did not have a job at the time and his girlfriend had to buy a ticket as well. He was a little bit embarrassed that they both had to buy a ticket.

They went out to communities and saw the discriminatory practices that were occurring, like not being able to use the local swimming pool at the same time as the rest of the community or waiting until the supermarket closed before they could do their shopping. In Walgett itself, they protested in front of the RSL club because even Aboriginal returned servicemen could not enter the club. They received a whole lot of abuse. [*Extension of time*]

Things were thrown at them, and they were called names. Meanwhile, a convoy of cars followed them out of town and drove them off the road. They then had to return to Walgett to get their bus fixed. But they raised awareness across the whole Australian community about some of the things that were happening, and they started a change. We went out for dinner at the RSL club and noted one great thing that has since occurred: 100 per cent of the RSL staff were Aboriginal. We have come a long way from 1965 to 2025, but there is more work to do.

Building on what the previous Government started through Closing the Gap, this Government has committed to developing a working partnership with Aboriginal people through the Aboriginal Coalition of Peaks and other groups across Aboriginal communities to get better outcomes. It can be a difficult journey, and we have some difficult conversations at times as we chart that path to change government, put local Aboriginal communities first and make sure that funding gets to where it needs to be. Looking back, it all started with events like the 1965 Freedom Ride. People will remember names like Charles Perkins and Jim Spigelman, but there were a number of others on that bus, and every single one of them made a massive contribution to human rights in this country. We should remember their contribution, their bravery and their willingness to stand up against what is wrong and to do the right thing, not just on the sixtieth anniversary but at all times.

Petitions

PETITIONS RECEIVED

The CLERK: I announce that the following ePetition signed by more than 20,000 persons has been lodged for presentation:

Nurses' and Midwives' Pay

Petition requesting that the Legislative Assembly call on the Government to provide nurses and midwives a 15 per cent pay increase; develop and commit to a plan for interstate pay parity, ratios in every public health service, and other retention measures for nurses and midwives; and publicly express its support for the skill and value of nurses and midwives to the people of New South Wales, received from **Ms Jenny Leong**.

Business of the House

BUSINESS LAPSED

The SPEAKER: I advise the House that in accordance with Standing Order 105 (3) general business notices of motions (general notices) Nos 2567 to 2595 will lapse tomorrow.

Bills

BAIL AMENDMENT (EXTENSION OF LIMITATION ON BAIL IN CERTAIN CIRCUMSTANCES) BILL 2025

First Reading

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Michael Daley, read a first time and printed.

Second Reading Speech

Mr MICHAEL DALEY (Maroubra—Attorney General) (12:13): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Last year the Government listened to calls from the community for action on youth crime, particularly in the regions. At that time there were concerns about young people under the age of 18 committing motor vehicle theft and break and enter offences, including when those young people were already on bail for those types of offences. The people of Moree expressed particular concern about the impact that this type of youth crime was having on their community. The Government introduced a multifaceted response to combat youth crime, including legislative reform, which this bill seeks to extend, and therapeutic and community initiatives, which continue to be implemented. This included a targeted package for Moree to address crime, support young people and improve community safety.

In April 2024 we introduced section 22C of the Bail Act. This legislative reform introduced a temporary additional bail test for young people aged between 14 and 18—that is aged 14 to 17 really because 18-year-olds, for the avoidance of doubt, are adults—charged with committing a serious break and enter or motor theft offence

while on bail for another offence of that type. Under this test, unless the bail authority has a "high degree of confidence" that the young person will not commit a serious indictable offence while on bail, bail is to be refused. The additional bail test was intended as a circuit breaker. It offered an immediate response while the broader community-based programs were implemented. Section 22C was initially intended to sunset on 4 April 2025, 12 months after it commenced. While I had hoped that 12 months would be sufficient to address community concerns, as the sunset approaches it has become clear that community concern remains high. More time is needed to fully implement and expand on the measures in Moree and other regional areas to address youth crime.

This bill replaces the current sunset provision so that the temporary additional bail test will sunset four years after it commenced, on 4 April 2028. This step is not taken lightly, recognising that it has a very real impact at an individual and system-wide level. However, the provision remains a time-limited and specifically targeted test. It is not being made permanent. Rather, the extension is intended to keep the additional bail test in place and keep the community safe while efforts continue across government to reduce youth crime through therapeutic and community-based solutions that aim to minimise a young person's contact with the criminal justice system over the longer term. Additional funding is being allocated to further develop and expand these programs.

I will say more about this broader program of work to support community safety now. Last year the Government announced a place-based response in Moree. This multifaceted project continues to be implemented. Almost \$900,000 of the \$1 million for additional after-hours activities has now been allocated. Programs for young people are seeing strong engagement. Miyay Birray Youth Service's Street Beat bus completed over 1,000 pickups in its first three months of operation, and both the PCYC and the Sports Health Arts and Education Academy [SHAE Academy] programs are attracting dozens of kids per night.

The small grants program has distributed over \$215,000 for the delivery of 20 diverse after-hours activities, from sports and arts activities to mental health peer support. A consortium of three local Aboriginal organisations has been chosen to design and deliver the Moree Bail Accommodation Program. The consortium consists of the Miyay Birray Youth Service, Pius X Aboriginal Medical Service and the SHAE Academy. While the program is expected to open later this year, Youth Justice NSW is also boosting resources in Moree by establishing additional temporary caseworker roles to supervise young people on bail. A temporary acting magistrate has been appointed to the New England circuit. Key themes and findings from a review of services supporting young people in Moree have been identified, and proposed recommendations and actions are now being developed with the local governance group established to oversee this work.

Beyond this place-based response, additional services and resources have been allocated to Moree since March 2024. In February 2025 the New South Wales Government announced an additional place-based investment in Moree of \$2 million over four years from July 2025 to address youth crime and strengthen community safety. The NSW Police Force has undertaken more than 30 surge operations in Moree over the past year, with Operation Regional Mongoose identifying 255 offenders across the western region. The Safe Aboriginal Youth program will be delivered by SHAE Academy from April 2025 for two years, providing activities and transport to Aboriginal young people aged 12 to 17 years.

The Casework Support Program, or CSP, will be delivered by Miyay Birray from April 2025 for five years, helping young people meet practical needs and goals as part of their case plan, such as enrolling in education, getting ID, finding work and applying for Centrelink payments. A new Legal Aid office is opening with two Aboriginal-identified roles advertised and four lawyers to be based permanently in Moree. An additional NSW Health Adolescent Court and Community Clinician role at the Children's Court has been established to help more young people access diversion services. Additional teachers have been recruited throughout the year.

I acknowledge the presence in the Chamber of the member for Northern Tablelands. He is one of the members on the other side that engages constructively with this Government. He has met with the Premier a number of times and has brought community representatives to see me. Some people in this Chamber choose to make crime, particularly youth crime, a political football. In my time in here, I have found that all that does is stoke fear, particularly amongst older people in communities, for the sake of votes. I find that the member for Northern Tablelands does not do that, and I look forward to further constructive engagement with him in the future, particularly when we talk about important things like doli incapax, which I note the member asked a question about today.

These are hugely important issues, and they are very complex. One of the things I lament is that when Labor formed government—I am not trying to be political here—there were not enough support programs for families in trouble, for mums and dads who do not have the wherewithal through drug and alcohol programs and intergenerational trauma to raise kids who are well grounded. Fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal ice syndrome are deep-seated problems, particularly in Aboriginal communities in regional New South Wales. They are very complex indeed. They certainly will not be solved by finger-pointing or political rhetoric. We need to attack this

on a long-term basis to start to move the needle. I look forward to working with the member for Northern Tablelands to do just that.

The Government is also expanding assistance to other communities struggling with youth crime, including regional communities across New South Wales. In February 2025 the New South Wales Government committed \$4 million over five years, including the current financial year, in Bourke and Kempsey to match the Commonwealth Government's investment in the Stronger Places, Stronger People program, which supports community-led, place-based responses to local issues. The funding for Bourke and Kempsey will be used to fund backbone teams to facilitate local planning, inclusive engagement, measurement and evaluation, joint decision-making, governance and local action.

The backbone teams work with, and are accountable to, local community leadership groups supporting the community in developing and implementing their tailored strategy and plan of action. The Australian Government Department of Social Services is planning to undertake an evaluation of the Stronger Places, Stronger People initiative to capture learnings and insights from the first phase to inform the forward approach and understand the effectiveness of community-led collective impact measures. This will be undertaken in partnership with Stronger Places, Stronger People, communities, and State and Territory Governments.

The three-year extension of section 22C proposed in this bill will also allow more comprehensive data to be obtained and for other work relevant to the issues of youth crime to be considered. At present, the final checked data regarding the impact of section 22C is limited to a six-month period from March 2024 to September 2024. Extending the temporary additional bail test will enable a detailed analysis of the relevant data trends and effects of the temporary bail test prior to its sunset in April 2028. In addition, the Government is expected to receive and consider the recommendations of the parliamentary inquiry into community safety in regional and rural communities in this period. The inquiry held community hearings in Bourke, Kempsey and Broken Hill. The final report of the inquiry is due in November 2025. This additional information will provide valuable insights and inform further work to be done to reduce youth offending.

I now turn to the short specifics of this very short bill. Schedule 1 replaces the current sunset provision in section 22C (5) with a new provision specifying that section 22C will be repealed at the beginning of 4 April 2028. That is about it for the detail of the bill. I conclude by saying that the Government is committed to addressing the causes of youth crime at their core, with the long-term aim of curbing the offending behaviour of young people in our community and their contact with the criminal justice system. However, our Government cannot and will not ignore the fact that the lived experience of youth crime in many communities is one of genuine fear, concern and frustration. The time-limited extension of section 22C is intended to support community safety while the extensive broader program of work undertaken by this Government to comprehensively address youth crime continues to be implemented. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned.

CRIMES AMENDMENT (INCITING RACIAL HATRED) BILL 2025

Second Reading Debate

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Ms KELLIE SLOANE (Vaucluse) (12:25): I speak in contribution to the debate on the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025. Over the past months, I have spoken forcefully against the rise of antisemitism in our community. I condemned the attacks on the Jewish community, the hateful rhetoric and the dangerous ideologies that seek to divide us all. My stand on this remains firm and unwavering. Hatred, in all of its forms, must be confronted and challenged. The wave of hateful antisemitic crime that we are seeing, particularly in the eastern suburbs of Sydney which I represent, has been unprecedented and disturbing. The community expects us to bring about laws in this place that will help prevent these crimes, and that is what we have been doing this week.

The Coalition supported two new bills this week that enhanced safety around places of worship and also strengthened other provisions. They included new offences that criminalised the display of Nazi symbols near a place of worship. They also ensured that hatred or prejudice as a motive for an offence would be considered an aggravating factor in sentencing. In other words, there would be tougher penalties for those bringing about these criminal acts. The New South Wales Coalition proposed amendments to further strengthen these bills to provide even tougher penalties for criminal activity and to address the enormous cost of the ongoing protests and demonstrations in our city. It is a shame that Labor did not support these amendments.

We support the bill before us today, which seeks to address hate speech by establishing a new criminal offence for intentionally inciting hatred. We are dealing with an acute issue at a particular juncture. We recognise

that hate speech can lead to criminal activity and that community leaders want more tools to address this activity. This bill came about with great speed. I sent a letter to both the Premier and the Attorney General one month ago asking to be involved in the development of legislation like this. This bill was brought about with haste at 10.30 p.m. last night, which gave the Opposition very little time to consider it. In that context, and despite my support for the bill, it is important to put on record some of my concerns, as we are entering difficult territory here.

I am concerned that, while this bill has the right intention for this moment in time, we may be using the wrong tools. This bill is quite selective in who it seeks to protect, and it ventures down a road that impinges on free speech. In our genuine desire to protect one part of the community, I wonder what message we are sending today to other faith and multicultural groups which also deserve our protection. How do my colleagues who represent other communities go back to them and say that they supported a bill that did not protect their constituents? I am concerned about that. I also worry about the LGBTQIA+ community. I have always agreed with its mantra that love is love, but I would say that hate is also hate. In that community, we unfortunately saw very dark times where hate speech led to action, harm and, in some cases, murder. I worry about that. While I am not suggesting that we should expand the scope of this bill, I believe that harms against other communities must be addressed in other ways.

In legislating against hate speech, with "hate" having such a subjective definition, I worry that we risk undermining foundational principles of our democratic society, including the importance of protecting freedom of speech and the right to disagree, even if we sometimes find other people's opinions distasteful and misguided or even offensive. While I understand the intention behind the laws to protect individuals and communities from harmful rhetoric, I fear that in our effort to suppress hate, we might also, inadvertently, suppress dissent. English author, journalist and former politician Brendan O'Neill said:

Censorship is the worst tool for tackling bigotry. All censorship does is push bigotry underground, where it can grow and spread and gain in influence, unchecked by rational, liberal thought.

That is why it is important that we talk about these issues today. We are entering very difficult territory indeed. History teaches us that free speech is a fragile yet essential pillar of democracy. It allows us to challenge ideas, expose falsehoods and engage in open debate. Without it, we risk creating a society where only officially sanctioned opinions are allowed. My colleague the shadow Attorney General talked about his deeply personal family experience where, in creating a sword to protect some, it can be turned against others. We do not want a situation where people fear speaking their minds and where the power to define what constitutes hate speech rests in the hands of those who may not always act in the best interests of others.

We are in a time when, globally and even in Australia, people are railing against the idea of constantly being told how to think, how to feel and what they are allowed to say. There is a rebellion against what people describe as woke culture. In asking to have a freer society, we cannot also ask to tell others what not to say and what not to think, even if we find it incredibly offensive. That is why I am glad to see that the bill includes a review after 12 months, which is an important safeguard. We need to look back in a year from now and say, "Did we do the right thing here today? Has it really given police the powers they require to address the kind of dangerous speech that leads to violence, or is it going to be weaponised in a way that we could not predict?" The Government must commit to that timely review. Reviews are often in legislation, but timeliness is not always adhered to. I urge the Government to stick to that timeline and do more to make sure that we have done the right thing.

We must fight against antisemitism and all forms of hate not by restricting speech but by confronting those bad ideas with better ones. Before I entered politics I worked in the education space with children. I delivered programs to enable them to better understand and empathise with others, to engage in constructive debate and not to bully, harass or intimidate but to work together to share different ideas and have differences of opinion, civilly. That kind of debate underpins a civil society. That is why I would like to see more investment in education programs and things that make us a socially cohesive society, rather than simply locking people up. Having said that, we support the bill because it comes at a time of acute need, when our communities are calling for it. But important safeguards must be noted. We need to monitor the consequences and be brave enough to revisit the bill if we need to in the future.

Mr JASON LI (Strathfield) (12:33): I contribute to debate on the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025. Racial hatred has no place in New South Wales, and yet in recent months we have seen a shocking rise in racial hatred, particularly antisemitism, including the systematic, coordinated, widespread firebombing of synagogues, homes and even a childcare centre. That is why the bill is so important and urgent. It sends a clear and unequivocal message that racial hatred is not just unacceptable, it is now a crime. The bill makes it an offence to intentionally and publicly incite hatred against a person or group because of their race. Let us be clear: The law does not just apply to one racial community; it applies to anyone targeted for their racial, ethnic or

national background. Whether someone is Jewish, Asian, Indigenous, African or Muslim, this law is designed to protect them.

I know firsthand how real and damaging racism can be. I have spent decades campaigning against racism against Asian Australians. I have experienced it myself, as have so many other Australians. Racism takes so many forms. It could be in the playground, with snide comments and bullying. I remember in the 1970s and 1980s at school, the refrain was "ching chong Chinaman". In the 1990s we heard, "Get on your boat." More recently, on Anzac Day 2023 I wrote an article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* arguing that the Anzac story belongs to all Australians, not just white Australians. That article triggered a flood of online hate—white supremacists posting vile racist abuse, including cartoon images of an Asian person being hanged. Would such actions be caught under this new law? That remains to be tested. But what is clear is that racial hatred is alive in our society, and we must take stronger action to stop it. But it is not just about one incident or one group.

We have seen racial vilification and hate directed at many communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Asian Australians, especially Chinese Australians, were subjected to an unprecedented wave of racism. People were spat on in the street, businesses were boycotted and even children were bullied at school. My community was blamed for the virus, as if an entire race of people could somehow be responsible. My neighbour at the time asked me if I could go to the supermarket for her because she was too afraid to do her grocery shopping herself. We saw media commentators and even some politicians fuel those divisions. The result at the time was a surge in anti-Asian hate crimes across Australia.

The bill will not stop racism or discrimination. We cannot legislate the human heart. The bill will not erase the harm that has been done. But it will ensure that if people intentionally incite racial hatred, there will be consequences. It is a crucial step in protecting our community from experiencing this type of hatred on an ongoing basis. Some have asked whether the bill will restrict what is framed as freedom of speech. It is actually an implied constitutional right to political communication. The High Court has made it clear that there is no personal right to freedom of speech in Australia. It is an implied constitutional right connected with our system of democracy. Free speech is fundamental to our democracy, but there is no right to incite hatred. This law has been carefully drafted to ensure that it does not criminalise debate, disagreement or even offence, but does criminalise intentional incitement to hatred.

The offence under the bill has four key elements. It must be a public act. That means the behaviour must happen in public where it can influence others, whether through speeches, online posts, graffiti or other public statements. The act must incite hatred—not just anger, offence or insult but actual hatred—an extreme and dangerous emotion that fuels division and violence. The incitement must be intentional. The person being prosecuted must intend to incite that hatred. The incitement must be based on race. This law specifically targets incitement of racial hatred, ensuring that its focus remains on protecting communities from discrimination and vilification. To protect legitimate public discourse, the bill also includes an exemption for religious teachers, ensuring that discussions of faith are not unfairly restricted.

These safeguards make it clear that this law is not about silencing political communication. It does not criminalise debate or even offence. It only applies where someone intentionally incites hatred. That is a high bar. Political discussion, robust disagreement, even harsh criticism—none of that is impacted, but we draw a line when words are used as weapons to incite hatred, fear and violence. This bill is not just about words. It is about safety. It is about a strong statement of who we are and what we stand for, because when hate speech goes unchallenged it creates the conditions for violence. It isolates communities. It makes people afraid to walk down the street, go to work or send their kids to school. We have seen where unchecked hate can lead. History tells us that. We have seen it in the most recent rise of antisemitic attacks, Islamophobia and racism in our own communities. We cannot allow that to continue.

Some have raised concerns that this bill focuses only on racial hatred, while other minority groups, such as those covered under section 93Z of the Crimes Act, do not receive the same protections. I fully acknowledge that. I believe if we are serious about tackling hate speech we must ensure that all communities vulnerable to vilification, whether based on race, religion, sexuality, gender identity or disability, are equally protected under the law. However, protecting effective, balanced legislation to criminalise incitement to hatred against these communities is complex and it will take time. So let us get this first step done now in respect of racial hatred. It is urgent.

The bill is a step towards a safer, more inclusive New South Wales. It is recognition that all of us, no matter where we come from, deserve to live without fear. It is a call to action for all of us to stand up, speak out and reject hate in all its forms. I support the bill because no-one should feel unsafe because of their race. We are stronger together. Let us send a clear message today that New South Wales stands against hate and we will not let it divide us.

Ms JENNY LEONG (Newtown) (12:41): I speak on behalf of The Greens in debate on the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025. The fact that we are in this place just a day after this bill was introduced and read for a second time by the Attorney General, with no time to consult with the many communities who will be impacted by this reform and no time to analyse it closely, is nothing short of a disgrace. This is a hugely significant piece of legislation that merits close, thoughtful scrutiny. It is a bill that purports to address racism in this State but is, in fact, little more than a performative act designed to give the illusion that those in power actually care about racism.

Our communities are crying out for a genuine anti-racist and intersectional approach that protects all people from discrimination. They want a human rights-based approach that ensures all people are treated with dignity, respect and equality under the law. An evidence-based approach to policy that recognises that we cannot police our way to a more inclusive society is desperately needed. Instead, what we get is a kneejerk law and order bill cobbled together off the back of a highly selective consultation, rushed through Parliament in a whirlwind matter of days and endless hand-wringing about the racism that has, apparently, just appeared in our communities overnight.

As they say, there is nothing like the zeal of the recently converted. It seems that many white politicians and commentators have had an epiphany over the summer and finally realised that racism exists in this country. Sorry if I am not feeling the multipartisan love and unity right now. May they know that, with their confected white tears that we see in this place, they are obscuring so many brown scars—scars that First Nations people and people of colour live with that have been inflicted on them by the racism that has existed in this country since invasion.

I never thought I would find myself in this place putting on the public record my opposition to a bill addressing inciting racial hatred. I also never thought that a New South Wales Labor government would sink so low as to entrench division within legislation that seeks to address one of the most significant issues in our community, which is hate speech. It is for this reason that The Greens will oppose this bill. The object of the bill is to amend the Crimes Act 1900 to make it an offence, by a public act, to intentionally incite hatred towards another person, or a group of persons, on the ground of race. On the face of it, this sounds like a good thing but, as always, the devil is in the detail.

One glaring issue is new section 93ZAA (2), which makes explicit that directly quoting from or otherwise referencing a religious text for the purpose of religious teaching cannot be considered public incitement of hatred on the ground of race. It is deeply concerning that the right to freedom of speech is apparently sacrosanct for those engaging in religious teaching but can easily be extinguished for all others in every other circumstance. What is more, this bill continues the resurgent NSW Labor tradition of giving the New South Wales police exactly what they do not need—that is, more power.

Not content to offer the cops a 40 per cent pay rise, NSW Labor just yesterday brought in a bill giving New South Wales police the power to, effectively, shut down any protests near a place of worship, regardless of whether they are actually targeting said place of worship. It is absolutely outrageous that an institution infected with the systemic racism and culture of discrimination that is the New South Wales police should have any power in determining which protests can go ahead or, indeed, which actions of racial hatred are worthy of prosecution and which are not.

Those are just two of the many reasons why The Greens cannot support this bill. It is a heavy-handed solution to a social problem that cannot be solved by legislation. The recent graffiti and attempted arson attacks on the synagogues, including in my electorate of Newtown, a childcare centre, a Jewish school and a home are absolutely deplorable. The Greens reject and condemn the hateful words and imagery that have been on display in these attacks, and the racist thinking that underpins them. So, too, do we reject and condemn the racist underpinning of hateful Islamophobic and anti-Arab graffiti scrawled throughout Westfield Hornsby, the separate attacks on two hijab-wearing women this past week alone, and the attempted arson of a school bus belonging to an Islamic school in Adelaide. It is stunning and deplorable that of these two lists of incidents, only one has been met with the widespread outrage and condemnation it deserves.

Only one has seen the New South Wales Labor Government put its shoulder to the wheel and claim to be taking anti-racism seriously. Only one has seen the establishment of a dedicated New South Wales police strike force—Strike Force Pearl—for the purposes of further investigation. Only one has seen the Premier and his Ministers, along with the Prime Minister, meet with community representatives and demonstrate active public support and solidarity. Indeed, only one of the communities that has been the subject of attacks in recent months will be protected by this bill.

The existing definition of race in section 93Z extends to ethno-religious or national origin, meaning Jewish communities and individuals will be protected under new section 93ZAA, but Muslim communities and

individuals who are not considered as sharing one ethno-religious or national origin will not. Tell me how that is adding to unity within society. Again, we cannot police our way into so-called social cohesion, and we certainly cannot achieve so-called social cohesion by picking and choosing which groups and which incidents are worthy of our confected outrage and protection.

Here I pause to quote Race Discrimination Commissioner Giridharan Sivaraman, who incisively points out that the phrase "social cohesion" has become widespread because people do not want to use the words "race" or "racism". The commissioner says the term erases conversations about structural racism, saying, "We need to be able to get along, but part of that is having difficult conversations sometimes, and we don't." I speak for myself and other people of colour in my team when I say it has been a gut punch to sit in this place this fortnight and listen to so-called leaders line up to talk about how, until recently, New South Wales has been a tolerant multicultural State in a tolerant multicultural nation.

Anyone who has ever been called a racist slur, been vilified for the colour of their skin or been told to go back to where they came from knows that this has never been true. To hear the member for Wahroonga say that New South Wales is the greatest multicultural success story in the world, or the Leader of the Opposition describe this country as one built on principles of respect, tolerance and unity when, in fact, this country is built on genocide and racist laws, like the White Australia policy, is a disgrace. To be crystal clear, we are in this sorry state of affairs, in which right-wing extremists feel empowered to paint Nazi symbols and the most disgusting antisemitic words on synagogues and other places frequented by Jewish people, because for years governments on both sides of the aisle have refused to take seriously incident after incident of racism. We are here because both major parties have ignored every time First Nations, migrant and other racialised communities have told them that we feel unsafe.

Since the genocide in Gaza began, Islamophobic incidents have increased by 510 per cent, according to the Islamophobia Register Australia. Where is the empathy for Muslim, Palestinian and other Arab communities? Where was the outrage when Islamophobic attacks, including graffiti and vandalism of mosques and attacks on visibly Muslim people, particularly women wearing hijabs, surged in the wake of the Christchurch mosque terror attacks? Where was the widespread concern when Asian women were being spat on in the streets and called dogs during the COVID lockdowns? Where is the horror and the fury at the coordinated response—or the failure to respond—to the 600 First Nations people who have died in custody since the royal commission in 1991, with not a single person being held accountable?

Antisemitism is a scourge that should never be tolerated, but so is every other form of racism that this State has consistently and routinely ignored. We are at this grim inflection point precisely because this country has always failed to grapple with the fact that we are a colony built on blood and dispossession and land stolen from First Nations people. We are here because those in power have chosen to ignore, for years, warning sign after warning sign that we are deep in dangerous territory. In 2020 the Australian Federal Police commissioner, Reece Kershaw, used his appearance at the National Press Club to warn us of the rise of right-wing extremism. *[Extension of time]*

That came after years of a rightward drift from governments and major parties at all levels, including the adoption of Pauline Hanson's One Nation policies by the Howard Coalition Government and the defection of the former leader of the Federal Labor Party to that very same extremist party. I note that the former Labor member for Bankstown in this place has since followed in his footsteps. Instead of governments taking the threats seriously and investing in diversionary measures that deradicalise people and pull them away from fringe groups, what did we see? We saw governments of all stripes doubling down on the amorphous ideas of social cohesion and multiculturalism. We are seeing repeated, deliberate conflation of the progressive, anti-genocide, pro-human rights left, who are criticising the State of Israel's actions in Palestine, with Neo-Nazis.

Black and brown people in this country know that the idea of a tolerant, multicultural community has always been a myth, a myth that those in power gladly peddle to get over their guilt for failing to recognise and make reparations for the foundational genocide of First Nations people. The word "tolerant" itself is insidious doublespeak and means that our acceptance is forever conditional upon our assimilation into some sanitised ideal of diversity. We are tolerated as long as we do not rock the boat—or arrive on one—our accents are not too strong, we stifle our mother tongue and our customs are deemed Western enough to be tolerated. We are coaxed into believing that we have more in common with the oppressor than the oppressed and that we are safe as long as we become the model minority. But we refuse. We will not let this Government pit us against each other and pick and choose which of us are worthy of protection and safety and which are not. Doing so only gives more space for the resurgent far right to drive wedges in deeper and divide us more. That is the last thing that we need.

The scars inflicted on me from living with racism ache listening to the debate today, so I can only imagine how First Nations people, Palestinian people and Arab and Muslim communities are feeling. Perhaps if we listen closely, we will hear the cries of rage at centuries of intergenerational trauma, while some in this place seem to

have only just noticed that racism exists. We need an anti-discrimination Act that does not discriminate. I note the commitment given by the Attorney General that the Government will undertake a review into protections against hatred for vulnerable communities to inform whether to broaden this new offence to other attributes. The Greens look forward to the findings of that review, which must be independent and holistic and take into account the hatred people experience on the basis of not only their race or religion but also their sexuality, gender identity or other attributes.

Right now the civil law falls far short of the mark. We need funding for diversionary and extremist intervention programs that are not police-led. As reporting from *Four Corners* revealed earlier this week, many families of people who have been radicalised by the far right are understandably reluctant to turn their loved ones in to the authorities for support. We need investment in genuine anti-racist education from an early age in our public schools so that we can finally meaningfully address the institutionalised, normalised racism that is shamefully entrenched in all aspects of our society. We need a treaty and a truth-telling commission urgently. This bill does not offer any of those solutions; all it does is further entrench division in our laws, further empower police and further divide different community groups. It is for those reasons that The Greens oppose the bill.

Dr MICHAEL HOLLAND (Bega) (12:55): I make a brief contribution to debate on the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025. I commend the Attorney General for introducing the bill to Parliament. I also commend the Premier and the Attorney General for their leadership in working with Cabinet to introduce three crimes amendment bills designed to fight the abhorrent epidemic of antisemitic attacks in our State. I acknowledge the Leader of the House for his powerful and emotional contribution yesterday. It was the most impactful statement in the current debate. Ironically, the two most impactful speeches that I have witnessed in my time here have been related to racial and sectarian conflict in the Middle East and its effect on cohesion in our society. Yesterday's contribution by Minister Ron Hoenig drew the same emotional response as did listening to my friend and colleague Minister Jihad Dib speak on 11 October 2023. With the introduction of legislation against incitement of racial hatred, the use of graffiti and Nazi symbols that induce racial and religious hatred and impeding access or egress from places of worship, the Government is addressing antisemitism and other forms of hatred in our community.

This is the first opportunity I have had to speak on last week's disgraceful and harmful example of hate speech by two individuals in the healthcare profession. I acknowledge the prompt and decisive action that the Premier and the Minister for Health and Minister for Regional Health took against those hateful individuals. I know how much that experience affected them as the leaders of our State and our health system. I can only imagine the depth of despair experienced by members of our Jewish community. As a medical professional I feel disgraced and dishonoured. Such actions and opinions are an anathema to healthcare professionals who are committed to providing the best possible care to every patient in New South Wales.

Healthcare is a profession of compassion, integrity and beneficence. People presume that doctors take the Hippocratic oath on graduation; at some universities, they do. Hippocrates said:

Into whatsoever houses I enter, I will enter to help the sick, and I will abstain from all intentional wrong-doing and harm ...

Health professionals are bound by its modern ethical manifestation, the Declaration of Geneva. The declaration states that doctors will not permit considerations of age, disease or disability, creed, ethnic origin, gender, nationality, political affiliation, race, sexual orientation, social standing or any other factor to intervene between their duty and their patient. Healthcare workers are ethically bound to treat patients with kindness and empathy, respect their dignity and put their health and wellbeing first. There is no place for hatred or division in the health system.

I have worked in NSW Health since 1981. I have worked with doctors, nurses, midwives and other health professionals of all races and religions and have never witnessed such abhorrent racially based or religious-based behaviour. Never, in the handing of a newborn baby to its mother, does one think of its race or religion. The thought of its future in our society led me to this place. The recent bills legislating against racial and religious violence and hatred have vindicated my decision. With the two bills passed yesterday and this bill being debated today, the Government will have provided complementary protections for the Jewish and other members of our community.

In August 2023 I made a contribution to debate on the Anti-Discrimination Amendment (Religious Vilification) Bill. I referenced the former great Democrat President of the United States of America John F. Kennedy, who is such a contrast to the current President. John F. Kennedy said, "Religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all." The bill before the House responds to the recent violent and hateful events that our community has witnessed on several occasions. Our community has seen unprecedented episodes of hate speech, acts of antisemitic graffiti, arson and other property damage.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Clayton Barr): It being 1.00 p.m., pursuant to standing and sessional orders, debate is interrupted for the committees take-note debate. I set down resumption of the debate as an order of the day for a later hour.

Committees

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Reports

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Clayton Barr): The question is that the House take note of the report.

Mr JASON LI (Strathfield) (13:01): As Chair: I speak on the Public Accounts Committee report entitled *A framework for performance reporting and driving wellbeing outcomes in NSW*, which is the committee's second report in the Fifty-Eighth Parliament. The inquiry commenced following a referral from the Minister for Finance, the Hon. Courtney Houssos, in May 2024. The terms of reference required the committee to examine how the Government can effectively report on the performance of New South Wales government services from a wellbeing perspective and how to drive wellbeing outcomes for New South Wales residents. The committee examined the proposed NSW Performance and Wellbeing Framework from the NSW Treasury, and considered how the proposed framework can support effective performance reporting and drive tangible wellbeing outcomes for people.

The committee heard from 40 submission-makers, including members of the public, non-profit organisations, government agencies, researchers and advocacy groups. We also heard from 27 witnesses at our public hearing in September 2024. Overall, the committee commends the New South Wales Government for seeking to put wellbeing at the centre of policymaking and government decision-making. Overseas politics shows that the pure hard economic numbers—GDP, GDP per capita, inflation rates, unemployment rates—do not necessarily reflect how people are feeling and faring. They do not necessarily reflect people's wellbeing and how they are going in their lives, sometimes with significant political consequences. The report supports the proposed framework as a first step to increasing consideration of people's wellbeing in New South Wales. However, the committee also found that there is scope for improvement and refinement of the framework as an ongoing process.

The committee supports a holistic approach to wellbeing that cuts through departmental silos. Achieving that requires robust collaboration across government agencies, local councils and community groups to deliver effective outcomes. In regard to other jurisdictions' approaches to wellbeing frameworks, stakeholders highlighted the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 as a best practice example. In other words, the Parliament and Government of Wales legislated its wellbeing framework and wellbeing targets. Under that legislation, Ministers in Wales are required to set concrete wellbeing targets that are reported on, and the holistic approach demands that Ministers and their departments work together to achieve those targets. As chair of the committee this strikes me as a fantastic approach whereby, through setting holistic targets, we require and drive collaboration between governmental silos for the benefit of the wellbeing of citizens.

We heard how the Welsh Act has become a source of national pride for the Welsh people. The committee recommends that the New South Wales Government considers the learnings from other jurisdictions, particularly the Welsh model. We also recommend that the Government consults with the people of New South Wales to establish a clear definition of wellbeing to reflect the aspirations and values of communities. We heard how in jurisdictions such as Canada the wellbeing policy was the product of a five-year process of community consultation and was really co-created with the community. It was not just top-down; it was also bottom-up. Through that process the framework and the policy won a great amount of community buy-in and support.

The proposed New South Wales framework sets out a series of 28 outcomes and over 100 indicators across eight key wellbeing themes. With regard to these outcomes and indicators, we note the importance of using lead, or headline, indicators that can be predictive, and which are in turn supported by lag indicators to show progress across different government portfolios. As part of the proposed framework's ongoing review and implementation, the Government should consider whether the current balance between lead and lag indicators is appropriate. It should also consider prioritising indicators and metrics. Some stakeholders advocated for a smaller number of holistic integrated outcomes and indicators. The New South Wales Government should consider refining the number of outcomes and indicators to better drive agency collaboration and to breakdown government silos, as I described happened in the Welsh context.

The committee also heard that quality data collection is crucial to the success of the proposed framework. The New South Wales Government should review and leverage existing datasets to avoid duplicate data collection and to address data gaps. We heard that the purpose of the framework should be to drive policy design and decision-making. The Government should ensure that the framework is embedded in budgetary and policy development processes. Local councils and community groups play a pivotal role in shaping and delivering

wellbeing policies. The New South Wales Government should consult with local councils and neighbourhood centres on wellbeing, adopting a place-based approach. Finally, the committee encourages the Government to maintain open and continuous engagement with the public so that the framework can adapt to the changing needs of New South Wales communities. [*Extension of time*]

If indeed the wellbeing framework can drive cross-departmental whole-of-government focus on a number of key areas that genuinely improve the wellbeing of residents of New South Wales, then wellbeing will be so much more than just a catchphrase or a motherhood notion: It will really be about good government. I thank my fellow committee members for their collaboration and assistance on this committee: the deputy chair, and member for Cessnock; the member for Newtown; the member for Wakehurst; the member for Lane Cove; and the member for Fairfield. I also thank everyone who participated in this inquiry and who contributed their valuable experience and perspectives. I thank the hardworking and dedicated secretariat, whose assistance has been invaluable in pulling the report together. I commend the report to the House.

Ms JENNY LEONG (Newtown) (13:08): I speak briefly on the Public Accounts Committee report entitled *A framework for performance reporting and driving wellbeing outcomes in NSW*. I echo the chair's acknowledgement and thanks to fellow committee members and NSW Treasury, which engaged in many discussions and briefings with members and the committee secretariat. I particularly put on record The Greens' appreciation for the New South Wales Labor Government moving towards a commitment to a wellbeing framework. I recognise that a wellbeing framework is not a new idea. As the chair pointed out, other jurisdictions have adopted this approach. My Greens colleague in the other place Abigail Boyd previously had carriage of the Fiscal Responsibility Amendment (Wellbeing Budget) Bill 2023.

I acknowledge that the Government is making a great move in a welcome direction. For members and people listening who are unaware of the context, the first objective of the Fiscal Responsibility Act as it stands is to maintain the triple-A credit rating of the State of New South Wales. However, one would assume the State could do better in the spending of public moneys than merely ensuring that we meet the objective of maintaining a triple-A credit rating; it should instead look at how it can serve the wellbeing of individuals and communities in our State. It is very welcome that the New South Wales Labor Government has moved forward on that, and it was wonderful to be part of it through the Public Accounts Committee.

I specifically highlight that the committee supported an absolutely holistic approach to wellbeing that transcended traditional departmental silos. It was clear from the consultations that it is very hard for the machinery of government—the public service, Ministers and their offices—to exist outside of those silos. Indeed, during the consultations, there were tables of people representing the economy, tables of people representing the community, and tables of people representing housing. In this wellbeing report, we want to see how those things can be integrated into a people-centred and community-centred approach that does not silo wellbeing indicators and measures but focuses on outcomes for people. I particularly highlight recommendation 2 that the New South Wales Government should ensure that the delivery of wellbeing is focused on people and community rather than service delivery. We absolutely do not want to see it as an excuse to ask people delivering services and programs to give more responses about how those are running; we want to look at real-world outcomes for people and communities.

I also point to recommendations 12 and 13, that the New South Wales Government should ensure that the NSW Performance and Wellbeing Framework is effectively embedded in budget and policy development processes, and that the New South Wales Parliament should be directly involved in the framework. It is critical that policy and budget development be integrated, and that the New South Wales Parliament has oversight of and involvement in developing a holistic wellbeing budget framework. I hope the Government's response is a commitment to further strengthening the inclusion of the wellbeing budget framework within all of the processes of the Parliament, and indeed in legislation. I look forward to the Public Accounts Committee having an ongoing role as we measure the wellbeing of people in New South Wales.

Dr DAVID SALIBA (Fairfield) (13:12): I speak to the Public Account Committee's inquiry and report entitled *A framework for performance reporting and driving wellbeing outcomes in NSW*. The report was quite extensive, as was the inquiry with respect to witnesses and their submissions. I thank them for their contributions. The committee looked at wellbeing frameworks and a proposed framework for New South Wales. It looked at the actual measurement of wellbeing, the ongoing consultation and iterative approach that is required in that regard, and setting targets and benchmarking to ensure that the framework is fit for purpose. The committee also looked at different themes, such as healthy; prosperous, skilled and connected; housed and secure; and community and sustainable. I will talk about those shortly, but first I thank all the contributors who enabled the inquiry. I firstly thank the chair, the member for Strathfield, and the deputy chair, the member for Cessnock. As I was coming to Parliament today, I noticed the member for Cessnock is boosting wellbeing outcomes on level 12 with chocolates, which are collecting for something. What was it for?

Dr Joe McGirr: For aerobics.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: Yes, I noticed that. Ideally, I would like to buy that chocolate, but I am trying to focus on my weight. But good on the member for Cessnock for that effort. I also thank the member for Lane Cove, the member for Newtown and the member for Wakehurst. I give a special mention to the committee staff for their help: Maddy Winkler, Ilana Chaffey, Alison Buskens, Leon Last, Rhea Maggs, Yann Pearson, Charlie King, Divya Bhandari. I also thank the witnesses. Stakeholders widely supported the framework's potential to enhance government accountability, improve transparency and achieve meaningful social outcomes. The committee supports that, but there is obviously room to grow in that regard.

The chair's foreword to the report highlighted a bunch of insights. The first was in terms of learning from best practice; we looked at the Welsh experience and the work they have done. The second was about the importance of defining wellbeing and articulating the end state. The third was about balancing lead and lag indicators, and the fourth insight related to data development. There is no point doing this without accurate, realistic and relevant data to ensure it is outcomes driven. The fifth was about embedding wellbeing in decision-making. It is one thing to say that we have wellbeing. It is another to ensure that it is embedded in government decision-making processes in order to help people.

The final point was about sustaining public consultation, with engagement with local governments and communities. There should be a three-layer approach where local, State and Federal governments all ensure they are synchronised, with wellbeing outcomes rather than economic outcomes as the cornerstone. Engagement should be ongoing rather than static so that we can improve continually. I commend the report and the people who worked on it. Wellbeing is critical. There is no point talking only about economic data indicators. We need to improve quality of life, and the report speaks to that. I commend the report to the House.

Report noted.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGE AND ETHICS

Reports

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Clayton Barr): The question is that the House take note of the report.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH (Sydney) (13:17): As Chair: I take note of the report entitled *Conduct of member for Kiama on 21 July 2024*. The committee thanks the Government and the Parliament for referring the inquiry to us. We thank the committee staff for their diligence in assisting us in the report. The report was unanimous and all committee members stand by it.

Report noted.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON ARTS AND MUSIC EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Reports

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Clayton Barr): The question is that the House take note of the report.

Ms JULIA FINN (Granville) (13:17): As Chair: I take note of the report entitled *Arts and music education and training in New South Wales*. The report highlights the importance of arts and music education and what we can do to improve the situation, which has eroded over a number of decades. Quality arts and music education provides opportunities for young people to explore their creativity, and also has important and helpful impacts on their cognitive and social development. More importantly, it helps shape our culture and fosters storytelling and a truly innovative, creative culture in New South Wales. Every child deserves the benefits of high-quality, rich and complex arts education, but the committee found that arts and music education is undervalued and has been for a very long time.

We also heard about a significant disparity in the delivery of creative education, particularly music, across school systems and between schools within the same system. We made a number of recommendations to support a fundamental shift to reprioritise arts and music in not only schools and the creative industries but also society as a whole. We found that there are a number of shortcomings in teacher training, leading to particular problems with primary school education. That is worse for music than it is for the other creative arts. Teachers play a vital role. They light the spark of creativity in students and instil a passion for arts and music. We certainly saw that at a number of the schools we visited, particularly Bulli and Bowral high schools. They have some really motivated and wonderful teachers and are getting fantastic results. There are other schools where we do not even know if music is being taught at all. The syllabus requires that all four aspects of creative education be taught, but it does not make specific recommendations about the number of hours required for each subject. It is essential,

particularly for music education, that lessons be sequential and ongoing. That is just not happening in many of our schools.

We recommended that the Government fast-track the provision of training material to facilitate the delivery of the new creative arts K–6 syllabus, consider the development of a music education plan and support initiatives to encourage students to enrol in stage 6 arts and music courses. We also made recommendations to address the acute skills shortage in the creative industries across New South Wales and strengthen formal tertiary education and training pathways for those who want to pursue their passion for arts and music. Across the State, there has been a decline in the availability of tertiary education pathways for both the arts and music. They need to be restored. We also noted the real importance of the regional conservatoriums and that we need an equivalent, such as a music hub, in Western Sydney to support skilled creative arts in that region.

The committee heard a lot about the curriculum changes that are happening at the moment. During the inquiry, the NSW Education Standards Authority [NESA] released the music and drama syllabus draft. I note that the Coalition members of the committee did not support our recommendations about the syllabus and thought we should up-end the entire curriculum review process, which I note the former Government initiated. The released draft is a consultation document. NESA was seeking feedback, and that feedback has been taken on board. There was enormous amount of feedback about the proposed music and drama syllabuses and NESA has decided to withdraw the proposal to not include external examinations of drama ensemble performances. As a committee, we strongly support performances being assessed externally. The best way to ascertain if students are meeting a certain level of skill in a performance subject is to watch a performance.

It is important that the Government conduct a statewide audit to identify areas where arts and music programs are not delivered. Anecdotally, we heard that there are some schools where certain aspects of the creative and performing arts [CAPA] syllabus are not being taught or are being taught very rarely. It is important that they are taught and that they are taught competently. The committee heard that some of the partnerships with external parties that deliver music programs, particularly in primary schools, are absolutely fantastic. They should be encouraged. They have played a really strong role during a time of decline in the skills of primary school teachers to teach CAPA subjects. They come from outside the school and provide students with excellent instruction and support to deliver music education. It is really important we support the arts and music from the earliest age through education.

Dr JOE McGIRR (Wagga Wagga) (13:24): As Deputy Chair of the Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education and Training in New South Wales, I make a brief contribution to debate on the report entitled *Arts and music education and training in New South Wales*. I begin by thanking the committee members and acknowledge in particular the work of the chair, the member for Granville. It was a really important committee. I congratulate the Government on setting up the inquiry. At the outset, I gained a lot from the inquiry personally. As the member for Granville said in her contribution, it is pretty clear that arts and music education has been undervalued for some time in our education system. Despite some examples of real excellence, sadly, it is perhaps more undervalued in the public system than outside the public system. This is a matter of deep regret because arts and music education are fundamental to the wellbeing of society. It is important we promote it for the social, emotional and mental wellbeing of students.

The committee received a lot of evidence about the importance of exposure to the arts and, in particular, music for the cognitive, social and emotional development of children. I find it deeply ironic that at a time when we are so focussed on STEM subjects and NAPLAN results, that focus has taken away opportunities for music and arts education. That in itself is not right, but the irony is that it has probably led to a decrease in the NAPLAN results. For all the focus on NAPLAN, have we improved the results? They are stubbornly resistant. I suspect it has something to do with the fact that we are not providing our children and students at all levels with the arts and music education that they require.

The recommendations of the committee are bold but important. I want to touch on an important subject for me, regional conservatoriums. The committee found that regional conservatoriums provide excellent music education and foster creativity and connectedness in regional communities in New South Wales. The committee recommended that the New South Wales Government increase funding to regional conservatoriums, review their key performance measures and, importantly, formalise and strengthen the partnership between the Department of Education and regional conservatoriums. This is a real opportunity for regional communities. The deep irony is that regional conservatoriums often feel that they are part of the Department of Education and are puzzled why the Department of Education shows no interest.

During the inquiry, it became clear that the Department of Education sees its role as simply administering a Treasury grant to regional conservatoriums and no more. That is a sad situation. We have a rich resource for music education and training in our regions that brings so much to students and communities, yet the Department of Education essentially does not really regard them as part of its resources. It is fundamentally important that the

Government embraces regional conservatoriums and uses the opportunity to strengthen what they can bring to regional communities. In the long run, that will be better for students and families.

On a final note, I thank the committee members and the secretariat. I acknowledge the member for Tamworth. During one of our visits, the member for Tamworth had to step in. We went to a school to visit a music class but, unfortunately, the teacher was not able to be there that day. The member for Tamworth used his musical skills on the guitar to help with that class. I am not sure if that has ever happened during a committee site visit. I take my hat off to the member for Tamworth for that marvellous effort and congratulate the chair on encouraging him to get involved.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth) (13:28): I contribute to debate on the report of the Joint Select Committee on Arts and Music Education in New South Wales, and I echo the sentiments of the member for Wagga Wagga in congratulating the chair and thanking her for her excellent work. The member for Wagga Wagga touched on regional conservatoriums. The committee heard that regional conservatoriums provide an essential service in supporting high-quality music education in regional, rural and remote communities, but a lot more needs to be done. The committee heard that regional conservatoriums often light the spark for students' interest in music and foster their passion for further study. The member for Wagga Wagga elaborately illuminated the concerns about regional conservatoriums.

While the Coalition largely supports the committee's final report, it notes important departures from the committee's sentiments regarding the draft stage 6 music and drama syllabuses proposed by the NSW Education Standards Authority, expressed in chapter 5. The Coalition strongly affirms report findings 6 and 7 that the draft stage 6 drama and music syllabuses do not meet community expectations and need extensive revision. However, it believes that the committee's comments and recommendations do not go far enough to address those findings.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Clayton Barr): It being 1.30 p.m., debate is interrupted. I set down resumption of the debate as an order of the day for a later time.

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL MATTERS

Membership

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Clayton Barr): I report receipt of a message from the Legislative Council informing the Legislative Assembly that it has this day agreed to the following resolution:

- (1) That Mrs Overall be appointed as a member of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Mr Faraway.
- (2) That a message be forwarded to the Legislative Assembly conveying the terms of the resolution agreed to by the House.

I shall now leave the chair. The House will resume at 2.30 p.m.

Bills

ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT AMENDMENT BILL 2025

First Reading

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Paul Scully, read a first time and printed.

Second Reading Speech

Mr PAUL SCULLY (Wollongong—Minister for Planning and Public Spaces) (14:31): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act Amendment Bill 2025, which makes necessary amendments to further streamline the planning system, support the delivery of housing and provide certainty to the construction industry, local communities and other stakeholders. The housing challenge in New South Wales demands action and the Minns Labor Government has already introduced a range of measures to address the challenge before us all. The challenge before us has no magic solution. It is complex. It requires innovative thinking, continual examination of assessment processes with fresh eyes, and a strong commitment to cutting through the unnecessary red tape that has too often slowed progress.

Families are struggling to find affordable homes. Young people are being priced out of the housing market and renters are facing unprecedented pressures. Over the past 12 years the New South Wales planning system has been a bottleneck, delaying critical housing supply and frustrating those who seek to invest, build and live within the communities they choose. The objective of the Minns Labor Government is that the legacy left by the previous Government must change. Uncertainty in the planning system has impacted on the delivery of new homes and the simple modification of a development consent. It has held back progress at a time when we clearly need efficient,

effective and streamlined planning processes. The bill continues the Government's pragmatic and functional reforms of the planning system, specifically reforms to development assessment and determination.

The bill responds to decisions from three separate challenges in the New South Wales courts to restore certainty in planning assessment decisions. Unfortunately, in two of those cases, the decisions of the Court of Appeal and the Land and Environment Court have caused considerable uncertainty. In the third case, the decision established a positive planning outcome, but the pathway used to reach that conclusion is not without doubt. That pathway is clarified in the bill. The bill proposes to respond to those recent court findings by amending sections 4.55 and 4.56 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act—the EP&A Act—to clarify the powers of a consent authority to modify a development consent. It amends schedule 1 to the EP&A Act to provide certainty around how submissions are counted. It amends section 4.24 of the EP&A Act to provide the ability for a consent authority to assess and determine a subsequent development application, subject to conditions, following the determination of a concept development application, despite any inconsistency between the concept development application and the subsequent development application.

The bill also aims to further support housing delivery and streamline the planning system by removing the statutory requirement for the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces to obtain and publish advice from the Independent Planning Commission before declaring certain types of residential development to be State significant development [SSD] in accordance with the powers vested in the Minister under section 4.36 (3) of the EP&A Act. It will implement less formal meeting arrangements for the Housing Delivery Authority, given its advisory role, to deliver high-quality housing advice to government more quickly. It will reduce the minimum exhibition period for most residential SSD applications from 28 days to 14 days for a more efficient assessment and determination process and to match the exhibition requirements had the same application been submitted to a local council.

The bill modernises requirements for affordable housing contributions to better align with current needs and expectations across New South Wales. It removes outdated references to the "Six Cities Region" under division 3.1, thereby establishing a more cohesive strategic planning framework for the State. Those measures reflect the Government's commitment to cutting red tape, improving the efficiency of our planning system and continuing to tackle the housing challenge. I will now turn to each of the proposed amendments, explain why they are essential and outline how they will be implemented in practice.

I refer first to the amendment regarding the modification of development consents. This amendment responds to part of the New South Wales Court of Appeal's decision in *Ku-Ring-Gai Council v Buyozo Pty Ltd* [2021] NSWCA 177, or the Buyozo decision. The court's decision in Buyozo changed the established understanding of the powers of a consent authority to modify a development consent under sections 4.55 (1A), 4.55 (2) and 4.56 (1) of the EP&A Act. This case found that a modification application must seek to effect some change to the development. This limits the ability of an applicant to seek a modification of a condition of their development consent where the proposed modification of that condition would not result in a change to the development that is the subject of the original consent.

The Buyozo decision applies to all part 4 developments, including both SSD projects and local developments. Historically, applicants have sought different modifications, some of which did not necessarily involve a change to the development that was the subject of the original development consent—for example, modifying a condition of development consent relating to the proposed timing, staging or sequencing of the development. However, since the decision in Buyozo, the power of consent authorities to assess and determine a modification application that seeks approval to modify a condition of development consent only has become uncertain. That has led to a proliferation of applicants "bundling" other proposed changes to a consent to be certain that the consent authority has the power to modify conditions under sections 4.55 (1A), 4.55 (2) and 4.56 (1) of the EP&A Act.

In some cases, that has resulted in applicants seeking very minor and otherwise unnecessary changes—for example, minor landscaping amendments—which costs time and means that planning resources are allocated where there may not be spare capacity. Industry and government agency proponents have raised concerns about the uncertainty created by the Buyozo decision and asked the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure [DPHI] to amend the EP&A Act in response. The Urban Development Institute of Australia wrote to DPHI as far back as January 2022—under the previous Government—to identify this issue. The bill seeks to amend sections 4.55 and 4.56 of the EP&A Act to clarify that a consent authority is not prevented from modifying a development consent merely because the modification sought is to a condition of development consent that, if modified, would not result in a change to the development that is the subject of the original development consent. This will provide greater clarity and certainty for both applicants and all consent authorities.

I now move to the amendments regarding how submissions are counted. Schedule 1 to the EP&A Act sets out the minimum requirements for public exhibition and community consultation of plans, applications or other

matters. Section 15 of that schedule states that submissions may be made during the exhibition period but does not state that they can only be made within the exhibition period. The bill amends schedule 1, division 3, clause 15 of the EP&A Act to require submissions, in response to a publicly exhibited development application or plan, be made during the exhibition period. This amendment will strengthen the department's established policy for counting and considering submissions, particularly for State significant development applications. It will provide greater clarity for all consent authorities, communities, State agencies and the development industry by making it clear that only submissions received during an exhibition period can be counted when identifying a consent authority.

It also provides greater certainty for applicants and State agencies on the consent authority for State significant development applications. Firstly, the planning system has a longstanding, established framework for deciding the consent authority for State significant development applications. It makes sure that the most appropriate authority considers and determines those applications. For example, the Independent Planning Commission will determine most State significant development applications if the relevant council or councils object to the application, if there are at least 50 submissions other than from a council objecting to the development application, or if there is a political donation or donations disclosure made by the applicant. Where the Independent Planning Commission is not the consent authority, I, in my capacity as the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, or my delegate, will usually be the consent authority.

It is essential that the rules are clear around establishing consent authority for State significant development applications. The amendment makes clear that only submissions lodged within the public exhibition period will be counted when determining the consent authority. This amendment responds directly to the decision of the court in *Filetron Pty Ltd v Innovate Partners Pty Ltd af Banton Family Trust 2 and Goulburn Mulwaree Council* [2024] NSWCA41. That decision has cast uncertainty over whether a late submission, by way of objection, should be counted for the purpose of determining the consent authority for a particular development application.

It is worth noting that incorrect counting of a late submission may lead to the wrong consent authority being appointed. Without an amendment to the EP&A Act to clearly define when a submission should be counted, it is possible that inadvertent errors will be made, and further court challenges will follow—further adding uncertainty and potential delays to the delivery of housing projects. However, I emphasise the point that this amendment will not prohibit the consent authority from considering any issues raised in late submissions during the assessment of the project, as currently takes place.

I refer now to a court decision that has had a positive impact on the planning system, and the processes we should be adopting as a result. A concept development application allows approval for the overall development concept of a site, such as building envelopes and height limits. However, a subsequent development application must still be submitted, assessed and approved by the relevant consent authority before construction works can commence. The subsequent development application must align with the approved concept development application for consistency.

The Land and Environment Court decision in *Castle Hill Panorama Pty Ltd v The Hills Shire Council* [2023] NSWLEC 24 clarified how consent authorities can address inconsistencies between concept approvals and subsequent development applications. In this case the Land and Environment Court confirmed that a consent authority could approve a subsequent development application even if it departs from the original concept approval by using the mechanism established in section 4.17 (1) (b) and (5) of the EP&A Act. The decision resulted in a positive planning outcome enabling an increase in housing supply.

The Land and Environment Court came to the decision that consent authorities could impose a condition requiring the applicant to either modify or surrender the original concept approval as part of granting development consent for the subsequent development application. This amendment removes potential barriers to sensible planning outcomes. It is intended to support housing delivery by improving the ability of a consent authority to approve a development application that seeks to use housing bonuses that are inconsistent with approval for a concept development application, such as additional height or floorspace, because they may not have been available when the consent development application was originally approved.

The bill builds on the Castle Hill decision by providing certainty and clarity in the planning process. It confirms that consent authorities have the power under section 4.17 (1) (b) and (5) of the EP&A Act to impose conditions requiring the modification or surrender of a concept approval when assessing a subsequent development application. This will make sure that there are no jurisdictional barriers to achieving flexibility in planning decisions while also maintaining a framework that supports consistent and sustainable development outcomes. These changes strike a balance between delivering positive planning outcomes and maintaining the integrity of the concept approval process.

I now inform the House of other elements of the bill that will help speed up the much-needed delivery of new homes in this State. As members will be aware, in November 2024 the Government took a significant step towards boosting housing supply in New South Wales by establishing the Housing Delivery Authority [HDA]. The Housing Delivery Authority was created with a clear purpose: to streamline the delivery of residential accommodation using the State significant development planning pathway. It should also be noted that this is an optional planning pathway for proponents of projects. A main function of the delivery authority is to review expressions of interest for residential accommodation. These reviews are conducted against a set of well-defined criteria, making sure that only projects with significant potential for impact and delivery are recommended for further consideration. Based on its assessments, the HDA provides expert advice to me, in my capacity as the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, on whether specific developments should be declared as State significant development, enabling them to benefit from a streamlined assessment process.

Under the current provisions of section 4.36 (3) of the EP&A Act, I am required to seek and publish advice from the Independent Planning Commission [IPC] before declaring a development as a State significant development. The IPC plays a vital role in providing oversight for a range of projects. However, this additional advisory step for residential State significant development is an unnecessary duplication, slowing down the determination process for housing projects that are urgently needed. The bill seeks to address this issue by removing the statutory requirement to obtain advice from the IPC before deciding whether certain residential developments should be declared State significant developments under section 4.36 (3) of the EP&A Act. Instead, the Housing Delivery Authority will provide the advisory role for residential projects as part of its agreed functions.

The IPC will continue to provide advice to the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces for all other types of developments that are proposed to be declared State significant developments under section 4.36 (3) of the EP&A Act. As the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces, I also retain the option and capacity to refer matters to the IPC for consideration should the circumstances warrant it. By eliminating the duplication of advisory functions, the proposed reforms will streamline the decision-making process, reduce red tape and accelerate the delivery of housing while also maintaining the integrity of the planning system.

The bill also amends the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2021 to provide less formal meeting arrangements for the Housing Delivery Authority. This is important for the following reasons. The HDA will primarily perform an advisory role, and the public hearing style forums typically used for planning functions, such as determining development applications or hearing evidence, are less relevant. It is anticipated that the HDA will meet monthly, and at short notice when required. This more agile approach will reduce lead times and associated administration to deliver high-quality advice to government more quickly. The department will publish a record of each Housing Delivery Authority meeting, including high-level information about the expressions of interest submission, the HDA recommendations, advice and reasons. I assure the House that the consultation processes for subsequent development stages will continue to be undertaken to ensure that opportunities for important community input are maintained.

The bill will introduce an important amendment to reduce the mandatory minimum exhibition period for certain residential State significant development applications from 28 days to 14 days. This change is designed to streamline the approval process for critical housing projects while maintaining opportunities for public consultation. The proposed reduction in exhibition time will apply to the following State significant development applications: development applications declared State significant by the Minister under section 4.36 (3) of the EP&A Act that include residential accommodation; and housing developments listed under schedule 1 to the State Environmental Planning Policy (Planning Systems) 2021, such as housing developments carried out by certain public authorities, infill affordable housing projects, build-to-rent housing projects and seniors housing projects.

Developments within the transport oriented development [TOD] precincts listed under schedule 2, clause 19 to the State Environmental Planning Policy (Planning Systems) will also benefit from the reduced 14-day exhibition period, provided they include residential accommodation. While this amendment reduces the statutory minimum exhibition period, it does not limit a longer exhibition period being imposed on a case-by-case basis, where appropriate. The proposed amendments will improve consistency between the exhibition requirements for State significant developments and those of local development applications assessed by councils, which also have a minimum exhibition period of 14 days. It strikes a balance between speeding up the delivery of critical housing projects and making sure that the community has sufficient opportunity to provide input on proposals.

By streamlining this aspect of the planning process, the Government aims to reduce delays and facilitate faster delivery of housing projects. Affordable rental housing is vital for individuals and families with low or moderate incomes and is a key provision of this bill. It provides a critical safety net for those who are unable to afford housing in the private market, which has become increasingly inaccessible for many due to the ongoing

housing challenge. As a result, demand for affordable housing has surged, highlighting the need for targeted measures to address this issue. The delivery of affordable housing is a key objective of the EP&A Act.

Under new section 7.32, a financial contribution for affordable housing can be imposed if a State environmental planning policy identifies a need for affordable housing in a specific area and the condition is authorised by a local environmental plan through an affordable housing contributions plan. The EP&A Act also makes sure that financial contributions collected for affordable housing are reinvested within the local government area where they were collected or in an adjacent area. The bill will streamline the development application process for councils by clarifying when a condition requiring an affordable housing contribution can be imposed on a development consent. Given the maturity of community housing providers and the need for affordable housing, this is not just an overly complex process but also one that could lead to geographical gaps in the availability of affordable housing. This reform will enhance the efficiency and certainty of processes related to the assessment of development applications involving affordable housing contributions, thereby enabling the New South Wales Government to respond more effectively to the housing crisis.

The bill also aims to modernise the State-led rezoning process by allowing all environmental planning instruments, not just local environmental plans, to impose affordable housing contributions as a condition of development consent. This change will enable both a local environmental plan and a State environmental planning policy to implement affordable housing contribution schemes and collect contributions directly, making the framework more flexible and effective. This amendment will also apply retrospectively, from 1 March 2018, resolving any uncertainties about existing provisions within the State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing) 2021 that address the loss of low-cost rental housing. I will conclude shortly but, before I do, I inform the House of the last amendment proposed in the bill. The bill removes legacy references to the Six Cities Region, paving the way for the creation of a new strategic plan for Greater Sydney.

Following the repeal of the Greater Cities Commission Act 2022 last year, strategic planning powers for the Greater Sydney, lower Hunter, Central Coast and Illawarra-Shoalhaven regions were transferred to the Minister for Planning and Public Spaces and the planning secretary in 2024. Under the proposed changes, all regional boundaries, including Greater Sydney, will now be declared by ministerial order. The delayed commencement of these amendments will provide an opportunity for consultation to make sure that the regional boundaries are considered. Until the new regional plans are finalised, existing regional strategic plans and district strategic plans will remain in operation, providing continuity. These changes represent an essential tidy-up of the EP&A Act, resulting in consistent and flexible processes for boundary declarations and strategic planning requirements across the State, including the declaration of housing targets and how they are to be addressed in regional strategic plans.

It also eliminates the requirement for the Secretary of the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure to advise a local council within the Six Cities Region about the consistency of a local strategic planning statement with any applicable strategic plan. These changes will pave the way for a more modern and cohesive strategic planning framework that reflects what we need now and in the future. This bill is not the end of the planning reform journey started by the Minns Labor Government; it is a significant milestone on the path towards a better, more effective planning system and a better future for New South Wales. It is a clear statement of our values, as a government, of fairness, opportunity and progress. It is about delivering more quality and well-located houses, closer to jobs and near public infrastructure investments, particularly for young people, families and key local workers so they can live within the communities they choose. It is a recognition that the challenges New South Wales faces demand bold solutions and that we cannot afford to keep kicking the can down the road any more, as happened under the previous Government.

The reforms proposed in this bill will support the delivery of more homes faster and more efficiently through the planning system. It proposes to cut red tape further, reducing delays in assessment created by court decisions and removing duplication of resources, time and effort. It will provide greater clarity and more certainty for applicants and all consent authorities and restore confidence that planning decisions are being made efficiently. This bill will make our planning system more transparent, more flexible and more focused on the outcomes that we all want to see—the delivery of more homes and more jobs. It will make sure that New South Wales remains a place where everyone can live, work and thrive in the communities they choose, in a place they can call home. I commend this bill to the House and ask that all parties and Independent members support the reforms to the planning assessment system, as proposed, when we resume debate on the bill during the March sittings.

Debate adjourned.

CRIMES AMENDMENT (INCITING RACIAL HATRED) BILL 2025**Second Reading Debate****Debate resumed from an earlier hour.**

Dr MICHAEL HOLLAND (Bega) (14:56): I thank the House for the opportunity to complete my interrupted contribution to debate on the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025, and I will repeat my previous sentence for continuity's sake. Our community has seen unprecedented episodes of hate speech, acts of antisemitic graffiti, arson and other property damage. As the Attorney General has stated, those malicious events do not arise spontaneously; they begin with hateful, racist language that incites that action, and it is the bill's intention to eliminate that. The New South Wales Government has consulted with legal, law enforcement as well as faith, Indigenous and anti-discrimination agencies in developing this bill.

I turn to the content of the bill. The bill introduces new division 8A into part 3A of the Crimes Act. New section 93ZAA will provide that a person who, by a public act, intentionally incites hatred towards another person or a group of persons on the ground of race commits an offence. There will be an exemption that applies to directly quoting religious texts, to avoid the unintended criminalisation of the reading out of parts of religious texts for the purpose of religious teaching. New section 93ZAB will provide for a review of the new division after the offence has been in operation for a period of 12 months.

The proposed offence at new section 93ZAA will contain the following elements: It must be a public act; the public act must incite hatred; the incitement to hatred must be intentional; the intentional incitement to hatred must be on the basis of race; and the public act that intentionally incites hatred on the basis of race would cause a reasonable person who was the target of the incitement of hatred, or a reasonable person who was a member of a group of persons that was the target of the incitement of hatred, to fear harassment, intimidation or violence, or fear for the reasonable person's safety. It will be irrelevant whether the alleged offender's assumptions or beliefs about the race of another person or a member of a group of persons were correct or incorrect at the time that the offence is alleged to have been committed, and it will be irrelevant whether hatred was actually incited in another individual.

There will be a statutory exemption with respect to directly quoting religious texts for the purpose of religious teaching, as was referred to earlier. A prosecution will only be able to be commenced by the Director of Public Prosecutions or the NSW Police Force. Finally, the definitions of both "public act" and "race" are taken from the existing definitions in section 93Z of the Crimes Act. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ALEX GREENWICH (Sydney) (14:59): Hate has consequences. A few words can change a person's life, sense of safety and wellbeing. Like many LGBTQ people, I know this firsthand. The Jewish community is facing an unprecedented onslaught of targeted and aggressive hate speech. This Parliament must act, and it must not leave anyone behind. I have negotiated with the Government a process to review current and further protections and to make further recommendations for action. This is a complex area of law. Following the six-month review announced by the Government, it is my hope that we cover the field to protect other vulnerable groups, including the LGBTQ community, people with a disability and religious people. I seek leave to table a letter from the Attorney General outlining the review for the information of members.

Leave granted.**Document tabled.**

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: Everyone deserves to live free from hatred, harassment, intimidation and threats. The Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025 aims to deal with antisemitic hate speech, which has reached a new level of ferocity and caused many Jewish people to fear for their safety. The situation has reached a crisis point. Reports of threatening graffiti and arson attacks have become common. We need to take the heat down. The bill will create an offence for a public act that intentionally incites hatred on the grounds of race where that act would cause a reasonable person of that race to fear harassment, intimidation, violence or for their safety.

While criminal offences are not a silver bullet that will put an end to antisemitism, the bill ensures that our laws recognise the impact that inciting hatred has on Jewish people and other victims of racially motivated hate while providing them with an opportunity for recourse. Inciting hatred against a group is dangerous. When public hatred is tolerated, it can justify poor treatment and violence. Yesterday the member for Heffron talked about how negative stereotypes and a growing culture of blame and hatred led to the horrors of the Holocaust. Creating new offences against the most insidious forms of public hate will help slow its spread and provide an important intervention before that hatred leads to worse outcomes.

Australia, and much of the world, is seeing a disturbing rise in dehumanising contempt for minority groups fuelled by Neo-Nazism, white supremacy, the manosphere and fascist ideology. People are being threatened for who they are, where they are from, what religion they practise, how they identify or who they love. We cannot ignore these trends or exclude any form of prejudicial hatred, because they all pose a risk to individual safety and to our harmonious multicultural society. Threats and hate speech against LGBTQ communities are increasing again. The Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ hate crimes found that widespread stigma and discrimination led to violence, murder, indifference and the denial of justice. It showed that we need to act when a group is being targeted.

While inclusion and equality have come a long way, the community is worried about the recent rise in homophobia and transphobia. Trans and gender-diverse people are particularly under threat, especially trans athletes and their allies and healthcare providers. As one of very few gay politicians, I know firsthand that extreme and threatening language is commonly being used against my community. Misogyny, gender-based violence and technologically facilitated gender-based violence such as online hate speech, online sexism, online sexual harassment and digital misogyny are also spreading and making Australia less safe for women and girls. A dramatic rise in Islamophobia is seeing violent attacks on Muslim women, hateful graffiti and online attacks. People with a disability are experiencing more attacks and are especially vulnerable to intersectional discrimination and hate.

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability recommended that vilification and hate laws provide protections on the grounds of disability. All vulnerable communities need to feel safe and protected from threats that incite hatred and instil fear. The perpetrators are the same, and there should be no loophole for them to focus on one group over another. I welcome the Government's announcement of an independent review into hate crimes to look at existing offences and limitations for all minority groups under threat, including the LGBTQ community, women, people with a disability and people of faith. The review must lead to more inclusive protections. We need more data on hate crimes to understand the extent of threats in the community and emerging trends.

I understand that work is being done on a national racial hate crimes register. I ask the Government to work to get the register broadened to include other hate crimes. I am seeking this commitment in the Attorney General's speech in reply. The LGBTQIA+ Consultative Committee is advising the Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ hate crimes on the police response, and I have asked the Government to empower it with considering ways to achieve better reporting of hate crimes within the LGBTQIA+ community. Concerns have been raised that the defence for referencing a religious text in the bill is broad and could be open to misuse or used to justify hate speech. Vague references to religious texts are often used to justify hatred for and violence against homosexual, bisexual and transgender people. It could be used to justify racial hate.

I hope that the review looks at appropriate defences that do not provide loopholes. I come to this debate as someone with lived experience of being a target of hate. In this year alone, two people have been arrested and charged for making threats against me. A third person is actually facing court today. The police have sought a number of apprehended violence orders on my behalf. The past two years have been extremely tough on me, on my staff and on my husband and family. I do not want the Jewish community to be targeted with hate. I do not want Muslim people, my community or people with disability to be targeted with hate. This bill is a start, but we have more work to do with our laws, in our Parliament and in our communities.

Mr EDMOND ATALLA (Mount Druitt) (15:07): I speak in support of the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025. This legislation represents an immediate and necessary response to the deeply troubling rise in antisemitic conduct in our State. This bill stands as a strong statement that we, as a Parliament, will not tolerate hatred in any form. It demonstrates our Government's commitment to ensuring that every community in New South Wales, including our strong and vibrant Jewish community, can live in safety and free from fear. Recent incidents of antisemitic graffiti, property damage and even the setting alight of vehicles have left many members of our community feeling threatened and vulnerable. These acts are not merely expressions of ignorance or prejudice; they are deliberate attempts to create division and incite further hostility.

As lawmakers, we risk allowing such hatred to grow and escalate if we fail to respond adequately. The bill introduces a targeted offence to the Crimes Act 1900, which makes it a crime to intentionally, through a public act, incite hatred against a person or group based on race. The key elements of this offence ensure that it applies strictly to acts that are intentional and public, and that incite hatred based on race. It ensures that the law is precise, effective and does not inadvertently criminalise lawful expressions of opinion. This bill is not just about punishing those who spread hatred. It is about protecting our communities, ensuring public safety and sending a clear message that racial vilification and incitement to hatred will not be tolerated in New South Wales.

Under the new offence, individuals who intentionally incite racial hatred through public acts face a maximum penalty of two years imprisonment or a fine of \$11,000. Corporations found guilty of the offence will

face a fine of up to \$55,000. Those penalties reflect the seriousness of the crime and the profound impact that hate speech can have on individuals and society. This legislation acknowledges that hate speech is not simply offensive; it is dangerous. History has shown us time and again that unchecked hate speech can lead to violence and persecution. We have a duty to ensure that such rhetoric does not go unchallenged, does not become normalised and does not fuel further acts of discrimination or aggression.

The bill also includes vital safeguards to ensure that it is applied fairly. For example, a statutory exemption ensures that directly quoting religious texts for the purpose of religious teaching will not be criminalised. Freedom of religion and freedom of expression remain fundamental principles in our society, and the exemption strikes the necessary balance between protecting those freedoms and ensuring that they are not exploited as a shield for hate speech. Furthermore, a prosecution under the offence can only be initiated by the New South Wales police or the Director of Public Prosecutions. That measure ensures that only serious cases are brought forward, preventing frivolous or vexatious claims from undermining the integrity of the law.

Some may ask why the offence is limited to racial hatred and does not extend to other forms of vilification, such as those based on religion, sexual orientation or gender identity. The Government acknowledges that vilification of all kinds is harmful and unacceptable. However, we must act now to address the immediate and pressing issue of racial hate speech, particularly the deeply concerning rise in antisemitic behaviour in recent months. The bill is not the end of our efforts to combat hate speech; it is just the beginning. The Government has committed to a broader review of criminal law protections against hatred, ensuring that all vulnerable communities receive the protections they deserve. That review will consider the complex issues surrounding the criminalisation of other forms of hate speech and ensure that future reforms are well considered and effective. Additionally, the bill includes a statutory review provision, meaning that the operation of the new offence will be formally assessed after 12 months. That will allow Parliament to consider whether further refinements or expansions of the law are necessary to ensure its effectiveness in protecting our communities.

It is important to remember that this legislation is not about limiting freedom of speech; it is about drawing a clear line between free expression and speech that incites hatred and violence. Our democracy depends on robust debate and the exchange of ideas, but it also depends on mutual respect and the protection of those who are vulnerable to discrimination and harm. No-one in New South Wales should fear for their safety because of their race or ethnic background. No-one should feel targeted, intimidated or excluded from their own community. The bill ensures that those who seek to spread racial hatred will be held accountable and sends a strong message that the Government will always stand up against racism and antisemitism in all its forms. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) (15:13): I contribute to debate on the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025, which I support. What an ugly place we find ourselves in—not physically, but rather in that space in our society where hatred grows against those who are different to us. I know that every member of this House is feeling the weight, and sharing the burden, that many in our communities are suffering because they do not know where they will next experience hatred aimed at them, people they love or, indeed, people they may not even know but for whose welfare they are concerned, as human beings and members of their community. We feel for them. It simply should not happen in a civil society.

Like others, I express my sympathy and support for our State's Jewish community. The racially motivated attacks aimed at them are abhorrent and cannot be tolerated. At the same time, I am concerned for other racial and faith groups targeted by hateful ignorance. With the terrible rise in this type of hate, particularly evident in the antisemitic hate speech too frequently occurring, the Government must obviously take swift action. If that action is not fully supported, then the resolve of this Parliament will be questioned and, indeed, diminished.

I take a moment to reflect on the extraordinary contribution of the member for Heffron. I think most members have heard the speech or heard of it. I have been in this place for a long time, Madam Deputy Speaker, as have you. We have heard lots of speeches on significant matters. It is rare for a member to be able to bring into this place something not just of their lived experience but that is deeply embedded in their family. I know that is not the preferred way for the member for Heffron. He looks at these matters in a very objective way. It was extraordinary for him to be motivated to bring forward his story. It was a privilege to be in the Chamber and listen to it. I think that would be the position of most members who heard it. I thank the member for Heffron for his extraordinary contribution to debate, not on this bill in particular but on these bills generally.

I understand members' concerns with the haste with which this bill is going through the Parliament—those raised by the Opposition and by the Manager of Opposition Business, and shadow Attorney General—but I believe that the abbreviated passage of the bill reflects the Government's best intentions to address these appalling attacks in a timely manner. Yet it must be acknowledged that laws enacted quickly and in response to emergencies have, at times, had undesired and unforeseen consequences. An example was mandatory minimum sentencing, which I spoke strongly against in this place. The relevant cognate bills, which included lockout laws

in Sydney, were debated and passed with extraordinary haste in this House in the early days of the relatively new Coalition Government in 2014. It is therefore vital that laws passed urgently have robust review mechanisms to determine whether their application is, in fact, achieving the desired objective. Scrutiny is particularly important in this case, where the bill forms part of a reform package with constitutional, criminal law and human rights implications.

The wording of the bill may be simple on its face, but the underlying concepts are certainly complex. Statutory review of the bill's provisions 12 months after its commencement will give Parliament the opportunity to reflect on whether the offence is necessary and proportionate to achieve its intended purpose of stopping public incitement of racial hatred. That review, together with the general review of hate speech laws announced by the Attorney General, will help to ensure that criminal offences for inciting hatred are fit for purpose and that they properly respond to the evolving social and political landscape in Australia and abroad. I commend the Attorney General and the Government for taking action quickly, even in light of my earlier cautionary words. Legislation is rarely perfect, and hurried legislation is even more prone to fault. However, as I said, the bill is relatively simple, dealing with a complex and urgent matter. For that reason, I give it my support.

Mr GREG WARREN (Campbelltown) (15:19): I find myself in the unfortunate yet necessary position of having to speak in debate on the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025, which is a disappointing reflection of behaviour we have seen in and around our communities related to the incitement of racial hatred. I think back to my inaugural speech, after I was privileged to be elected to this place. I do not know where I plucked it from, but I remember making a commitment to the people of Campbelltown and, by extension, to the people of New South Wales, that I would represent them without fear or favour, and without prejudice. I am very fortunate to represent a diverse community. My electorate extends to the Cowpastures and has a multicultural community made up people of many faiths, including Catholics, Anglicans and those of Islamic faith. I enjoy a good relationship with them all because I have the privilege of serving them.

When I see on television acts that are a stain on our communities, it makes me sad. It makes me feel sick. We are better than that. Never before have I seen some of the horrific and horrible things that are taking place now. These are not just acts by a particular individual. They are premeditated actions that are motivated by hate. In this place, we know that love beats hate every time. I will choose to love and live harmoniously before I will ever engage with people who do things that are motivated by hate. Due to this piece of legislation, people who incite hate or use hate speech will be alleged criminals and find themselves subject to the law. That is a good thing. I draw attention to the contribution of the member for Sydney. I have always admired the member for Sydney. He is a man of conviction who never walks away from his own values and principles, and he makes those representations on behalf of his community. From our private conversations since I entered Parliament, I know about some of the challenges he has had to confront over the years. I think that is a representation of what other colleagues in this place have experienced.

I saw a bewildering instance on television of a service station in Campbelltown that was graffitied. The act was totally unnecessary and absolutely motivated by a hate that I simply do not understand. I say to people who continue to incite hatred that such acts are no means to an end. They only create disharmony, devalue our society, and are inconsistent with the wonderful principles that we all embrace as Australians. We have always been a fair, equal and accepting community. Australia, New South Wales and indeed Campbelltown have displayed that over many generations. We have long welcomed people into our communities. I am sure my colleagues agree that one of our greatest joys as members is going to citizenship ceremonies and seeing the new Australians who have chosen Australia or, in my case, Campbelltown as their home. It is one of their happiest days, and seeing the look of pride on their faces really warms my heart. Those occasions represent the good nature of Australia.

Let us be clear that the overwhelming majority of people do not engage in these acts. We are privileged to represent accepting, good, harmonious communities where 99.9 per cent of people would never harm anyone else. They would rather do what Australians do best, and that is help out each other in times of need. It is important that we reflect on that as this legislation comes before the House. Yes, it is essential but it is not a holistic reflection of the wonderful Australian values and principles that we all value so dearly. The bill is part of a suite of reforms that the Government is progressing to address racially motivated hate speech and antisemitic conduct that has been prevalent in the community.

Racially motivated violence begins with hateful, racist language that may inspire an individual to commit a violent act. Racially motivated hate speech, and the violence it inspires, threatens the very fabric and the social cohesion of each of our communities. That is why I commend the Attorney General and the Premier for a robust criminal law response that is needed to enable police to prosecute people on behalf of the community who are charged with racially motivated hate speech, in addition to the existing conciliation and complaints mechanisms for racial vilification under the civil law.

Specifically, the new offence contained in the bill prohibits a person, by a public act, from intentionally inciting hatred towards another person or a group of persons on the ground of race. The definition of "race" is taken from the existing definition in section 93Z of the Crimes Act 1900 to include colour, nationality, descent and ethnic, ethno-religious or national origin. The offence has been drafted to include only race in direct response to the current issues in New South Wales. It aims to prevent hate-based conduct before it escalates into violence. The Government acknowledges that hate speech based on other attributes occurs and condemns it. As the member for Mount Druitt stated, this is not the end. The Government will take any and every step necessary to improve laws so that communities can be kept safe.

Generations of people have served and protected our community since before Federation. Those people who served domestically or abroad did so with the intention of protecting and building a harmonious society. That is something that we nurture as Australians, and nothing will deter us from protecting it. These actions by individuals will soon be a crime—and so they should be. They will not distract us good living people from getting on with our lives and doing what we do best: caring for and nurturing each other. I thank the House.

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY (Albury) (15:29): I make a short contribution to debate on the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025. The first thought that comes to my mind is very much around the context in which we engage in debate on this bill. In that sense, first and foremost is the great wrong of antisemitism that we face in our community at the moment. Just last week, on the first parliamentary sitting day, I gave notice of a motion—and I reiterate what I said then—calling on the House to highlight that antisemitism has absolutely no place in our community; to acknowledge that, if left unchecked, such prejudice and division can escalate to harmful discrimination and violence against our Jewish community; and to recognise the importance of ongoing education and leadership about diversity to tackle that hatred and bigotry. Adding to that, I follow other speakers by saying that not just antisemitic hatred and bigotry but all hatred and bigotry has no place in our community.

That is the context in which we engage in this debate. We have had some 16 antisemitic attacks since October 2024, extending back to protests on the Opera House steps in October 2023. The issues are longstanding. I also speak about my concern regarding the process of this debate. Standing orders were suspended at 10.30 last night to bring on debate so the bill could proceed through all stages today, rather than allowing it to lay on the table for the customary period. It is not the first time the Government has done this, especially with more challenging and complex legislation. We were given less than 12 hours notice of the debate, and previous speakers have described it as "hurried". We absolutely need to attend to this issue in a timely manner and within an appropriate time frame but we must exercise a level of caution, lest we fall into the trap of acting in haste.

I will conclude my speech by coming back to the contribution of the member for Mount Druitt. This bill seeks to criminalise speech, which has its complexities. We also recognise, as the member for Campbelltown said—and I thank him for his comments—our Australian values and freedoms. We recognise the obligations that are attendant on that. As we criminalise speech and go about eliminating the hate and bigotry that is occurring, we must be very conscious about safeguarding our freedoms. In that sense, it is important to have a more fulsome debate and allow due process to ensure that we shape the right and most appropriate legislation. I would welcome the opportunity to explore certain aspects of the bill. One example is the definition of "hate". I acknowledge that the Attorney General gave a definition of hatred in his second reading speech, which I recognise acts as a guide for the judiciary. However, at the end of the day, should we, as a Parliament, be more prescriptive and make sure that a tight definition is in the legislation? That is one area that could be explored.

Another area that could be explored is the safeguard around referencing a religious text for the purpose of religious teaching in new section 93ZAA (2). Does that give sufficient assurance to those of religious faith? Without going any further, they are some elements of the bill that come to mind that I think require more fulsome debate. It is appropriate to engage in debate about how to deal with legislation on an everyday basis in a manner that offers the opportunity to explore issues with the public and our community. I have had very little time—if no time—to engage with my constituents about this bill as it stands. As I said, the bill is complex in that it criminalises speech, something about which the Law Reform Commission has urged caution. I thank all members who have engaged in this debate, and I reiterate my concern about the hatred and bigotry that we are seeing in our community.

The member for Mount Druitt referred to the statutory review that will occur 12 months after the laws come into effect. I welcome it, but I am concerned that statutory reviews have not always been conducted in a timely manner by this Government or, if I am candid, by the previous Government. How can the House make sure it holds the Government to account to ensure that the review takes place in a timely manner? Finally, the member for Mount Druitt said that future reforms will be well considered and effective. I remind members that standing orders were suspended to bring on this debate within 24 hours of the bill's introduction. It is all very well to say that future reforms will be well considered and effective, but it is our job to ensure that the laws we make are well

considered and effective in the first place. I do not believe we are doing our best in that regard by contracting the time for this debate. While I certainly do not oppose the bill, I raise concerns about the process of the debate.

Mrs TINA AYYAD (Holsworthy) (15:38): The Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025 seeks to amend the Crimes Act 1900 to make it a criminal offence to intentionally incite hatred towards another person or group of persons on the grounds of race. I am confident that everyone in this place has grave concerns about the rise of antisemitic attacks in Sydney. The reforms to the Crimes Act are no doubt required to discourage the incitement of hatred. New section 93ZAA legislates a maximum penalty of two years imprisonment and/or a fine of \$11,000 for individuals or \$55,000 for corporations. I recognise the intent of the actions taken by the Government, however I am concerned that the bill will divide our community, similar to the way it was divided until religious vilification was made unlawful in late 2023.

An element of the offence of inciting racial hatred is that the public act must be on the basis of race. That definition is drawn from section 93Z of the Crimes Act, and includes colour, nationality, descent and ethnic, ethno-religious or national origin. An ethno-religious group is a grouping of individuals who are part of a common religious and ethnic background. According to current classifications, that means groups such as Jews, Sikhs, Maronites and Melchites are protected. However, other Christian denominations, such as Catholicism, and other religions, such as Islam, are not protected. Whilst I have no doubt that such protections are required for all ethno-religions, particularly Jewish people in the light of the recent antisemitic events, I also believe that such protections should be afforded to religions as well.

The electorate of Holsworthy overlaps with the Liverpool local government area, which is one of the most religious council areas in the State. According to the 2021 census, over one-third of residents identify as Christian and 15 per cent identify as Muslim. In late 2023 in this place, I supported the changes in the Anti-Discrimination Amendment (Religious Vilification) Bill 2023. The status quo at the time was that some religious groups were protected from religious vilification as per the definition of race in section 93Z of the Crimes Act, but religious groups that are not based in a region of origin were not protected. That bill, which is now the law of the land, rightly balanced the scales to cover all religions. Just over 12 months later we are having the exact same debate and we are now considering whether inciting hatred should be considered a criminal offence.

The Anti-Discrimination Act allows for a complaint of inciting hatred on religious grounds to be referred to the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal for determination, and NCAT can order relief of up to \$100,000 in damages and an apology, should a case of inciting hatred be substantiated. If this bill passes as is, using the same definition of race, that will mean different groups will have different means of complaining about instances of inciting hatred. Whilst ethno-religious groups can make a police report which can lead to subsequent prosecution by the Department of Public Prosecutions or NSW Police Force, religious groups can seek relief only through civil means. One group can seek a criminal charge; the other can seek only an apology and damages.

The Government fixed this problem in 2023 and now is causing the exact same problem. As someone who was vilified for my religion during the 2023 State election campaign, with a vile smear campaign that claimed I wanted to Islamise my electorate, I cannot stand by without speaking for those who will be left behind by this bill. We cannot afford to create a two-tier system where some communities have access to stronger protections under criminal law while others must navigate a civil process to seek justice. If the goal of this bill is to combat hate and ensure that all people in New South Wales feel safe, then it must be consistent in its approach. Hate should not be tolerated in any form against any group. If we truly stand for equality before the law, then this bill must reflect that. All communities and all religions are entitled to live free from fear, intimidation and hatred. The law must be applied equally to all communities. I thank the House.

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama) (15:42): So this is how liberty is eroded, with alacritous applause. It is not often that I allude to the Dark Lord of the Sith, but that inimitable phrase is appropriate when it comes to this legislation. I think that the Premier has been supportive of the Jewish community, but he was too slow to react. This legislation is a reflection on a government that simply took too long to respond to the events of October 7. Had there been stronger and swifter leadership, we may not be in the position we are in today and having to deal with this bill, which raises some very important questions about free speech.

I might not like what other people say—and I will come back to that in a moment—but we need to think very carefully when enacting bills about the impact they have on democracy, liberty and the right of people to express themselves in a way that may offend some people. That can happen. I am not saying that that should rise to the point of inciting violence or vilification. I made clear in this place yesterday that that is certainly not something I support, particularly when that impacts on or impedes on another individual's rights and liberties. But people should be able to say things that do not necessarily make other people happy and may offend. That can happen because, when they do, we know we live in a democracy that allows free speech.

We do not enjoy First Amendment rights like people in the United States do. Some people may think that free speech is somewhere hidden in our Constitution. It is not. Australia is the only Western democracy I am aware of that does not have an express right to free speech. Every other Commonwealth or constitutional democracy seems to enjoy that privilege. Our privilege or rights to free speech come off the back of cases in the High Court involving mostly issues around political donations and defamation. It began with *Theophanous v Stephens*. Then that was largely overturned by the case of *Lange*, the former New Zealand Prime Minister, in an action against the ABC.

Then the Australian Capital Television case founded the principle of political communication and discussion, which largely revolved around the Keating Government's attempt to limit the amount of time that political parties could advertise. It wanted to limit the capacity of advertising by political parties to the pre-elected Parliament while there was only a very small amount of time reserved for other political participants. The High Court overturned that legislation on the basis that our Constitution has provisions related to the election of the Senate and the House of Representatives and the need for political communication and discussion among people who can vote. The legislation was quashed.

We do not enjoy an express right. The rights we have are based on jurisprudence and cases from the courts that have led to the point of what we have. Governments can regulate speech. I accept that. Speech can be hurtful. As someone with albinism, a very obvious disability, I have been on the end of some horrendous abuse. I have been called everything from Casper to Silas, and have received general attitudinal reactions because, unfortunately in modern literature, people with albinism are perceived pejoratively. Do I like that? No. But my response to any action when it comes to free speech is not to limit free speech. My view has always been that the answer should be more speech to combat that. There has been a dire lack of consultation on this incredibly significant bill. Normally this type of legislation would undergo parliamentary process, such as a committee inquiry to call evidence, and there would be discussion. Instead, to fix a political problem this bill is being rammed through Parliament because the Premier said something at a press conference and overreached.

Now we are playing with something that is really delicate and can have real-life impacts. No-one wants to see people hurt, but I also do not want to unintentionally limit the rights of people by this legislation. New section 93ZAA (1) (a) relates to fear of harassment, which is the low-level provision that the Government argues should be in this bill. But it could easily be weaponised by someone who felt harassed and could lead to someone being charged. Eventually, a court, without much guidance at all, would have to determine whether or not the complaint met that threshold. There has been no real discussion to get to this point; nor is there any advice from the Attorney General in relation to whether or not police will be trained.

Will we see a rewriting of the curriculum for the Goulburn academy so that police can understand every line, verse and parable of every religious text so they are not in breach by this legislation when it is applied? As we all know, the most significant power the police have is their discretion in how they apply the laws of the land and how they assess whether or not someone's speech or conduct has breached the law or not. But we have not had an opportunity to debate that. I note that there is already a definition in the Anti-Discrimination Act. I draw to the attention of the House division 3A section 20B, which states:

any form of communication to the public, including speaking, writing, printing, displaying notices, broadcasting, telecasting, screening and playing of tapes or other recorded material, and

conduct ... observable by the public, including actions and gestures and the wearing or display of clothing, signs, flags, emblems and insignia, and

the distribution or dissemination of any matter to the public with knowledge that the matter promotes or expresses hatred towards, serious contempt for, or severe ridicule ...

Then follows section 20C, "Racial vilification unlawful". I will come back to that. My point is that there is already law in place, and the bill goes far and away beyond what we already have. I am not exactly sure what may be wrong with the current law. Section 20C states:

- (1) It is unlawful for a person, by a public act, to incite hatred towards, serious contempt for, or severe ridicule of, a person or group of persons on the ground of the race ...
- (2) Nothing in this section renders unlawful—
 - (a) a fair report of a public act referred to in subsection (1), or
 - (b) a communication or the distribution or dissemination of any matter ...

- (c) a public act, done reasonably and in good faith, for ... artistic, scientific or research purposes or for other purposes in the public interest, including discussion or debate about and expositions of any act or matter. We already have this legislation. I cannot comment on the matter involving the two nurses because it may well be before the courts, but comments like theirs—which every member of this House would rightly condemn as abhorrent—are already captured by existing legislation. I do not quite understand how many people the Government thinks will be charged or convicted as a result of this new legislation. That is why there needs to be a sunset clause: so that we can come back in a year to see whether or not any of it actually worked. The Government has bowled the legislation up in the hope that it will end all of the attacks. Of course we would like that if people are in fact inciting hatred, but is harassment the standard we are setting—because someone got upset or angry, or some snowflake has had a meltdown because someone said something they did not like? That is too low a standard. We need to protect free speech. Free speech is so often under attack, and no-one stands up for it.

I have said over the 14 years that I have been in this place that we should promote multiculturalism, inclusion and diversity, but I am fearful that the standard in this legislation will mean that the bill has unintended consequences, particularly because of the lack of consultation and due process. I know the Attorney General will say that it is all very clear, but it is not. We do not know what the education regime will be, we do not know how it will be enforced and, while there is a statutory review, I do not think that is sufficient. However, I note there is a body of evidence, and I thank the Executive Council of Australian Jewry for its evidence with respect to Jewish incidents. I run through those because there are two sides to this. In 2024 the percentage increase of physical assaults of people of Jewish background rose by 65 per cent, vandalism by 29 per cent, verbal abuse by 622 per cent, messages by 283 per cent, graffiti by 393 per cent, and posters and stickers by 670 per cent. That is concerning.

I could not possibly object to what members did yesterday in the House. In fact, I embraced it with alacrity because we were talking about Nazi symbols on synagogues or direct attacks on people because of their race. That is absolutely unacceptable, but we already have the law in place. Clearly it is not working to the extent the Government wants it to. The legislation is a knee-jerk reaction that could have unintended consequences and continue to erode free speech in a way that I cannot accept. Whilst I accept that members of the Government and Opposition do not want to see an incitement of violence, and I agree, the law already covers that. It is another example of governments running in to create law reform without properly assessing its consequences. We know that because it has not gone through the usual parliamentary process. Whilst I support the bill, I am loath to do so and am disappointed with the way it has been handled.

Ms LYNDIA VOLTZ (Auburn) (15:52): I say to the member for Kiama that the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025 will indeed undergo review in 12 months time. The intention of the bill is to provide that it is an offence to intentionally incite hatred towards another person or group of persons on the grounds of race in circumstances that would cause a reasonable person, who was the target of the incitement to hatred, to fear harassment, intimidation, violence, or for their personal safety, and to provide for a statutory review of the events in the 12 months after the legislation commences.

Hate speech and the incitement to violence only causes distress and divides our community. Whether it is antisemitism, Islamophobia, misogyny or hatred against the LGBTQI community, it has no place on our streets. There is a reality at the moment, and it is a global reality, that war touches everyone. While we feel far away from conflicts as a modern multicultural liberal democracy, war seems to be touching some of us every day. Members of Parliament who represent the most diverse communities in Australia feel it more than most. War causes distress to those who are grieving the extravagant loss of life in those conflicts as they see those who they love wounded and killed, and the destruction of their towns, cities and villages.

But alongside hate speech in the modern context is a worrying trend. Although the member for Kiama was talking about freedom of speech, there may not be as much freedom of speech as the member thinks there is. There is a tendency for people to feel cowered and for one side of the story to be heard. Alongside hate speech is the incitement of misinformation and the denial of events. A sense of history and an acknowledgement of past horrors such as the Holocaust are fundamental to ensuring restraint from conflict and division across the world. Holocaust denial is also an offence in many countries and the real motives behind Holocaust denial are antisemitism, wider racism and the rehabilitation of Nazism.

It is a tendency towards denial that I find greatly concerning because we now live in a world where denial and mistruth at the highest levels of government seem to be the modus operandi of modern leaders. Today I was hugely distressed to hear the United States President falsely accuse Ukraine of starting the war with Russia. As the member of Parliament representing the largest Ukrainian community, I cannot tell members how distressing that is to my community. To give a rough idea of the history—and I take it from *The Economist*, which is not exactly one of the most radical newspapers—in 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed, bringing independence to its 15 constituent republics. Ukraine became home to the world's third-largest nuclear arsenal. In 1994 it agreed to denuclearise in exchange for security assurances from America, Britain and the Russian Federation. Ukraine used

this agreement, known as the Budapest Memorandum, to ask America and Britain for aid on the eve of Russia's invasion in 2022.

In 2004 the "Orange revolution" highlighted Ukraine's democratic ambitions. Thousands protested against a rigged presidential election that gave victory to a pro-Russian candidate. Ukraine's democratic resolve was more visible during the "Maidan revolution" in 2013 to 2014. That was a reaction to the refusal by Viktor Yanukovich, Ukraine's president, to sign an association agreement with the European Union. Thousands of Ukrainians took to the streets. Mr Yanukovich fled to Russia. Ukraine's new government signed the agreement, infuriating Mr Putin. His response to the Maidan revolution marked Russia's first military incursion into independent Ukraine. It was not Ukraine's, but Russia's, first military incursion there.

The reality is that, at the moment, that conflict has killed more than 14,000 Ukrainians, with an estimated one million casualties. I deal with residents suffering in real time from conflicts around the world. When someone such as Donald Trump states that he denies the rights of people, whether they are in Ukraine or Palestine, that creates huge grief among my community. The reality is that we in this modern world need to create a sense of unity and cohesion. That unity and cohesion is not advanced by people denying the 1967 resolutions of the United Nations that recognised the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence, sovereignty and the return of their lands.

Many people are involved in those conflicts and that sometimes plays out on our streets. But we cannot countenance any hatred or incitement to racial or other violence, whether it is towards Jewish people, Muslims, women, the LGBTQI community or our Chinese community—as I saw happen during COVID. There is a reality that people want to be divisive. I urge everybody to consider the grief my constituents feel about these wars, and the great distress they feel when they hear people like Donald Trump talking about them. I urge members to remember that there is a move towards militarisation around the world. At the moment, European leaders are meeting to increase their military capability. We are standing at a certain time in a certain place. We need to be sensitive to that and make sure that we stay as cohesive as we possibly can.

Mr MARK HODGES (Castle Hill) (15:59): I contribute to debate on the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025. This is the third bill introduced by the Government that has an overall purpose of combating the increasing racist and antisemitic violence that has plagued our community over the past 16 months and well before that. Racist and antisemitic violence and hate speech will never be tolerated in democratic societies. The term antisemitism is not mentioned in the bill. However, the Attorney General began his second reading speech by saying:

This bill is the third Government bill this session that responds to the recent instances of antisemitic behaviour that we have seen in Sydney.

I repeat that racist and/or antisemitic conduct directly targeting religious or cultural groups within our society is abhorrent and will never be tolerated. Over the past 16 months, the rise in antisemitic violence in our society has been significant. I will provide some statistics—some of which the member for Kiama referred to during his contribution to the debate—on the incidence of antisemitic acts of violence. For each year since 1990 the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the peak elected national body of the Australian Jewish community, has published the *Report on Antisemitism in Australia*.

The detailed report includes a summary of the incidence of antisemitism in Australia. Along with the member for Kiama, I believe it is important to record those statistics, which show the increasing number of incidents in the past five years. In 2020, there were 331 incidents. In 2021, there were 447 incidents. In 2022, there were 478 incidents. In 2023, there were 495 incidents. In 2024, there were 2,062 incidents, which represents a fourfold increase. The report provides some information about incidents of antisemitic violence or hate speech in New South Wales for the years 2023 and 2024. In 2023, there were 181 incidents in New South Wales. In 2024, there were 795 incidents in New South Wales. That is a significant increase. We must take action to ensure that those who commit these types of offences are deterred.

The Government has now tabled three bills. The bill before the House was tabled in Parliament only yesterday. Last night at about 10 p.m. the Leader of the House moved a motion to suspend standing orders in order for the bill to be debated today. I am concerned that the normal processes of this Chamber have not been followed and members have not been given the proper time to consider the bill, consult with the community and consult with important stakeholders. I do not understand why the Government chose to suspend standing orders to debate this bill on short notice. I can only assume that Government members have chosen to not allow the appropriate and normal time for consultation with the community and stakeholders for some reason. However, I do also understand that the increasing level of racist violence and hate speech in our community demands that some action be taken promptly. Whether the suspension of standing orders was warranted in the circumstances, considering the history of the past 16 months, is a matter for others to judge in the future.

I have mentioned that the Executive Council of Australian Jewry publishes reports of incidents of antisemitism and, as described in the reports, anti-Jewish incidents. The most recent report, from 2024, records numerous incidents of hate speech, including in graffiti placed on placards, posters, stickers, walls, houses, fences, shops and other places. That is just one antisemitic action. I will not go through the details of the report in full, but they are horrific and shocking. I believe that all reasonable members of our community understand that more must be done by our leaders to make it clear that hate speech is not and will never be acceptable in our society. I agree with the member for Holsworthy that the bill should apply equally to all members of our society.

I have looked closely at the text of the bill. There are four elements of the offence created by new section 93ZAA. First, the conduct must be a public act. The definition of a public act is found in section 93Z. Second, the conduct must be found to intentionally incite hatred towards another person or group of persons. Third, the intentional incitement of hatred must be on the ground of the race of the other person or group of persons. Fourth, the public act would reasonably cause a reasonable person who was the target of the incitement of hatred, or a reasonable person who was a member of a group of persons that was the target of hatred, to fear harassment, intimidation or violence, or fear for their safety. It is noted in the bill that it is irrelevant whether, in response to the alleged offender's conduct, any person formed a state of mind or carried out an act of hatred.

I note that yesterday during his second reading speech the Attorney General referred to five elements to the offence. The Attorney General referred to the public act and then said, "The second element of this new offence is that the public act must intentionally incite hatred." He noted five elements. When I read the legislation, I am not sure whether the Attorney General was correct. He referred to the five elements of the offence during his second reading speech but in the media release published by his office the Attorney General referred to the "four elements of the offence". I ask the Attorney General to clarify the elements of the offence in his speech in reply, bearing in mind that police and the courts will read the Attorney General's second reading speech and they will rely upon it. It seems to me that it is not necessary for a person to form a state of mind for it to be an offence. New section 93ZAA (3) states:

- (3) In determining whether an alleged offender has committed an offence against this section, it is irrelevant—
- ...
- (b) whether or not, in response to the alleged offender's public act, any person formed a state of mind or carried out an act of hatred.

It seems to me that the media statement may not be correct. The media statement, which was published yesterday, refers to the second element by saying, "The public act must incite hatred." When I read the legislation, it states, "It is irrelevant whether or not, in response to the alleged offender's public act, any person formed a state of mind or carried out an act of hatred." I ask the Attorney General to clarify the issue in his speech in reply. Perhaps this is part of the problem that arises when legislation is brought to this House with less than 24 hours notice and no time for people to read it.

The Law Reform Commission was asked to review section 93Z of the Crimes Act. The commission received that request on 14 February 2024. The Law Reform Commission consulted widely. It concluded that section 93Z should not be amended. I note the reasons are set out in the commission's report. We are facing a situation of increasing incidences of antisemitic violence in our society. We must take some action. I believe we should pass this legislation. I am satisfied and comforted by the fact that there will be a review of this legislation within 12 months. I look forward to reading the review report. The Opposition will not oppose this bill.

Mrs WENDY TUCKERMAN (Goulburn) (16:09): It is unfortunate that debate on the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025 is happening in the context of several different circumstances. Last night in this House, the Labor Party voted down Coalition attempts to increase the maximum penalty for the public display of Nazi symbols from two years imprisonment to five years imprisonment. The Labor Party, which introduced the bill, voted down Coalition attempts to criminalise the public display of terrorist symbols with the same penalty of five years imprisonment.

Last night the Labor Party voted down an attempt to criminalise the public display of symbols that are deceptively similar to Nazi symbols and that a reasonable person would perceive to show sympathy for those abhorrent causes. Labor voted down Coalition amendments that would have ensured that matters involving more severe penalties would be heard in the District Court rather than the Local Court, and it voted down Coalition attempts to give those stronger penalties a standard non-parole period of 18 months. The antisemitism crisis started on the steps of the Opera House in October 2023, and we know of 16 antisemitic attacks since October 2024. It does not seem that the Government has acted with haste in bringing forward this legislation, given that our community has been in crisis for many months. It is curious that the bill is being rushed through Parliament this week, given that the antisemitic attacks and racism in our community have been longstanding.

As the Law Reform Commission report makes clear, criminalising speech is an incredibly difficult area of law reform. We have an implied right to freedom of political expression in our country, as recognised by the High Court of Australia, and any legislation needs to conform with that implied right. But the bill has been presented to Parliament for debate with less than 12 hours notice. When the Law Reform Commission reports that it is concerned about unintended consequences, it is really saying that legislation of this kind may actually achieve exactly the opposite of what is intended.

It is important that I highlight the connection of the Goulburn electorate with the Jewish community. During the nineteenth century, the Jewish community contributed significantly to Goulburn's local economy and culture. My electorate had many Jewish settlers—hotel owners, storekeepers, gold buyers, jewellery makers, traders and industrial operators. The Jewish community shaped much of Goulburn's history. The 1851 census recorded 75 Jewish residents in Goulburn and the Jewish cemetery, used from 1844 to 1943, stands as a historical marker of Jewish presence in the region. Interestingly, the Goulburn electorate also had three Jewish members of the Legislative Assembly between 1861 and 1881.

The Law Reform Commission has identified the difficult territory we enter here. I am concerned that the bill has the right intention but uses the wrong tools to deal with the issue. In legislating against hate speech, do we risk undermining a foundational principle of our democratic society—the importance of protecting freedom of speech and the right to disagree, even when we find certain views offensive or misguided? While I understand the intention behind the laws—to protect individuals and communities from harmful rhetoric—I fear that in our effort to suppress hate, we may also suppress dissent.

History teaches us that free speech is a fragile but essential pillar of democracy. It allows us to challenge ideas, expose falsehoods and engage in open debate. Without it we risk creating a society where only officially sanctioned opinions are allowed, where people fear speaking their minds and where the power to define what constitutes hate speech rests in the hands of those who may not always act in the best interests of all. Globally, there has been a rising up of people who are sick and tired of being told how to think, how to act and how to feel about things—a backlash against so-called woke culture.

That is why the thorough review of this legislation is an important safeguard. More importantly, it will allow us to change the legislation if it is not effective or has unintended consequences. Has it effectively empowered police to address the issues around dangerous hate speech? Does it allow them to act to ensure the safety of communities and dissipate the incitement to violence, as it means to do, or is it being weaponised in a way that we did not predict? Let us stand firm in our opposition to hatred, but let us also stand firm in our commitment to the freedoms that make our society strong.

Mr JORDAN LANE (Ryde) (16:14): I contribute to debate on the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025. Why do we introduce laws? We do so to respond to community expectations and, if we do it well, to get ahead of them. We introduce laws to guide us, to plug gaps and to help keep people safe. I also believe that there is a role to play in elevating the standard of democracy and public discourse, lifting society to an elevated place of understanding, embrace and ambition for one another. For this reason I support what would otherwise, on the face of it, be quite a significant deviation from the principle of protecting speech. As much as one person has a right to speak, the rest of us have a right to avoid speech that gnaws at the fabric of our social tapestry or, worse, subverts the democratic institutions that enliven and protect the speech of citizens who want to participate in a civilised society.

Those citizens may not like every part of our country. They may despise the policies of a contemporary government, decry the coverage of our media or hold views that cause embarrassment to their loved ones. But never once do they fail to understand the difference between being a fully paid up member of Australia and being a belligerent to its future. I would like to think that this bill is not for them. I would like to think the bill and the way it is interpreted will keep free those who love Australia despite protesting elements of its construct. I hope the bill will send a message to those who do not buy into the very constitution of Australia and will elevate the standard against those in New South Wales who would seek to do harm to the majority through the targeted hatred of a minority.

I preface my contribution with those remarks because I know many members are concerned about the process, wording and potential for unintended consequences of the bill. I share those valid concerns. The reality is this legislation is being proposed in unusual circumstances and has not had the usual degree of scrutiny. It was introduced late last night. No legislator, including those in government, could genuinely have thought deeply about its application and the implications of its passage. Still less hope exists for the judicial and enforcement agencies charged with enacting the law, much less for impacted stakeholders and those citizens who will be subject to its power. I like that there is an urgent desire to respond to appalling and unquestionably cruel acts of antisemitism, but we owe it to the Jewish community to protect them, not to offer the promise of protection unmatched by action in the realm where it truly matters: the public domain.

The bill seeks to amend the Crimes Act 1900 to make it an offence to intentionally incite hatred towards another person or group of persons on the grounds of race in circumstances that would cause a reasonable person who was the target of the incitement to hatred to fear harassment, intimidation or violence, or to fear for their personal safety. It also provides for the statutory review of the offence 12 months after it commences. The bill inserts criminal penalties for the incitement of racial hatred after section 93Z of the Crimes Act. But what is not clear, and what the Government has failed to articulate, is how the legislation captures conduct that is not already covered by existing laws.

I would be grateful if the Attorney General in his reply could provide a specific and practical example of a case where this law would take effect in isolation from existing provisions in the Crimes Act. In other words, when might a person be subject to prosecution under this law but not under an existing law? If the answer is unclear then we must ask ourselves whether this legislation will genuinely afford any of the protections that I know the Government is seeking to provide or whether a more thorough process is warranted. Another concern is the potential for this legislation to exacerbate radicalisation rather than prevent it. International and domestic experience has shown that heavy-handed criminal sanctions can push individuals further into extremism rather than deradicalising them.

Locking people up does not always solve the problem. It can entrench ideologies, fuel resentment and create a cycle of radicalisation, producing martyrs rather than reformed citizens. I personally do not believe those who set out to deliberately subvert our democracy are capable of much reform. However, there are many who have exhibited behaviours that bear some hallmarks of racial hatred who are not necessarily anti-Australia or anti-democracy. While I accept that the legislation does not require one to act upon the incitement of hatred for a crime to have occurred, there must be some degree of consideration given to the intent behind the end goal.

It is one thing to be imprisoned for acts akin to treason or sedition, and another thing to have acted antisocially online. That is why I strongly support the review provision in the bill, although I note that 12 months is a long time to wait should it become evident earlier that there are deficiencies in the Act in practice. If we are to implement such significant laws, we must ensure they are reviewed rigorously. We must not only meet but beat that deadline. If we are to truly address the issues of racism and intolerance in our community, then the Government must also do more than just legislate punitive measures.

We need education and interventionist programs that address the root causes of radicalisation before individuals enter the criminal justice system. That means investing in community-led deradicalisation programs and working with schools, faith leaders and youth organisations to provide young people with the tools to critically engage with harmful ideologies. It means ensuring that those at risk of being drawn into extremist movements have alternative pathways to rehabilitation and inclusion rather than being funnelled into the prison system, where, as I have previously articulated, extremism can flourish.

We must also improve early intervention frameworks, training frontline workers—including teachers, social workers and community leaders—to identify the early warning signs of radicalisation and provide appropriate support before it escalates into criminal conduct. If we do not address the underlying societal issues that contribute to the rise of racial hatred, then punitive measures alone will not break the cycle. We must commit to a multifaceted strategy that combines enforcement with education, prevention and rehabilitation. I again ask the Attorney General to respond as to how, if at all, the statutory review will inform those solutions. That is particularly necessary in an age of social media.

People—ignorant, perhaps, but not extreme—will continue to fan the flames of division and hatred. It is they, not the subversive types, that this law will most likely deter. However, as we know, deterrence is just one reason for imposing a punishment. It must be coupled with measures to elevate understanding and awareness of the broader consequences for such actions. Ultimately laws are not just about penalties and enforcement; they are about standards. They elevate the expectations of a civilised society. They send a message about the kind of community we want to be.

There are individuals in our society who do not believe in democracy. They seek to undermine our institutions and they fundamentally reject our values of tolerance and inclusion. By doing so, they undermine not just free speech but also free association, free movement and, in extreme cases, the liberty of life. Those freedoms are each protected by institutions that uphold democracy. When someone attacks those institutions, they are, in fact, undermining freedom itself. That is the paradox at play here, and that is why, ultimately, we must take a stand.

The Ryde electorate is one of the most diverse communities in New South Wales. We do not need a law to tell us to stand up to racism, intolerance or antisemitism; we do that every day. But this bill sends a message to those who have always fought the good fight, even in the face of noisy opposition, that they have the backing of this Parliament, which is our State's most important democratic institution. It says that we are right to fiercely

defend our principles and proclaim them loudly. I continue to have concerns about the bill. The process has been flawed, the consultation has been inadequate and the broader implications for free speech are troubling. However, we must draw a line. We must stand against those who vilify, threaten and seek to erode the values upon which this democracy is built. If we fail to do so, we fail not just the Jewish community but all communities. That is the line. With reservations, I commend the bill to the House.

Ms MONICA TUDEHOPE (Epping) (16:23): I contribute to debate on the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025. I have previously addressed the House on the deeply troubling incidents of antisemitism that have taken place in New South Wales. In that speech, I spoke about the profound impact those events have had, not just on Jewish communities but on our broader society. When any group within our community feels threatened, isolated or unwelcome, it weakens the very fabric of our society. Those incidents do not occur in a vacuum; they affect us all, eroding the trust and cohesion that underpin a strong and resilient democracy.

While I cannot personally speak to the experience of Jewish Australians, I acknowledge and deeply respect the contributions of my colleagues who have spoken about the impact within their communities. Their voices are essential in this debate. Before addressing the substance of the bill, I must acknowledge a hard truth. We find ourselves debating this legislation today because of the Government's failure to act swiftly and decisively in response to the events of last October. The Government had an opportunity to provide clear leadership, to bring people together and take firm action against hate and division. Instead it has been reactive rather than proactive, slow rather than swift, and more concerned with political optics than with real solutions.

There is no question that we must continually strive to address incidents of hate and discrimination wherever they arise. Racism, antisemitism and all forms of prejudice are corrosive forces that undermine the shared values of our society. But addressing those issues requires more than hurried legislative action; it requires genuine engagement, careful deliberation and a long-term commitment to strengthening our social fabric. That is why I am deeply uncomfortable with the manner in which this bill has been brought before the House. This is not how good law is made. Something as fundamental as legislating on the topic of free speech should be approached with the utmost care, diligence and respect for democratic processes. It is frankly staggering that we are being asked to consider this bill with barely a day's notice of its contents.

Democracy is not just about the work that takes place in this Chamber. It is not just about government institutions or the passing of laws. It is a delicate balance of rights and obligations, of institutions and civil participation. When we rush through legislation of this nature—without robust debate, without proper consultation and without due consideration—we diminish that balance. We weaken democracy itself. It is telling that members of this House have had to learn about the details of this legislation not through a structured consultative process but through media reports and leaks. That approach is emblematic of a government more focused on public relations than on substantive, meaningful change.

As lawmakers, we bear a profound responsibility to ensure that the laws we pass in this place are good laws: laws that are clear, just and proportionate. That responsibility extends to every person in New South Wales. It is not a duty we can take lightly. In my view, this legislation raises concerns about the erosion of free speech in our State. Freedom of speech is not an absolute right, nor should it ever be a shield for hate, but it is one of the pillars of a functioning democracy. For those reasons, I feel compelled to put my concerns on record. While I do not oppose the bill, I pledge to remain vigilant. It is our duty to continually review our laws, ensuring that they are fit for purpose and that they do not undermine the freedoms that define our society. We must focus on fostering civic participation and strengthening our democratic culture so that we do not find ourselves having to consider such legislation in the first place.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY (Maroubra—Attorney General) (16:27): In reply: I thank members for their contributions to debate on the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025. I thank members representing the electorates of Wahoonga, Coogee, Vacluse, Strathfield, Newtown, Bega, Sydney, Mount Druitt, Lake Macquarie, Campbelltown, Albury, Holsworthy, Kiama, Auburn, Castle Hill, Ryde and Epping. I will touch on the opening comments made by the shadow Attorney General, and member for Wahoonga, which regrettably had nothing to do with this important bill. Instead those comments rehashed matters raised and arguments dealt with last night in relation to other bills introduced by the Government. The member for Wahoonga complained that the Government has moved to deal with the crucial measures in the bill urgently, when only yesterday he criticised the Government for not acting quickly enough. The Government has responded to a serious and urgent issue as quickly as possible. That is entirely appropriate.

The Government also consulted with key stakeholders, including with NSW Police, those in the legal sector and members of our faith communities. The question for the member for Wahoonga and his colleagues is: Do they support these measures—measures that criminalise the intentional incitement of racial hatred—or do they think that the naked racism and antisemitism that we have seen in our State is not an urgent problem and should not be subject to criminal penalties? I listened to the long contribution by the member for Wahoonga and, at the

end of it, I could not work out whether he was or was not supporting the bill. He was purporting to lead for the Opposition. We will wait and see what those opposite do.

The Government recognises that the antisemitic attacks that we have seen do not begin and end with graffiti and setting fire to buildings and cars. They begin often with hateful racist language that may ultimately inspire an individual to commit a violent act. The Government is moving to urgently progress these measures that will help to keep our community safe. The Government acknowledges that the bill raises complex issues. I have said that. That is why we have included a 12-month statutory review provision in the bill to enable further consideration of the legislation's impact and effectiveness, and whether any further changes should be made. In addition, as I said in my second reading speech and the member for Sydney drew attention to, we will also progress a review of the sufficiency of criminal law protections against hatred for vulnerable groups in our New South Wales community to be conducted by a suitably qualified and experienced legal expert and to be completed within six months. I thank the member for Sydney for his work with the Government on this.

With respect to concerns raised about the impact on freedom of speech, the bill strikes the right balance between freedom of expression and the public interest in addressing racial hatred and enhancing community safety and harmony. The Australian Constitution recognises the importance of freedom of political communication and freedom of expression and is protected under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. However, limitations may be imposed on freedom of expression for legitimate purposes in the public interest and to protect the rights and freedoms of others. The bill targets intentionally hateful speech—the type of speech that threatens public order and the safety and wellbeing of members of the community. No person should feel unsafe in New South Wales because of their race.

The member for Castle Hill appeared to be confused about the elements of the offence and how it will operate. I clearly outlined in my second reading speech—in considerable detail—that the offence has five elements. The member can refer to that if he needs further guidance. The member for Castle Hill referred to the wording in the media release for the bill. The media release carries no legal force; the bill does. The media release is not a tool used by courts to interpret legislation. It seeks to explain the offence in clear and understandable terms. There is no lack of clarity with respect to what the elements of the offence introduced by this bill are.

With respect to the point made by the member for Wahroonga about the lack of a defence in the bill, the offence targets the deliberate and intentional incitement of racial hatred. Unintentional acts and acts that are done recklessly are not captured by the offence. That would be one's defence. The Government does not consider it appropriate for acts done deliberately and intentionally to incite racial hatred to be exempt from the offence because they were done for an academic, artistic or educational purpose. The Government does not consider that an act done intentionally and deliberately to incite racial hatred will ever be in the public interest.

The member for Newtown and the member for Sydney raised concerns about the very limited exemption in the bill. An exemption has been included in the offence to protect freedom of religion in relation to the use of religious texts as part of religious teachings. That enables reference, citation and quoting of texts as part of religious teachings. That exception has been included to ensure the offence does not unintentionally capture the direct reference to existing religious texts that are historical and may cite an historical call to arms against people on the basis of race. The term "otherwise referencing" has been included to ensure the effective operation of this exception—not to expand it to provide any form of broad licence for the incitement of racial hatred. It is a narrow and targeted exemption. The Government has included a 12-month statutory review provision in the bill, which will facilitate consideration of the impact and effectiveness of the religious teaching exemption, as well as other matters relating to the operation of the offence.

The member for Newtown and the member for Holsworthy raised concerns that the bill does not create protections for all vulnerable groups in the community. We know that. As I said in my second reading speech, the Government acknowledges that hate speech based on other attributes, including religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, occurs and condemns it. We will continue to look at how laws in New South Wales can be improved to address hate speech based on other attributes and promote social cohesion. As I said before, we will establish a review into criminal law protections against hatred and, in particular, the sufficiency of protections against hatred for people involved in vulnerable communities in our State.

To the point made by some speakers about the lack of a definition of "hatred" in the bill. Hatred is not defined and the word will take its ordinary meaning. Other jurisdictions have introduced, or are in the process of introducing, offences that target the incitement of racial hatred and other hateful speech motivated by race. They include Victoria, Western Australia and internationally in the United Kingdom. Victoria and Western Australia have not defined the term in their criminal legislation. The UK Public Order Act 1986 also did not define the term. There is some guidance in tribunal decisions under civil vilification legislation that "hatred" means intense or violent dislike, detestation, hostility or strong aversion. The Government has given careful consideration to whether hatred should be defined but, given the matters I have just referred to, it considers that the current form

of the bill is appropriate and fit for purpose. I have referred to the statutory review previously and this will provide an opportunity to consider the operation of the term "hatred" in the context of this offence.

The member for Wahroonga and some other members said that the criminal law is not the only answer to the abhorrent antisemitic conduct we have seen in our State. We agree. That is why the Government has progressed other measures, including increased funding to support the crucial work of the NSW Police Force Engagement and Hate Crime Unit by \$525,000. That will allow for boosted engagement and communication with the community, including additional synagogue and school visits. Measures also include an increase to the NSW Social Cohesion Grants for Local Government program by \$500,000 and training to support local governments to address the rising prevalence of hate crimes in their areas and communities.

Those measures build on the significant work of the police, including part of Operation Shelter. More than 300 proactive patrols are conducted under Operation Shelter every day. They centre around significant sites, such as places of worship. Resources from the Traffic and Highway Patrol, regional enforcement squads, the Dog Unit and PolAir have also been brought in to help local police on the ground. Strike Force Pearl has also been established to investigate these hate crimes and has doubled its full-time dedicated detectives from 20 to 40. I should say local members at both the State and Federal level, with mayors and councillors from local government, have also played significant roles as community leaders because they have popped up in my local area of Maroubra—from La Perouse to South Head through to Heffron. There are regular meetings with Federal and State members of both political persuasions. We have seen action from mayors. There was a forum recently that was headed up by three mayors of different political persuasions and different ethnic backgrounds, attended by councillors who made very strong statements.

There has been really strong response from elected representatives to work with the community, the police, the Jewish community, and with CSG NSW, to make people feel safer and to facilitate the flow of information between the community, the Parliament and the police. The police have always said that their best assets—their most effective and valuable assets—are the eyes and ears of the community. We are seeing that now with some of the police patrols apprehending people quickly. There has been a very good, comprehensive effort by people of all persuasions in helping the Jewish community feel safe and in facilitating information. The member for Wahroonga was right when he said that legislative response is only one aspect of it. The response has been comprehensive; it will not stop until we—all of us—are done, no matter what our political persuasion is.

These legislative measures are not the only things that the Government is doing to tackle antisemitism, hatred and prejudice in our State. They are one part of a suite of measures that will work together to keep our community safe. The member for Sydney asked about a national register to track hate crimes. At a National Cabinet meeting on 21 January, the New South Wales Government agreed to work with the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions to establish a national database to track antisemitic crimes and incidents. The purpose of having one national reporting system is to better inform and coordinate responses to antisemitic incidents. The Government recognises that tracking hate crimes is important and is giving consideration to how it can ensure that it tracks all crimes involving hatred against vulnerable groups, including on the basis of religion, sexual orientation and gender identity.

I note that the member for Sydney is in the Chamber, and we will be discussing the issue that he raised at a Standing Council of Attorneys-General meeting on Friday. The member for Sydney also asked to empower the LGBTQIA+ Consultative Committee established by the NSW Police Force to consider ways to achieve better reporting of hate crimes. The NSW Police Force has established an LGBTQIA+ Consultative Committee to play an advisory and consultative role in the development of the NSW Police Force response to the recommendations of the Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ hate crimes, with a view to achieving ongoing cultural enhancement within NSW Police Force. We understand that there can be under-reporting of hate crimes, and we want to support the LGBTQIA+ community to feel confident about reporting to police. We are grateful to the member for Sydney for raising this important matter, and we will request that the consultative committee consider this issue.

The matters that the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Bill 2025 deals with are complex and challenging—we do not shy away from that—but they are also hugely urgent. We must act now to combat racial hatred, and the Government will continue the important work of comprehensively considering the sufficiency of criminal law protections against hatred for all vulnerable groups in our New South Wales community in the weeks and months ahead. I commend the bill to the House.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Alex Greenwich): The question is that this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

HOUSING AMENDMENT BILL 2025

Second Reading Speech

Mr DAVID MEHAN (The Entrance) (16:42): On behalf of Mr Ryan Park: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce the Housing Amendment Bill 2025 in this place on behalf of the Minns Labor Government. In doing so, I note that this bill has come to us from the other place and, in its passage through that Chamber, it was amended by the addition of new section 35H, which now becomes part of the tabled copy before the House. It was a Labor Government that introduced the first Housing Act to this State in 1912. It was a Labor Government that, in 1913, established the first public housing estate in the nation when it established the suburb of Daceyville, just down the road from here and named in honour of a Labor member of this House, John Rowland Dacey, who was the member representing that area.

Daceyville is still a public housing estate to this day, and a monument to Labor's commitment to public housing in this State. I should also note that it is where the first cul-de-sac was constructed in this country. Incidentally, it was named the Colonel Braund Crescent cul-de-sac in honour of Colonel Braund, whose name appears next to Sergeant Larkin's on a plaque in this Chamber. They were the two members of this House who fell in the Gallipoli campaign. The bill amends the Housing Act 2001 to give the Minister for Housing the same functions as the Land and Housing Corporation under the Act and under other laws, including to acquire, hold and deal with property consistent with the objects of the Housing Act.

The bill supports the implementation and delivery of the New South Wales Government's commitment to build 8,400 new social homes and 21,000 new affordable market homes as part of the Building Homes for NSW program. Since taking office in 2023, the Minns Labor Government has worked tirelessly to tackle the housing crisis that has been decades in the making. It has established Homes NSW, an agency dedicated to delivering new homes to those most in need and providing a single social and affordable housing service to better drive long-term outcomes.

The Government has committed a record-breaking \$6.6 billion investment. It is funding thousands of new social and affordable homes, repairing and making habitable thousands more public and Aboriginal social homes, and boosting homelessness support services. This year we are on track to deliver 850 new social homes as part of year one of the Building Homes for NSW program. Whether it be a working family that cannot afford an affordable rental, a young woman trying to escape domestic violence or one of the 2,037 people who found themselves sleeping rough during the 2024 street count, the housing crisis has had a devastating impact on people from all walks of life. The Housing Amendment Bill 2025 is a critical enabler of the hard work needed to solve the housing crisis. It unlocks \$4 billion worth of investment committed in the 2024-25 budget in Homes NSW. It provides for a direct line of responsibility to the Minister for Housing for the delivery of new social and affordable homes.

I now turn to the detail of the bill. The substantive amendments to the Housing Act are set out in schedule 1 [4] to the bill. Item [4] inserts a proposed new part 4, division 6 into the Act, which gives the Minister express powers to deal with property, including to purchase, hold, lease or dispose of property; to acquire land in accordance with the terms of the Land Acquisition Just Terms (Compensation) Act; and to accept gifts of property or the surrender of land. Proposed new section 35F gives the Minister the same functions that the Land and Housing Corporation has under relevant legislation that relates to the corporation. Relevant legislation includes the Housing Act, the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, the Residential Tenancies Act and any regulation or subordinate instruments made under these and other laws that relate to the corporation.

It means that where the Land and Housing Corporation has a power, duty or authority to make decisions or take particular action, the Minister will have the equivalent power, duty or authority, including under planning legislation. References in provisions in relevant legislation to functions of the Land and Housing Corporation, however it is described, will be extended to the Minister for Housing unless otherwise specified in the Act or regulations. To be clear, the planning powers and functions that the Land and Housing Corporation has under part 5 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act and under planning instruments will apply to the Minister. Equally, the planning decisions or actions that the Land and Housing Corporation can take or must comply with will also apply to the Minister.

Similarly, by operation of new section 35F, references to the Land and Housing Corporation in the Residential Tenancies Act will be read as references to the Minister. Like the Land and Housing Corporation, the Minister will be a social housing provider and will be able to enter into social housing tenancy agreements. To reiterate, the amendments mean that the Minister can deal with land and property and make decisions or take particular action under relevant legislation in the same way that the Land and Housing Corporation does. This means that whether the property is held or dealt with by the Minister or by the Land and Housing Corporation will make no difference from the perspective of a social housing tenant. Their statutory entitlements will be the same and the powers, duties and authorities will apply to whichever entity is the landholder.

Proposed new section 35G provides for the transfer of assets, rights and liabilities between the Minister and other government agencies, by agreement, through the making of a transfer order by the Minister. This is a commonly used mechanism that has several precedents in New South Wales legislation. It enables transfer of land between government agencies to be achieved quickly and efficiently and at a significantly lower cost to taxpayers. The details of how these transfer orders will operate are set out in item [7] of schedule 1 to the bill. This inserts a proposed new schedule 2A into the Act. Among other things, the new schedule 2A details when a transfer order takes effect, what the effect of a transfer order is and that a transfer order can be for value and can specify the terms and conditions of the transfer.

Importantly, new section 35A provides that the Minister must not exercise any of the functions conferred on the Minister by the bill unless it is for a purpose consistent with the objects of the Act. The objects of the Act include maximising opportunities for people in New South Wales to have access to secure, appropriate and affordable housing and to ensure that public and community housing reflects contemporary housing standards. Item [6] of schedule 1 allows the Minister to delegate the Minister's functions to employees of the department or to the Land and Housing Corporation and allows a delegate to sub-delegate where authorised to do so.

Items [1], [3] and [5] of schedule 1 make minor changes to the Act. They update references to relevant departments to reflect current administrative arrangements. Item [2] of schedule 1 amends the definition of public housing so that any land that is owned or leased by the Minister comes within the definition of public housing. The bill does not affect the functions of the Land and Housing Corporation, which will continue to deliver services to many thousands of households while also revitalising over 30,000 social homes. The bill does not alter the rights and obligations of existing public housing tenants. I note that proposed new section 35H, which is an amendment from the other place, will require the Minister to report to Parliament on the operation of the Act once every 12 months.

By providing these powers to the Minister for Housing, we are supporting the implementation and delivery of the Building Homes for NSW program to provide 8,400 new social homes and 21,000 new affordable and market homes over the coming years. In doing so, it will support both our election commitment to establish Homes NSW as a single point in government to drive the delivery and management of social housing, and our record Building Homes for NSW program that will boost the supply of social and affordable homes, as we committed to in our 2024-25 budget. The people of this State have made it clear that housing affordability and availability is one of the biggest pressures they are facing today. We know that confronting the housing crisis requires a comprehensive plan.

By funding new social homes and homelessness support services, we are addressing a community need whilst alleviating pressure on the private market. The Building Homes for NSW program includes the largest investment in social housing in New South Wales history. This once-in-a-generation program will directly build thousands of homes across our State to confront the housing crisis and rebuild our public housing system after a decade of neglect. This bill is a big step in that journey. The views and advice of affected government stakeholders were canvassed and incorporated in the bill across a range of departmental and regulatory functions. I thank those who have contributed to the preparation of this bill, including the hardworking staff in the Minister's office. I commend the bill to the House.

Second Reading Debate

Mr JAMES GRIFFIN (Manly) (16:53): I speak on behalf of the shadow Minister for Housing, Scott Farlow, in debate on the Housing Amendment Bill 2025. The Coalition will not oppose the passage of this legislation. I sit on the Legislative Assembly Select Committee on Essential Worker Housing, which you chair, Mr Temporary Speaker Greenwicz. We have been doing a lot of work looking at the need for social and affordable essential worker housing across New South Wales. Without a doubt, Labor has talked a big game on social housing. It has made many grand promises, some of which we just heard, and celebrated ribbon cuttings. To be clear, those ribbon cuttings have almost exclusively been for projects that were initiated, planned and funded under the former Coalition Government.

Labor's biggest achievement in the social housing space is not actually building any new homes on its own initiative, but rather announcing the new social housing bureaucracy, Homes NSW. That brings us to this bill. It is our understanding that the Government is introducing this legislation because when it attempted to spend the funds allocated in the budget it realised that the Department of Communities and Justice [DCJ] did not have the power to issue grant funding. This major mistake in the establishment of Homes NSW does not give the Opposition or the public any confidence that Homes NSW will actually build any new homes. The Government provided DCJ with the majority of the money from its social housing plan. This is a total of \$4 billion allocated in increments of \$1 billion over four years to fund new social housing, which we applaud.

The Government has assigned funding to an organisation, DCJ, which did not have the legislative power to construct a thing. This has caused a delay in social housing construction of the Government's own creation. Instead of enabling an existing agency with a proven track record, like the Land and Housing Corporation, the Minns Labor Government created an administrative hurdle that has slowed the process and required Parliament to bail out the Government. On this occasion, the Opposition will cooperate with the Government's request because we are serious about solving the problem at hand and working with the Government when needed. The problem at hand is the inability of people across this State to get into the housing market, no matter where they live.

The Minister for Housing had the choice to empower the Land and Housing Corporation to build more homes. Instead, she chose to assign \$4 billion of social housing funding to DCJ, which is an agency with little legislative authority to develop housing. We are here today because the Government did not plan the structure of its new bureaucracy properly. We must ask why the Minister preferred to issue capital funding to DCJ rather than grant funding to the Land and Housing Corporation. Meanwhile, the results of the Minns Labor Government speak for themselves. The social housing waitlist has ballooned from 55,880 applicants in June 2023 to 63,260 in December 2024. This is an increase of 7,380 applicants in just 18 months.

Even more concerning is the priority waitlist, which has surged by 43.6 per cent. The increase in the need for social housing has undoubtedly been fuelled by Labor's cost-of-living crisis. What has been built? According to data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there have been only 600 non-private housing commencements across all of New South Wales since June 2023. The Government continues to announce housing targets and rebrand departments, but it has not been able to deliver meaningful progress. The bill introduces several amendments to the Housing Act 2001 that give the Minister for Housing an express statutory power to purchase, acquire, hold, develop, lease, dispose of and otherwise deal with land and property consistent with the objects of the Housing Act. It also gives the Minister the same functions as the Land and Housing Corporation under the Housing Act and other relevant legislation.

The bill also gives the Minister powers to make vesting orders to enable the transfer of land between the Minister and other government agencies by agreement, and to delegate the Minister's functions to a relevant person who is an employee of the department or the Land and Housing Corporation. This bill is consistent with the Housing Act 2001. It makes numerous references to "the Minister" when considering the Land and Housing Corporation, including for the acquisition of land, sale of land, building construction, entering joint ventures and determining applications. While these changes are largely administrative, they highlight the housing Minister's failure to properly structure Homes NSW with the necessary legislative powers at its inception. This Government's record after nearly two years speaks for itself when it comes to homes and housing in this State.

We, along with the public, will hold the Minister accountable for her grand promises. The Coalition will support the passage of this bill not because we have confidence in this Minister and the Labor Government, but because we do not want to impose further delays in delivering housing for the people of New South Wales caused by the Government's own incompetence in setting up Homes NSW. The Government will be judged upon its record in delivering new social homes. It is worth revisiting the social housing waitlist, which has ballooned from 55,880 applicants in June 2023 to 63,260 in December 2024. It is an indictment on the activity that has taken place to date. Mr Temporary Speaker, you and the other members of the committee know that the Government has made a number of promises and commitments. The industry, stakeholders and the community are all invested in making sure that this issue is resolved, as it is a big one. Blunders like this do not create much confidence in the Government or Homes NSW to make sure that this issue is dealt with. That being said, we do not oppose passage of the bill and commend it to the House.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Alex Greenwich): It being 5.00 p.m., pursuant to standing and sessional orders, debate is interrupted for the public interest debate. I set down resumption of the debate as an order of the day for a later hour.

*Public Interest Debate***RURAL AND REGIONAL OBSTETRICS**

Dr JOE MCGIRR (Wagga Wagga) (17:00): I move:

That this House:

- (1) Notes that the decline in rural and regional obstetric services is presenting a risk to the health and safety of rural and regional women and their babies as well as rural and regional families and communities.
- (2) Calls on the New South Wales Government to restore, maintain and grow rural and regional obstetric services.
- (3) Calls on the New South Wales Government to immediately work with key clinical stakeholders to deliver an action plan by the end of the year to ensure that networked obstetric services provide care as close to home as possible for rural and regional women and families.

Rural and regional obstetric services are in decline. We must act now to stop that decline and rebuild our services. The community expects us to provide women and families with safe birthing services as close to home as possible. Instead, in rural and regional areas we have seen, and are seeing, a progressive decline in those services. At the heart of this are the stories of real people. Rural and regional women increasingly face long travel to give birth and real risk of delivering their babies before they reach hospital because birthing services are not available close to home.

Here are a few cases. A story in *The Australian Women's Weekly* last year told how a Hunter Valley woman gave birth in the toilets at the Muswellbrook Hospital emergency department because the hospital's birthing service was closed and the baby's arrival was so imminent that the parents did not have time to drive to Singleton. According to a story in *The Sun-Herald*, on the South Coast, a woman delivered her baby boy on the side of the Princes Highway because her home hospital, Milton Ulladulla Hospital, closed its birthing services in 2016. In Tamworth, mothers travel as far as Maitland to have their babies because the home hospital has been on birthing bypass too often. I could go on. Those are real stories, real families and real risks.

Should we need statistics to underpin those cases, we do not have to look far. I am aware of at least 15 birthing services in rural and regional communities that have closed in the past decade or so. At least another six birthing centres are facing closure, downgrades or bypasses. Women from communities in western, northern and southern New South Wales are facing the prospect of long journeys to deliver their babies and the ever-present risk of giving birth before they reach their destination hospital. According to *The Sydney Morning Herald*, NSW Health data showed that women who gave birth on roadsides or in cars or ambulances en route to hospital made up 0.7 per cent of births for all New South Wales districts in 2022. But in the Northern NSW Local Health District, that rate reached 1.7 per cent. That is more than one in 60 babies born before the mother arrived at the hospital. In western New South Wales, it is more than one in 80 babies. That rate reached 1.2 per cent in 2022, and that was a rise of 0.5 per cent in just three years.

In rural and regional New South Wales there are about 70 general practitioners with the additional skills in obstetrics who provide services in hospital settings. It is anticipated that we will need another 55 to 70 GPs in the next five years—a doubling in number—just to maintain services. That is an alarming picture for women and their families, and for rural and regional communities. Obstetric services are a critical component of district hospital services. They link to local anaesthetic, surgical and emergency services to provide centres of acute care that support communities and help them to grow and thrive.

Rural and regional obstetric services are not like city-based services. They rely on close cooperation between GP services and midwives, with the support of specialists based in regional centres. That has been the model for many decades. But all too often now, there are too few obstetricians and midwives to meet demand. Just as alarmingly, collaboration between those dedicated workers and the specialists may not be good enough. My crossbench colleagues and I raised those concerns with the Government. In response to our inquiries, the health Minister points to the system of networked services, general recruitment and retention initiatives, some rural midwifery initiatives and a pilot project on GP trainee intentions.

I acknowledge the Minister's commitment to rural health. But when it comes to rural obstetrics, it is not good enough. We need a specific, targeted approach, not just a global, generic strategy. For example, the Government talks of networking services led by tertiary referral maternity services. But if the services are so well networked, why have so many closed? Why are they going on bypass? Make no mistake: The lives of women and babies and the wellbeing of their families and communities will remain at risk unless we make dramatic improvements. The key aim must be to develop strategies that will make a real and lasting difference to the workforce. Those strategies include better training pathways and professional recognition to recruit, retain and nurture a growing workforce of rural and regional GP obstetricians and midwives, respected and supported by specialist services and the health system.

Safe birthing facilities are as non-negotiable in the country as they are in the city, and their provision cannot be brushed aside as all too hard. The time has come to draw a line in the sand. There must be no further decline in rural and regional birthing services; in fact, they must be significantly improved. That is why I am calling for the delivery of an action plan by the end of this year, with genuine clinician input, to take on this problem and fix it. This is a statewide issue, and it needs strong leadership from the Government. I acknowledge that this issue has been in the making for many years and that this Government inherited this challenge. I acknowledge that many factors have led to it. In a way, the system has just watched this slow decline.

But enough is enough. We need action right now. There could be no greater signal of the Minister's commitment to rural and regional health than to make this his flagship reform. I know that he is committed to improving rural and regional health. Here is an opportunity to bring those good intentions to a new level and make a real and lasting difference. An action plan will offer a means of making that difference and assuring rural communities that the Government is backing them in. We are at a crossroads on this issue in rural and regional health. Let us move ahead, with a clear destination in mind, and deliver a brighter future to rural families.

Dr MICHAEL HOLLAND (Bega) (17:07): I acknowledge the member for Wagga Wagga for his ongoing advocacy for health services in his electorate and in rural and regional New South Wales. The Government supports the member's motion and will continue to focus on actions to address workforce challenges in rural and regional communities. I make it clear that the New South Wales Government is committed to rebuilding the rural and regional health workforce across the State. It is one of our highest priorities. We have spoken about this issue in this Chamber many times. We want to ensure that the people of regional, rural and remote New South Wales have access to safe and high-quality health care to achieve the best health outcomes possible. In that regard, this Government committed to implementing all 44 recommendations of the rural health inquiry. To date, NSW Health has completed 28 of the recommendations—more than half. The remaining 16 are progressing.

This debate raises the important issue of maternity services in rural and regional communities. I assure the House that NSW Health is providing safe and high-quality maternity care across New South Wales, including in regional, rural and remote communities. We continue to support our obstetricians and our midwifery workforce. The global shortage of specialised maternity clinicians, such as obstetricians and midwives, poses a significant challenge, particularly in rural and regional areas. We are working to improve the situation in New South Wales. Considerable work is already underway. This Government, in partnership with the Commonwealth, funds the NSW Rural Generalist Medical Training Program and the NSW Rural General Practitioner Procedural Training Program. Those programs provide GPs and GP trainees with advanced skills training in obstetrics and other specialist areas. Under those programs, 103 GP obstetricians have been trained in New South Wales. Currently, there are 14 active GP obstetrician trainees in various stages of training.

The NSW Rural Generalist Single Employer Pathway is being rolled out in all regional districts to enable rural generalist trainees to be employed by NSW Health while completing their four years of training. Under that program rural generalists with an advanced skill in obstetrics can work across primary care and hospital facilities providing maternity services. There are 44 rural generalist trainees at various stages of training employed on the pathway in 2025. To underpin those programs, the Government is undertaking a project to understand the barriers for GP trainees doing obstetrics, which will make recommendations aimed at increasing the uptake of GP obstetrics training and GP obstetric positions in regional and rural communities.

I assure the community that New South Wales maternity and obstetric services remain strong and safe. Local health districts plan and provide maternity services and models of care across New South Wales according to their population needs, birth numbers and availability of staff. Maternity services in New South Wales are networked, ensuring women and their babies receive the safest care at the most appropriate facility. Maternity clinicians work with pregnant women to ensure they have appropriate care plans in place. Since taking office in March 2023, the New South Wales Minns Labor Government has made major investments in our rural and regional workforce to support our maternity services.

The Government has doubled the incentive for our hardest-to-fill positions in rural and remote New South Wales, with up to \$20,000 on offer from NSW Health, which is designed to encourage more workers to take up opportunities in locations with critical staff vacancies. In September 2024 the New South Wales Government announced an expansion of the sign-on bonus, offering a \$20,000 bonus for midwives relocating from metropolitan New South Wales, interstate or internationally to any rural or remote NSW Health services classified MM3 to MM7.

This Government continues to build capacity in maternity services around the State. Over the past 12 months it has announced a number of new and enhanced maternity continuity of care models, including midwifery group practice and midwifery antenatal and postnatal services within Hunter New England, Illawarra Shoalhaven, Mid North Coast and Southern NSW local health districts. That has resulted in increased access to

maternity continuity of care in regional and rural areas, providing more choice for women closer to home. I can assure the House that this Government works extensively with clinicians, stakeholders and our Federal colleagues to support our specialist maternity workforce and rebuild the regional health services our rural communities deserve.

Mr GURMESH SINGH (Coffs Harbour) (17:12): I contribute to debate on this important motion brought by the member for Wagga Wagga and thank him for moving it. Over the past few decades the landscape of maternity care in New South Wales has drastically changed. One in two of our birthing units and more than 140 maternity services have closed. They are not just statistics; they represent the loss of essential lifelines for regional mothers, babies and families. Imagine being in a remote community where the closest place to give birth is now hundreds of kilometres away and where the comforting presence of local care has been replaced by uncertainty. Women living in regional, rural and remote communities are now 62 times more likely to die during childbirth compared to their city counterparts.

The decline in services has far-reaching consequences. Since 1990 born-before-arrival births have doubled in northern New South Wales and tripled in western New South Wales, and recent cuts have further deepened the crisis. Maternity services have recently ceased in Muswellbrook, Parkes, Cootamundra, Milton, Ulladulla and Woy Woy. Meanwhile communities like Gunnedah, Glen Innes and Kempsey are witnessing a reduction in essential services. In places like Kempsey, mothers can often be transferred to a neighbouring hospital without their babies. I cannot imagine the stress and trauma that that brings to both mother and baby. The ongoing closures, downsizing and bypassing of regional maternity units only compound the risk, leaving our most vulnerable even more exposed.

Last week in this House we spoke about a mother who was turned away from three hospitals and gave birth on the side of the road on the way to the fourth. That is simply not good enough. Recruiting and training obstetricians in rural areas has become increasingly difficult. The situation is further exacerbated by experienced midwives leaving the profession. Even private obstetrics units are closing because they do not feel supported by the current business model. Women with high-risk pregnancies, which require specialised care, now often have to travel to major centres or even to Sydney, sometimes for days on end. This not only delays critical care but also incurs significant costs: thousands of dollars that could be better spent on sustaining local services. Occasionally, it means families are thousands of dollars out of pocket at a time when money can be tight.

Some great community advocates are highlighting the issues, such as Jen Laurie from Her Herd. Jen is a perinatal and paediatric mental health clinician who looks after rural families via telehealth and runs a popular podcast that discusses the issues regional mothers face in not only pregnancy and birth but also parenting. Her Herd is behind the Bush Babies campaign, which currently has a petition before the Parliament, asking the Government to increase funding to promote better service delivery in regional New South Wales and set up an advisory group on rural health to evaluate and monitor the recommendations from the rural health inquiry. It is a great organisation and I am very happy to be supporting its cause. The following story was sent to me by one of my constituents:

I am apparently part of the 1% of women who labor extremely fast. When I presented to the hospital for a check after 1.5-2 hours, I was already 7-8 cm dilated, making it impossible to transfer me to Tamworth. Due to significant blood loss and the fact that my baby was not yet in my pelvis, an emergency caesarean was required. The reality is, I wouldn't have made it to Tamworth in time. This resulted in the on-call doctor being urgently brought from Tamworth, traveling in the back of a highway patrol car with lights and sirens at 150 km/h, while we waited for the anaesthetist to drive from Tamworth to Gunnedah. This experience highlights the challenges of centralized care, where everything is routed through Tamworth, and the lack of local resources, such as available doctors, in smaller towns.

Being the father of two children myself, I cannot imagine what she went through waiting for that baby to come. The Health portfolio is not an easy one. In my first term here I saw the physical toll it took on the health Minister, which is why the Regional Health portfolio was created. The challenges in regional health are different, and can be different from town to town and region to region. The Opposition continues to call on the Minns Labor Government to reinstate a dedicated Minister for Regional Health: Someone who can sit at the Cabinet table and advocate strongly for those of us living in regional New South Wales; someone who can have the fight with the health Minister from time to time because the health system is not doing well. During COVID our health system was the best in the country and the envy of health systems around the world. Two years in, can we really say the same about our health system under Labor?

Ms JULIA FINN (Granville) (17:17): It is a well-known fact that rural and regional health facilities across Australia struggle to recruit and retain staff due to a range of factors. It is a longstanding issue that has become increasingly challenging. My grandfather was an obstetrician here on Macquarie Street. When I was born, he insisted that my mum came to Sydney to give birth to me because he was worried about the standard of obstetrics in country New South Wales back then. A few years later, he was happy for my sister to be born in Cowra hospital.

In the current day we face big challenges. Minister Park has said time and again that worker shortages in the regions are the single biggest challenge confronting our health system. As a Government, we are addressing that. We have doubled the incentive for the hardest-to-fill positions in rural and remote New South Wales with up to \$20,000 on offer from NSW Health, which is designed to encourage more workers to take up opportunities in locations with critical staff vacancies. The \$20,000 attraction and relocation incentive package applies for the first year of service, with up to \$10,000 per year for ongoing service. It includes a range of benefits, including an additional rural and regional health allowance, relocation and accommodation assistance, additional leave and access to training and education.

I can assure the House that NSW Health provides safe and high-quality maternity care right across New South Wales, including in regional, rural and remote communities. Maternity clinicians work with pregnant women to ensure that they have appropriate care plans in place. The New South Wales Government continues to work with the Australian Government to achieve greater coordination and support for a stable clinical workforce for rural and regional communities, including by boosting numbers of junior doctors choosing to train as a GP with advanced skills training available in obstetrics. NSW Health, in partnership with the Commonwealth, funds the NSW Rural Generalist Training Program and the NSW Rural General Practitioner Procedural Training Support Program. Furthermore, we are working closely with clinicians and stakeholders on a project to understand the barriers for GP trainees doing obstetrics to find solutions that will increase the uptake of GP obstetrics training and GP obstetric positions in regional and rural communities.

This Government supports our entire specialist maternity workforce. NSW Health supports the growth of the midwifery workforce with recruitment strategies, such as GradStart and MidStart, and the Rural Postgraduate Midwifery Student Strategy. The Mentoring in Midwifery Program helps midwives to develop skills and the confidence to mentor midwifery students and transitioning midwives. We recognise the challenges faced by specialist clinicians and maternity staff located in rural and remote parts of this State and the sense of isolation that can be experienced. That is why this Government is investing \$6.19 million every year in the Pregnancy Connect initiative. This is a critical investment in our obstetrics and midwifery workforce. Under this innovative program, NSW Health is recruiting a total of 13 full-time equivalent midwives and eight full-time equivalent obstetricians across every local health district.

This team of obstetrics and midwifery specialists supports regional maternity clinicians, reducing the sense of isolation that can act as a barrier to rural and regional recruitment and retention of staff. Through Pregnancy Connect, we are improving timely access to specialist consultation close to home and the safe transfer of pregnant women who require higher levels of care. But, most importantly, we are improving outcomes for women and their babies by reducing the dislocation often experienced by women and their families when transfer to higher level care is necessary. Having safe and comfortable accommodation is also one of the most important considerations for healthcare workers when accepting work in our rural and regional health facilities.

As a government, we have committed \$200.1 million to deliver new health worker housing in regional New South Wales to attract and retain health staff in our regional, rural and remote communities. To be delivered over the next four years, this investment is expected to support the recruitment and retention of over 500 additional health workers and their families in regional New South Wales. I assure the House that this Government will not rest until we have rebuilt the specialist health workforce in rural and regional New South Wales. It is an incredibly important priority. I appreciate how important that is, particularly for maternity and obstetrics.

Mrs HELEN DALTON (Murray) (17:21): In politics we often speak of motherhood statements. A motherhood statement is a statement about something that no-one is meant to oppose. That is because no-one is meant to oppose mothers. Everyone is meant to support mothers. Motherhood statements are meant to be no-brainers, and any politician who is against the subject of a motherhood statement is usually committing political suicide. Yet here we have a situation where the New South Wales Government does not seem to support mothers. That is because the New South Wales Government continues to fail mothers in rural areas, as well as their unborn and newborn babies.

Rural obstetric services in New South Wales have declined to a point where really no mother should feel safe. Lives are already at risk. Some lives may have already been lost. This is a disgraceful situation, and it must change immediately. The lives of a rural baby and that baby's mother are just as important as the lives of a city baby and a city mother. But the allocation of resources and services makes it clear that rural lives are not worth as much to this Government as city lives. Why do we treat rural mothers and their unborn and newborn babies as second-class citizens? And why do rural voters put up with this? I am a mother of four and, believe me, I know how stressful pregnancies and childbirth can be. So why do we allow our Government to add to that stress by providing substandard obstetric services in rural and regional areas?

The New South Wales Government must commit right now to restoring, maintaining and growing rural obstetric services—and the "growing" part of that is very important because rural New South Wales is growing,

Currently, we do not have adequate services, so if the Government does not get serious a bad situation is only going to get a lot worse. When we consider the inadequate services in my electorate of Murray, it is clear that the New South Wales Government must act immediately. The Government must establish a taskforce that includes key clinical stakeholders in order to develop an action plan that will ensure rural obstetric services provide an appropriate level of care for rural women and their babies.

There are few things more important for a government to do than to keep us and our loved ones alive. That is why I completely support what the member for Wagga Wagga is seeking to achieve. We must not continue to have two health systems in New South Wales. The taskforce is long overdue. I call on the Government to act on this fundamental issue immediately.

Ms LIZA BUTLER (South Coast) (17:25): I thank the member for Wagga Wagga for raising this issue today in Parliament. It is an issue that is very close to my heart. I thank the good member for Wagga Wagga for sharing the stories of regional women, especially those on the South Coast. This issue has been in the making for many years—it is one of the reasons that I ran for Parliament. The member for Coffs Harbour said that the Milton hospital recently closed its maternity services, but that happened in August 2016 under the previous Government. Since that time, I have been advocating for the return of birthing services. Prior to my election, I found out from doctors on the South Coast that when maternity services are removed from a small regional hospital, the area loses the anaesthetist because there is not enough work and then they move out of town. Then how do we attract doctors, GPs, obstetricians, anaesthetists to an area that is not supplying a service? It has been very difficult to get that service back.

In 2016 my predecessor stated in *Hansard* that at a public meeting the area health service said it would return birthing services to the Milton Ulladulla Hospital. When the Minns Government came to government in 2023 there was still absolutely nothing happening in that hospital. I am really pleased that now the South Coast is at least attracting regional midwives and other staff to hospitals by offering incentives, but what we are seeing now at the Milton Ulladulla Hospital is stage one. We are rolling out the midwifery group practice model, which will allow women to have one point of contact through their hospital instead of having to travel an hour in one direction to the Shoalhaven hospital, or an hour and a half to the Milton hospital to see a different person every time. The midwifery group practice model is a step in the right direction.

Stage two of what we are trying to achieve on the South Coast will be expanding services to offer midwifery-led home births for women who are low risk and are having a second pregnancy. All other women will continue to go to the Shoalhaven hospital. Stage three will return birthing services to the Milton Ulladulla Hospital. I want my community to know that not a week goes by when I am not advocating on this issue. It is not just about birthing services; it is women's health generally. Whether women need reproductive or screening services, in regional areas they have to travel long distances. It is easy to remove a service, but bringing it back takes time. As I said, I have been working to get to this point on the South Coast for two years. I am really pleased that my electorate is attracting staff. We are rolling out those models in contrast to the seven years of absolutely no action whatsoever under the previous Government.

I will continue to advocate. The two labour wards at Milton Ulladulla Hospital are totally unfit for women to give birth in in 2025. That is another issue we must look at. Are the spaces that women give birth in suitable today, especially when they have been left empty or used for many years as storage cupboards for broken equipment, as they were at Milton hospital? It is a long road, but I am committed to working with the Minister for Health, and Minister and for Regional Health, to return services to women and families in regional areas in New South Wales, and to fix the previous Government's removal of services over the past 12 years.

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal) (17:29): I speak in support of the important motion on rural and regional obstetrics moved by the member for Wagga Wagga, and I thank him for his learned commentary in his introduction. I express my thanks to the member for Wagga Wagga for raising such an important issue. I note from the outset that the Parliamentary Secretary said in his opening comments that he agreed with the motion moved by the member for Wagga Wagga, which I hope means that the Government has agreed to the third paragraph, in which stakeholders will deliver an action plan by the end of the year.

Access to obstetric services is close to every single parent's heart, no matter where they are in New South Wales. Parents want to ensure that they have the best services available to them, regardless of where they live. In my opinion, it is every parent's right to have access to those services. Paragraph (1) of the motion rings true for our region of the Central Coast. Access to obstetric and maternity services became a major concern to the people of the Central Coast following the planned closure of Gosford Private Hospital's maternity ward at the end of March. The Central Coast is a region of over 350,000 people that will be left with a singular maternity ward. That is one maternity ward to serve a region that stretches from the Mooney Mooney area at the mouth of the Hawkesbury River all the way to the shores of Lake Macquarie at Gwandalan.

That means that, for expectant parents, there is no longer an option for private care. There is an increase in demand from Gosford public hospital, where more than 3,000 babies are delivered annually. Our community is very concerned about the severe impact on patient choice and continuity of care. However, the story gets worse for the Central Coast because in December, just before Christmas, executives at Gosford Hospital warned of the risk of the coast's only public obstetrics and gynaecology services going on bypass. Yet 27.1 per cent of our region are couples with children and 12.8 per cent are one-parent families. At some stage, they will all need access to or will have already accessed obstetric services. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has stated:

... following significant consultation regarding concerns around clinical supervision and safety, the college has made the difficult decision to suspend training accreditation at Gosford Hospital from semester one, February 2025.

It has been a sudden and hard-hitting decline in services for our region, despite Gosford Hospital being one of the busiest hospitals outside metropolitan Sydney. Despite those challenges, I commend the acting chief executive, Jude Constable, for the outstanding job done and thank the rest of the Central Coast Local Health District staff for their response to the crisis. The Central Coast Local Health District is working hard to recruit staff into its obstetrics and gynaecology medical workforce, with formal offers provided to a head of department for obstetrics and a head of department for gynaecology.

On top of that, the health district is working closely with the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists to visit Gosford Hospital to work towards reinstating training accreditation later in the year. While I congratulate and thank them all profusely for those efforts and steps to ensure we have the best care for parents on the coast, this should never have occurred. It is unfathomable that our region could fall into such a state so quickly under this Government's watch. If access to obstetric and maternity services is being lost in our rapidly growing region, where our population is expected to grow to 412,000 residents by 2046, what is the story for the rest of regional and rural New South Wales?

Smaller regional towns and villages are at risk of being left behind, and that cannot happen. I recognise the efforts of the member for Wagga Wagga to bring light to the issue today and call for more action for regional and rural families. Every family, regardless of where they live—whether it be Terrigal, Dungog, Orange or anywhere else in New South Wales—deserves equitable access to obstetric and maternity care. If this Government does not work towards restoring, maintaining and growing regional and rural services, then we risk being left behind. We are already being left behind by the Government on several issues, and we cannot afford to let obstetric and maternity services to be added to that growing list.

There are several actions this Government can take to work towards improving the situation for the regions. We need funding commitments, we need more healthcare workers for regional areas including the Central Coast, and we need to have the taskforce inserted immediately, as requested by the member for Wagga Wagga. To have that action plan in place means that the Government has to deliver. Time is running out and we need swift action to support regional and rural communities. That is why supporting the motion moved by the member for Wagga Wagga is so important to every regional and rural community right around New South Wales.

Mr ROY BUTLER (Barwon) (17:34): By leave: I start by thanking my friend the member for Wagga Wagga for moving a motion on rural and regional obstetrics in the public interest debate. The member is well placed to speak on this topic given his profession as a rural doctor and the inquiry he has conducted into regional, rural and remote health in New South Wales. I also need to acknowledge that, since 2023, the Government has made several positive changes that will help to resolve the problem in time, but I need to represent my electorate in what is happening right now. There are few places in Barwon where women can confidently give birth. Most women leave their community to have their babies. In a large city, people generally have the luxury of choosing where they can give birth. Many want to do so close to where they live for the convenience of having only a short ride to the birthing centre. Some might choose a specific hospital so that their child can have their hometown on their birth certificate, but many just want to choose the hospital they know: the one they or their parents were born in.

When a woman has to leave her community to give birth, it can create a diverse range of problems, like Cobar's "Iron Ringers". This is a privileged title for people born in Cobar. It signifies that they are true locals. It is so important to Cobar that there is an iron ringer monument as a tribute to this part of their culture. Cobar can no longer have Iron Ringers because families must now travel hundreds of kilometres to Dubbo or Forbes for access to obstetric services. It is also vitally important to Indigenous women that babies are born on country, on the land of their ancestors. It ensures a spiritual connection between the newborn and the land, and it is a very strong belief that this gives the child a good start in life. In the town of Bourke, there is no operating birthing unit at the multi-purpose services, so women need to travel—again to the big regional centres of Dubbo or to Forbes—to give birth. That significantly impacts cultural ties to the land. It means that expectant mothers are separated from their community, and it can be very distressing for the entire family.

To the credit of community leaders in Bourke, the Western NSW Local Health District and Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Directorate, a "Welcome baby to country" ceremony has been initiated for when mothers and their babies return to town. People say that it strengthens their connection to the land. It is so important that this ceremony has now been extended to non-Indigenous families, so that they can all feel part of the same community. In Narrabri, women sometimes do not even bother presenting at the hospital because they know they will be transferred to Tamworth or Moree. Narrabri used to run a very successful antenatal clinic. It serviced surrounding communities like Wee Waa and out as far as Lightning Ridge. Now women are shifted to Moree to meet a group of John Hunter clinicians flown in for the day for something as simple as their initial pregnancy tests. That is over an hour's drive away. That baffles the community.

The equipment for those initial ultrasounds and blood tests is in Narrabri, and historically the service was successful. Yet, the Hunter New England Local Health District continues to quietly strip away services and promote centralised obstetric care. Women can return to Narrabri for postnatal care, but often the nursing staff have little to no maternity training or experience. That can have adverse results like poor breastfeeding rates, and women can be sent home without important health checks and referrals. I have heard Hunter New England staff talk at length about other models of obstetric care, like the one used in towns like Glen Innes, which allow births to happen under carefully planned circumstances while more complex births are sent elsewhere, and which they wanted to introduce to Narrabri. Meanwhile they ignored the fact that focusing on recruiting more obstetric staff is the easiest solution to solving the shortfall in obstetric services.

We need health districts that are invested in these small communities and willing to work with them, not against them, for better outcomes. The Far West Local Health District is one of those examples. They had their maternity services showcased at the Women's Healthcare Australasia "Safety and Quality in Maternity Care" insight forum. That is a great example of a local health district getting it right. Their presentation included maternal and neonatal safety and quality clinical indicators, mode of birth data, and neonatal outcomes as well as how the Far West Local Health District is enhancing continuity of care programs like the Broken Hill Midwifery Group Practice, which is the gold standard of midwifery care and has been modelled in other services in New South Wales and other States.

Evidence shows that midwife-led care, with women at the centre of decision-making, leads to better outcomes. We need to make sure that the key clinical stakeholders who are delivering successful services to regional women are part of a conversation moving forward so our health districts can fully comprehend the importance of delivering babies close to home. Again, I acknowledge that the Government has taken some very positive steps that should result in some very positive changes.

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY: I seek leave to make a contribution to the debate.

Leave not granted.

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: I seek leave to make a short contribution to the debate.

Leave not granted.

Mr DAVID LAYZELL: I seek leave to make a contribution to the debate.

Leave not granted.

Mr BRENDAN MOYLAN: I seek leave to make a contribution to the debate.

Leave not granted.

Dr JOE McGIRR (Wagga Wagga) (17:40): In reply: I acknowledge all the speakers and would-be speakers. It is quite a crowd. I know the member for Lismore wanted to contribute to the debate, but she was gagged as well. I acknowledge the contributions to the debate of the member for Bega, the member for Coffs Harbour, the member for Granville, the member for Murray, the member for South Coast, the member for Terrigal and the member for Barwon. I also acknowledge the would-be speakers, the member for Tamworth, the member for Albury, the member for Northern Tablelands and the member for Upper Hunter.

Ms Janelle Saffin: The would-bes if they could-bes.

Dr JOE McGIRR: No, they are would-bes because they are here fighting for their communities and families. They recognise there is a real issue with the provision of obstetric and maternity services. At the outset, I acknowledge the Government's initiatives to increase recruitment and retention that the member for Bega and the member for Granville spoke of. I acknowledge the work that has been done. But this issue requires another level of focus. The member for South Coast really nailed the issue, as did the member for Barwon. The member for South Coast spoke about how hard it has been for her to get a unit at Milton Ulladulla Hospital, even for level 1. Why does it have to be so hard? When a maternity service shuts, why does the community have to fight

with the local health district to get a service re-established? Why is every stop not pulled out to start building the services up again? Instead, it is almost like they say, "Okay, it's fallen over. We will let that one go". Then there are all sorts of talks about the level of care being provided to women—they can transfer to a bigger centre and so on.

There is a reduction in the provision of services for women and families. As the member for South Coast said, it is so hard to rebuild those services. It is not enough to have global strategies around recruitment and retention. This issue needs a focus. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists needs to get on board. The Government should bring the college in to support this. It needs real support. We need more than a GP training program. We need places for these people to work. The member for Barwon quite rightly and tellingly spoke about the situation in Narrabri and the importance of these services for birthing on country. It is important to First Nations people. We need links to antenatal care. If health providers cannot deliver health services for women and children, they should not be in the game of providing health services. That is how critical this is. The fact that there is such a divide between country and city—which is increasing—is why I moved this motion. That divide is an alarm bell.

I welcome the fact that the Government has committed to delivering an action plan by the end of this year, in conjunction with commissioners. I look forward to seeing the results of that plan and the subsequent actions. I commend the motion to the House.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Alex Greenwich): The question is that the motion be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Bills

MENTAL HEALTH LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2024

Second Reading Speech

Dr MICHAEL HOLLAND (Bega) (17:44): On behalf of Mr Ryan Park: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to bring to the House the Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. This bill makes a number of amendments to the Mental Health and Cognitive Impairment Forensic Provisions Act 2020, known as the forensic Act, and the Mental Health Act 2007 to improve the oversight of forensic patients. Forensic patients include people who, while mentally unwell or cognitively impaired, have committed crimes—sometimes terrible crimes. They include people who are not considered criminally responsible for their acts because, under law, they either did not know the nature or quality of the act, or did not know that the act was wrong. The fact that forensic patients are not considered criminally responsible under law for their behaviour does not lessen the significant trauma, anger and grief experienced by victims and their families. I am sure all members agree that it is important to recognise the pain and immense suffering of those who have been harmed and those who have suddenly and tragically lost loved ones. The pain and suffering experienced by victims and their families can be tragic and is lifelong. I express my deepest heartfelt sympathies to all victims of crimes and their families who have been impacted by people in the forensic system.

The forensic mental health system in New South Wales is a robust regime with responsibility for treating and managing patients with the aim of protecting the community. The forensic system is not about punishment. It is about ensuring that forensic patients are appropriately managed and provided with specialised care to minimise risk to the patient and others and ensure that patients are not released into the community or given leave unless and until it is safe to do so. The forensic Act sets out the processes for the oversight and review of forensic patients. The Mental Health Review Tribunal is the independent semi-judicial body responsible for reviewing forensic patients and making decisions regarding their detention, care, treatment, leave and release. The tribunal must review each forensic patient every six months. At those reviews, the tribunal can make decisions relating to leave or release. However, the tribunal cannot make an order for release or leave unless, among other things, the tribunal is satisfied that the safety of the patient or any other members of the public will not be seriously endangered if the leave or release is granted.

I emphasise that victims can request and the tribunal can grant what are known as non-association conditions or place-restriction conditions on forensic patients when granting leave or release. Such conditions restrict the ability of a forensic patient to associate with victims or their families or visit particular places. Various other conditions can be imposed when the tribunal grants leave or release to a forensic patient. There is a non-exhaustive list of conditions set out in section 85 of the forensic Act that the tribunal can impose when granting release. This includes conditions relating to medication, rehabilitation programs, drug testing and medical

tests, for example. Under section 94 of the Act, the same non-exhaustive list applies to conditions that can be imposed on an order granting leave to a forensic patient.

The list does not currently expressly refer to an ability for the tribunal to impose conditions relating to the use of social media or access to other forms of online communication. In some cases, providing access to social media or email may be appropriate, such as to allow a patient to connect with family overseas. However, it is important that the tribunal has the power to consider, on a case-by-case basis, whether access to online communication is appropriate and, if so, whether the form of communication should be restricted or limited. Whilst the tribunal can already impose such conditions, in today's digital world, it is important that it is expressly recognised in the forensic Act.

As such, the bill amends the forensic Act to make clear that the tribunal can impose conditions relating to prohibiting or restricting the use of social media or access to other online communications. The bill also makes a change in relation to the composition of the tribunal when granting leave. When reviewing forensic patients, the forensic Act currently provides that the tribunal must be constituted by three members, including a president or deputy president. However, when the tribunal is considering the release of a forensic patient, the Act requires that at least one member of the tribunal, including the president or deputy president, be the holder or former holder of a judicial office. This ensures that there is appropriate, robust judicial oversight before a forensic patient is released.

The requirement to have a current or former judicial officer sitting on the tribunal currently applies to release decisions only; it does not apply to leave decisions. The bill changes that. Under the bill, the tribunal cannot make a decision relating to leave, other than escorted leave, unless at least one member of the tribunal, including the president or deputy president, is the holder or former holder of a judicial office. This will bring leave decisions into line with release decisions. It will ensure that there is appropriate judicial oversight of the decision-making process for granting leave to forensic patients, which involves careful consideration of community safety concerns and the care and treatment of forensic patients.

I note that this requirement will not apply to escorted leave, where a patient is escorted from the facility by a staff member. Escorted leave may be required when a patient needs to attend a medical appointment or access the external grounds of a mental health facility. Escorted leave requires a staff member to be with the patient and is accessed only on a case-by-case basis with the approval of the patient's treating team. Due to the new requirement that all leave decisions other than escorted leave need to be made by a tribunal that has at least one member, including the president or deputy president, who is a current or former holder of a judicial office, the bill also amends the Mental Health Act to make it easier for magistrates and judges to move between the court and the tribunal.

Under the Mental Health Act, if a Supreme Court or District Court judge is appointed president of the tribunal, they retain their judicial status, remuneration and entitlements. However, the current provisions do not extend to a magistrate appointed as president or to magistrates or judges appointed as full-time deputy presidents. The bill changes that. Under the bill, if a magistrate or judge is appointed president or full-time deputy president, they will retain their judicial status and entitlements and the higher of the tribunal remuneration or judicial remuneration. This change will assist in attracting magistrates and judges to the tribunal as it will allow for the transition of entitlements and enable judicial officers to easily return to the court. Further, it will allow for increased flexibility, allowing judges and magistrates to be appointed to the tribunal for short periods to deal with any unexpected increases in workload.

The changes in the bill are important and sensible, and will help to address community concern and improve the judicial oversight of decisions relating to leave for forensic patients. Finally, I take a moment to once again acknowledge the victims of crime and their families across New South Wales. I am hopeful that this bill is a reflection to them of the New South Wales Government's commitment to improving oversight of these matters and to helping to ensure that the community feels safe. I commend the bill to the House.

Second Reading Debate

Ms ROBYN PRESTON (Hawkesbury) (17:52): I speak on behalf of the Opposition in my capacity as shadow mental health Minister in support of the Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. The bill seeks to make several amendments to two Acts, the Mental Health and Cognitive Impairment Forensic Provisions Act 2020, commonly referred to as the forensic Act, and the Mental Health Act 2007. I am sure this bill, introduced in the other place, will go a long way towards addressing concerns and recent incidents involving forensic patients' leave and entitlements. Forensic patients are people who have committed a crime—including terrible crimes, such as murder—while mentally unwell or cognitively impaired. Due to their mental impairment, offenders are deemed not to be criminally responsible for the act they have committed.

Whilst forensic patients are vulnerable, they can also be a risk to innocent people they encounter. It is therefore important that the legislation regarding care and leave for those patients is reviewed so that the safety and wellbeing of society is not compromised in the effort to provide appropriate treatment and detention for offenders. The families and loved ones of victims pay the ultimate price of ongoing grief, anger and trauma for the remainder of their lives, and that must not be exacerbated by legislative oversight. The forensic mental health system is robust, with processes to oversee and review forensic patients set out in the forensic Act. The Mental Health Review Tribunal is the independent semi-judicial body responsible for reviewing forensic patients and ensuring that their detention, care and treatment align with that Act.

The bill has been introduced under serious, regrettable and heartbreaking circumstances. Before I go further, I pay my respects to the victims of crime and express my deepest condolences to their families and loved ones, who carry the pain and trauma of their loss indefinitely. In 2020 Emerald Wardle was killed by strangulation by her boyfriend Jordan Brodie Miller. After Miller was originally found guilty in 2022, his sentence was overturned in the New South Wales Court of Criminal Appeal, which found that he was experiencing symptoms of undiagnosed mental illness at the time of the offence. Found not to be criminally responsible and sent to the Mental Health Review Tribunal, Miller was granted day release from his mental health facility four years after conviction. Whilst on day release, he was found to be scouting for love on a dating app.

Another case is that of Bridgette "Biddy" Porter, who in 2020 was just 10 years old when she was brutally killed by a teenage girl that she knew. Last year it was discovered that her killer had been given day release. Biddy's parents have since called for parliamentary inquiries into the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Mental Health Review Tribunal regarding why an individual who committed such a heinous crime and seemingly showed no remorse was able to access release provisions less than four years following the offence.

The Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2024 aims to address two main issues regarding leave requests and communication allowances for forensic patients. Currently the tribunal can impose conditions from a list set out in section 85 of the forensic Act when granting leave or release. Access to social media or other forms of online communication are not explicitly included in the Act, and the bill aims to amend that. It also aims to bring leave decisions into line with release decisions, stipulating that judicial oversight must be involved when decisions are made about day release. That excludes escorted leave for things such as attendance at a medical appointment or an external mental health facility, where a staff member accompanies the patient.

The bill's amendments to the Mental Health Act will make people who hold or have held office as a magistrate eligible for appointment as president or deputy president of the tribunal and specify that they will retain their judicial appointment and entitlements and will receive whichever remuneration is higher. Those amendments aim to attract magistrates to the tribunal and support flexibility among various roles, particularly during times of unexpected increases in workload. I have consulted some stakeholders about the bill, and the one criticism expressed to me was that there was not enough engagement with them prior to this debate. I recognise and thank the member for Orange for his advocacy for the bill and for acknowledging that it is intolerable for individuals who commit such terrible crimes to then receive leave or other provisions. I also acknowledge the proposed amendments to the bill foreshadowed by the member for Orange. Whilst acknowledging his intention, the Opposition will not support the amendments.

I pay tribute to the families of Emerald Wardle and Biddy Porter. I again offer my sincerest condolences for the pain and suffering they continue to experience following the terrible crimes committed against their loved ones. Their advocacy for the bill and the issues it aims to address is truly commendable. I hope that, should the bill pass, the legislative changes provide them some peace. The bill addresses a lapse in the oversight of forensic patients and aims to correct it, whilst balancing the safety of the community and the rights of forensic patients. The Opposition supports the bill in the hope that it will ensure the grief and trauma experienced by victims, their families and their loved ones are not diminished by inadequate or outdated legislation governing forensic patients in the digital age.

Ms CHARISHMA KALIYANDA (Liverpool) (17:59): I make a contribution in support of the important Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2024, which aims to improve oversight of forensic patients by requiring greater judicial oversight of leave decisions and expressly recognising that the Mental Health Review Tribunal can impose conditions restricting or prohibiting social media when granting leave or release. The New South Wales Government is committed to addressing community concerns raised in the media last year regarding forensic patients by introducing the bill. The bill makes various amendments to the Mental Health and Cognitive Impairment Forensic Provisions Act, which I will refer to as the forensic Act, and the Mental Health Act, with the intention of improving oversight of forensic patients and ensuring that the Mental Health Review Tribunal comprises appropriate persons so as to make fair, balanced and legally sound decisions. The amendments in the bill relating to oversight of forensic patients aim to address the need to protect the safety of the community, victims of crime and their families.

The amendments in the bill relating to the composition of the tribunal, and entitlements of tribunal members, aim to ensure there is appropriate judicial oversight of certain decisions, and that judges and magistrates are better able to swiftly and quickly move between the courts and the tribunal, particularly if there is a need to deal with any unexpected increase in workload. The fact that forensic patients are not considered criminally responsible under law for their behaviour does not lessen the significant trauma, anger and grief experienced by victims and their families. I am sure all members agree that it is important to recognise the pain and immense suffering of those who have been harmed, and those who have suddenly and tragically lost loved ones. It is in this tricky and difficult space that this bill seeks to provide greater protections for such families while balancing the reality of the legal framework for forensic patients.

The pain and suffering experienced by victims and their families can be tragic and lifelong. I express my deepest, heartfelt sympathies to all victims of crime and families who have been impacted by people in the forensic system. The forensic mental health system in New South Wales is a robust regime with responsibility for treating and managing patients with the aim of protecting the community. The forensic system is not about punishment. It is about ensuring that forensic patients are appropriately managed and provided with specialised care to minimise risk to the patient and others, and to ensure patients are not released into the community or given leave unless and until it is safe to do so.

The forensic Act sets out the processes for the oversight and review of forensic patients. The Mental Health Review Tribunal is the independent semi-judicial body responsible for reviewing forensic patients and making decisions regarding their detention, care, treatment, leave and release. Obviously, since the rise and the influence of social media over the past 10 to 15 years, it is important that we grapple with the impact on this space as well. That is exactly what the changes in the bill seek to do. The changes in the bill are important and sensible and will help to address community concern and improve the judicial oversight of decisions relating to leave for forensic patients. The Mental Health Review Tribunal has given the Government confidence that this will have no bearing on the efficiency of the system and the time frames in which it will be able to have reviews heard.

Under the proposed changes, decisions regarding leave other than escorted leave will require current or former judicial officers to be part of the decision-making panel. This change will be made through an amendment to the Act. The Government will also seek to make it clear that the tribunal may impose conditions or restrict or prohibit forensic patients' access to social media or other forms of online communication while on leave or release. This is because there are currently no restrictions on the types of conditions that may be imposed for leave and release orders. Social media and other forms of online communication are not directly referenced. The explicit inclusion of social media as something to be considered for restriction reflects community expectations that it be addressed by the tribunal in the same way that alcohol, drug testing and travel restrictions are when making leave or release decisions.

These changes are part of the New South Wales Government's ongoing work to ensure the State's forensic system is accountable, and reflects the feedback generously provided by those with a lived experience. This follows the \$2.4 million recent investment in the Mental Health Review Tribunal to enable it to improve records, upgrade IT systems and develop a new case management system. The New South Wales Government will continue to explore avenues to improve and strengthen the tribunal's work in consultation with stakeholders, experts and those with lived experience in this space.

I acknowledge those who have engaged with the Government on the need for this bill, especially the Porter family, as well as all families of victims. The courage and resilience demonstrated by those who campaign for change in the wake of heartbreak and devastation is clear for all of us in this place to see. I also especially acknowledge my parliamentary colleague the member for Orange for leading the way in this place, and I acknowledge the Attorney General and the Minister for Mental Health, as well as their ministerial and departmental staff, for their work in bringing this reform that better reflects community expectations and provides additional safety measures for our community.

Finally, I once again take a moment to acknowledge the victims of crime across New South Wales and their families. I hope that this bill is a reflection to them of the Government's commitment to improving oversight of these matters and to help in ensuring that the community feels safe. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr PHILIP DONATO (Orange) (18:05): I support the Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. Firstly, I take this opportunity to thank Minister Rose Jackson for her swift response to the incident that prompted her introduction of this bill in the other place. Some present here may have heard, or later became aware of, the substance of the private member's statement I delivered in this Chamber on 16 October 2024. My speech that evening was in relation to a forensic patient, Jordan Brodie Miller. Miller was then a patient of the Bloomfield Hospital in Orange. I was made aware of social media posts circulating and warning the community that a male person named Jordan Miller, or Jordan Brodie, was on Tinder and other social media platforms, and actively talking to women while in a forensic mental hospital for murdering his last girlfriend.

The posts alleged that Miller receives day release to leave and roam the Orange community. I was contacted by Kristy Smith, who is in the gallery this evening. She is an aunt of the late Emerald Wardle. Emerald was strangled to death by Jordan Brodie Miller. In 2022 Miller was subject to the Mental Health Review Tribunal as a result of killing Emerald. We have heard the member for Hawkesbury give a chronology of the appeal of his conviction by the Court of Criminal Appeal. Again, I convey my heartfelt condolences to Kristy Smith and all of Emerald's loved ones for their heartbreaking loss and their ongoing anguish. I acknowledge Kristy and family members here in the gallery or watching online tonight.

Due to the mental impairment at the time of the murder, Miller avoided jail time but was subject to the forensic mental health system. Even though Miller was not sentenced to mainstream jail, most people would assume that forensic mental health custody would mean that the community was at least safe from the killer. Access to social media and online dating platforms questions how well unsuspecting women could ever be protected by the unknown threat Miller potentially posed. The issue raised essential questions. How can a person who committed such a heinous crime be permitted to engage in activities that allow them to interact with the public, particularly vulnerable women? How and why was Jordan Miller granted release? What are the guidelines for his rehabilitation? How is access to social media and dating sites justified? These questions go to the heart of our duty to protect the community, particularly young women who could unknowingly interact with him.

This situation does not meet the community's expectations. Allowing someone with Miller's history to interact online is a glaring oversight. It poses an unacceptable risk to not only potential victims but also the integrity of our justice and mental health systems. Emerald's family, and indeed all families impacted by similar tragedies, deserve transparency. They deserve to know what safeguards are in place to prevent future violence. It is imperative that we re-evaluate protocols around the rehabilitation of criminal clients, especially those with histories of extreme violence.

The ability to access social media and dating apps must be critically examined. Are we prioritising rehabilitation at the expense of community safety? The bill addresses that to some extent. Until now, it seemed as though the system had been designed to favour those who commit crimes, rather than supporting living victims and protecting the community. Young women and the parents of young women would be appalled to know that this unsuspected threat exists. Women would not have known they were interacting with a killer under the so-called watch of the forensic mental health framework. The alarming behaviour we have witnessed falls far short of what would be expected by the community, and the bill addresses that specific issue.

I have spent considerable time listening to the family members of homicide victims. They are themselves living victims. Their experiences, as relayed to me, indicate that there is a great imbalance between the funding, consideration of care and support mechanisms provided to forensic patients who have committed homicide, and that which is provided to the families of homicide victims. The bill only partially addresses the many issues that require changes to the Justice Health framework and a shift in approach. For too long the emphasis has been on the forensic patients, who have been labelled as patients or clients rather than offenders, killers or murderers. The pendulum has swung too far. The balance in Justice Health has been weighed significantly in the favour of health rather than justice. No-one wishes to deny necessary mental health care to forensic patients. Rather, their treatment should be managed with consideration for the safety and expectations of the wider community. That is the crux of the issue.

There was a missed opportunity to consider and incorporate additional reform measures in the bill. I foreshadow that I will move an amendment during the consideration in detail stage. The amendment is a reasonable step to address a legislative gap. Finally, I acknowledge the people in the gallery and the many who are watching the broadcast. I have met with the victims of crime support group Advocacy Australia, and Clare and Alice Collins. As the member for Hawkesbury said, Bridgette Porter was a 10-year-old girl who lived in my electorate. She was tragically murdered by a young woman known to her and her family. I have spoken to Bridgette's parents, Bek and Dominic.

It beggars belief that perpetrators are released from mental health facilities only a couple of years after committing the most heinous acts. It is unimaginable. It is unthinkable. Quite frankly, the Mental Health Review Tribunal needs to take a good hard look at itself. I am quite glad that the Ministers acceded to the request to overhaul the system to ensure that magistrates or judicial officers have oversight of the decisions made by the tribunal. I commend the bill to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Hornery): Before I call the Parliamentary Secretary in reply, I also acknowledge the visitors in the gallery.

On behalf of the member for Ballina, I inform members that the Empowering Older Women group is currently meeting in the Jubilee Room. Unfortunately, I cannot be there. However, if other members would like to drop in to that get-together, they are more than welcome.

Dr MICHAEL HOLLAND (Bega) (18:13): On behalf of Mr Ryan Park: In reply: I thank members for their contributions to debate on the Mental Health Legislation Amendment Bill 2024. In particular, I thank the member for Hawkesbury, and shadow Minister for Mental Health and Medical Research for her bipartisan and collaborative actions. I thank the member for Liverpool for her considered contribution to the debate. I thank the member for Orange, who is a good man, a good local member and a sincere advocate for mental health legislation reform. The bill addresses a number of legitimate concerns about the oversight of forensic patients that have been raised by the community in recent times.

I indicate that the Government does not support the amendment foreshadowed by the member for Orange. The amendment would require the Mental Health Review Tribunal, when granting a forensic patient leave, to impose a condition that the forensic patient must be subject to electronic monitoring while absent. The Government thanks the member for Orange for his contribution to the bill and the work he has undertaken in his advocacy for victims of forensic patients. However, the system, in its current state, provides appropriate protections to the community. Orders are made contextual to the patient and any potential risks they might present. That scale and application of electronic monitoring would be entirely new to the justice and forensic mental health system. It would require thorough analysis to understand the operational, legal and financial feasibility. As such, the Government is not in a position to support the foreshadowed amendment.

The forensic system is not punitive; it is about rehabilitation and safety. Forensic patients who are detained may be granted leave for a variety of reasons. That could be leave to attend a medical appointment or structured leave as part of a step-down process progressing to release. Leave can be subject to conditions. However, in all cases, public safety is the paramount concern. Section 94 of the Mental Health and Cognitive Impairment Forensic Provisions Act already provides that the tribunal cannot grant leave unless it is satisfied, on the evidence available to it, that the safety of the patient, a registered victim of the patient or any other member of the public will not be seriously endangered if the leave of absence is granted.

Further, the tribunal has the power to grant leave subject to conditions. In appropriate cases, that could include a condition relating to electronic monitoring. In fact, sections 85 and 94 of the Act already expressly allow conditions to be imposed relating to electronic monitoring when granting leave or release. However, each case is assessed individually to determine the risks and benefits of any leave application. The evidence to support the current approach is demonstrated in the very low reoffending rates among forensic patients. Requiring the tribunal to impose a condition that a forensic patient must be subject to electronic monitoring while on leave undermines that approach, and the cost and resourcing would be prohibitive.

The bill expressly recognises that the Mental Health Review Tribunal can make orders prohibiting or regulating social media or other electronic communication access when making orders for leave or release. In addition, the bill requires the tribunal to have at least one current or former judicial officer sitting on the tribunal when making leave decisions, other than escorted leave or release decisions. Those are sensible changes that increase the judicial oversight in relation to leave decisions. I reiterate the comments made in the second reading speech about victims and their families. While forensic patients are not criminally responsible, that does not lessen the impact of their actions on victims and their families. I once again acknowledge and recognise that pain and suffering. I commend the bill to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Horner): The question is that this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Consideration in detail requested by Mr Philip Donato.

Consideration in Detail

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Horner): By leave: I will deal with the bill in groups of clauses and schedules. The question is that clauses 1 and 2 and schedules 1 and 2 be agreed to.

Mr PHILIP DONATO (Orange) (18:19): I move my amendment No. 1 on sheet c2025-002B:

No. 1 **Electronic monitoring of forensic patients granted leave**

Page 3, Schedule 1. Insert after line 7—

[1A] Section 94 Tribunal may grant leave for forensic patients

Insert after section 94(3)—

- (3A) If the Tribunal makes an order granting a leave of absence to a forensic patient, the Tribunal must impose a condition on the order requiring the forensic patient to be subject to electronic monitoring while absent.

- (3B) The regulations may provide for matters relating to electronic monitoring of forensic patients granted a leave of absence, including the minimum requirements for, and the supervision, monitoring and enforcement of, electronic monitoring.

[1B] Section 94(4)

Insert "also" after "Tribunal may" .

The amendment proposes to mandate the electronic monitoring of forensic patients who have been granted leave from mental health facilities utilising electronic monitoring devices; namely, ankle bracelets. Last year I advocated for the same technology to be applied to persons accused of serious domestic violence offences and the subject of bail. This measure is not only a matter of public safety, but also a step toward restoring community trust in our mental health and justice systems.

The proposed amendment stems from a recent incident involving forensic patient Michael Aller. In 2015 Aller was convicted of manslaughter for the brutal killing of his then girlfriend, Amy Aiton. At the time of the offence, he was reportedly on bail for domestic violence charges. Following his conviction, Aller was the subject of a limiting term under direction of the Mental Health Review Tribunal and, for the recent part of his term, has been detained at Bloomfield Hospital forensic health unit. Alarming, Aller has absconded on more than one occasion whilst on leave from Bloomfield Hospital. In December 2024 Aller failed to return from unsupervised leave, prompting the issue of a warrant for his apprehension. Police deployed significant resources over the three days that Aller was at large. He was eventually located, apprehended and returned to the custody of the Bloomfield Hospital forensic health unit.

While the immediate concern was Aller's return to custody, we must also consider the profound distress caused to Amy's family for the duration of his absconding. The uncertainty of his whereabouts and potential intentions undoubtedly inflicted severe emotional trauma on the family. Had electronic monitoring been in place, authorities could have tracked Aller's movements in real time, enabling a swift response and mitigating the family's anguish. I wish to convey my heartfelt condolences to Amy's parents, Debbie Roberts and Allan Aiton. I acknowledge their ongoing trauma as a result of their daughter's senseless killing, as well as the anxiety and fear they have experienced with Aller's absconding and their frustration with the system that keeps letting them down. I understand Debbie is watching this remotely online.

Our police operate under constrained resources. The extensive effort required to locate forensic patients who abscond diverts their attention from, and hinders their response to, other critical public safety duties. Implementing electronic monitoring would allow rapid identification of a forensic patient's location upon breaching leave conditions, facilitating efficient and effective use of resources. The community rightfully expects that individuals who have committed serious violent crimes, particularly those resulting in death, are subject to the most stringent of oversights. Allowing such individuals to be on leave without any form of monitoring does not align with public sentiment. The amendment addresses those concerns by ensuring continuous oversight, thereby enhancing public confidence in the justice health system. Some may argue that supervised leave is sufficient to prevent absconding. Believe it or not, each year for the past seven years there have been multiple occurrences of forensic patients absconding whilst on supervised leave.

The amendment proposes the use of electronic monitoring as a tool to enhance public safety and reduce the burden on policing resources, supporting the rehabilitation process while eliminating unnecessary fear, anxiety and anguish experienced by homicide victims' families. It is a commonsense measure that balances the treatment of forensic patients with the safety and expectation of the community. By mandating electronic monitoring for forensic patients on leave, we can deter absconding, ensure swift responses when breaches occur and uphold our duty to protect the public.

I understand that the Government and the Opposition will not support my amendment, which is somewhat disappointing, due to lack of resources to implement and manage, among other things. What would it take to motivate government to initiate such reasonable security and community safety policies and mechanisms? Let us hope it does not take another death. In the case of domestic violence victims, it took the death of a woman—a mother—from Forbes, in my electorate, to initiate government-led legislative reform and the electronic monitoring of serious domestic violence offenders who are subject to bail. It should not take the death or serious injury of an innocent person at the hands of an absconding forensic patient or known killer to motivate the Government to act. I urge all members to support the amendment. I commend the amendment to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Hornery): The question is that amendment No. 1 on sheet c2025-002B of the member for Orange be agreed to.

The House divided.

Ayes8

Noes74
Majority.....66

AYES

Butler, R
Dalton, H (teller)
Donato, P (teller)

Hannan, J
McGirr, J
Piper, G

Regan, M
Scrubby, J

NOES

Aitchison, J
Anderson, K
Atalla, E
Ayyad, T
Bali, S
Barr, C
Butler, L
Car, P
Catley, Y
Chanthivong, A
Clancy, J
Cooke, S
Cotsis, S
Coure, M
Crakanthorp, T
Cross, M
Crouch, A (teller)
Daley, M
Davis, D
Dib, J
Doyle, T
Finn, J
Griffin, J
Hagarty, N (teller)
Harris, D

Haylen, J
Henskens, A
Hodges, M
Hoenig, R
Holland, M
James, T
Kaliyanda, C
Kemp, M
Kirby, W
Lane, J
Layzell, D
Leong, J
Li, J
McDermott, H
McKeown, K
Mehan, D
Minns, C
Moylan, B
O'Neill, M
Park, R
Petinos, E
Preston, R
Provest, G
Quinnell, S
Roberts, A

Saffin, J
Saliba, D
Scully, P
Shetty, K
Singh, G
Sloane, K
Smith, T
Speakman, M
Stuart, M
Taylor, M
Tesch, L
Toole, P
Tuckerman, W
Tudehope, M
Vo, T
Voltz, L
Wallace, J
Warren, G
Washington, K
Whan, S
Wilkinson, K
Williams, R
Williamson, R
Wilson, F

Amendment negatived.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Hornery): The question is that clauses 1 and 2 and schedules 1 and 2 be agreed to.

Clauses 1 and 2 and schedules 1 and 2 agreed to.

Third Reading

Dr MICHAEL HOLLAND: On behalf of Mr Ryan Park: I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

HOUSING AMENDMENT BILL 2025

Second Reading Debate

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Ms DONNA DAVIS (Parramatta) (18:35): The Housing Amendment Bill 2025 amends the Housing Act 2001 to give the Minister for Housing the same functions as the Land and Housing Corporation under the Act and other relevant legislation, including the power to acquire, hold and deal with land and property consistent with the objects of the Act. The Minns Labor Government is committed to delivering housing for our communities and, to that end, Homes NSW was established as a division of the Department of Communities and Justice on 1 February 2024. Accompanying that move was the record investment of \$6.6 billion in the 2024-25 budget for the Building Homes for NSW program. The purpose of that program is to build 8,400 social homes by 2031, with Homes NSW taking the lead on the delivery of that new social housing, primarily in partnership with community

housing providers. The bill supports the implementation and delivery of the Building Homes for NSW program to not only build 8,400 new social homes but also deliver 21,000 new affordable and market homes.

Since coming to office in 2023, the Minns Labor Government has worked tirelessly to tackle the housing crisis, which has been decades in the making. It established Homes NSW, an agency dedicated to delivering new homes for those most in need and providing a single social and affordable housing service to drive better long-term outcomes. It committed a record-breaking \$6.6 billion investment and is funding thousands of new social and affordable homes, repairing and making habitable thousands more public and Aboriginal social homes, and boosting homelessness support services. This year the Government is on track to deliver 850 new social homes as part of year one of the Building Homes for NSW program.

Whether it be a working family who cannot find an affordable rental, a young woman trying to escape domestic violence or one of the 2,037 people who found themselves sleeping rough during the 2024 street count, the housing crisis has had devastating impacts on people from all walks of life. The Housing Amendment Bill 2025 is a critical enabler of the hard work needed to help solve the housing crisis. It unlocks \$4 billion of investment committed to Homes NSW in the 2024-25 budget and provides for a direct line of responsibility to the Minister for Housing for the delivery of new social and affordable homes.

A fortnight ago I joined with the Federal Minister for Housing, and Minister for Homelessness, the Hon. Clare O'Neil, Hume Community Housing representatives, Federal member for Parramatta Dr Andrew Charlton, the Lord Mayor of the City of Parramatta, Parramatta-based construction company Mono Constructions and others for the sod-turn on a much need-needed housing project in Parramatta. The project, which will deliver 66 new social and affordable apartments on two sites in Parramatta—in Collett Parade and Isabella Street—has been made possible by the joint investment of Housing Australia and Homes NSW. The \$33 million project will provide 28 social housing and 38 affordable housing apartments to support a diverse group of residents, including essential workers, individuals and families on the social housing waitlist. Through a partnership with Women's Community Shelters, some of the homes will also offer a safe, stable environment for women escaping domestic and family violence, as well as for older women at risk of homelessness.

On 24 September 2024 the Minns Labor Government announced a further three government-owned properties, identified as surplus land in the Government's land audit, to be transferred to Homes NSW. Sites in Woolloomooloo, Hurstville and the Parramatta electorate's Edwin Flack Avenue, Sydney Olympic Park, will deliver nearly 600 homes, with more than 50 per cent anticipated to be social housing. By providing these powers to the Minister for Housing, we are supporting the implementation and delivery of the Building Homes for NSW program, to deliver 8,400 new social homes and 21,000 new affordable and market homes over the coming years.

Schedule 1 [4] to the bill gives the Minister for Housing express statutory power to purchase, acquire, hold, develop, lease, dispose of and otherwise deal with land and property, consistent with the objects of the Act; the same functions as the Land and Housing Corporation under the Act and other relevant legislation, including the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 and the Residential Tenancies Act 2010 and any instruments made under the Acts; power to make vesting orders to enable the transfer of land between the Minister and other government agencies; and power to delegate the Minister's functions to an employee of the department or the Land and Housing Corporation.

I thank the Minister for bringing this bill forward. I appreciate the work undertaken by the Department of Communities and Justice, particularly its consultations with Treasury, the Cabinet Office, the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, and the Department of Customer Service—including the Building Commission, the Rental Commissioner and the Registrar of Community Housing. The bill supports both our election commitment to establish Homes NSW, as a single point in government to drive the delivery and management of social housing, and our record Building Homes for NSW Program that will boost the supply of social and affordable homes as we committed in our 2024-25 budget.

The people of New South Wales want and deserve a government that invests in public housing. They no longer want a government that flogs off public housing and uses that funding for other things. They want a government that invests in the maintenance of our public housing. When I ask staff in my office what our number one issue is, every week the answer is housing and maintenance of that housing. After years and years of neglect, people have been waiting for basic renovations as their homes are virtually crumbling down around them. This bill will enable the Government to build better homes in New South Wales so that everyone in our community can have access to the housing they need—from the most vulnerable members of our community to those essential workers whom we rely on in our workplaces, particularly in our cities where people have to travel so far to get to work.

So many people are displaced, and so many people are in a challenging situation due to homelessness. It is not just in the city. The regions are also significantly impacted, and for too long they have been neglected. For

those people living in my electorate and right across New South Wales, the bill will impact the lives of some of the most vulnerable members of our community. One of the very reasons that I put myself forward for this job is to restore faith in our public housing and commit funding to deliver what our community needs to thrive. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms JENNY LEONG (Newtown) (18:44): On behalf of The Greens, I contribute to debate on the Housing Amendment Bill 2025. From the outset, I indicate that The Greens absolutely support the bill. The bill seeks to amend the Housing Act 2001 to give the housing Minister—and, by extension, Homes NSW—the same powers as the Land and Housing Corporation [LAHC] to hold, acquire and deal with land and property, consistent with the objects of the Act. Crucially, through the housing Minister, it also enables Homes NSW to use capital funds to expand its housing portfolio and services. These are necessary reforms. The Greens absolutely welcome them as the first of many steps necessary to overhaul the broken public and social housing system in this State. That said, it is impossible to consider the bill currently before the House without asking: Why now?

A little over a year ago, Homes NSW was established as the government agency with paramount responsibility for rebuilding the social and affordable housing system in New South Wales. Its entire reason for being is to deliver much-needed housing support for the thousands in our communities who are struggling to keep a roof over their heads. The housing crisis is urgent and worsening by the day. Members in this place may not always agree on the way forward, but one thing is absolutely clear: We must act decisively, and we must act now. Across the State, people are struggling to meet mortgage costs that keep climbing, and more still are living in precarity and shoddy rentals as the cost of rent outpaces the expansion of renters' rights. For those experiencing homelessness or those who have waited for years on the long public housing waiting list, the picture is even more grim. It is clear that we urgently need more public and social housing and more specialist homelessness services to address the worsening crisis.

Why, then, has it taken the New South Wales Labor Government this long to bring vital legislation to empower the Minister—and, by effect, Homes NSW, the very agency tasked with addressing the housing crisis—to work toward that goal? Last year the same Government committed \$4 billion in capital expenditure for public and social housing in New South Wales over the next four years. The Greens absolutely welcomed this announcement as a departure from the convention of investing only the barest minimum in our seriously broken non-market housing system in this State. But, because of the way LAHC was established—as a self-funded public trading enterprise—there is currently no way for the \$1 billion apportioned for this financial year to actually be spent on housing through LAHC. For more than half a year, that money has sat on the table. All the while, the number of approved applications on the NSW Housing Register has ballooned to over 63,000. The bill will correct that perverse situation, and while the second-best time to act is now, let us not forget that yesterday—or, in this case, a year ago—was always the best.

I now turn to the details of the bill. The consequential amendments are contained in schedule 1 [4] to the bill, which seeks to insert a new division 6 into the Act, enabling the Minister to acquire, sell, develop and manage land and property, consistent with the objects of the Act. This is a welcome change. If we are to strengthen and expand public and social housing in this State, then Homes NSW, as the agency with chief responsibility for that task, must be able to do all those things. New section 35C allows the Minister to acquire land in accordance with the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991, while new sections 35D and 35E respectively allow the Minister to accept property that has been gifted or bequeathed to the State or that has been surrendered by way of a lease, dedication or grant under this Act.

I note that, while The Greens are broadly supportive of the powers that schedule 1 [4] would confer, we do have concerns about the unfettered nature of the power contained in new section 35B, which allows the Minister to "purchase, exchange, take on lease, hold, dispose of and otherwise deal with property". While we appreciate that this New South Wales Labor Government and the current housing Minister in the other place have gone on the record saying that it is not their intention to engage in mass sell-offs of public housing—as previous governments, sadly, of both stripes have done—this may well not be the case for future governments or, indeed, future Ministers in this Government. The Greens are therefore committed to establishing safeguards around the exercise of the power to dispose of properties and land, recognising that flexibility can sometimes be required to manage housing stock.

I acknowledge that we have already engaged in constructive discussions about potential safeguards with the housing Minister. We look forward to continuing this conversation moving forward. This bill empowers the housing Minister to make and receive transfers of land and other assets from other government agencies. New section 35G sets out the parameters for such transfers, including that the government agency in question must provide consent for any transfer. This section also defines "government agency" as any other New South Wales Minister; a public service agency, as defined by the Government Sector Employment Act 2013; a New South Wales government agency or statutory corporation; or a State owned corporation.

Schedule 1 [7] to the bill proposes the insertion of new schedule 2A into the Act, which would make clear that any transfers of property between a government agency and Homes NSW would not be subject to stamp duty or other fees or charges otherwise imposed by the State. Notably, new schedule 2A would include a provision by which "no compensation is payable to a person in connection with a transfer order except to the extent to which the transfer order provides". In conversations with our office prior to debating the bill, the housing Minister confirmed that this provision would allow, theoretically, the transfer of land from one government agency to another, such as from Transport for NSW to Homes NSW, for free for the purposes of transforming the land into social housing. That would make sense. In both cases the land is owned by the State Government. I say "theoretically" because, unfortunately, this is foiled by the New South Wales Labor Government's current Treasury policy that transfers between government agencies must be transacted at market costs.

To use a practical example to demonstrate the implications of this policy, in Camperdown, which is nestled on the border between the Newtown and Balmain electorates—and I note that the member for Balmain is in the Chamber—there is a patch of public land, currently owned by Transport for NSW, that was used as a dive site during construction of the WestConnex tunnel. Some 500 new homes are to be built on this site. That is great, but none of those homes will be public housing, despite the land itself being public land. Presumably, that is because the cost of transferring this prime inner-city land from Transport for NSW to Homes NSW would be too high for Homes NSW to bear.

It is The Greens' understanding that a portion of the \$1 billion annual investment of capital expenditure from the last State budget, which is currently sitting with the housing Minister and is meant to be used for the delivery of housing, will be used to purchase land from other government agencies—in this case, Transport for NSW. That includes land identified through the much talked about public land audit. How many hundreds of millions of dollars that could be used to get on with building the homes our communities desperately need will be burnt through by government agencies buying so-called public land off each other? How much of the \$1 billion a year will be left to break ground on sites purchased in this way, and how many dwellings will it actually fund? These are important questions, in response to which the Government must provide further detail or, better yet, revisit its policy of requiring government agencies to pay one another market rates when transferring land to each other. This is a highly questionable use of public funds, particularly in the midst of a housing crisis that demands massive investment and urgent action.

On this note I will briefly address comments made by the Minister in the other place about the Government's desire to ensure that the delivery of public and social housing is done "in the most direct and streamlined way possible". This is not always what is taking place. In Redfern, which is in the Newtown electorate, there is an apartment complex at the site of what used to be the Rachel Forster Hospital, a public hospital for women and children. Not long after the apartments were built and the hospital site was sold off, a local community organisation informed my office that it had been made aware that the Department of Communities and Justice had taken out headleases on a number of apartments in the building and that it was allocating them to people on the social housing register. *[Extension of time]*

The idea of privatising public land that was a hospital site, allowing a private developer to cash in on the development of private apartments on public land and then the State Government coming back and headleasing the properties from a private owner is certainly not the most direct and streamlined way to deliver much-needed public housing. Surely this is not the most efficient way to spend funds that are in short supply. Obviously, it would have been better to keep that land in public hands to begin with, and The Greens will be focused on ensuring that the Government does not sell off public land and public housing that we will need in the future. I hope the bill takes us away from the very convoluted process that has resulted from asset recycling, privatisation and the so-called Communities Plus model. This no doubt happens elsewhere, but I am acutely aware of the situation in the Newtown electorate.

I acknowledge the work of my Greens colleague in the other place Ms Abigail Boyd, who successfully moved an amendment to the bill, which was supported by the Government, that requires Homes NSW to provide an annual statement of its activities to Parliament through the Minister. This is a crucial step not only in transparency but also towards collecting the kind of data we need to drive evidence-based housing policy in this State, like how many social homes are being built and how much money is being spent, as well as what is being bought and sold. I end by commenting on the significance of the bill enabling Homes NSW to spend capital on expanding public and social housing in this State. As I have already explained, on its surface this is an accounting trick that allows Homes NSW to spend the \$4 billion apportioned in the State budget over the next four years for non-market housing.

It is also a very significant and meaningful departure from the self-funding model of LAHC, which relies on rental yield and the income from asset sales to fund new public and social homes. With rental yield in decline for years, this model has underpinned the demolition and flogging off of public housing under the previous

Coalition Government in Millers Point, Glebe, Airds and Claymore. This has led to hundreds of public housing tenants being displaced from the communities they have called home for years, and to the absolutely perverse and vicious cycle in which the total pool of social housing in New South Wales must always contract before it can grow. For every step taken towards building more public and social housing in this State, we have in recent memory always had to take two steps back.

By creating an alternative pathway for funding public and social housing in New South Wales through capital expenditure, the bill marks a hopeful and crucial first step away from the current broken model. The Greens absolutely support this departure. I urge the New South Wales Labor Government to go further and faster on reforming the public and social housing system in this State for the most vulnerable in our community. We are absolutely committed to working with the housing Minister and the Minns Labor Government to constructively ensure that this is prioritised and delivered. I hope the first statement will come through and we can celebrate a massive capital expenditure on public housing for the people of New South Wales.

Ms LIESL TESCH (Gosford) (18:57): I am proud to speak on the Housing Amendment Bill 2025, and I am very proud to be part of the Minns Labor Government, which is making significant changes to investment in public housing in New South Wales. This has been a long time coming. As the member for Newtown pointed out, the previous Government's dilapidation of the public housing system across New South Wales, including in the electorate of Gosford, was very disappointing. This Government is committed to rebuilding the State's public housing system.

The bill amends the Housing Act 2001 to provide the Minister with the same functions as the Land and Housing Corporation. Since taking office in 2023, the Minns Labor Government has focused on reducing the impact of the housing crisis so that more people go to sleep at night with dignity and respect, without the burden of worrying about how they will keep a roof over their heads. People across the State are doing it tough right now, which is why the Government is building homes for New South Wales to continue to address the housing crisis. Making this change gives the Minister direct resources to build more social housing, which is just what we need, and not before time. The bill is a critical enabler of the hard work needed to solve the housing crisis.

The Government is getting on with the job of building new houses. When we came to office we knew that the housing system was broken, which is why we launched Homes NSW. I thank all the people who work in every aspect of Homes NSW, from the frontline workers in the Gosford office, who deal with people currently living in or wanting to live in housing—because demand is so great—to the administration staff, who are working on the massive changes we need across New South Wales for this once-in-a-generation reform and important first step in rebuilding the public housing system. The bill aims to put people back at the heart of housing and a roof over their heads. It has been tasked to turbocharge the construction, maintenance and repair of social and affordable homes across our State. But this cannot be our last step.

Our next step was a record investment in the Building Homes for NSW program. In the 2024-25 budget we announced a record investment of \$6.6 billion. Part of that critically important program will build 8,400 new public homes and deliver more than 21,000 affordable and market homes. To complement that, the bill provides a direct line of responsibility to the Minister for Housing on the delivery of that important program. While the Land and Housing Corporation will continue to maintain public housing, the bill allows the Minister to direct resources towards that investment. This year we are on track to deliver 850 new social homes as part of the Building Homes for NSW program. By providing those powers to the housing Minister, we are continuing to support the implementation and delivery of that important program.

Every day my office is approached by constituents who need assistance with housing. I have been very clear that investment in social housing on the Central Coast is critical, and I will continue to ask the Minister and her team to invest in our community. The member for The Entrance is in the Chamber. He has raised the issue of homelessness and the need for housing on the coast on numerous occasions. This legislation will unlock \$4 billion in much-needed investment from the Minns Labor Government. The legislation is essential for Homes NSW to get on with the job of delivering on the Government's commitment to build thousands more homes for the State. I thank Minister Jackson and her team for the work they have done on the bill and for the work they continue to do. The Government is committed to rebuilding our public housing system, and the bill represents another step in achieving that goal.

Mrs JUDY HANNAN (Wollondilly) (19:00): As all members know, the Housing Amendment Bill 2025 amends the Housing Act 2001 to allow the Minister for Housing to acquire, hold and deal with land and property according to the objective of the Housing Act to deliver secure, appropriate and affordable housing to all people in New South Wales. Specifically, the bill proposes to give the Minister for Housing the same functions as the Land and Housing Corporation. The suggestion that a second process be established to fulfil the functions of the Land and Housing Corporation shines a light on the current housing supply problem. I support the proposed

amendments to the Housing Act but express my disappointment that such an amending bill is required. Clearly, adequate housing and infrastructure are not being delivered.

In creating a sideline process that mirrors what another government entity should already be doing, the proposed amendment shows the inadequacy of the current system. In my electorate of Wollondilly, the Government already owns 871 hectares of land through Landcom, which is a State owned corporation established under the Landcom Corporation Act 2001. Landcom has promised 5,600 new homes and two new schools in the Wilton area. However, those developments in infrastructure have not been delivered in a timely manner. In June 2023 Landcom claimed that new residents would be settling into the area by 2025, but so far the development has not progressed beyond the first stage of bulk earthworks and a few wooden poles.

Moreover, due to easily correctable errors in the calculations in Biosis's *Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan: Functional Koala Corridors* report, up to 800 potential house blocks in those potential developments were lost. Those errors will result in land not being developed to its full potential and have significant implications for housing supply. They will also place unnecessary restrictions on landowners outside the growth area at the junction of Wilton and Appin. In trusting to Landcom, a commercial business, the vital work of supplying houses to the people of New South Wales, the Government has failed to deliver the promised housing on time. Consequently, the Wilton area suffers from an unacceptable lack of infrastructure.

Wollondilly Shire Council has a projected population increase of 85,000 by 2041, yet currently there are only two public high schools in the entire electorate, which is covered by two local councils. Students are spending as long as two hours a day in transit. Nearly all of them must travel to high schools outside the area. I urge the Government to deliver the K-12 public school to the growing population of Wilton that has long been needed, in accordance with the Wilton Junction Master Plan and my submission to the 2025-26 budget. The amending bill proposes to open a new avenue for the Government to acquire land to deliver much-needed housing to the people of New South Wales, yet government-owned land in my electorate lies empty while my constituents suffer from an unacceptable lack of infrastructure. The Government should make use of the land it already owns to supply the infrastructure that the growing population of Wollondilly desperately needs.

Mr STEVE WHAN (Monaro—Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education) (19:04): I support the Housing Amendment Bill 2025. I listened to the contribution to debate from the shadow assistant Minister and would characterise the Opposition's contributions to bills like these in two ways: Opposition members say, "We were fantastic and we did everything," or they act as though the world began in March 2023. In this case, the world began in 2023. The shadow assistant Minister failed to acknowledge the housing problems the Government inherited across New South Wales but then went on to quite hypocritically criticise the Minister for being too slow in introducing this legislation.

When making major changes to the delivery of housing and public housing, including creating Homes NSW, there will obviously be consequential amendments along the way to put in place the arrangements necessary to deliver those resources. We should welcome the bill before the House. While the Opposition supports the bill, it should absolutely welcome it. I highlight the fact that in the electorate of Monaro in 2011, during my first term as its local member, the issue of homelessness was fairly isolated. It is now a massive issue, and it is not only focused in Queanbeyan, as it was back then. The issue of homelessness now extends to the Snowy Mountains, where sleeping in a car is incredibly risky because temperatures get down to minus eight degrees or minus 10 degrees at night. That is happening because during the 12 years of the former Government new public and social housing was not built.

When I was the local member in 2011, I was delighted to visit Queanbeyan to see the redevelopment of old public housing stock to create multiple units and public housing dwellings. That progress in our city stopped completely with the change in government in 2011. Instead, the old public housing stock became decrepit. Boards were put up over windows and there were no tenants. When I returned as member for Monaro in 2023, at least 30 houses in the suburbs surrounding where I live had boarded-up windows and people were unable to live in them. More importantly, the former Government did not build any new public housing stock in its decade in government.

As a result, groups in our community that try to help people who are at risk of homelessness such as St Benedicts, which provides meals and housing support to people, reached desperation point. St Benedicts talked about setting up tents on the oval near its office to accommodate people. Unfortunately, getting on top of this problem is a slow process, but the Government is committed to doing that. As the local member, I am very committed to working with Minister Jackson to make sure that we see some of that investment in housing. We are looking at areas where the Government can undertake the development of social and key worker accommodation, including in Queanbeyan. A site in Cooma is about to go ahead, and key worker accommodation has been provided at Cooma Hospital.

Recently we saw an example of the way that Labor governments work on these issues, because housing is a priority for us. In the past week Federal member Kristy McBain was in Queanbeyan to announce \$4.8 million in Federal funding for 12 homes for transitional housing for women over 55 that are within walking distance to the town centre. That is the first investment we have seen of that kind in Queanbeyan in years. That is the sort of proactive work that we want to see happen. I get annoyed when I hear a shadow assistant Minister say that we are not doing things fast enough. We are trying to overcome an incredible backlog of problems left to us by the former Government over its 12 years in government. That problem exploded in the electorate of Monaro during the time that I lived in Queanbeyan. I was able to observe what was going on but was unable to come to this place to see what was being done about it.

One of the things that highlights this for me happened when I was re-elected. I have wonderful staff in my office who are committed to helping people with housing, and none more so than Indigo. She has volunteered at sleepbus for many years. It is a terrific initiative we have in Queanbeyan for people who are homeless and have nowhere to go. Sleepbus has been operating for only a few days per week, but it was recently purchased by the Terry Campese Foundation and will now be available for more days per week. Members with good memories will remember that Terry Campese was going to be the Labor candidate for Monaro until The Nationals started spreading rumours and nasty stories about him and he pulled out of the race. He is the sort of person who would probably have been very good in this place, although I am very much enjoying my opportunity to do this for the second time around.

The three dedicated staff members in my office work with these people every day. One of the things that struck me was the people who came into my office to say, "We're so pleased that we have a Labor member back again because we did not get a hearing when we used to come into this office." People who work in housing have said to me, "Isn't it nice to have a local member who actually cares about people getting a roof over their head?" That does not mean we are anywhere near solving this problem. It remains an incredibly high priority for me to make sure that people do not need to sleep in tents. I have spoken before about my brother-in-law who was living in those circumstances. It is important that we do not have people in the Snowy Mountains and in Cooma who are at risk of homelessness. It is far too cold there for people to be sleeping rough. I strongly support this bill and the measures that we are undertaking to try to get on top of this incredibly difficult problem.

Ms KOBI SHETTY (Balmain) (19:11): As outlined by my colleague the member for Newtown, The Greens support the Housing Amendment Bill 2025. This bill seeks to amend the Housing Act 2001 to give the Minister for Housing, and by extension Homes NSW, the same powers as the Land and Housing Corporation [LAHC] to acquire, hold and deal with land and property consistent with the objects of the Act. This bill also enables Homes NSW, through the Minister for Housing, to use capital investment to expand its housing portfolio and services, which neither LAHC nor Homes NSW can currently do. As the member for Newtown outlined, this amendment is a positive change. Prior to the establishment of Homes NSW in February 2024, LAHC was the sole agency responsible for growing and maintaining public housing stock in New South Wales. Because LAHC is a self-funded public trading enterprise, it cannot receive or spend capital investment.

One of the reasons we have seen the loss of so much public housing over recent years is an entity of that nature must generate its own funding through rental income and asset renewal. The Greens, along with public housing experts and advocates, have been clear that we do not support this model for funding and maintaining public housing. The model resulted in LAHC selling public housing in sought-after locations that had been gentrified and where land values had gone up. This occurred in my electorate of Balmain, particularly in Glebe. The sell-offs have been used to fund housing maintenance and the delivery of new housing that is usually much further from the city. As a result, public housing residents have been moved from their homes and communities. We now have a significant shortfall in the amount of public housing across our State.

Public housing is not what it once was, and it is so good to see this Government investing in public housing again. We need public and social housing to support vulnerable people, but this kind of housing should also be available to ordinary people with incomes that cannot keep up with the cost of living and who need support to keep a roof over their heads. We have drifted so far from what is needed and from what was originally done in the post-war era. The positive aspect of this bill is that it provides Homes NSW and the Minister with the power to purchase and hold land and property without the same restrictions that LAHC has. It will hopefully have a positive impact on the number of public housing properties in New South Wales. For years, The Greens have been calling on the State Government to find a better way, to stop cannibalising existing housing stock to create anything new and to start building the homes our communities need so desperately. We are glad to see this step in the right direction.

As the member for Newtown said earlier, we have concerns about the potential for State agencies to charge market rates for the transfer of land from other agencies to Homes NSW. We call on the Government to ensure this does not happen. We do not want to see much-needed funding for housing being spent on land that already

belongs to the New South Wales Government. I note that the land audit includes some key pieces of government land in my electorate of Balmain that are going to contribute a large amount of future housing. I express my disappointment, and that of my community, about the type of housing that is going to be delivered on some of these sites.

Firstly, there is the Blackwattle Bay Precinct development where the Sydney Fish Market currently stands. By the time it opens later this year, the former Government and the current Labor Government will have jointly spent \$836 million to develop the new fish market and free up land for the Blackwattle Bay Precinct. The development is due to deliver up to 1,500 apartments on this large piece of public land. The provision for a 7.5 per cent affordable housing contribution can be a monetary contribution, and this would result in zero affordable housing properties as part of that development. There is also no public or social housing incorporated in the development. It is a great shame that the Government has spent so much money to free up such a big piece of public land when there will be no public housing on it.

The former WestConnex Camperdown dive site, which is actually in Annandale, is another large piece of publicly owned land with key worker housing. This is a positive step in the right direction, but no public or social housing will be delivered onsite even though the land is publicly owned by the New South Wales Government. We do not want to see more swathes of inner-city land given over to private development with little or no public or social housing on it. I hope this bill will make a difference and deliver more public housing through Homes NSW, because it is desperately needed. My office receives desperate calls and visits every day from people in our community who are at risk of homelessness, couch surfing or on the long waitlist for a public home. People are already living in public housing that was badly neglected by the former Government through the cannibalisation and poor funding arrangements of LAHC.

The state of these properties cannot be overstated. Some of the houses have ceilings that have collapsed. Homes are riddled with mould and the electrics are damaged. The list goes on, and residents are unable to get a transfer to a safe property because of the lack of public housing. I acknowledge the amazing staff in my electorate office of Balmain, particularly Alison, David and Hamish, who receive these complaints and speak to our community with such compassion and care. They work so hard to support all these people who are trying to keep a roof over their head or to stay safe in existing public housing properties if they are lucky enough to have one. This bill is a step in the right direction. I hope that we see some big steps forward in building or purchasing much-needed public housing as a result. The Greens support the bill.

Mr DAVID MEHAN (The Entrance) (19:17): On behalf of Mr Ryan Park: In reply: I thank members who contributed to the debate, including the member for Manly, who led for the Opposition; the member for Parramatta; the member for Newtown; the member for Gosford; the member for Wollondilly; the member for Monaro; and the member for Balmain. I will briefly address some of the matters raised by those members during debate in my speech in reply. In summary, the bill will amend the Housing Act 2001 to give the Minister for Housing the same functions as the Land and Housing Corporation under the Act and other laws. This includes the ability to acquire, hold and deal with property consistent with the objects of the Housing Act.

The bill supports the establishment of Homes NSW and the implementation and delivery of the New South Wales Government's commitment to build 8,400 new social homes and 21,000 new affordable and market homes as part of the Building Homes for NSW program. In response to the criticisms from the member for Manly, the first point I make is that right up to the bell under the former Government the Land and Housing Corporation was a self-funded entity that had an operational philosophy of cannibalising its own capital and properties to self-fund its operation. It was actively selling public housing. A new government does not come to a situation like that without some hangover. That is why, disappointingly, the housing waitlist has continued to grow.

I am advised and assured that the Building Homes for NSW program has not been delayed by the bill. The Government is on track to deliver that program's year one target of 850 homes, and the year two delivery pipeline is well on its way to completion. The bill will not impact existing social housing tenants or their residential tenancy rights, which remain unchanged regardless of whether their home is owned by the Land Housing Corporation or the Minister for Housing. The homes and tenancies of social housing tenants will continue to be managed by Homes NSW. The bill does not affect the functions of the New South Wales Land and Housing Corporation, which will continue to deliver services to over 120 households while revitalising over 30,000 social homes. As to The Greens' concerns, new section 35H, which was inserted by a Greens amendment in the other place, accepted and supported by the Government, provides a useful discipline for Parliament to monitor the rollout of the Building Homes for NSW program and to keep an eye on things.

I note the Legislation Review Committee's comments on the bill. As the committee noted, the Minister's proposed powers are no more than the corporation's current powers, and those powers must only be exercised for purposes consistent with the objects of the Act. I acknowledge that a decision to acquire land or an interest in land within the terms of the Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation) Act 1991 is a significant decision and, for

that reason, currently any such decision can only be made with the approval of the chief executive of the corporation or an executive director. I am a little surprised that the Legislation Review Committee, as it is currently chaired, commented on that. We already compulsorily acquire land for the purposes of building roads. What could be more socially useful than compulsorily acquiring land to build houses for people in need? That is certainly a more socially useful object than building roads.

In conclusion, the bill unlocks the Government's \$4 billion investment into new social, affordable and market housing as part of the Building Homes for NSW program and provides a direct line of responsibility to the Minister for Housing for the delivery of new social and affordable homes. The housing crisis has had a devastating impact on the people of New South Wales. We cannot confront the crisis, solve homelessness or reduce the social housing waiting list or wait times without more social housing. That is what the bill is all about. Social housing is public infrastructure, and the Government has made a historic decision to confront the housing crisis and build housing for the people of New South Wales, a decision that rests entirely within the culture and history of the Labor Party in this State. I commend the bill to the House.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Ms Donna Davis): The question is that this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Third Reading

Mr DAVID MEHAN: On behalf of Mr Ryan Park: I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (FOGO RECYCLING) BILL 2024

Second Reading Debate

Debate resumed from 12 February 2024.

Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst) (19:23): I continue my contribution to debate on the Protection of the Environment Legislation Amendment (FOGO Recycling) Bill 2024. Each year in New South Wales, households and businesses generate an enormous amount of waste. Most of that material is collected in red-lid rubbish bins and ends up in landfill. Greater Sydney may be facing a waste management crisis—projections indicate that landfill capacity will be exhausted by 2030 if urgent action is not taken—but that crisis should not be resolved at the expense of regional and rural councils. The main issue for many smaller regional and rural councils across the State is that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work.

Regional New South Wales will be worse off unless exemptions are adopted. For rural councils like Blayney Shire Council, which contacted me, and many others, a one-size-fits-all approach would not work. A service like FOGO recycling may work more easily in built-up, dense areas but would struggle to be delivered in smaller outlying villages and numerous farms in between villages. Additionally, for some larger properties, there would be no reduction in green waste to landfill. However, we would also see the cost imposed on property owners. That is something we definitely cannot afford during a cost-of-living crisis.

As I said, not all council areas across New South Wales are able to implement FOGO recycling. Therefore the provision for exemptions is important. I thank the Minister and her team for listening to the concerns raised by a number of councils across the State. Correspondence was put forward on behalf of councils through Local Government NSW. An important aspect of the bill is new section 170I, which allows the Environment Protection Authority to grant exemptions from any of the requirements. As I said, a one-size-fits-all approach will not work. I thank councils like Lithgow City Council that have adopted FOGO already. Councils require greater flexibility to tailor services to local needs. We need to be very clear about the exemptions in the bill.

FOGO implementation in regional and rural councils can be more challenging compared with urban areas for several reasons. Regional and rural areas often have lower population densities, meaning less waste is generated. That makes it harder to justify the expense of setting up FOGO systems, which require investment in bins, collection infrastructure and processing facilities. Also, the collection of organic waste from dispersed households can be more complex and costly. A number of valid concerns were raised by Local Government NSW. Principally, those included capacity to deliver the service and the added impost on already stretched councils. We do not want to see another situation where costs are shifted to the local government sector in the implementation of this scheme.

Many councils already deliver the service. However, for those which are not yet at the level of sophistication to do so, the appropriate support—whether that is financial or educational—needs to be

continuously provided by the Government. I hope that the Minister and the department also continue to meet, listen to and reach out to those individual councils to determine their position as we go forward and how best to support their individual needs, ensuring that flexibility is built in so that we respond to the individual circumstances of our different communities. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr RICHIE WILLIAMSON (Clarence) (19:26): I support the Protection of the Environment Legislation Amendment (FOGO Recycling) Bill 2024. I do so as one of the first mayors in New South Wales to bring in this system, in 2012, when I was mayor of Clarence Valley Council. Both councils in my electorate—Richmond Valley and Clarence Valley councils—have had the FOGO system for a very long time. I say proudly that my neck of the woods is doing a lot to ensure that the environment is looked after. Our soils are improved by the benefits of FOGO.

In fact, I strongly urge all local governments and the State Government to embrace FOGO as soon as they can. That comes at a cost, as it did in my community. The ratepayers 100 per cent bore that cost. They embraced the change. There are some challenges in the change, but they can certainly be overcome. I provide to the House some lessons learnt from my experience in FOGO. Firstly, one of the initial criticisms was that the green bins and yellow bins—and I know that the bin colours change—were not big enough. We made the mistake of simply replacing like for like and changing the colouring on the lids of the bins.

We quickly learnt that our residents were putting more in the bins, so we went to a bigger recycling bin, a bigger green FOGO bin and a smaller red bin. That instantly gave our residents the message that really nothing should be going in the red bin, particularly organics, which should absolutely go into the green. Another thing I am very proud that we did was to educate our community on what it meant for not only the environment but also our farmers and the mums and dads that put the bins out each and every week. We then had a partnership with dirtgirl. Members may not understand—

Ms Jenny Leong: I love dirtgirl.

Ms Jacqui Scruby: Yay for dirtgirl.

Mr RICHIE WILLIAMSON: We have some big fans of dirtgirl here. Dirtgirl is the brainchild of Cate and Hewey, who live in my electorate. We partnered with them to put dirtgirl on every truck in Clarence. The byline was "rubbish ... handle with care", which still can be seen on the buses and rubbish trucks as well. Education is absolutely the key. We learnt quickly that if you educate the young, they will educate mum and dad. We did that through dirtgirl and scrapboy, and that had instant results in my electorate. The recycling message was seen by four-year-olds to 11-year-olds who took that message home and mum and dad were then educated through the kids. Seriously, it works. To give a shameless free plug for that program, it is still available, if members care to read between the lines. I absolutely support the bill, but not all local governments in regional New South Wales are flush with cash. If there were opportunities for the change to be co-funded, I would strongly support that. I thank the House.

Ms KOBI SHETTY (Balmain) (19:31): On behalf of The Greens I contribute to debate on the Protection of the Environment Legislation Amendment (FOGO Recycling) Bill 2024. I will keep my comments brief as my colleague Dr Amanda Cohn, the New South Wales Greens spokesperson on both waste and local government, has already made a significant contribution to debate on the bill in the other place. The bill mandates source-separated collection of food and garden organics [FOGO] waste from households, of food waste from businesses and the reporting of food donations by large supermarkets. That means all New South Wales households will be required to have a council FOGO collection from 1 July 2030, legislating what was outlined in the previous Government's 2021 Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy.

Make no mistake: Our waste management strategies are in crisis. At the current rate of waste generation, Greater Sydney is projected to run out of landfill capacity by 2030 or earlier. On average, food waste makes up more than one-third of the material in New South Wales household red bins. New South Wales households and businesses generate around 1.7 million tonnes of FOGO waste per year and most is landfilled, despite potential for FOGO waste to be recovered for beneficial use, such as for compost for industries like agriculture. The bill will see the gradual implementation of its mandates, with businesses starting from 1 July 2026 in stages based on bin volume, and households from 2030. Councils will be able to choose to collect food organics and garden organics together or separately. Application of the mandates to all New South Wales households is estimated to divert almost 950,000 tonnes of FOGO waste each year from landfill.

The bill includes a broad provision for the New South Wales Government to issue exemptions from the mandate. That could include exempting entire local government areas where appropriate, such as rural LGAs where a FOGO collection is not needed or is not viable due to the lack of markets, or exempting classes of buildings. Kerbside FOGO collection exists in 43 of the 128 LGAs in New South Wales. Some have implemented

it with great success, such as Albury, and neighbouring Wodonga in Victoria. Some have had some difficulties with rushed implementation, such as the Inner West Council.

Members would struggle to find a community that is more interested, willing or excited than mine to have FOGO collection come along and give them the opportunity to recycle. People in my electorate often live in small houses that have small gardens, so it is often quite hard to compost. FOGO bin collection was really embraced by residents in my electorate, but the Inner West Council's implementation was rushed and there was very little community consultation. Broad changes to the recycling bin collections were needed to accommodate the FOGO collection, but the community were not given a great deal of time to adjust to the changes. Smaller bins were swapped for bigger bins that did not fit on small properties with bin areas designed to hold only the two smaller recycling bins.

There was quite a bit of backlash about the changes. It was done, reasonably, to accommodate the changes required to harmonise systems across the entire local government area after the amalgamation of three councils, but it did not work particularly well for a lot of homes. People were grappling with bigger bins and a rapid change of collection days followed by a quick reduction in the collection of the red bins. As a result, people just did not have the time to make the behavioural change, which we know is such an important part of adapting to different waste management practices. It was a shame.

We had a lot of issues, despite it being a community that was keen to see FOGO implemented. It is a real lesson for other communities that are looking to implement FOGO in future. They need to take the time to bring the community along and make sure that people are consulted and understand why things need to be changed. People need to be given a good opportunity to start working out how they will reduce their waste to landfill before they have reduced red bin collections foisted upon them by council in a short space of time. It was a real shame to have that level of pushback locally. Inner West Council had to work quickly to give people the opportunity to put more waste in red landfill bins for longer. Now that people have had more time to adjust, they are really on board, but it would have been good for the time to be taken in the first instance to get it right.

We must acknowledge that we are already in a waste and climate crisis and that every level of government needs to act urgently to reduce emissions and landfill. We must transition to a truly circular economy, and proper implementation of the provisions in the bill will help us do that. The Greens will hold the Government to account to ensure that councils are adequately supported and that the announcements slated for the coming weeks are sufficient. The local government sector is asking that regional councils be funded to develop and implement waste plans for the future of waste and resource recovery in their regions. The sector is also asking that the New South Wales Government fund the delivery of priority infrastructure and other projects procured by local government that are needed to deliver the plans, particularly when there is market value identified, and that the New South Wales Government offset the full costs of implementing mandated FOGO services. This important reform must not become yet another exercise in cost-shifting onto local governments, which are struggling so much with growing costs and limited funding.

Of course, it would be ideal for FOGO collection and processing to be implemented more quickly. The Government has justified its staged approach to implementation in part based on the limitations of existing infrastructure to process organic waste. That is an unfortunate but genuine issue, in part caused by a broken planning system in which private developers must seek consent to build processing infrastructure, often at odds with local residents. When households and businesses do the right thing and separate out their organic waste, they need confidence that it is being processed into a beneficial product. The reform should not follow in the footsteps of the programs that led to massive stockpiles of soft plastic that people thought was being recycled or the offshoring of plastic and other waste that people thought was being recycled and sent overseas.

To support the successful implementation of this critical reform, the Government should take a proactive role in supporting processing infrastructure in appropriate locations with appropriate regulation to protect human and environmental health. That said, enforcing mandates on the biggest businesses and largest producers of organic waste first is the right priority. The Greens commend the bill to the House. We look forward to holding the Government to account and working with it to provide the community education and support for councils that is needed for the reform to be implemented successfully.

Ms DONNA DAVIS (Parramatta) (19:39): I am pleased to speak in support of the Protection of the Environment Legislation Amendment (FOGO Recycling) Bill 2024. This Government recognises that we have an extreme challenge to overcome. Sydney is running out of landfill capacity and people are producing more waste than ever before. We just have to walk down a suburban street on bin night to see rubbish overflowing from the general rubbish bins and, sadly, the incorrect waste hanging out of the recycling bin making recycling an even more challenging task than it should be. The Minns Labor Government is introducing this bill to make a meaningful difference by seeking to divert food organics and garden organics, or FOGO, from landfill.

I had the good fortune of serving on the City of Parramatta Council when we took the first steps to introduce FOGO across the local government area. It was a challenging discussion because, largely, humans are resistant to change and very parochial when it comes to their personal wheelie bins. Prior to the introduction of FOGO, food waste made up about 40 per cent of red-lid bins each week in the City of Parramatta. Separating it out allowed for not only freeing up space in residents' red bins but also an opportunity to divert up to 19,000 tonnes of waste from landfill each year. City of Parramatta undertook community consultation in 2022 when I was the Lord Mayor and our residents told us they were happy to contribute to reducing the harmful impact of methane on our environment, but they were worried about managing waste and stinky bins. This was because, initially, council officers proposed that the red bins would be collected only fortnightly, and residents were particularly concerned about dirty nappies sitting in their bins for two weeks at a time.

In response to this, across the City of Parramatta a smaller red-lid bin was adopted with weekly collections. Residents who need more space can still opt for a larger red-lid bin for an additional cost. Parramatta's FOGO waste collection service started from November 2024. The new service included a 240-litre green-lid FOGO bin for food scraps and garden waste that will be collected weekly; an 80-litre red-lid garbage bin, previously 140 litres, for general waste collected weekly; and a 240-litre yellow-lid recycling bin collected fortnightly. The new service allows residents to recycle their food scraps in a FOGO-friendly bin that is picked up weekly while also providing households with this additional 120 litres in overall bin capacity each fortnight at a reduced cost.

Residents received a starter pack to help them make the change, including a seven-litre kitchen caddy with compostable liners, to collect food scraps. These are emptied into the FOGO bin and eventually every member of the household—from the 22-year-old son to my husband—remembered where to scrape their plates, and where to toss their eggshells and the rotten soggy cucumber in the bottom of the crisper. As the member for Clarence said earlier, education is critical to the success of FOGO. We had that mantra in Parramatta. We had banners in our streets. We had stickers in people's letterboxes. We were providing every little bit of education we could to ensure the success of the rollout. Regardless of the success of the FOGO rollout in places like Parramatta, Penrith and beyond, our Government also recognises that a one-size-fits-all approach does not always work.

This bill enlivens provisions to allow the Environment Protection Authority to grant exemptions from the requirements. Our Government recognises that, while we want to help businesses and councils meet the mandates in some situations, that may not be possible and, in some situations, an area or a business—despite their best efforts—will need more time to comply with the requirements. In those situations, an exemption power is necessary and sensible. This Government is not about trying to punish businesses and councils. The Minns Labor Government is focused on outcomes, and the main outcome we seek is to ensure as much FOGO waste as possible is diverted from landfill.

Our Minns Labor Government will not be draconian. The sectors that need help to transition will get help. As I said, we want to help businesses and councils achieve an outcome, not enforce compliance unnecessarily. It is intended that exemptions will be both proactive and reactive. The Environment Protection Authority may exempt activities for organisations that apply for them, and may also proactively exempt local government areas from the requirement, where appropriate. As part of the exemption process, we will consider the threshold where the population of an area does not support FOGO viability, or where the collection and processing infrastructure is simply not available. The Minns Labor Government does not wish to punish anyone where access to a FOGO service is limited or cost prohibitive. An exemption power may also be used to allow the necessary exemption of certain multi-unit dwellings, or MUDs.

MUDs can have unique challenges in their infrastructure design, such as the use of bin chutes or lack of available bin room space. The power to grant exemptions recognises that while some MUDs may be able to adopt FOGO immediately, there will be others that need more time to get there. The Government wants to support businesses, councils and households to divert FOGO from landfill. We recognise that this bill is necessary to provide the regulatory certainty for the industry to invest in infrastructure. This bill is an important step in the Government's plan to tackle the waste management crisis we face. As part of this plan our Government will work to educate the public to reduce FOGO contamination. We will assist businesses and councils in achieving the mandates, and we will ensure the best possible outcomes for the people of New South Wales.

We are committed to the diversion of FOGO waste from landfill. However, we will not lose sight of the challenges that this bill may impose on businesses and councils, and we are committed to working with them to achieve these mandates. I am excited about the positive step this bill takes in moving towards a more circular economy. I acknowledge the work of the previous Government that introduced FOGO and the work of the current Minister, who is continuing to enhance the program through amendments. Thanks to the team and the dedicated staff in the Minister's office, agencies, local government and stakeholders for their work in the preparation of this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms JENNY LEONG (Newtown) (19:45): I contribute to debate on the Protection of the Environment Legislation Amendment (FOGO Recycling) Bill 2024 and wholeheartedly support the comments made by my Greens colleagues the member for Balmain in this House and Dr Amanda Cohn in the other place. Every year in New South Wales 1.7 million tonnes of food and organic waste are generated by households and businesses. We know that most of this material is sent to landfill via the red-lid rubbish bins in this State. We are in the middle of a climate crisis and it is imperative that all levels of government take urgent actions to reduce our emissions for the planet and all its inhabitants. The domestic food scraps that households naturally produce generate a significant quantity of methane as they decompose. Every tonne of organic waste that is diverted from landfill represents the equivalent of 1.5 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions.

The appropriate processing of FOGO is a critical climate action because it has the potential to divert tonnes of FOGO waste from landfill each year. This bill mandates a source-separated collection of food and garden waste from households and businesses in New South Wales by 2030, which people have long been calling for. I acknowledge the work of the New South Wales Labor Government and its commitment to delivering on those calls. Greens councillors across the State, working with Labor councillors, Independents and progressive others who are also committed to the idea of environment action, have been working on rolling out successful FOGO programs in many council areas. We have heard many members in this debate talk about the challenges and the contributions that local councils have made to rolling out FOGOs in their local areas. I acknowledge former Greens councillor Cath Blakey, who was incredibly committed to the FOGO project in Wollongong for a long time. I do not think I ever had a conversation with Cath while she was a councillor when FOGO was not mentioned at least every third or fourth idea.

As we heard from the member for Balmain, not all councils have had an easy time rolling out the program. Sadly, the Inner West Council and the Council of the City of Sydney—both local government areas that cover the Newtown electorate—have struggled to roll out FOGO projects for very different reasons. The member for Balmain outlined the types of struggles that occurred in the Inner West Council. Although our community was so supportive of and crying out for these changes, there was a lack of community consultation and communication, and no clarity about what was going on. For example, I live in the City of Sydney area but I received FOGO bags for the Inner West Council collection. Other people were delivered multiple new bins. Some people were provided with small bins or big bins that could not fit in their area. It was, to be clear, a bit of a debacle.

The reality is, though, that communities adapt. It could have been better rolled out, and clearly there was a need for more support and community consultation—sadly the enthusiasm to announce something is often prioritised over the community rollout—but I am glad that things seem to have calmed down. My understanding from speaking to our councillors is that their inboxes are no longer filled with people sharing stories of or lamenting bins that were appearing or not appearing, or feeling unsure of what to do with different bins, because they would get some and not others.

We also see a very different story on the City of Sydney council side. As a resident of the City of Sydney local government area, I registered to be part of the City of Sydney trial a very long time ago. I was never taken up on my offer, but I believe some people were. The City of Sydney is in a unique position as a council because it is very well resourced compared with others but, as the member for Parramatta explained, there are lots of high-density developments in the area, with communities living in apartment complexes with less obvious ways and spaces to deal with some of these challenges.

That said, the trial has now been going on for a very long time with no further rollout. I appreciate that there may be complex challenges around that, but more progress could potentially have been made had the City of Sydney put it higher on a list of priorities for living and not outsourced all its garbage collection services. That said, I am very committed to working with both the Inner West Council and the City of Sydney council to ensure that our local residents have access to FOGO services. It is not acceptable that people often do not have the opportunity to engage with a system within their own backyard simply because they do not have space in the inner city. They then have no choice but to put all their waste into a red-lid bin for landfill.

I echo the point raised by the member for Balmain when she says that it is critical for the State Government to implement these changes and this requirement, but it is also important that the State Government steps up and provides proper support to local government to complete the rollout. We do not want communities to become resentful about doing good for our environment because we bungled the rollout. Thankfully people in the inner west are so committed to climate action and environmental reforms that they are still committed to the FOGO despite the bungle. But we do not want a statewide situation where people feel really negatively about the State Government or it becomes a battle between State and local governments.

We all need to work together to make sure that FOGO is delivered for the State of New South Wales. I also acknowledge the incredible work of the many people and activists in our community who are committed to waste reduction, the circular economy and ensuring local environmental action to address some of the biggest challenges

of our time. These laws follow the lead of community-led initiatives which started years ago. I remember an app where you could share that you had food waste, find out who in your local community had a compost bin, and go to drop off your bucket there.

There was also a wonderful project at Camdenville Public School where parents would rock up with compost bins of rotting fruit—and any parent who has found a bit of fruit in a lunchbox after a holiday period knows what I am talking about—once a week in the morning, and tip them in a big compost bin that would go to the community garden next to the school. That was a way to recognise that many inner city homes do not have the space to compost at home. It is because of communities who have taken local action for so long that these laws have now come into place and that we can make a statewide commitment to a FOGO program that works for recycling in our communities.

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) (19:54): I am very pleased to speak to the Protection of the Environment Legislation Amendment (FOGO Recycling) Bill 2024, which will hopefully see the introduction of FOGO throughout New South Wales. I am proud to report that residents of Lake Macquarie were relatively early adopters of FOGO. Lake Macquarie covers the entirety of the State electorate of Lake Macquarie, a large part of the electorate of Swansea and Charlestown, and a significant part of Wallsend and Cessnock. Residents have been doing this since mid-2018. Since then, over 243 tonnes of organic waste have been diverted from landfill and received a second life as high-quality compost. The amount of landfill waste per capita has also been significantly reduced.

I see the introduction of FOGO recycling across New South Wales as an intelligent and inevitable step to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill. It addresses the urgent lack of landfill space available and promotes a circular economy. It is a little bit back to the future, as it is what our grandparents might have done—my grandparents, anyway. I am not sure about others, but my grandparents, great-grandparents and generations before them did not have this question. We have created a modern problem, and we have to own up to that. It is not just about producing a process for dealing with food and garden organics; it is about reducing the amount of waste we produce by not over-purchasing, and making sure that food is well utilised and well distributed. It is not just about dealing with our waste; it is about having an equitable society when so many of us have too much and too many have too little. It is a whole-of-life issue for food and how we deal with it. Right now, too much organic material is being wasted, and I really do support the bill.

The bill will not have the same impact on Lake Macquarie City Council residents as it will on other local councils that do not yet have FOGO recycling services in place. However, the impact of the bill on local councils and our ratepayers deserves attention. To the credit of members who have contributed the debate tonight, I believe that is going to be duly paid. First, New South Wales councils generally do a very good job at delivering waste services to our communities. They all have different needs depending on their population density, geography and their built form. There are many reasons why there will not be parity between the ability of councils to deliver these sorts of services. But they can certainly do a lot better, I believe, than those who are not delivering FOGO or a similar service.

The household mandate in the bill will require councils without FOGO recycling to deliver another waste service. That will come at a cost. It seems inevitable to me that ratepayers will bear some cost burden associated with the rollout of the additional service, but the Government must do what it can to support councils to minimise the cost linked to complying with the bill. If not, councils will suffer, which means ratepayers will suffer, and many are already suffering due to high rates and pressure for increased rates. Second, the bill includes financial penalties for noncompliance with the household mandate. As a former councillor and former Mayor of Lake Macquarie, I cannot say that I support the hefty maximum penalties included in the bill.

I have had many discussions over the years with the NSW Environment Protection Authority about the way it has engaged with waste proposals. Penalties are a blunt tool for compliance. I would prefer to see a greater emphasis on collaboration between councils and the State Government embedded in the bill rather than a punitive approach. I firmly believe councils should not be punished where they are using their best endeavours to comply with the mandate. However, I acknowledge that the penalties operate as a compliance mechanism and that there is a penalty notice regime, which means a smaller fine would typically apply for breaches of the mandate.

I also take comfort in the strong words of the Minister that the compliance mechanisms in the bill will never be the Government's first step and that councils will not be held responsible for issues that occur in other parts of the sector. If adopted, the amendment proposed by the member for Wakehurst will be another source of comfort for councils concerned by the requirements and potential impacts of this bill. An implementation advisory panel with local government representation will create an opportunity for consultation on regulations and ongoing input about the implementation and operation of the mandate. It is important for local government to have that seat at the table as the party responsible for delivering FOGO recycling services. I thank the member for Wakehurst for his efforts to ensure the views of local councils are properly heard.

Third, I highlight a concern raised by the local government sector, including Lake Macquarie City Council. In simple terms, we do not have the existing infrastructure to recycle the FOGO waste mandated for collection from houses and businesses. This bill will prompt the development of FOGO material handling and processing facilities. It is important to ensure that the development can be achieved in an appropriate time frame so that it does not end up in landfill. I call on the Government to support councils and industry to develop the capacity as a priority. It is clear that there is a strong desire to process FOGO as well as other types of waste, such as soft plastics, in the move to a circular economy. We all want to get the FOGO piece right. To do so, the Government must work in partnership with councils to ensure that the rollout and expansion of FOGO recycling services are as seamless as possible. I commend the Government for taking decisive action to tackle the State's waste crisis and I look forward to further waste reform as we move towards a circular economy. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms JACQUI SCRUBY (Pittwater) (20:01): I speak in support of the Protection of the Environment Legislation Amendment (FOGO Recycling) Bill 2024. Separating organic waste, composting it and re-using it are a no-brainer. New South Wales is running out of landfill space, especially in Greater Sydney. Without action, landfill space will run out by 2030, which is only five years away. Meanwhile, 40 per cent of the rubbish in red bins is organic waste, which is filling up our landfills unnecessarily. Food waste and other organic rotting materials in our landfills also release methane, which is 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide. A paper by Local Government NSW demonstrated the significant emission reductions food organics and garden organics [FOGO] recycling can deliver.

The paper included a 2020 example of Tweed Shire Council collecting more than 11,000 tonnes of FOGO waste. The scheme saved 17,000 tonnes of CO₂. If the end product is used as mature compost and applied to soil, there is an additional saving of 18,000 tonnes of CO₂ per annum. That is the equivalent of approximately 12,000 cars being taken off the road, according to the Federal Government Green Vehicle Guide. It is not insignificant. It is a real contribution to tackle one of the sources of carbon dioxide. We know we are in a climate crisis. We also know that we need good organic material to fertilise our food and for the growing of food. It is a great example of a circular economy. FOGO recycling is just the first step to complete that circle.

I acknowledge the former Government's Waste and Sustainable Materials Strategy 2041 and the work that was done, particularly around FOGO waste. I also acknowledge the member for Manly, who was the Minister for Environment and Heritage at that time. I congratulate the current Government on picking up where the former Government left off and mandating FOGO recycling across New South Wales by 1 July 2030. In the 2041 strategy document, the list of targets includes halving the amount of organic waste to landfill by 2030, net zero emissions from organics to landfill by 2030 and a 10 per cent reduction of waste per person by 2030. All households have that responsibility. After hearing about the education measures outlined by previous speakers, I have every confidence that we can achieve a reduction on a per person basis as well.

Another target outlined in the strategy was a general 80 per cent average recovery rate from all waste streams by 2030. The targets are ambitious but achievable. I am very excited about FOGO recycling, in particular. Home composting is hard and can be time consuming. In the Pittwater electorate, which is covered by Northern Beaches Council, we have only the option of home composting. I believe my constituents are welcoming of FOGO recycling and the role that local government will play to implement FOGO recycling, rather than expecting individuals with already busy family lives to be home composting. We do hear that local government is responsible for roads, rates and rubbish. FOGO recycling squarely fits into the mandate that I hear about so often in my electorate, particularly in recent times.

In Pittwater, we have felt frustrated that other local government areas—approximately 43 of them across New South Wales—have been providing FOGO for a number of years. Some of those programs have been incredibly successful. In the areas where the rollouts have not been so successful, there are great opportunities for lessons learned to be implemented in the rollouts of local government areas where FOGO recycling will be new as a result of this legislation. I reflect on my time living in London, where I was lucky enough to have a FOGO waste collection. I had a separate bin for FOGO waste. A mini caddy was also provided, which sat on the kitchen bench. It was very easy. It was satisfying to see the amount of waste reduce. The general reduction in waste volume was very noticeable. It was during a time when my family was committed to living zero waste. We sent only a few inches of waste to the landfill each week. I am no longer as good as I was at that time, but I look forward to FOGO recycling assisting me in my own personal waste reduction.

When I returned from London to Australia, I was genuinely disappointed that there was no FOGO recycling offered by Northern Beaches Council. I did reluctantly take up home composting, which I seem to continually fail at. This is a problem for others in my local government area. During COVID, I was involved in a number of online forums about waste reduction run by Northern Beaches Council. I heard from many of my now constituents about their continuous issues with home composting and how they were looking forward to a FOGO future. Some of

the previous speakers mentioned some of the initiatives that are available, such as apps to connect people with houses that are composting. Those options were explored by my constituents at the time, but they are problematic and hard to implement.

We need lots of education. The Government needs to support local government areas to provide education to residents and ratepayers. All members have an obligation to be champions for FOGO recycling in our respective electorates. I will be an advocate for change in my community. The Pittwater community is full of sustainability warriors. We love our natural environment. We have local heroes leading the way, including our local schools, such as Avalon Public School, which offers a collection of organic waste. Parents do take their organic waste into the school. We also have community gardens such as Newport Community Garden. In August last year Newport local David Lye won the Northern Beaches Volunteer of the Year Award for his charitable composting initiative. He has been leading the way in food recycling, serving another community charity called One Meal, which makes meals for those most in need in our community. David has created a local circular economy by bringing the charity's waste to local groups that are able to compost it. He was quoted in the *Manly Observer* last year.

It is important to acknowledge the impact the bill will have on not only our communities as they transition to adopt FOGO recycling but also councils. I have met with Northern Beaches Council and Local Government NSW. I am concerned about cost-shifting. The recent parliamentary inquiry into the ability of local governments to fund infrastructure and services highlighted that cost-shifting from the New South Wales Government onto councils is an incredibly serious issue that warrants attention. As other members have mentioned, we all need to support councils and push the Government to make sure there are adequate grants and supports for them to implement the requirements while minimising costs to ratepayers as well.

I am concerned about the fines and what appear at first glance to be some draconian measures, particularly if they end up impacting local businesses. But following my discussions with the Government, I am also confident that councils, local businesses and households will be supported. I welcome the amendments foreshadowed by the member for Wakehurst, which he will speak to shortly. It may sound like a small issue, but fruit stickers present a considerable contamination risk that we need to address. The 2023 Environment Protection Authority document *NSW Plastics: Next Steps* mentions that fruit stickers are on the agenda, and we need to spend time assessing what impact they may have on contamination and how to reduce that contamination load.

In Western Australia, South Australia and international jurisdictions such as New Zealand and France, plastic fruit stickers have been banned. Those bans have allowed for compostable fruit stickers, which the Minister and the Government should look into as an area for potential reform. Most importantly, we must consult with community and local government and work together. I welcome the foreshadowed amendments from the member for Wakehurst, which will seek to establish an advisory panel made up of industry representatives, with mandatory consultation requirements. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms TRISH DOYLE (Blue Mountains) (20:11): On behalf of Mr Jihad Dib: In reply: We have heard a number of contributions to debate on the Protection of the Environment Legislation Amendment (FOGO Recycling) Bill 2024 over the past fortnight. I thank the member for Manly, and shadow Minister, for his contribution on behalf of the Opposition, and I thank the member for Balmain for her contribution on behalf of The Greens. I particularly thank the member for Wakehurst for his engagement and his foreshadowed amendments. I also thank members representing the electorates of Coogee, Oxley, Penrith, Heathcote, Sydney, Campbelltown, Bathurst, Clarence, Parramatta, Newtown, Lake Macquarie and Pittwater.

I briefly address some of the matters raised during debate on the bill and raised with the Government throughout the consultation period. I thank members for engaging on this issue—some with incredible enthusiasm—for their representation of the concerns of their communities and for their desire to work together as food organics and garden organics [FOGO] champions, as the member for Pittwater said, to achieve productive outcomes. I thank industry, local government, individuals and environment groups for their engagement on the bill and their broad support for what the Government is trying to do. I thank the members who have worked directly with the Minister's office to clarify parts of the bill, particularly the member for Sydney, the member for Pittwater, the member for Manly and the member for Wakehurst.

We all agree that we must take action to fix our waste crisis. Almost all contributions to debate have put that commitment on record. Around half the councils in New South Wales already have a FOGO service. The bulk of those are in regional New South Wales, so our regions are absolutely leading the way. Many of those councils have contacted my office and the Minister's office to say that they are happy to offer advice and support to other councils, and I thank them for that offer. I place on record a few issues raised and some answers that I hope will provide assurance and comfort, particularly to those in the local government sector.

The Minister provided this information in the other place, but I put it on record here as well. Councils are absolutely crucial in delivering and reforming waste management and the circular economy, and our Government

wants to work in partnership with councils and the sector to do that. The Government is focused on a policy outcome and behaviour change approach, rather than a punitive or compliance-led approach. There are compliance mechanisms in the bill, but they will never be our Government's first step. That is important to remember. We want to work with councils and all other parts of the waste and recycling sector to keep contamination low and ensure a clean waste stream. We all agree that we want to divert as much FOGO from landfill as possible. Some councils and their local members raised concerns with the Government about what they have to do to comply with the mandates.

The Government has been very clear that councils will not be held responsible for issues that arise in other parts of the sector, just as industry will not be held responsible for issues that could arise with councils. For councils to comply with the legislation, they essentially need to do three things by 2030. Firstly, they must provide bins for households for FOGO or food organic waste. For many councils that will be a direct transition of their existing green waste bins. Secondly, they must ensure that the bins are collected weekly. Thirdly, they must ensure via contract that they are transported separately from non-organic material. Councils are welcome to apply for an exemption if they need more time to respond to individual circumstances. Councils can approach the Environment Protection Authority [EPA] for extra time, support or exemptions.

Practically, the transportation component means that if a council has a waste contract with a licence provider and the contract aligns with the requirements then the EPA would consider the council to be acting appropriately and complying with the mandates. The Government has asked the EPA to assist any council that asks for help with the contract terms. The Minister's direction to the EPA is that assistance, support and collaboration are to be the tools that government uses to roll out the mandates. Compliance and penalties must be the last resort. I acknowledge and express gratitude to the fantastic EPA team, who are in the gallery tonight, for their incredibly good collaborative work.

Regarding exemptions, the Government recognises that a one-size-fits-all approach does not always work with waste services. That is especially true for the very different types of communities that we are dealing with in waste collection. The FOGO legislation enlivens provisions to allow the EPA to exempt some requirements or to give a longer transition period. However, we absolutely must pass this legislation before we can design and roll out any necessary exemptions. We want flexibility to respond to the different needs of councils and communities, rather than stipulating the possible exemptions in law. Legislating exemption types, as some councils have asked the Government to do, narrows the scope and removes that flexibility. As part of the exemption process, some of the things we will consider and take into account are geographical and population constraints, and the impact on processing availability, particularly in remote areas; the availability of infrastructure, particularly processing facilities; the timing and exploration of waste contracts; and the infrastructure impairments of certain building types, particularly in councils with a large number of apartments.

Everyone who is interested in waste knows that contamination is one of the biggest challenges we face, and that we face it throughout the supply chain. As other members have said, community education is key. More community education is needed, and the Government wants to invest in that aspect. I place on record that in the coming weeks—or even sooner—the Minister will announce a package of additional money and other supports for councils for community education, behaviour change and action against contamination. That money will flow to councils this year; we are not waiting until 2030.

In conclusion, the bill is essential to ensure that New South Wales, and Greater Sydney in particular, is able to reduce the amount of material going to landfill. It will drive up recycling and drive down greenhouse emissions. These measures are urgent and the time to act is now. The Government recognises that significant reform is needed in order to solve significant waste management challenges for the people of New South Wales. This bill is one aspect of that much-needed reform. While the bill is essential, it also represents a fundamental change to the way that councils and businesses operate. We are introducing this legislation now to give councils and businesses time to prepare. We want to provide the certainty for local government and the waste sector to invest in the new infrastructure that New South Wales needs.

The Government is committed to solving the State's waste crisis, and this bill is an important part of that plan. I thank the Minister and her fantastic team, who have worked very well with members across Parliament. Members of the team are in the advisers area tonight. I commend the bill to the House.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Michael Kemp): The question is that this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Consideration in detail requested by Mr Michael Regan.

Consideration in Detail

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Michael Kemp): By leave: I will deal with the bill in groups of clauses and schedules. The question is that clauses 1 and 2 and schedules 1 to 3 be agreed to.

Mr MICHAEL REGAN (Wakehurst) (20:23): By leave: I move my amendments Nos 1 to 9 and 11 on sheet c2025-013F in globo:

No. 1 Omission of penalties for local councils

Page 3, Schedule 1[2], line 13. Omit all words on the line.

No. 2 Omission of penalties for local councils

Page 3, Schedule 1[3], lines 18–23. Omit all words on the lines. Insert instead—

Maximum penalty—the maximum penalty for the executive liability offence if committed by an individual.

No. 3 Omission of penalties for local councils

Page 6, Schedule 1[4], proposed section 170E(1), penalty, lines 31 and 32. Omit all words on the lines.

No. 4 Frequency of collection of food organics waste

Page 6, Schedule 1[4], proposed section 170E(2)(a), line 37. Omit "least once each week". Insert instead "intervals the local council considers appropriate".

No. 5 Omission of penalties for local councils

Page 6, Schedule 1[4], proposed section 170E(2), penalty, lines 43 and 44. Omit all words on the lines.

No. 6 Reasonable excuse for local councils transporting FOGO waste with non-organic waste

Page 7, Schedule 1[4], proposed section 170E(3), line 2. Insert ", unless there is a reasonable excuse" after "transportation".

No. 7 Omission of penalties for local councils

Page 7, Schedule 1[4], proposed section 170E(3), penalty, line 3. Omit all words on the line.

No. 8 Reasonable excuse for local councils transporting FOGO waste with non-organic waste

Page 7, Schedule 1[4], proposed section 170E. Insert before line 5—

(4) For subsection (3), a reasonable excuse includes that FOGO waste collected for transportation is, or is likely to be, already mixed with non-organic waste at the time of collection.

No. 9 Authorised officers

Pages 7 and 8, Schedule 1[4], proposed section 170G, line 42 on page 7 to line 12 on page 8. Omit all words on the lines.

No. 11 Omission of penalties for local councils

Page 9, Schedule 1[6], proposed Schedule 5, Part 21, clause 77, lines 18 and 19. Omit ", and an offence is not committed against section 170E for a failure to comply with the section,".

The issue of food organics and garden organics [FOGO] recycling is important, as it is a race to the top. It is too much like a gubernatorial election, as my boy likes to say—if you can get that word in, you are apparently a legend. My amendments relate to four areas. The first area is penalties for local councils. The bill includes penalties of up to \$500,000 for councils, with further \$50,000 penalties for each day an offence occurs, as well as executive liability for failing to implement the mandate or arguably for perceived infractions in the operation of an organics service. Those penalties are unnecessarily punitive and not conducive to a collaborative partnership between State and local governments on reducing the waste going to landfill.

There are already mechanisms under the Local Government Act—including performance improvement orders—to ensure that councils comply with their various obligations. The Office of Local Government Improvement and Intervention Framework provides a graduated approach to ensuring that councils comply with relevant legislation and standards so that significant risks facing the council are addressed and councils are able to exercise their core functions. The framework encompasses encouragement and assistance before escalating to orders, interventions and sanctions to ensure that councils comply with relevant legislation or requirements. If councils, particularly smaller councils, struggle with the FOGO mandate, it is likely because they need support and assistance to comply, not penalties. My amendments remove the penalties.

The second area is the frequency of collection of food organics waste. I agree with weekly collection in metro areas, and I see it as a positive. However, the explicit direction in the bill for collection to be weekly is an inappropriate intervention at the operational level that does not consider local circumstances across the 128 local government areas in New South Wales. Councils must be enabled to design the waste and materials collections that best suit their community's needs and context, and their ability to match infrastructure availability and

capacity. Mandating collection frequencies may cause inefficiencies or increase the potential for contamination. My amendments remove the requirement for weekly collection.

The third area is the need for a reasonable excuse for local councils transporting FOGO waste with non-organic waste. The absolute contamination ban in the bill limits how councils can manage contamination at the operational level and does not appear to appreciate the various ways in which contamination can occur, or where in the supply chain contamination is most likely. For example, there are likely to be instances when a council can identify highly contaminated organic waste and arrange for it to be collected with non-organic waste to prevent the contamination of the broader organic collection. That also minimises the number of collection runs, limiting costs and greenhouse gas emissions. My amendments allow for a reasonable excuse for local councils transporting FOGO, including that FOGO waste collected for transportation is, or is likely to be, already mixed with non-organic waste at the time of collection.

The fourth area is the work of authorised officers. The bill enables a local council authorised officer under the Food Act to also exercise the functions under this Act. That could place an additional burden on the environmental health officers, who are already at full capacity undertaking food safety inspections. The most recent *Local Government Workforce Skills and Capability Survey Report* for New South Wales identified a great shortage of environmental health officers in local government. The Environment Protection Authority [EPA] suggests that councils could execute that function under a cost recovery model. That is inappropriate. It would never enable the true costs to be fully recovered and would place the resulting financial burden on small business and councils. Beyond issues of cost shifting, there is no capacity in the local government environmental health officer workforce to undertake that additional function. My amendment removes that potential unfunded additional burden on existing council officers.

I understand that the current wording in the bill does not require council authorised officers to perform that function. Rather, it gives them the option to do so. However, from my discussions with local government representatives, I do not believe the issue is resolved. Under the Protection of the Environment Operations Act, councils will still be the appropriate regulatory authority for the disposal of business waste. The bill creates new rules in relation to that, which is an additional unfunded task for councils. Although the Minister said councils will not be punished should they choose not to enforce the FOGO business mandates, there may come a time when the Government or the community ask why councils are not "doing their job". Local government representatives would like it to be made explicit that the EPA is responsible for monitoring compliance with the business mandate, or to allow for the EPA to fully cover the cost to councils from undertaking that activity—for example, via a claim on the waste levy. I encourage the Government to clarify that in law as soon as possible.

Ms TRISH DOYLE (Blue Mountains) (20:29): I am happy to address the group of amendments moved by the member for Wakehurst and explain why the Government is unable to support them. In relation to amendments Nos 1, 2 and 3 and amendments Nos 5, 7 and 11, the Government does not support removing the option of penalties for councils or any other entities that do not comply with these mandates. Currently any entity that does the wrong thing in the waste industry is liable for a potential penalty, whether that is a warning, an improvement notice or a fine. This provision mirrors the penalty infringement regime across the broader protection of the environment legislation and across the broader waste sector. The provision and penalties are in place to ensure that a council does not choose to ignore the legislation or consider noncompliance as a cost of doing business.

The penalties proposed in the bill have been very carefully considered. Removing this provision means there is no recourse for those who do the wrong thing. The Government does not support amendment No. 4. All evidence and community feedback shows that, unless you collect FOGO bins weekly, community cooperation and action decreases. To speak frankly, smelly bins lead to people choosing not to participate and sort their waste. They start putting their food waste back into the red bins and the system falls apart. The Government has had strong feedback from community, some councils and industry that weekly collection is essential to making FOGO work.

In relation to amendments Nos 6 and 8, the bill notes that there is the potential for enforcement action for providers, either councils or waste contractors, who deliberately flout contracts and mix waste. This could occur, for example, when FOGO waste is collected but then transported and mixed in with red bin waste. The Government does not support amendment No. 9. The bill gives the ability for authorised council officers to undertake compliance on business mandates. This provision provides flexibility as to who can undertake compliance and it is not a requirement to utilise these personnel. It does not force officers to do this and there is no penalty if they do not.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Michael Kemp): The question is that amendments Nos 1 to 9 and 11 on sheet c2025-013F of the member for Wakehurst be agreed to.

Amendments negatived.

Mr MICHAEL REGAN (Wakehurst) (20:32): I move my amendment No. 10 on sheet c2025-013F:

No. 10 FOGO Implementation Advisory Panel

Page 9, Schedule 1[4]. Insert after line 9—

170J FOGO Implementation Advisory Panel

- (1) The FOGO Implementation Advisory Panel (the *Panel*) is established.
- (2) The Panel consists of members appointed by the Minister and must include—
 - (a) at least 2 members nominated by Local Government NSW, and
 - (b) at least 2 members from or otherwise representing the waste and resource recovery industry.
- (3) The functions of the Panel are to—
 - (a) provide advice to the Minister and the EPA about the implementation and operation of this chapter, and
 - (b) be consulted about, and provide advice to, the Minister about matters to be prescribed in regulations made for the purposes of this chapter, other than regulations proposed to be made under this section, before the Minister recommends to the Governor the making of the regulations.
- (4) The procedures of the Panel are, subject to the regulations and any direction of the Minister, to be decided by the Panel.
- (5) The regulations may provide for matters relating to the Panel, including—
 - (a) the eligibility of persons for membership of the Panel and other matters relating to the constitution of the Panel, and
 - (b) the appointment of members of the Panel, and
 - (c) the remuneration of members of the Panel, and
 - (d) the Panel's procedures.
- (6) This section is repealed on 1 July 2035.

At every stage—collection, transport, processing and use of end products generated from FOGO—there are significant uncertainties about how this massive scaling up, over a relatively short time, will play out. Before regulations in relation to the FOGO mandates are made, it is entirely appropriate that local government and industry representatives are consulted. In fact, it should make them more effective, and that is ultimately what we want. We all support this.

In formalising a panel to ensure this consultation happens in a systematic way over the course of this transition, my hope is to support constructive communication between State and local government, the waste management sectors and other relevant stakeholders. The FOGO implementation advisory panel will have at least two members nominated by Local Government NSW and at least two members from, or otherwise representing, the waste and resource recovery industry. The functions of the panel are to provide advice to the Minister about the implementation and operation of this new chapter of the Protection of the Environment Operations Act, and to be consulted and provide advice to the Minister before regulations are made.

I thank the Government and my colleagues on the crossbench and in the Opposition for their support of this amendment. I reiterate that I very much value the opportunity for the Government to work more closely with local government and their representatives and councillors, because ultimately they are the ones that have to implement this legislation. They are the ones who have the best knowledge, they are not telling the Government what to do, and they are very supportive. I would prefer a few more roundtable conversations before we get to the point where I have to annoy the Government with amendments. I thank the Government for its support and, for the second time in this House, I thank the Minister's staff, who have done a great job. I respect and thank them for all their effort on this. I know that there is a lot more to come. I do not know how they do it. I genuinely say thank you.

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal) (20:34): The Opposition supports amendment No. 10 proposed by the member for Wakehurst and acknowledges the importance of the amendment. There is nothing wrong with making amendments to legislation, because often amendments make legislation better. I thank the member for Wakehurst for the work he has done on this with the Minister's staff, and with the Opposition and the shadow Minister. The shadow Minister and the Opposition support the amendment.

Ms TRISH DOYLE (Blue Mountains) (20:35): The Government is happy to support amendment No. 10 for an implementation panel. I note that a longstanding working group with representation from the regional organisation of councils and local government already exists in the EPA and meets regularly. However, as the member has pointed out, if a more formal implementation panel would give comfort to, and acknowledge and respect, councils, the Government is very happy to set that up. I thank the member for negotiating the wording to ensure that the panel is constructed properly and avoids conflicts of interest, and that there is also proper representation from industry as well as councils.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Michael Kemp): The question is that amendment No. 10 on sheet c2025-013F of the member for Wakehurst be agreed to.

Amendment agreed to.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Michael Kemp): The question is that clauses 1 and 2 and schedules 1 to 3 as amended be agreed to.

Clauses 1 and 2 and schedules 1 to 3 as amended agreed to.

Third Reading

Ms TRISH DOYLE: On behalf of Mr Jihad Dib: I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

INSPECTOR OF CUSTODIAL SERVICES AMENDMENT BILL 2024

Consideration in Detail

Consideration of the Legislative Council amendments.

Schedule of amendments referred to in message of 18 February 2025

No. 1 GRNS No. 1 [c2025-003C]

Page 3, Schedule 1[1], proposed section 2A(3)(b)(iii), line 23. Omit "people.". Insert instead—people,

- (iv) women and gender diverse persons,
- (v) people with physical and cognitive disabilities,
- (vi) people with life threatening conditions and illnesses.

No. 2 GRNS No. 4 [c2025-003C]

Page 7, Schedule 1[12], proposed section 8G(5)(b), line 26. Omit all words on the line. Insert instead—

- (b) includes the power to carry out interviews in private, at the request of the potential interviewee or on the initiative of the Official Visitor, and

No. 3 GRNS No. 5 [c2025-003C]

Page 7, Schedule 1[12], proposed section 8G. Insert after line 27—

- (6) An Official Visitor visiting a custodial centre to which the Official Visitor is assigned must inform custodial centre staff members at the centre and the persons in custody, detained or residing at the centre, that interviews with the Official Visitor may be carried out in private.

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG (Macquarie Fields—Minister for Better Regulation and Fair Trading, Minister for Industry and Trade, Minister for Innovation, Science and Technology, Minister for Building, and Minister for Corrections) (20:37): I move:

That the Legislative Council amendments be agreed to.

I thank colleagues in the upper House and in this place for their support of this important bill, the Inspector of Custodial Services Amendment Bill 2024. It is the second bill that has been moved in the Corrections portfolio, the other being the Crime (Administration of Sentences) Amendment Bill 2024 that we passed last week. Improving accountability and transparency is important to ensure that our justice system in Corrections works, and that it works to community expectations. I take this opportunity to thank and recognise the efforts of my adviser Ms Constance Piperides. We were also ably supported by our departmental liaison officers, Ms Brenna Lorkin and Laura Dewberry. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal) (20:38): On behalf of the Opposition, as the shadow Minister for Corrections, I support the Legislative Council amendments to the Inspector of Custodial Services Amendment Bill 2024. I agree that amendments Nos 1, 4 and 5 are absolutely correct in this particular instance. I also offer

my thanks to the Minister's office and the staff. I believe this was Constance Piperides' first piece of legislation passing through this place. I congratulate her on that and acknowledge the great work that she and the team have done. I thank my senior electoral officer, Jack Robinson, for the work he has put into this. It is a good piece of legislation with good amendments. The Opposition supports the bill.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Michael Kemp): The question is that the Legislative Council amendments be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

SOUND NSW ADVISORY BOARD BILL 2025

Second Reading Speech

Ms JULIA FINN (Granville) (20:39): On behalf of Ms Jenny Aitchison: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Government is pleased to introduce the Sound NSW Advisory Board Bill 2025 to the Legislative Assembly, having passed the Legislative Council last week. This bill presents new legislation for the Sound NSW Advisory Board to advise the Minister on the strategic direction and sustainability of the contemporary music industry in New South Wales. I note that the Minister for music is the first Minister for music in this State, and his passion for live and contemporary music has driven incredibly important reforms that are starting to bear fruit. The bill establishes the board, its composition, functions and other establishing documents. The effect of this is to allow members to be appointed to the board and ensure the board's membership reflects the diversity of the contemporary music industry in New South Wales while providing important advice to the Minister.

The legislation will formalise the existing non-statutory Sound NSW Advisory Board and ensure that this Government's focus on and prioritisation of contemporary music endures in New South Wales. The bill also delivers on a commitment outlined in the Government's Creative Communities policy. The Government has made no secret of its ambition for New South Wales to be known for its vibrant and thriving arts and cultural sector, which engages with the community and reflects its cultural diversity. Music is an integral part of this vision. Following a decade of lockouts and lockdowns where we lost over half of our music venues, outlawed mirror balls and stopped poetry readings in certain venues because only two people were allowed on stage at a time, the Government is bringing this city and State back to life.

In my part of New South Wales, in Western Sydney, we are producing some of the most exciting new artists like Becca Hatch, Vv Pete, A.Girl and Sevy, but there are very few permanent live music venues supporting original artists. I really want to see that change. Along with our vibrancy agenda, we aimed at tackling outdated rules and regulations. We responded by committing \$103 million over four years to the contemporary music sector. That investment reflects the significant contribution of the music sector to the State's economy.

The recent *State of the Scene 2024* report, a first-of-its-kind piece of research to understand the current state of the New South Wales live music industry, found the State's live music industry has a total economic output of \$5.5 billion, employs over 14,000 direct workers and supports over 10,000 indirect jobs. New South Wales is also home to more than 80 independent record labels, three major record labels, 17 regional conservatoria and 795 venues that offer live music, including 55 dedicated live music venues. To effectively guide the \$103 million investment, the Government established Sound NSW as a dedicated office committed to the growth, development and promotion of contemporary music in New South Wales. We have an agency for the film and TV sector—Screen NSW—so it was about time we put contemporary music on an even footing.

Sound NSW is leading the Government's work to revive the contemporary music sector, with the initial steps underway to support live music as a form of entertainment and ensure it remains a commercially viable sector. A 10-year Contemporary Music Strategy was released late last year, which represents, for the first time, a clear government approach for supporting and growing the sector. The global music industry is projected to experience substantial growth over the next decade. New South Wales needs a robust plan to ensure the State is competitive in the global market as both a music destination and a music exporter. Music stakeholders are dealing with significant disruption in audience behaviours, supply chains, globalisation and concerns about the impacts of artificial intelligence and social media. The strategy outlines a staged approach for the next 10 years to stabilise industry foundations, drive growth and improve safety, equity and diversity.

Formalising the Sound NSW Advisory Board through this bill will secure the ongoing advice and industry engagement necessary to realise that vision. The inaugural non-statutory advisory board was appointed in November 2023 and has provided invaluable input regarding targeted funding programs and ensuring those programs meet industry needs and evolve in alignment with industry feedback. It also contributed extensively to the development of the 10-year Contemporary Music Strategy. As well-intentioned as the Government might be,

it is vital that the voices of the industry are heard and have a method to engage with decision-makers. The potential is enormous if government can proactively and collaboratively work with an empowered music industry.

New South Wales is in a prime position to cement itself as a global music powerhouse and engine room for the Australian industry. The new advisory board will play a key role in guiding the implementation of the strategy. It will identify issues and opportunities to improve the contemporary music sector and provide advice on priorities, projects and proposals. This advice will ensure that New South Wales Government investment aligns with industry and community needs and supports local artists, businesses and audiences to participate in the contemporary music sector. The advisory board will also be tasked with providing advice on matters relating to the intersection between the contemporary music sector and the broader creative industries, integrating contemporary music into the activities of other artforms and providing New South Wales citizens with more opportunities to participate in music.

I now turn to the detail of the bill. As I previously noted, this bill seeks to legislate the Sound NSW Advisory Board, its membership requirements and functions. The board will consist of a chairperson and at least eight and no more than 11 members appointed by the Minister. The bill sets out composition requirements, including requirements for the board to have regional, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, community radio and artist representation. These build on requirements in the existing board charter and will ensure that the board reflects and taps into the diversity of the contemporary music industry across the State. Other appointees will include those with skills or experience that the Minister considers relevant to the functions of the board.

The board's principal function is to provide current advice to the Minister about the contemporary music industry in New South Wales. This includes but is not limited to identifying issues affecting the contemporary music sector; providing advice about contemporary music-related priorities, projects and proposals; identifying opportunities to improve the sector; providing advice about matters relating to the intersection between the contemporary music sector and the broader creative industries; and other issues relating to the planning, development, integration or implementation of policies and programs in the contemporary music sector.

The bill before the House today has been strengthened through debate in the other place and a number of amendments being incorporated into its current form as a result of consultation across Parliament—in particular thanks to the member for Tamworth and the Hon. Jacqui Munro. We supported the Opposition's amendment to schedule 2 to the bill to increase the representation of artists to at least two members and to define an artist as:

a professional songwriter, musician, DJ or recording artist who—

- (a) has at least 3 years professional experience in the creation, performance or recording of music, and
- (b) either—
 - (i) has a demonstrable body of work as a professional songwriter, musician, DJ or recording artist, or
 - (ii) has otherwise made a significant contribution to the music industry.

Creative Communities and the NSW Contemporary Music Strategy both have a focus on people and artists. We welcome the amendment that means the Sound NSW Advisory Board will have at least two members who are artists while keeping the total number of members to a workable number. It is tough to speak to the artist experience on your own, and this requirement is consistent with the artist representation on the current non-statutory advisory board. We also note that the term "artist" can often be used quite broadly. It can sometimes be understood to exclude songwriters, composers, DJs and music producers, or those who create music but are not the front face of a project. We worked with the Opposition on this definition to ensure that it is inclusive and that the terminology used does not inadvertently exclude important creative voices from the advisory board.

In relation to amendments proposed by The Greens by Ms Cate Faehrmann, MLC, we welcome two amendments, namely, including one member who is a member of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance [MEAA], and introducing a review process. The inaugural advisory board had one MEAA member, and it would be good to enshrine that in the schedule to the bill for this practice to continue. The MEAA is an important body representing workers' rights, and we support its inclusion in this formal advisory body. The incorporated review process strengthens and provides further accountability for the appropriateness of the board composition in the regulations. For all of those reasons, I commend the bill to the House.

Second Reading Debate

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth) (20:49): I note at the outset that the Opposition supports the Sound NSW Advisory Board Bill 2025 and has moved amendments in the Legislative Council regarding the make-up of the board. The Sound NSW Advisory Board Bill 2025 seeks to legislate a board for the New South Wales Government's contemporary music agency. Sound NSW was established in 2023 by the Government as, "A dedicated office within the New South Wales Government committed to the growth, development and

promotion of contemporary music in New South Wales." Sound NSW is responsible for overseeing the New South Wales Government's commitments to the contemporary music sector. The Sound NSW Advisory Board Bill 2025 comes after a commitment to legislate the Sound NSW Advisory Board as part of the Government's Creative Communities policy. The bill seeks to establish the board and its composition, functions and other establishing documents.

I note that the inaugural, non-statutory Sound NSW Advisory Board was appointed in November 2023. Music and live performance are major economic and cultural contributors in New South Wales. The Live Performance Australia 2023 *Ticket Attendance and Revenue Report* demonstrated that Australia's live performance industry contributed \$3.1 billion in revenue. New South Wales had a 33 per cent share of that revenue. Furthermore, music and live performance are key aspects of the State's night-time economy. According to the Sound NSW *State of the Scene 2024* report, the live music industry supports 25,000 jobs and contributes \$5.5 billion to the New South Wales economy. As a result, the Opposition undertook a thorough consultation process on the proposals in this legislation and put forward a series of proposed amendments on behalf of stakeholders for the Government to consider. I thank the stakeholders that provided valuable feedback.

The Opposition has a collaborative and consultative approach, and the amendments were taken to the Government prior to the debate on this bill. I thank the Minister and his team for their cooperation and conversations during this process. In short, the proposed amendments sought to require the following eligibility requirements as part of the Sound NSW Advisory Board Regulation 2025: three artists; two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island representatives; two regional and remote industries representatives; three industry representatives with experience in either live music, production, recording, publishing, distribution or artist management; one music education expert; one independent director who is not currently professionally engaged in the industry; and one representative from the night-time economy.

I note that many of the amendments were not supported by the Government when the Minister responded to the amendments during the debate in the other place last night. The Opposition has secured a commitment from the Minister that the proposed amendments to the regulation will be given consideration and that the feedback provided by the industry will be taken on board. This will be particularly important in future compositions of the board to ensure that it has the appropriate diversity and representation to effectively advocate for the contemporary music industry. This is an incredibly broad and diverse industry. For example, country music is an industry with a large cohort of music professionals who may live and work in regional New South Wales. Their needs, advocacy and required support is very different from that of an electronic music producer based in Enmore.

The Opposition's expectation is that the Minister will take our feedback on the make-up of the board into consideration when appointing a future board. These are suggestions from the industry, and they deserve proper consideration. I thank industry representatives again for their feedback. The Opposition successfully moved two amendments in the Legislative Council relating to membership of the board, stating that two of its members should be artists. In the Opposition's amendments:

artist means a professional songwriter, musician, DJ or recording artist who—

- (a) has at least 3 years professional experience in the creation, performance or recording of music, and
- (b) either—
 - (i) has a demonstrable body of work as a professional songwriter, musician, DJ or recording artist, or
 - (ii) has otherwise made a significant contribution to the music industry.

These amendments strengthen the bill by ensuring that artists have a strong voice in providing advice to the Government on the future direction of government policy regarding contemporary music. I now turn briefly to the bill in detail. The bill seeks to legislate the Sound NSW Advisory Board, its membership requirements and its functions.

In part 2 of the bill proposed section 6 requires the Minister to appoint members to the board, including a chairperson and at least eight, but not more than 11, other members. Proposed section 7 details the functions of the board, including the principal function of providing advice to the Minister about the contemporary music industry in New South Wales. Schedule 1 to the bill outlines the constitution of the board, including processes in the instance of a vacancy, personal liability, proper disclosures and the three-year terms of office members. I remind the Minister in this instance that it is good and proper practice for the Minister and for Sound NSW to conduct a proper review of the make-up and diversity of the board at the time of any vacancy or at the expiry of a board member's term.

Schedule 2 to the bill outlines the Sound NSW Advisory Board Regulation, which details the eligibility requirements and establishes the minimum diversity requirements for when the Minister makes appointments.

I have previously addressed the Opposition's expectations around this. The Opposition supports the bill. I have had the opportunity to discuss the direction of Sound NSW with both department staff and the Minister's team. I thank them for their cooperation. I also note the Government's cooperation regarding some of the amendments proposed by the Opposition. These are amendments that came directly from stakeholders who will be affected by the decisions and advocacy of the Sound NSW Advisory Board.

The Minister and the Government should take note of stakeholder feedback when considering the future make-up of the board. I thank all of the stakeholders who contacted me regarding this legislation. I thank the Minister and his team for their work consulting with the Opposition. Support for the live music industry is bipartisan. The Opposition looks forward to working with the Government to support our State's contemporary music professionals not only in metropolitan Sydney but also in regional New South Wales, where the lights also burn brightly late at night.

Ms DONNA DAVIS (Parramatta) (20:56): I speak in support of the Government's Sound NSW Advisory Board Bill 2025. I thank the member for Tamworth for his contribution, but I also note that electro music does not just come from Enmore. It is more likely to come from Mount Druitt and Western Sydney these days. The member should take note of where the heart of music is now moving to. The New South Wales Government is committed to the growth, development and promotion of contemporary music in New South Wales. Live music provides 25,000 jobs and contributes an economic output of \$5.5 billion to the New South Wales economy. That is what the Sound NSW *State of the Scene 2024* report found last year. This research was the first of its kind and demonstrates the fact that the Minns Labor Government gets it. Unlike those opposite, we recognise this is a sector that needs to be supported and not treated with suspicion or punitively driven out of our venues and events.

I am very passionate about this bill and about the need for change. Parramatta is a destination. It is where the people from the north-west, the west and south-west come to work and play. A city of our size and importance needs to cater for our communities. When it comes to dining and entertainment, Parramatta is where it is at. We have Eat Street, Little India, CommBank Stadium, Accor Stadium, Qudos Bank Arena, Netball Central, the Sydney Showground and much more. While we are great at catering for many aspects of entertainment, including visiting national and international artists, we have very few venues and limited support for local live music. Music deserves to be valued by governments. We need a clear plan with good data in place for how to support the sector. We need to put our money where our mouth is, which is why we came to the election with a historic \$103 million commitment.

I live and breathe the experience of struggling musicians. I hit my toes on amps and electric guitar cases on a regular basis. My sons formed a band about seven years ago and, while they are not yet the Gang of Youths, they dream and they write and they have hope. I feel their struggle, so I decided to share some of their experiences with the House tonight. They go out on a Monday night to rehearse. They travel from Parramatta to Castle Hill, because that is the closest place they can go to rehearse. They pay \$105 for three hours, plus petrol there and back. They are uni students working in casual jobs and paying their way as struggling musicians. They are going to do a gig this Saturday night, and they make between \$50 and \$250 between the four of them—not quite enough to pay the rent for the week. They are in the process of cutting an EP. Going to a recording studio costs them a minimum of \$500 for a meaningful and effective time slot.

I said to Hayden, the lead guitarist, "What do you think is important about this plan for a board to focus on live musicians and live music?" He said that bands and artists need more than just the word of mouth of their immediate friends and family to support them as they are trying to make their career. Sure, that is fine for the first few years, the honeymoon phase of being a live performer. But there are only so many times they can pester their mum and dad, work colleagues, flatmates and cousins to fork out time and money to see them. That is where the Government can step in. With the ongoing support of up-to-date, consistent advertising, gig guides and widespread access to bands and artists to perform smaller gigs, there is a chance to share some of the opportunities and access, and to support our most talented and successful performers and creatives.

For bands to get a foot in the door takes the money and the opportunity to earn enough money at gigs to at least cover costs—but preferably to buy a meal. Looking at the number of attendees at a sold-out Laneway Festival held in our wonderful city last week, the figures speak for themselves. They show us that people want to go and see live music. It is great that crowds are returning to festivals like Laneway, but we have to support the next generation of entertainers. We need to ensure that that same crowd are aware of what is going on in the music scene across New South Wales so they can support the thousands of amazing talents right across our State.

Those of us who grew up in the days of *Countdown* know how much that show did to support new music and especially new Australian artists. Similarly, triple j has played an incredible role over the past 50 years to break new artists into the Australian music scene. But the world has changed. MTV started it, and music streaming and pay TV have changed the Australian music scene. Sadly, the biggest killer of the live music scene has been

the pokies. When I moved to Sydney in 1988, the Regent Hotel on Anzac Parade in Kingsford was the place to go on a Monday night to have a beer and a bit of live music. It might be Phil and Tommy Emmanuel if you were lucky. They were regulars.

But by the time I was graduating, the live music had dried up and was replaced with poker machines. The impact of poker machines on live music continues today. It absolutely breaks my heart to go to see The Bancrofts' gigs with only a handful of others in attendance. To see the same thing happen to each and every band performing before them, after them or in the next bar is tough. There is a lot of tough competition for people's time and money. In a city like Sydney there is so much to do. There are great beaches, parklands, food and footy, and much more to take our attention.

We can stay at home and watch a movie that has just been released at the cinema a few weeks ago and there it is on the big screen in the lounge room. To crack open a drink and sit there with the family is very relaxing. We do not have to worry about going out into the cold. But other big cities are succeeding at supporting new music. Two weeks ago I visited Brunswick Street in Fitzroy. There were small bars and live music, and that was repeated across the city of Melbourne over and over again. That is why the bill is so important for New South Wales. It will insist that the Government's relationship with New South Wales's burgeoning arts scene is an evolving and healthy one.

We also know that we need to listen to expert advice. The bill supports the New South Wales Government's agenda for the cultural sector and contemporary music sector. A legislated advisory board for Sound NSW will ensure that the focus and prioritisation of contemporary music endures in New South Wales. A non-statutory Sound NSW Advisory Board was established in November 2023 as an interim measure only. The purpose of legislating the Sound NSW Advisory Board is to formalise its establishment and ensure that its role in providing advice to the Minister on the strategic direction of the contemporary music industry in New South Wales is maintained.

The intention is for the new statutory advisory board to replace the current non-statutory Sound NSW board. That is so important to do now because the State has a 10-year contemporary music strategy, launched late last year. The advisory board will be an important player in the delivery of that vision. Legislating the board provides confidence and reassurance to the contemporary music industry that Government's commitment to music is ongoing. It ensures diversity and representation of the Advisory Board while striking the right balance with the flexibility required for a functioning board. It creates consistency with Screen NSW, which has a legislated film and television industry advisory board. It ensures current industry advice and expertise continue to be embedded in the work of Sound NSW. It delivers on the commitment in Creative Committees to legislate the Sound NSW Advisory Board. [*Extension of time*]

Sure, cover bands have a place, but so does new music. As generation X and baby boomers—there are probably a few in this room—if we want the next generation of the music that we enjoyed when we were young, we need to put measures like this board in place. We need to ensure that we support the current generation and the next generation to play their own music and tell their own stories with their own sounds, including sounds that we have not heard yet, not the sounds of yesterday. My God, every time I turn on the radio I hear the same song I have been listening to for the past 30 years. I want to hear new music. But we will not get that new music if we do not have a board like this in place and if we do not have a government like ours that supports creatives putting their music, their ideas and their experiences into our everyday lives so that we can hear what they want to tell us.

The protest music of the past told the story of that time. Where is that music today? We do hear it, but often it is not Australia's sound; it is the sound of others living in other countries. We want to ensure that the sounds and the protest music of the people of today are heard. I will continue to kick my foot on the amp and those heavy guitar cases. I will support the youth who want to get those voices heard and get the music played. I am happy for the baby boomers and generation X to flock to see Daryl; the Eurogliders; Richard Clapton, who was at Riverside on the weekend; Pseudo Echo, who we see putting their posters up around town; and any other '70s and '80s revival bands. But the Minns Labor Government is demonstrating its commitment to the music of today and the music of tomorrow. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms JENNY LEONG (Newtown) (21:09): I contribute to debate on the Sound NSW Advisory Board Bill 2025. I acknowledge that when we talk about the support for music and live music in this place, we actually have multi-partisan support, not bipartisan support. I love that the New South Wales Labor Government is seeking to rewrite the story of the past and be the champion of live music in this State. Members will recall that just over 10 years ago the New South Wales Labor Party, then in opposition, lined up with Premier Barry O'Farrell who imposed the lockout laws in an emergency sitting. I acknowledge that the New South Wales Labor Party has moved on, but members must always remember that the need to revive the live music, festival and creative scenes in Sydney is due in no small part to the bipartisan support back then for the CBD and Kings Cross lockouts. So be it; that is where we are, with the Sound NSW Advisory Board Bill before the House.

During the debate members have given their perspectives on their favourite styles of music and their preferences for setting up the board. But it is critical that we recognise the work of Sound NSW, consider the ability of the advisory board to adequately represent the diversity of the music industry and the geographic spread of music and live music in this State, and ensure that the right voices are at the table to make those decisions. We need to be conscious of that because, to be frank, anyone looking at the other advisory boards the Minister has been relying on, particularly the night-time economy board, would see them as a dudfest of the bros that hang out with the Minister at parties. When we are devising a creative arts scene that represents the creativity of our communities, we need to make sure that their diversity is represented. While I recognise that Labor members have a much better track record in ensuring diversity than those now on the Opposition benches, the requirement for diverse representation must be protected in the legislation, whether it be geographical, First Nations or musical. We must also ensure that enough musicians are on the board. The Greens are committed to and want to see that diversity.

I acknowledge that in her second reading speech the Parliamentary Secretary mentioned The Greens amendment to ensure that a Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance representative is on the advisory board. The Greens welcome the adoption of that amendment. We were also hoping to see a range of other experts guaranteed on the board, but I appreciate we may not get to that in the negotiations. However, I urge the need for that diversity. I strongly encourage in our discussions of government policy, whether about the music industry or creative industries in general, that we do not deal with only commercial and professional forms of music. I say that because it has been raised with me that the Contemporary Music Festival Viability Fund that assists and supports festivals in the State, which the Minister is responsible for, is only available to ticketed festivals. Public funding is supporting commercial, ticketed festivals, but similar music festivals that are neither ticketed nor commercial but attract the same kind of community support are not getting any public funding and support through that program. That is a huge problem.

Similarly, going back to the night-time economy folks, a lot of those people are working in for-profit hospitality industries. We need to consider culture as well as the economy. We cannot be focused just on those who are delivering monetary and economic benefits to the State. We must also recognise the benefits in creativity. In relation to that, I would strongly encourage the Sound NSW Advisory Board to make sure it looks holistically at what is required to support independent artists and creatives working in the music industry. For example, in my electorate of Newtown, one of the biggest challenges that people have is unloading their gear from their vans. They unload their gear only to find that Clover Moore or Darcy Byrne has given them a large council parking fine. To be fair, it is not actually Clover or Darcy; it is the parking inspectors. The money that they get for the gig that night goes to paying the parking ticket.

Practical things like that need to be looked at, but there are also much bigger priorities, such as addressing the fact that creatives and artists unfortunately cannot afford to live in our city anymore. Rent caps, housing controls and the need for a guaranteed basic income are all broader issues that impact the ability for creatives and musos to engage in their artistic endeavours. The Greens are supportive of the bill. We hope that the review that was secured in the other place, by way of amendment to the bill moved by my colleague Ms Cate Faehrmann, will ensure that the Government does everything it can to support live music in this State.

Ms JULIA FINN (Granville) (21:16): On behalf of Ms Jenny Aitchison: In reply: I thank all the members who contributed to debate on the Sound NSW Advisory Board Bill 2025. As outlined in my opening remarks, the bill will legislate the Sound NSW Advisory Board to advise the Minister on the strategic direction of the contemporary music industry in New South Wales. In legislating the Sound NSW Advisory Board, the Government will ensure the role of the existing board is formalised and maintained into the future. As noted in my earlier speech, the bill before the House today has been strengthened through the debate in the other place, with several amendments being incorporated into its current form as a result of consultation across Parliament. The Government supported the Opposition amendment to increase representation of artists to at least two members and to define "artists" appropriately, and supported two of The Greens amendments to include a member of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance and to introduce a review process.

The debate in this place raised important questions, including a legitimate desire to ensure diversity and representation on the advisory board in a number of ways. It is good practice to limit the number of board members to a manageable number, but many suggested amendments require increasing the size of the board beyond a workable group. The approach of the current legislation allows for diverse music industry representation without stipulating or naming representation from every part of the industry. That flexibility is especially important given that the needs of the music sector can change over time and the right people can add enormous value. To add multiple kinds of representation, whether that be through the usual considerations of diversity or considerations of the different genres of music, would result in the board being much larger than 12 positions, which is not best practice when establishing a functioning advisory board.

Given the scope of the projects and the work of Sound NSW, many of the suggestions discussed could be better served by utilising other working groups and round tables across government. The same goes for representation. Prioritising and protecting First Nations music is one of the key pillars of the 10-year contemporary music strategy. There are incredible musicians in New South Wales. They are making a great contribution and we need to support them. Given that, Sound NSW will be establishing forums for diverse advice from First Nations musicians and industry professionals to directly advise them as they develop their programs.

I thank the member for Tamworth, the member for Parramatta and the member for Newtown for their contributions to the debate. The member for Tamworth has immense experience as a performer and as a champion of contemporary music, as well as being a shadow Minister. I thank him for his input. I also thank him for the committee work we did, and for playing his guitar and singing at a school in my electorate when the music teacher, who was supposed to be explaining the program to us, was off sick. He performed *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*. It was just great—and the kids loved it.

The member for Parramatta told us a lot about her son's band, The Bancrofts, and their experience, as well as the huge financial struggles that come with the small revenue that bands make from live performances, together with the costs of rehearsals, and what an impact that has on a young band. She also spoke about the loss of venues over the past 35 years and how important it is to support new music. She also asked: Where are the protest songs? Protest songs by Australian artists do not get wide airplay the way they used to, but I recommend to her Dobby's beautiful album *Warrangu: River Story*, which is a protest about the devastation of the rivers in western New South Wales.

Ms Lynda Voltz: Amyl and the Sniffers have got a few protest songs.

Ms JULIA FINN: They certainly do. The member for Newtown made a number of comments about the importance of diversity and wanting to see diversity on the board. The Government is very keen to do that as well. There may not be funding for free music festivals through the program that she mentioned, but there is a lot of funding from this Government to free community festivals and enlivening communities and street festivals through a number of different other avenues. They are well catered for, and they are very important. In the part of Sydney where I live, where there are very few live music venues, councils and community events provide the most frequent platform for contemporary musicians. As she noted—and it is definitely true—it is becoming increasingly difficult for artists and creatives to afford to live in Sydney anymore.

I thank Emily Collins and the Sound NSW team for the extraordinary amount of work involved in setting up the new agency, developing the 10-year strategy for contemporary music and delivering a significant number of programs and grants. I also thank the Minister's officers and MPs involved in this process. I commend the bill to the House.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Michael Kemp): The question is that this bill be now read a second time.

Motion agreed to.

Third Reading

Ms JULIA FINN: On behalf of Ms Jenny Aitchison: I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

CREATIVE STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT BILL 2025

Second Reading Speech

Ms JULIA FINN (Granville) (21:22): On behalf of Ms Jenny Aitchison: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Government is pleased to introduce the Creative Statement to Parliament Bill 2024 to the Legislative Assembly, having passed the Legislative Council last week. The bill presents a straightforward proposal to mandate the preparation of a statement to Parliament on the arts, culture and creative industries in New South Wales every three years. This important accountability measure will enable ongoing transparency and reporting to Parliament and to the public. It will provide a clear understanding of the size, complexity and health of the arts, culture and creative industries sector. The New South Wales Government believes that culture is a public good, and that the right to participate in arts, cultural and creative activities is a fundamental human right. The Government also recognises that the creative industries are economically impactful. They account for a fifth of

services exports and 10 per cent of the State's workforce, and have the potential for meaningful, sustainable growth.

New South Wales has the largest creative workforce in Australia, with creative industries representing 12 per cent of the Greater Sydney workforce. Creative industries generate highly skilled jobs, foster innovation, attract global investment and tourism, and boost the profile of New South Wales. Jobs in creative industries grew at nearly twice the rate of the broader Australian workforce pre-pandemic. The creative industries are a critical segment of the New South Wales economy, particularly in relation to jobs, export revenue, pace of growth, opportunities and trade. Internationally, the export of creative goods and services is one of the fastest growing sectors in the world.

In December 2023, the New South Wales Government met an election commitment by releasing Creative Communities, the first whole-of-government arts, culture and creative industries policy. Creative Communities is a 10-year policy with the goal of sustainably growing the depth and breadth of creative industries throughout New South Wales. Over the next decade it will enable creative individuals, organisations and communities throughout the State to reach their potential. The Creative Statement to Parliament will report on progress against our strategic priorities over this 10-year period and beyond. Creative Communities not only represents the first whole-of-government commitment to arts and culture in New South Wales, but also is the first time that New South Wales Government cultural policy has included the broader creative industries within its remit. By doing so, it brings New South Wales government thinking and action on cultural policy in line with the diverse outputs and creative practices that the twenty-first century has to offer.

Creative Communities complements Revive, the national cultural policy, and shares its commitment to prioritise First Nations culture and take our multifaceted stories and creativity to the world. It supports sustainably growing the creative industries and accepts the responsibility to advocate for the value of culture to build capacity, creativity and community cohesion. Creative Communities grew out of deep listening over months of consultation and engagement with community and sector stakeholders between July and September 2023. The program included engagement across many formats. Over 1,000 people attended 15 town halls in person and online, peak body briefings and sector-specific round tables. This consultation spanned the breadth of New South Wales. The Minister and I attended town halls across various regional locations, including Lismore, on Bundjalung land; Newcastle, on Awabakal land; Bega, on Djiringanj land; Wagga Wagga and Dubbo, on Wiradjuri land; Tamworth, on Kamilaroi and Gamilaraay land, Wollongong; on Dharawal land, and Broken Hill, on Wilyakali land.

Individuals, industry groups, local government, commercial businesses and social enterprises lodged 775 written submissions. Through this consultation, we heard that there was an urgent need for government support and a comprehensive framework to strengthen the sustainability of the whole cultural ecosystem in New South Wales. Participants in the consultation wanted to see equitable distribution of resources so that those in Western Sydney and regional areas can flourish and connect with their audiences and communities. People across the State wanted to see that the culturally and geographically diverse communities of New South Wales could all find a sustainable place in the sector. Growing the creative industries in New South Wales will be enabled by a government that advocates and invests in them, in collaboration with an organised creative sector.

The New South Wales Government has committed through Creative Communities to legislate the delivery of a Creative Statement to Parliament every three years, detailing and tracking the status, health and progress of the arts, culture and creative industries. The statement will ensure transparency and accountability as we progress the Government's vision for the sector. It will provide crucial information about the state of the sector so that we may best direct our efforts. The bill gives effect to this commitment. A range of reforms and priority streams of activity are already underway and will be progressed over the ensuing years. The bill is one of many steps the Government is taking to implement its aim of putting culture at the heart of New South Wales, including investment reform, regulatory reform, activating spaces for creative use, education and training reform, and specific strategies and geographic plans.

I now turn to the detail of this bill. As I previously noted, this bill seeks to require the preparation and tabling of a statement to Parliament about the arts, culture and creative industries in New South Wales. The objective of the bill is to track the status, health and progress of the arts, culture and creative industries in New South Wales, and to promote ministerial accountability by requiring the Minister to report on progress in implementing related policies and plans. The statement will consider the intrinsic value and economic impact of the arts, culture and creative industries, as well as identify challenges and opportunities for the sector and factors impacting its sustainability and growth.

Schedule 1 to the bill requires that the first statement must be tabled within 18 months after commencement of the Act. Subsequent statements will be required to be tabled in each House of Parliament no later than three years after the last statement was tabled. The bill will also require the statements to be made publicly available on the New South Wales government website. The bill will ensure the transparency and accountability

required to drive systemic improvements in the outcomes achieved across the arts, culture and creative industries in New South Wales.

In consultation with the Opposition and crossbench, the Government moved a series of amendments in the Committee of the Whole in the other place to strengthen the bill, and they were agreed to. We proposed five amendments, which flowed from the consultation, and in each case they strengthened the intent of the bill, clarifying its purpose, providing further accountability to the Parliament and the public, and driving whole-of-government focus. First, we proposed to define what we mean by the health of the creative industries ecosystem. Proposed section 6 notes that the purpose of the statement is to report to Parliament on the status, health and progress of the creative industries in New South Wales. In consultation with The Greens, we clarified the meaning of health by introducing a definition in part 1:

health, of the creative industries, means sustainably positive economic, environmental, ethical and operational conditions that support the long-term viability of the creative industries for continuing social benefit.

Second, again in consultation with The Greens, we incorporated some of the elements from our Creative Communities policy to strengthen the objects of the Act, which now read:

- (a) recognise the intrinsic value of arts and culture, and
- (b) acknowledge arts and culture are a public good and the right to participate in the creative industries is a fundamental human right, and
- (c) promote Ministerial accountability in relation to the creative industries in New South Wales.

The bill notes that these objects "are to be achieved by requiring the Minister to report to Parliament". That is very much in line with Creative Communities, which considers culture a public good and the right to participate in arts, culture and creative activities a fundamental human right. It accepts the responsibility to advocate for the value of culture to build capacity, creativity and community cohesion. Third, in consultation with The Greens we introduced a mechanism of committee referral to strengthen accountability and transparency and to allow Parliament the opportunity to examine and report on it. Clause 5 (4), (5) and (6) read:

- (4) A House of Parliament may refer the Statement to a relevant parliamentary committee within 7 days after the Statement is tabled in the House.
- (5) A relevant parliamentary committee to which the Statement is referred must report to the House that made the referral.
- (6) In this section—

relevant parliamentary committee means a committee of a House of Parliament designated by a resolution by the House for this section.

Finally, in consultation with the Opposition, particularly the shadow Minister and member for Tamworth, we strengthened the required content of the statement by introducing elements that must be included in any statement as well as an indicative list of elements that may be included in any statement. We strengthened two of the elements from the original proposal so that the statement must include:

- (a) a summary of the economic impact of the creative industries in New South Wales, including an estimate of—
 - (i) the contribution to the economy of the creative industries, and
 - (ii) the number of jobs supported by the creative industries, and
 - (iii) the forms of employment and other working arrangements and employment characteristics of persons working in the creative industries,
- (b) a summary of the activities and investment undertaken by the Government to support the creative industries in New South Wales

Subparagraph (a) (iii) was developed with Ms Abigail Boyd in particular, and subparagraph (b) with the member for Tamworth in particular. This will ensure that government investment is reported against its impact and the intended outcomes of the policy as well as ensuring that the character and shape of the industry, particularly in relation to working conditions, is well articulated. We noted in the Creative Communities policy:

Over the next decade, this policy will see the creative industries increase output and employment. Their success can be measured by output, profits and the jobs they create.

This amendment ensures that this is captured in the statement. I thank members across the Parliament for their contributions to this piece of legislation. In particular, I thank Ms Abigail Boyd for her important contribution in ensuring that the bill recognises the intrinsic value held by the arts, culture and creative industries as well as strengthening the definition of what we mean by the "health" of the creative industries. I also thank Ms Boyd for her contribution in relation to reporting on forms of employment and other working arrangements and employment characteristics of persons working in the creative industries and for seeking an opportunity for crossbench feedback on the proposed statement, provided now in a committee referral mechanism.

Similarly, I acknowledge the contribution of the member for Tamworth, which has assisted in refining the shape of the statement and what must be contained within it, particularly in relation to government investment. These refinements provide clarity to the bill, which will provide greater accountability going forward. While the Creative Statement to Parliament has arisen through the development of Creative Communities, the bill ensures that the statement continues beyond the 10-year horizon of the policy, ensuring long-term monitoring and accountability for the arts, culture and creative industries sector. The policy states:

Putting culture at the heart of NSW as a public good, as a whole-of-government responsibility, is a big change. It stretches beyond traditional arts policy to grow the creative industries and embraces transformative cultural solutions to transform lives. It presents an exciting opportunity for policymakers to learn from, and work with, grassroots initiatives, scaling and adapting as appropriate and to better engage with the commercial sector.

I commend the bill to the House.

Second Reading Debate

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth) (21:34): I contribute to debate on the Government's Creative Statement to Parliament Bill 2024 and note that the Opposition supports the bill. The Opposition also supported the Government's amendments to the bill, which were introduced in the Legislative Council following consultation and feedback from the Opposition. I thank the Hon. Jacqui Munro in the other place for her work and her spirited contribution on behalf of the Opposition in the other place during debate on the bill. The Creative Statement to Parliament Bill 2025 seeks to mandate that the Minister prepares a statement to Parliament on the arts, culture and creative industries in New South Wales every three years, and to ensure that a copy of the statement is tabled in each House of Parliament and is publicly available on a New South Wales government website.

The purpose of the statement is to promote accountability, transparency and sharing of information regarding the arts, culture and creative industries in New South Wales, and to report on the implementation of related policies and plans. The bill follows the creation of the Government's Creative Communities arts, culture and creative industries policy, which committed the Government to legislate the Creative Statement to Parliament. The Creative Communities document was created following community consultation, including 15 town halls held across New South Wales. I attended the consultation at the Tamworth Community Centre and can attest to the passion and commitment of the local artists and creatives who provided feedback. I acknowledge the member for Granville, whose attendance at the community consultation was greatly appreciated.

A key response from those in attendance from Tamworth was for greater investment in the arts through grant programs; a simpler application process for those grant programs; and greater support for regional artists, local government and regional art development organisations across New South Wales. There were calls for the Government to fund the proposed Tamworth Performing Arts Centre and Cultural Precinct, and I remind the Government of the importance of infrastructure investment for the arts, particularly in regional New South Wales. I know the Minister is aware of the project and the strong advocacy of Tamworth Regional Council's Peter Ross and others.

The Opposition recognises the importance of creative industries to the New South Wales economy, to tourism and to the culture of our State. The Commonwealth's National Arts Participation Survey demonstrates that 97 per cent of Australians participated in the arts in some way between 2019 and 2022. There is very little under the New South Wales Government's remit that has such a broad impact on the people of New South Wales. Like sport, the arts bind our communities, connecting us in shared experiences and allowing our creatives to express themselves. Despite Australians being labelled with the "sports mad" moniker, recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics demonstrates that 80 per cent of Australians go to at least one cultural venue a year, compared with just 43 per cent of Australians who attend sporting matches.

The 2023 Live Performance Australia Ticketing Reports demonstrated that Australia's live performance industry contributed \$3.1 billion in revenue, with New South Wales having the largest market share of live performance in Australia at 33.3 per cent. The arts are a major economic contributor in New South Wales and encompass not only live performance but a broad subsection of communities, including musicians, visual artists, dancers, video game designers, sculptors, digital artists, actors, writers and playwrights. I note amendments moved in the Legislative Council that require the Creative Statement to Parliament to provide a summary of the economic impact of the creative industries in New South Wales, including an estimate of the contribution to the economy and the number of jobs supported by the industry.

I thank the Minister and his dedicated team for their cooperation. The amendments also require a summary of activities and investment undertaken by the Government to support the creative industries in New South Wales, and an assessment of the sustainability and growth of the creative industries in the State. I note that the amendment requires them to be included in the Creative Statement to Parliament, a change from the first print of the bill, which left the Minister with the option to omit such analysis. I now address the detail of the bill. The bill creates

the Creative Statement to Parliament Act and requires the preparation of a statement to Parliament about the arts, culture and creative industries in New South Wales. The object of the bill is to track the health, progress and status of the arts, culture and creative industries. The bill requires the Minister to take accountability for these matters, take into consideration the economic benefit of the sector, and identify challenges and opportunities in New South Wales.

The Opposition implores the Government to ensure that the creative statement provides greater clarity to stakeholders across New South Wales about funding opportunities and access to government support. To this end, the statement will be publicly available on the New South Wales government website no later than seven days after being tabled in Parliament. Schedule 1 to the bill requires that the first statement must be tabled within 18 months after the commencement of the Act. Subsequent statements will be required to be tabled in each House of Parliament no later than three years after the last statement was tabled.

In closing, on behalf of the Opposition, I acknowledge the Government's work on this bill, which is an extension of the work undertaken as part of the consultation process for the Creative Communities policy. I acknowledge the advocacy and feedback of the more than 1,000 people who took the time to provide feedback to the Government as part of that consultation process. I thank them for sacrificing their free time to take part in that process. Whilst I did not hear anyone express the need for a creative statement to Parliament as part of that process, I acknowledge that this is an uncontroversial bill without opposition. I recognise the Minister and his team for working with the Opposition to fine-tune the bill. Their consultative and collaborative approach to legislation is welcome by the Opposition.

It is a pleasure to work with the Minister's hardworking and dedicated staff, including Angud Chawla, Mark Crees and Clara Klemiski. Quite often, we chatted and discussed the matter with them, working collaboratively together. I thank them. The Minister must acknowledge that he has a great team. The New South Wales Opposition looks forward to the release of the first Creative Statement to Parliament in just over 18 months. The Opposition looks forward to providing the proper scrutiny to the statement and to ensuring that the Government works for the betterment and growth of our State's creative industries. I thank the member for Granville for her contribution to the debate this evening.

Dr DAVID SALIBA (Fairfield) (21:41): I support the Creative Statement to Parliament Bill 2024, which seeks to promote and report on the progress of the implementation of policies and plans for the arts, culture and creative industries in New South Wales. The bill mandates that the Minister prepare a statement to Parliament on the arts, culture and creative industries in New South Wales every three years. The statement must be made publicly available on a New South Wales government website no later than seven days after being tabled in Parliament. The statement is to report to Parliament on matters including the status, health and progress of the creative industries in New South Wales, and to summarise the economic impact, challenges and opportunities facing the industries, as well as other notable factors that go to the progress the Government is making in implementing its policies and plans.

There are countless cultural and arts organisations in my community of Fairfield that have paved the way for a more vibrant, inclusive and creative future. I see the creative arts as the soul of our society. Since becoming an MP, I have engaged with many people in the arts space. One community organisation that comes to mind is the Fairfield City Art Society, which is pretty awesome. I have attended a number of the society's exhibitions, and the staff and members are so lovely and supportive. Students and young people contribute their pieces to the exhibitions, which are assessed and they win prizes. They get involved in expressing what they see and want to see in the world, and people from throughout community get involved. It is about not only creative expression but also social connection, especially when loneliness is prevalent in our society. At the events, like-minded people get together to have fun in the arts endeavour and there are so many smiles. To be fair, I go to look at the artworks, ask questions about them and try my best to improve my artistic IQ. I have a long way to go, no doubt.

A local film is getting made. I did not want to mention it, but I might as well talk about it now. This film is a cracker, to be honest. The *Echo 8* trilogy is directed by local Maria Tran, who starred in season one of *The Last King of the Cross* and is now making the movie. I got to meet her. The film is an action-comedy based in Western Sydney, particularly Fairfield and Liverpool. I believe it is getting picked up by Amazon Prime. Apparently, the series has a big audience in America and Asia. Do not hold it against me, but I have been told that one of the characters is based—

Mr Justin Clancy: Based on you?

Dr DAVID SALIBA: It is the member for Fairfield, played by George Basha, who has been in a whole series of movies. He is playing a politician. He is an awesome guy. Recently, I met him too, which I really enjoyed. The character is a politician by day who fights crime at night. When Maria told me, I said, "Cool, I'm looking forward to seeing this movie."

Mr Justin Clancy: You'll have to make sure it's based on true events.

Dr DAVID SALIBA: I'll try my best. I have also had the chance to go on set because a couple of my mates are extras in the film. At least one local councillor has a role. I saw the smiles on people's faces and the level of excitement, particularly for the young people. It is a film made by young people, and there is so much excitement around them producing it. While I was on set, I realised how much work goes into creative projects. There was the set, the scenes and the choreography, because there is a lot of fighting and kung fu in the film. It is a very professional outfit and a lot of work is going on. Acting and filmmaking is a lot harder than I thought. Now I have a much deeper appreciation. What I am trying to say is that bolstering the creative space has economic benefits alongside its social benefits. The member for Newtown and I worked on a wellbeing report for the Public Accounts Committee. Creative arts nests within wellbeing. We watch cool movies and look at awesome pieces of art, and they make us smile, make us feel connected and enable us to have fun.

The last point I raise is about HSC students. I visit schools, see students' major works and cannot believe they can create those things. I attempted to paint a self-portrait in year 7. It did not look human. But I enjoy looking at the students' work. So many kids are so into the arts and graphic design, especially with social media. It is great. By passing the Creative Statement to Parliament Bill 2024, we are ensuring that creative industries in New South Wales receive the support they deserve. This bill provides a transparent and accountable framework for measuring progress. It will also help foster a more vibrant and sustainable creative sector, which benefits our diverse communities. I noticed I made the Deputy Speaker smile tonight, which I am very happy about. I commend the Minister for the Arts for his work in this space. I also commend the member for Granville, who is an absolute stalwart arts supporter, particularly in Western Sydney. We have the best conversations, and she does educate and tutor me in the arts space. I commend her for her work. I commend the bill to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Sonia Hornery): I admire the mythical member for Fairfield who is a crime fighter by night. Tonight most of our colleagues will just want to go to sleep when the House adjourns, not fight crime.

Ms JENNY LEONG (Newtown) (21:48): On behalf of The Greens, I contribute to debate on the Creative Statement to Parliament Bill 2024. I acknowledge the contribution of the member for Tamworth, who said that while we support the idea of a Creative Statement to Parliament, it is a bit unclear from any conversation that we have ever had with any creative or artistic person in New South Wales whether this is what the sector has been demanding. That said, The Greens always welcome the idea of transparency and always welcome access to information about the state of the arts. The Greens support the bill and any efforts to bolster creative industries across the State.

At the end of 2023 the Labor Government launched the Creative Communities arts, culture and creative industries policy for 2024 to 2033, which set a 10-year goal of supporting creative industries across New South Wales to grow sustainably. The bill requires the Minister for the Arts to prepare and table a statement to Parliament, reporting on the progress towards implementing the Creative Communities policy and related plans every three years, in what would be known as the creative statement to Parliament. The three-yearly statement is envisaged as an accountability measure for the Minister and a way to provide the Parliament with an insight into the state, size and nature of the New South Wales creative industries. I acknowledge the Minister, his office and the other people working within various departments to support that work for taking on board the many suggestions made by my colleague in the other place Ms Abigail Boyd. I hope that the statement will allow us to continue to advocate for the support that the arts require in New South Wales.

I point to a specific issue with Create NSW that needs to be dealt with immediately, which is that there is simply not enough money in the pool. It is all well and good to support the arts and deliver a creative statement to Parliament. But almost every time a grant round is conducted, the assessment panel recommends a larger list of organisations and projects that would be suitable and appropriate to fund than there is money in the pool to fund them. That has been an issue since my time working at the Australia Council. Many constituents in the electorate of Newtown have raised with my office the despair of knowing full well that panels have recommended that their unsuccessful organisations, projects or programs be funded. The pool of money only went down to three or four projects, or five or six projects, or 10 or 11 projects, whereas 20 projects were recommended for funding. That is a huge issue with the model for funding the arts in this State and in this country. I said enough about the Venice Biennale this morning in my notice of motion, so I will stick to the scope of the bill.

The Greens support the statement as an important step towards ensuring that the health and growth of arts and culture across the State are monitored and supported to thrive, but we also know that the creatives who contribute so much to each of our communities need much more than just a three-yearly statement. As the member for Newtown, I have the privilege of representing one of the most creative electorates in the State. Members who take a walk from one end of King Street to the other will pass pottery studios, creative co-working spaces,

community theatres, local fashion designers and plenty of late-night live music venues. And that is just the main road—plenty more hidden gems are tucked into the backstreets and laneways.

So many of the wonderful people who make up the Newtown electorate are musicians, artists, actors, creatives, producers, architects and avid supporters of the arts—people who contribute so much to making our communities more vibrant, exciting and fun to be in. But they are also being priced out of our communities. Late last year *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Sydney is losing creative workers at four times the national rate. Sydney's creative workforce shrank by 6 per cent in the decade to 2021, and new research from the Committee for Sydney has found that the total floor space dedicated to related industries in the inner city of Sydney has plummeted by 30 per cent.

Wage stagnation and a desperate lack of genuinely affordable housing, rehearsal spaces and studios are pushing folks further away from areas that were once hotbeds of creativity. For many who have only just begun to recover from the economic hardship brought on by COVID, the rising cost of living—coupled with the skyrocketing costs of hiring rehearsal spaces, studios and other creative workspaces—has been a second huge blow. My Newtown electorate office has heard stories of people who have had to say a heartbroken goodbye to the inner west creative networks and venues to which they have given so much, because they simply cannot afford to pay the rent anymore. Creatives need more than a glossy policy document and a statement from the Minister to Parliament to thrive. People cannot pay the rent or create work with a creative statement. If the Government is as serious as it claims about nurturing culture, creativity and storytelling from diverse communities, it needs to back up the admirable goals set out in the Creative Communities policy with action and money.

That means increasing funding for cultural infrastructure across the State and ensuring that it is distributed equitably, so that First Nations and other diverse communities are particularly supported to tell their stories. It means paying artists a living wage in recognition of all that they do to enrich our lives and communities. It means publicly funding arts education at all levels so the next generation of creatives have the opportunity to grow their talents and dream big. Ideally it would mean buying the old Sando back so we could have live music there again and ensuring that the other venues for creative works are not lost. It means taking serious action to address the costs and pressures of being an artist in the community who is trying to be creative.

In doing so, it is critical to recognise the strong and thriving independent arts scene. Not everyone working creatively in our communities is held up as a flagship example and extravagantly funded. But we also do not want to see the bigger creative companies having to turn more and more to commercial and private funding to thrive. We do not want to create a situation where only the rich can afford to see high-quality arts, performances or productions because there is not enough government subsidy to allow people to enjoy the things that our city creates. The Greens look forward to working constructively toward the goals set out in the creative statement and to ensuring that our arts and creative industries are front of mind in this place at all times, not just once every three years. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr MATT CROSS (Davidson) (21:56): I contribute to debate on the Creative Statement to Parliament Bill 2024. The purpose of the bill is to deliver a statement to the Parliament every three years on the arts, culture and creative industries. Such a statement will no doubt create transparency and accountability to the public and to the Parliament. I know that the stakeholders in the arts, culture and creative industries will appreciate such a statement. It will give them certainty and will make sure that government—both Ministers and public servants—has a detailed plan for the arts sector. The Arts portfolio is very large and diverse, as one would expect in New South Wales. But the arts, culture and creative industries are so much more than just a portfolio; they are a way of life for so many people.

The creative workforce makes up 12 per cent of the jobs in Sydney, which represent a huge amount of economic activity. I note the previous arts Ministers who have made significant contributions, especially Liberal Ministers the Hon. Peter Collins and the Hon. Don Harwin, who were arts Ministers for seven years and five years respectively. I thank them for their service. Peter and Don were great and passionate ambassadors, proving that Liberals are also passionate about the arts. As a member of Parliament, I believe the arts, culture and creative industries are important on a local level. After all, as the great Tip O'Neill said, "All politics is local." I welcome the commitment from the Minister for the Arts that the statement will be:

... one of a range of steps that the Government is taking, including investment reform, regulatory reform, new spaces for creative use, a focus on education and training, specific strategies being developed for screen and contemporary music and plans for Western Sydney and regional New South Wales.

I also hope and trust it will include northern Sydney. I now talk about the importance of the arts to the Davidson electorate, and in particular the people who live in Ku-ring-gai. There is a need for a precinct for the arts, culture and creative industries in Ku-ring-gai, similar to the one in the northern beaches. The northern beaches has Glen Street and Willoughby has the Chatswood Concourse. I was proud to partner with Northern Beaches Council to deliver \$150,000 for a lighting upgrade to Glen Street, in my electorate, via the Community Building Partnership

program. Investment in the arts is so important. I know that the creative statement will outline strong strategies for that investment.

Both Glen Street and the Chatswood Concourse are multipurpose facilities that include a public arts theatre, a public library, offices and space tendered out for cafes. Creative precincts should be considered in any future creative statement, and such a precinct in Ku-ring-gai should also be a multipurpose facility. Currently there is the Marian Street Theatre, which is a key arts, culture and creative precinct. It was established as a hall in 1906. Sadly, in 2013 it was forced to close its doors due to safety concerns. That was a big blow to the local community. The people I represent are passionate about the arts, culture and creativity. A development application is currently approved for the site, but finance is pending. Finance, as we know, is very tough in this cost-of-living crisis. No doubt the financing of arts, culture and creative precincts will be considered as part of any future statement.

I look forward to meeting with Ku-ring-gai Council in the near future, particularly with Mayor Christine Kay, to discuss ways to fund such an arts precinct. I have asked questions in Parliament about further rounds of the Low Cost Loans Initiative established by the Liberal-Nationals Government. We are up to what we hope will be a fourth round of funding. The statement should consider funding major infrastructure for arts, culture and creative enterprises. I will go into more detail about my wonderful arts community, which is so passionate about the need to support local artists and jobs. At its heart, the arts, culture and creative sector is all about people. I had a wonderful opportunity to meet with the local people who are passionate about this topic. On Sunday 16 February I was honoured to attend "We HeArt the Arts" at Killara Uniting Church, organised by Marian St Action.

It was an exciting family event that included performances from several community groups and involved singing and dancing. I know that members should not mislead the House. I state for the record that I cannot dance; to suggest otherwise would be to mislead the House. The performers represented some of the groups looking to share performance space in a reimagined Marian Street Theatre arts, culture and creative hub. I trust that Marian St Action was among the stakeholders contributing to the work the Minister has done on the creative statement. Marian St Action has stated:

The community wants its theatre back as an arts and cultural centre. It is nearly a decade and a half since the petition to restore the theatre with over 2,600 signatures was tabled at Council. Come to enjoy the performances and help advance this project to the next stage.

Such advocacy from local arts groups should be considered as part of any future Creative Statement to Parliament. I call on the Minister to continue consultation before releasing such a statement. I thank the members of Marian St Action, including Tony Bates, Jess Ashby, Wendy Blaxland, Nadia Koustadinova, James Southwell, Alicia Powell, Gai Emerson and Holly Wang. I note that Holly Wang is present in the gallery. It is great to see her. I thank Holly for her contribution to the arts in our local community. I support Marian St Action's vision to create an arts, culture and creative oasis in the heart of Ku-ring-gai that will inspire generations to come.

I note one other person who is very committed to the local community. Cheryl Sztatow has been a driving force for many years as a former mayor and councillor on Ku-ring-gai Council. On the weekend I was proud to present Cheryl with the NSW Government Community Service Award, signed by the Premier. It was very well deserved. I thank Cheryl for all her work. I support the bill and look forward to witnessing the Creative Statement to Parliament in 18 months.

The SPEAKER: I also acknowledge Holly Wang and welcome her to the Parliament.

Ms JACQUI SCRUBY (Pittwater) (22:04): I contribute to debate in support of the Creative Statement to Parliament Bill 2025. This legislation is pivotal in recognising and fostering the creative industries, which are not only vital to New South Wales but also deeply embedded in the fabric of my local community in Pittwater. I am of an age to remember a very vibrant city. As I wander the streets, I sometimes remember live music venues that are now replaced by gyms. My hope is that when this bill becomes legislation, it will not only pave the way for making our cities vibrant but also foster communities across New South Wales, including Pittwater, that are often stepping stones to larger venues in New South Wales and internationally.

Pittwater and the wider northern beaches—and I will not split hairs when I name bands, because some may be from just outside my electorate—have long been a cradle for artistic talent, nurturing individuals who have made significant contributions to Australia's cultural landscape. In 1977 the iconic rock band INXS was formed on the northern beaches, and Kirk Pengilly still resides there. Midnight Oil also began their journey in the northern beaches. Jazz enthusiasts would be familiar with long-term Pittwater local James Morrison, who went to Pittwater High School. Will Morrison plays regularly in Newport at Mrs Robertson, in a small but vibrant lane in the Pittwater electorate.

In recent times, bands like Ocean Alley have emerged from the northern beaches. Angus and Julia Stone went to Barrenjoey High School. The Rions, another Barrenjoey High School band, gained attention after winning the triple j Unearthed competition. Lime Cordiale brothers Louis and Oli made a huge contribution to live music

on the world stage. It was through a discussion with Louis and Oli that the loss of live music venues in the electorate became apparent to me. They felt that if they were performing as junior musicians now, without those stepping stones to a broader stage, they might not have got to where they are today. It is important to acknowledge the contributions of bands and creative industries, and also acknowledge the venues that support them. I hope the statement looks not only at what is going on in the city but also at all the little hubs around New South Wales that can contribute to making the culture of the State really shine.

The northern beaches does not only have famous bands. There is a folk arts club called the Shack that has been a hive for folk music on the northern beaches, and which has run a local festival. There are also artist retreats. I acknowledge the musicians in my electorate and, more broadly, those who have contributed to the arts through crafts, poetry and literature. Eramboo is a retreat in Terrey Hills that has fostered the artistic talent of people from across New South Wales. A number of members of my community have contributed to the literature and poetry scene. Susan Duncan, who sadly passed away last year, was an esteemed writer. Others, like Michael Robotham and Sarah Turnbull, have also contributed to the literary world.

It is important to mention the venues that support artists. We have lost some live venues, like the Narrabeen RSL, which is sorely missed. However, the Avalon Bowlo, the Avalon Beach RSL and other venues across the broader northern beaches continue to foster our cultural heartbeat. I make particular mention of the Bookoccino bookshop. This Friday it is hosting a poetry competition. The shop often hosts authors to discuss their works. It really is a cultural hub of our electorate that I wish was replicated more broadly. It is also important that I mention a couple of schools tonight. How we foster education—and how education then links to creative arts industries, which then links to generating a workforce and, more broadly, to the economy—is something that I hope is included in the cultural and creative statement.

I recognise that 8 per cent of my electorate, or the broader northern beaches, is involved in the creative industries. That is double the State average of 4 per cent. Our schools are crying out for more funding, particularly when it comes to the arts. I particularly mention Narrabeen Sports High School, which is calling out for a creative arts and performance arts centre to be able to support younger generations who want to contribute to the culture of New South Wales. I also mention our bands, particularly at Avalon Public School, whose band was established 50 years ago, which makes it the oldest band in New South Wales. The band community in my electorate is screaming out for a venue to be able to practise and perform, and to bring that performance to the community. My hope is that this creative statement and the amendments that have been made in the other place set the scene for what will be a very vibrant New South Wales in years to come. The three-year review period brings continual improvement and, as other members have mentioned, the New South Wales Government supports this through measures such as investing in schools, grants, and supporting live music venues and festivals.

Ms JULIA FINN (Granville) (22:11): On behalf of Ms Jenny Aitchison: In reply: I thank members representing the electorates of Tamworth, Fairfield, Newtown, Davidson and Pittwater for their contributions to debate on the Creative Statement to Parliament Bill 2025. As I outlined in the second reading speech, the bill is straightforward. It seeks to mandate the preparation of a statement to Parliament on the arts, culture and creative industries in New South Wales every three years. The member for Tamworth remarked how he had attended the consultation for Creative Communities in Tamworth and what a valuable exercise it was, but that he did not hear anyone calling for a creative statement.

I did not attend the consultation in Tamworth, but I did hear somebody particularly say—and I cannot remember whether it was in Wagga Wagga or Liverpool—that at the moment New South Wales and Australia have really committed arts Ministers, but what happens when there is a change? They suggested that it will all go backwards again. The creative statement will make that a lot harder. It will put in place, for the very long term, an accountability measure. The member for Fairfield talked about the opportunity the Fairfield Art Society is creating for young people and how it brings people together, and also the *Echo 8* film developed by Maria Tran. It is about a crime-fighting member for Fairfield, who is a member of Parliament by day and a crime fighter by night. The character is being played by George Basha, who comes from Guildford in my electorate.

The member for Newtown raised concerns about funding and how there is always a larger list of good applicants than funding available. I am pleased to advise that under the Arts and Cultural Funding Program, \$73 million is currently provided in funding, which is more than in the past—more than before COVID. There is also the four by four-year funding arrangements for sustainability, together with two and four-year multi-year funding. The program has introduced expanded regional touring funding, which is really important. We have made the Arts and Cultural Funding Program simpler, fairer and more transparent, which has made it a lot easier for people who do not employ professional grant writers to actually get arts funding. The member also talked about the dire need for creative spaces, which is something we heard again and again throughout that consultation. It is a priority of this Government.

The member for Davidson talked about the need for an arts precinct in Ku-ring-gai like Glen Street and the concourse in Chatswood. He talked a lot about the Marian Street Theatre action group and its endeavours to bring its theatre back. The member for Pittwater talked about the loss of live music venues across her electorate and the history of fantastic live music in her area, from acts like INXS to Lime Cordiale, and also great literature groups and the dire need for rehearsal spaces on the northern beaches. The statement will enable ongoing transparency and accountability to Parliament and to the public by providing a clear understanding of the size, complexity and health of the arts, culture and creative industries sector. The statement will consider the intrinsic and economic impact of the arts, culture and creative industries as well as identifying challenges and opportunities for the sector and factors impacting its sustainability and growth.

Critically, the bill will enable the transparency and accountability required to drive systemic improvements in the outcomes achieved across the arts, culture and creative industries in New South Wales. This will allow policy settings to be regularly evaluated and adjusted in response to the changing needs of this rapidly evolving sector. In the process of consultation on this bill, several members provided suggestions to strengthen it, which were incorporated as amendments into its current form. In each case, the amendments strengthened the intent of the bill, clarifying its purpose, providing further accountability to the Parliament and to the public, and driving a whole-of-government focus. I thank members for their contributions to this piece of legislation.

In particular, as I noted in the second reading speech, I thank Ms Abigail Boyd, MLC, and Ms Cate Faehrmann, MLC, for their important contributions to ensuring that this bill recognises the intrinsic value held by the arts, culture and creative industries; for strengthening the definition of what we mean by the health of the creative industries, including reporting on forms of employment and other working arrangements and employment characteristics of persons working in the creative industries; and for seeking an opportunity for crossbench feedback on the proposed statement, provided now in a committee referral mechanism. Similarly, as noted in the second reading speech, I acknowledge the contribution of the member for Tamworth, which strengthened the bill in relation to the elements that must be included in the statement, including government investment. Those refinements provide clarity to the bill, which will provide greater accountability going forward.

The New South Wales Government recognises the vital role played by the arts, culture and creative industries in New South Wales. The bill is one of a number of steps the Government is taking, along with investment reform, delivering on reforming the Arts and Cultural Funding Program last year; regulatory reform, delivering a second tranche of vibrancy reforms last year, with more to come this year; activating spaces for creative use, with an audit completed last year and activation ramping up this year; education and training reform, including a parliamentary inquiry into arts and music education, which we delivered last year, with a Government response to be delivered next month; and developing sector- and region-specific strategies, including for screen and digital games and contemporary music, which we delivered last year, and plans for Western Sydney and regional New South Wales, which will be delivered this year. These actions contribute to the implementation of this Government's vision that everyone in New South Wales will benefit from participation in the arts, culture and creative industries.

I acknowledge the significant work that has gone on across the Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport to make the bill possible, particularly from the Create NSW team. The bill embraces the special role of government in the twenty-first century as the cultural and creative ecosystem's key advocate, enabler and investor. It reimagines cultural policy as a whole-of-government activity. I look forward to seeing the first statement to this House—and to the other place—in due course.

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

Motion agreed to.

Third Reading

Ms JULIA FINN: On behalf of Ms Jenny Aitchison: I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Community Recognition Statements

NEPALESE GUARDIANS GROUP

Mr NATHAN HAGARTY (Leppington) (22:18): On 6 October last year I had the immense privilege of joining the Nepalese Guardians at a barbeque held at Scott Memorial Park in Austral in my electorate. That wonderful group is comprised of parents of Nepalese migrants who care for their grandchildren while the parents are at work. As such, they play an invaluable role in our community. The guardians meet regularly, creating a strong network of support, friendship and camaraderie with one another. Their frequent gatherings are more than

just social events; they provide a space to share experiences, offer guidance and celebrate the rich Nepalese culture that has become an integral part of south-west Sydney. It was inspiring to see the deep connections they have fostered and their commitment to supporting families across Leppington and the surrounding suburbs. I was truly honoured to spend the afternoon with them, and I look forward to building better connections and working with council to provide them with better facilities and more support for many years to come.

HILLS DISTRICT TENNIS ASSOCIATION

Mr MARK HODGES (Castle Hill) (22:19): I acknowledge and commend the Hills District Tennis Association Inc. [HDTA] for its service to the local community over a very long time. HDTA was established in 1933 as a not-for-profit community tennis association. The committee is run entirely by volunteers. The association currently manages 17 well-maintained synthetic grass courts situated at either Fred Caterson Reserve or Dural Park. The association has over 1,200 members, who participate in competitions and social activities. It is estimated that about 110,000 people attend tennis centres each year as participants and/or spectators. The president of the association, Tricia Sanford, has been involved in the association for over 30 years, with the last 13 years as the president. I take this opportunity to recognise and acknowledge the service to tennis of the entire committee, including the president, Tricia Sanford; vice-president Neil Smith; treasurer John You; secretary Ruth Didsbury; and general committee members Robert Kilborn, Craig Muras and Lisa Jackett. The HDTA committee has built a vibrant, close-knit tennis community with a shared passion for sport. I thank the Hills District Tennis Association committee.

TRIBUTE TO ROBERT BAILEY

Ms KATE WASHINGTON (Port Stephens—Minister for Families and Communities, and Minister for Disability Inclusion) (22:20): Sadly, we recently farewelled a local Port Stephens legend known fondly by many as the "Mayor of Oyster Cove". Mr Robert Bailey was a humble, hardworking man who cared deeply for his community and the future of the marine industry in New South Wales. Robert and his family had operated Cove Marine at Oyster Cove since 1991. Together, they built a business that boaters could always rely on. Beyond his boating business, Robert was always looking out for others, especially when it came to anything Oyster Cove and training opportunities for young people. Most recently, I had been working with Robert on improving access to TAFE training for marine motor mechanic apprentices, whilst he was busy walking the talk, with his latest young apprentice being awarded Apprentice of the Year under his tutelage—all of this at the age of 85. On behalf of our community, I extend my deepest condolences to Robert's widow, Meg, his family, friends and the beautiful Cove Marine team. Personally, I am going to miss Robert's can-do attitude, his thoughtfulness, his quick wit and his kind eyes. Vale, Robert Bailey.

CALEY MCKELLAR

Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst) (22:21): I congratulate Caley McKellar on the recognition given to her as the 2024 Oberon Junior Sportsperson of the Year. Caley is just 12 years of age and has demonstrated an outstanding level of commitment, dedication and achievement across many sporting arenas. After coming second in the New South Wales qualifying leg, Caley achieved sixth place in the National Pony Race. She has successfully competed against riders of all ages in many gymkhanas. She also represented in district hockey and received the coach's award for her skill and teamwork. Caley also received the best and fairest award from the Oberon Junior Hockey Association in 2023 and 2024. Caley's love of sport has also seen her represent in swimming, soccer and touch football. That is a reflection of her passionate pursuit of sport and community involvement. An outstanding young ambassador, I commend Caley for her involvement in sporting pursuits and her achievements, and I recognise her as an inspiring young citizen and role model to her peers.

PAUL JUDGE

Ms KYLIE WILKINSON (East Hills) (22:22): I recognise incredible local and friend of mine Paul Judge for his dedication to improving the East Hills community. Over many months, Paul worked tirelessly to install street libraries throughout the area, creating easily accessible spaces for everyone to share and discover books. I have known Paul for many years, and I admire his passion, ideas and community spirit. Paul has set up street libraries across the road from Milperra Public School, inside Flower Power Milperra at Frankie's Food Factory cafe and outside the community hall in Ashford Avenue. Through Paul's extensive connections with many in our community, he managed to obtain some old bar fridges. He then worked with the men's shed to refurbish the fridges and bring them to life as bookshelves. Street Libraries encourage reading and foster a sense of togetherness, as neighbours come together to enjoy and exchange books. Those little libraries have made a significant impact on many. I thank Paul. We are lucky to have him as part of our community.

HANA MAROSA

Mr MICHAEL REGAN (Wakehurst) (22:23): I congratulate Hana Marosa on her recent acceptance into the Y's Youth Parliament as a taskforce member volunteer. That is a fantastic achievement and a testament to Hana's dedication to youth advocacy and community service. Hana has a deep interest in politics, government and democracy—which is great to see in anyone, let alone a young person, but especially in someone who is driven to help the community, like Hana. Currently studying politics and history at Sydney university, Hana generously dedicates her free time to volunteering and supporting my team with local research and community issues. Her hard work, analytical skills and genuine interest in public service make her a valued member of our community. I am excited to see Hana's involvement in Youth Parliament, which will no doubt allow her to continue building skills and shaping discussions on issues that matter to young people. I congratulate Hana. Her passion and efforts are truly inspiring, and we are all seriously proud of her for this great achievement. I hope her time as part of the Youth Parliament is exceptional.

LIVERPOOL ARTIST IN THE SPOTLIGHT SERIES

Ms CHARISHMA KALIYANDA (Liverpool) (22:24): After a few weeks of bare walls during the Christmas and new year break, I am delighted to inform the House that the Liverpool Artist in the Spotlight series has returned to my office foyer. The latest works featured in the series are five pieces by Linda Ferlazzo. Linda has been a facilitator and committee member at the Liverpool Art Society for over 15 years, running workshops at the Chipping Norton boatshed. Linda is a self-taught oil painter who has completed many commissions, sold works and even won prizes. Her talent is exceptional. Linda's favourite subjects to paint are people, animals and buildings. Like so many who get involved in the Liverpool Art Society, what started as a casual hobby has developed into a passion for Linda. I thank her for her beautiful pieces and express my appreciation to the art society for continuing to bring beauty and creativity to the Liverpool electorate office and showcase local artistic talents.

TRIBUTE TO BRENDAN DONOHUE

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley) (22:25): Today I honour the life and legacy of Brendan Donohue, a man whose passion and dedication to AFL and our community will never be forgotten. As club president of St George from 2009 and 2019, Brendan played a pivotal role in strengthening the club, securing vital grants and improving facilities at Olds Park. His leadership ensured that future generations would continue to enjoy and grow the game he loved so much. Brendan was more than just a leader; he was a mentor, a friend to many and an inspiration. His tireless efforts, kindness and commitment to others made a lasting impact on so many lives. To Brendan's family and friends, I extend my deepest condolences. His legacy will live on in every game played, in every player supported and in the community he helped build. Rest in peace, Brendan. You will be dearly missed.

MAITLAND MEN'S TABLE

Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland—Minister for Regional Transport and Roads) (22:26): The Men's Table in Maitland is a new initiative aimed at fostering social connection, support and open conversations for men in our community. With over 220 groups Australia-wide, the Men's Table provides a safe, confidential and structured space for men to share their experiences—the highs, the lows and everything in between. The Maitland chapter kicked off with an entree event on Tuesday at The Kitchen at Waterford, where attendees got a taste of what the group offers. Regional host Dave Robinson has highlighted the importance of creating a space where men can connect in a healthy and supportive way, without pressure or judgment. Research has shown that participation in groups like this not only benefits individual members but also strengthens their relationships, their families and the wider community. By simply sharing a meal and having honest conversations, this initiative is making a real difference in men's lives. I commend the Men's Table team for bringing this valuable program to Maitland and I thank the local men who got involved.

TAMWORTH HARNESS RACING CLUB

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth) (22:27): Today I congratulate the Tamworth Harness Racing Club, the outstanding leadership of the board and the commitment of local participants. Tamworth Harness Racing Club is the sixth largest club in New South Wales, led by chair Jock Stier, deputy chair Terry Browne, directors Joyce Walsh and Brendan James, and secretary manager Mike Jones. I had the pleasure of joining the club at the Tamworth Golden Guitar Paceway as part of its action-packed January carnival, with strong crowds enjoying a busy January of racing. The highlight was the Carnival of Cups as elite harness racing was coupled with world-class entertainment from Daryl Braithwaite, Travis Collins, The Buckleys and Tori Darke. It was an outstanding event and a credit to the forward-thinking, progressive club. The welfare of horses at the club is front of mind, which was demonstrated by the installation of a brand-new air conditioning unit in the race day stalls.

ahead of the hot January carnival. I look forward to continuing to work with the Tamworth Harness Racing Club as it continues to develop its facilities.

KEVIN MCCUSKER

Ms TRISH DOYLE (Blue Mountains) (22:28): Today I acknowledge Kevin McCusker. As a deputy captain for the NSW RFS, a botanist and a community volunteer, Kevin has long been a lover and protector of the natural environment. Living with his wife on their bush block in Dargan on the edge of the Blue Mountains, Kevin understands the joy and responsibility of living safely in the bush. From managing vegetation and garden design to identifying and protecting native animals, Kevin has gathered his knowledge and insights in his new book *Killibinbin, Our Mountain Paradise: A guide to living in our bush*. Kevin's generosity of spirit and dedication to his community shone through when he rallied with adjacent bush communities to form the Association of Bell Clarence Dargan Incorporated. The ABCD Inc., as it is known, came together following the Black Summer bushfires of 2019-20. Together, they achieved the replacement of the Clarence community hall, which had been destroyed by fire. That hall is a shining symbol of strength and resilience. I thank Kevin for his leadership, for sharing his knowledge and for his stewardship of the environment.

KIAMA SEVENS RUGBY TOURNAMENT

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama) (22:29): The Parliament of New South Wales recognises the fifty-third Kiama Sevens tournament, which is set for Saturday 22 February 2025 at the Kiama Showground. This prestigious event has grown to become one of Australia's largest and long-running rugby sevens competitions. It features 44 teams and offers over \$30,000 in prize money. The launch event brought together key figures from the rugby community and government, including the Mayor of Kiama, Cameron McDonald; Councillor Matt Brown; Patrick Schmidt, a representative from the major sponsor, Kells Lawyers; dual Olympian, Dietrich Roache; and representatives from Destination Kiama. I also acknowledge the other sponsors that keep this event going year after year. As the tournament approaches, organisers are anticipating a crowd of around 5,000 throughout the day. This showcases the significant community impact of the event. This year, the teams face an additional challenge to each raise \$1,000 for Hearts in Rugby Union, which is a charity supporting players with life-changing injuries. If successful, this initiative could raise \$44,000 to assist injured players. The enduring success of the tournament is attributed to its evolution, strong sponsorship, prime location and world-class facilities. I thank the tournament director, Mark Bryant, for his hard work.

COOPER KNOWLES

Ms MARYANNE STUART (Heathcote) (22:30): I recognise the outstanding efforts of Cooper Knowles, a student at St John Bosco College Engadine. Cooper placed first in his construction examination in the 2024 Higher School Certificate. This is a testament to the dedication, passion and hard work of this young man in achieving his goals. His hard work certainly paid off. Cooper is headed towards his dream of studying construction project management at university. He has been striving towards that since the beginning of his year 11 studies. I congratulate Cooper Knowles and wish him all the best for his studies at university. We look forward to following his success.

JOHNSON CHU AND ELLE QUACH

Mr JORDAN LANE (Ryde) (22:31): I ask the House to join me in congratulating Johnson Chu and Elle Quach, who were married in November. There is something to be said for the commitment of marriage. It is a symbol of love, loyalty and triumph over the inevitable adversity that one would encounter in any partnership. They would have seen significant change throughout the journey of life. We know that communities evolve, and technology develops. People come and go from within our respective orbits. To have the steady presence of a life partner, which Johnson and Elle are for each other, is to experience that journey to its fullest. Along the way they have built many meaningful connections in their life. This is exemplified by their groomsman, Mike, who asked to share these heartfelt words in Parliament:

Congratulations to the happy couple! May your happiness give strength to our favourite team. Let's go T1!

Johnson and Elle's example of a lifetime of partnership and the building of an enriching legacy is something that we can all aspire to. I ask the House to join me in congratulating Johnson and Elle on their wedding.

NOEMIE FOX, OAM

ROYCE SIMMONS, OAM

Ms KAREN McKEOWN (Penrith) (22:32): I congratulate two Penrith favourites, Noemie Fox and Royce Simmons, on receiving a Medal of the Order of Australia in the 2025 Australia Day Honours List. Noemie was recognised for her service to sport as a gold medallist at the Paris Olympic Games in 2024. Penrith Panthers great Royce Simmons was honoured for his contributions to rugby league as a player and a coach, as well as for

his outstanding community work. Royce made his first-grade debut in 1980 and played 237 games for the Panthers. His final match was the 1991 grand final. His heroic performance helped the Panthers win their first premiership. Simmons captained the Panthers for eight seasons, from 1983 to 1990, and then became the head coach from 1994 to 2001. He was inducted into the Panthers Hall of Fame in 2016. After an Alzheimer's diagnosis in 2022, he established the Royce Simmons Foundation and has raised millions of dollars for the cause.

CLARENCE ELECTORATE STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE VOLUNTEERS

Mr RICHIE WILLIAMSON (Clarence) (22:33): I acknowledge the SES volunteers in my electorate in the New South Wales Parliament tonight. We are blessed to have a band of volunteers that are well-financed and highly trained in New South Wales. I acknowledge Sue Chappell, Leonie Williamson, Katrina Bloomfield, Mark Sekulic, Jimmy Lamont and Brendan Wren. These volunteers recently answered the call when north Queensland was severely flooded. Teams from the Casino SES and the Clarence-Nambucca Capability Unit went to north Queensland to help the community recover. I thank our SES volunteers and also acknowledge the volunteers in the Rural Fire Service. At times when our communities are in need, they always answer the call.

KIRA INKOVA

Ms LIZA BUTLER (South Coast) (22:34): I congratulate Kira Inkova, the winner of the ABC Heywire award, which encourages young people from regional Australia to share their powerful stories. Kira's story is one of resilience, strength and hope. Originally from Ukraine, Kira was preparing for her exams when war changed everything overnight. When she was forced to leave her home with her mother, sister and aunt, Kira embarked on a journey of uncertainty, leaving behind her father, grandmother, best friend and beloved dog, Elsa. Arriving in Ulladulla, Kira faced the challenge of rebuilding her life in a new country, learning a new language and finding her place in a new community. Despite those hardships, Kira has found warmth and support from her teachers and friends, and every day Ulladulla feels more like home. Her courage in sharing her experience is an inspiration. Kira's story reminds us of the strength of young people and the power of community in providing hope and belonging. I thank her for sharing her story.

HAYLEE BURKINSHAW

Dr JOE MCGIRR (Wagga Wagga) (22:35): The recognition of Wagga Wagga's Haylee Burkinshaw as Young Citizen of the Year shows once again that the future of the city is in good hands thanks to the stellar contributions of our young people. The award announced on Australia Day was fitting recognition of a remarkable young woman who began her community service at the age of just 13 when she raised more than \$1,000 in the World's Greatest Shave. While still at school, Haylee helped to unite the school community after the death of beloved teacher Ron Anschuetz and raised money for Mr Anschuetz's family. At the end of year 10, Haylee became the inaugural recipient of a peer-voted award established in Mr Anschuetz's name. After school, she continued her community service, entering the Miss Wagga Wagga Quest and raising funds for charities. Crowned Community Princess in 2023, she represented her hometown at Wagga's sister city, Leavenworth, USA. She has been active in Rotaract and the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards, and continues to support community and charitable causes—all by the age of just 25. Haylee's award is a testament to her compassion, drive and vision. I thank Haylee and congratulate her on her well-deserved recognition.

GOSFORD SAFE HAVEN SERVICE

Ms LIESL TESCH (Gosford) (22:36): I recognise the importance of the Gosford Safe Haven service on the Central Coast. Since opening in November 2023, the amazing service has played a crucial role in the delivery of support services to the Central Coast area. In 2024 alone, it provided immediate personalised support to more than 1,600 visitors. Visitors to Safe Haven are supported by trauma-informed peer workers with lived experience of suicide and recovery. That support can include assistance with creating safety plans, accessing services and developing recovery goals. Having access to a judgement-free space such as Safe Haven has already had an incredibly positive impact not only in the Gosford electorate but also across the entire Central Coast. I thank all the loving and caring staff at Safe Haven who support our community. The importance of community awareness cannot be overstated when it comes to mental health services. At a time when many people are doing it tough, I encourage anyone who is struggling with their mental health to consider Safe Haven as a great place of safe refuge.

MITCH WALLIS

Ms KELLIE SLOANE (Vaucluse) (22:37): I congratulate constituent, mental health expert and social entrepreneur Mitch Wallis on his contributions to our community. Mitch is a leader in the wellbeing space, with a lifelong mission to change the way the world feels. His goal is to transform the lives of one billion people. Mitch is a mental health expert, holding a master's degree in clinical psychology. He is most well known for being the founder of Heart on my Sleeve, the creator of a book called *Real Conversations* and an accomplished keynote

speaker. Mitch has delivered talks to tens of thousands of people, as well as some of the most recognised companies in the world, including American Express, Amazon and Google. I thank Mitch for his commitment to mental health. Our community and our State are grateful for his contributions.

SALLY AND MARTEN WYND

Mr STEPHEN BALI (Blacktown) (22:38): I congratulate Sally and Marten Wynd, co-founders of Eagles RAPS, on being awarded Order of Australia medals. Eagles RAPS was formed in 1997 to provide youth an outlet and safe space while combating the rise of youth suicide. The centre grew beyond being a drop-in centre and began to provide various TAFE certificate courses. It also partnered with Amazon Web Services. While local businesses and individuals have donated to the cause, Marten and Sally have financially supported the ongoing operation of the Eagles RAPS centre. Sally and Marten and their team have given the local youth the opportunity to develop skills to deal with adverse challenges and develop strategies to succeed. I thank Sally and Marten for their service to the youth of our community. In many instances, they have given the youth their first real chance in life.

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Mrs JUDY HANNAN (Wollondilly) (22:39): Southern Highlands Community Foundation held its end-of-year showcase to highlight the positive impact made in the community through its grants programs and Highlands Heroes initiatives. Jenny Bott, AO, the new chair of the Southern Highlands Community Foundation, warmly welcomed guests to the event. The foundation raises funds locally to meet the true needs of the community. It supports essential projects like Vocal Muster and Meals on Wheels. Highlands Heroes celebrated on the night included Peter Titmus, a volunteer at the Bradman Foundation; Kerstin Schweth of Native Wildlife Rescue; Helen Johnston from the Bowral and District Art Society; and Sonnya Davis from the Hill Top Community Association. One of the most inspiring moments of the night was celebrating young Melinda Walker-Smith. She was recognised for her remarkable advocacy work that began at the age of seven. Melinda successfully lobbied for the rejuvenation of a local park in Mittagong and secured a New South Wales State Government grant for a large-scale improvement project. Thanks to her efforts, the park has become a cherished place. She was honoured with the Young Highlands Heroes Award.

CREATING CANOPIES PROGRAM

Ms LYNDA VOLTZ (Auburn) (22:40): Tonight I highlight the partnership between Greater Sydney Landcare and the Carnarvon Golf Club. Over the past five years, the Landcare team has worked alongside golf club members, corporate teams and dedicated volunteers to transform the space into a thriving, sustainable environment. The Creating Canopies program has seen over 700 trees and shrubs planted, including native species such as gum trees, wattles and banksias. Those trees will provide vital shade and cooling, which plays an important role in reducing urban heat. The initiative has enhanced canopy cover, boosted habitat values and improved water quality. The results are evident in the lush, green sanctuary that has been cultivated—a space that benefits both wildlife and the wider community. Carnarvon Golf Club has become more than just a recreational space; it is a hub for flora, fauna and local biodiversity. I thank Greater Sydney Landcare for its dedication in nurturing this urban sanctuary.

NORTHBRIDGE AMATEUR SWIMMING CLUB

Mr TIM JAMES (Willoughby) (22:41): Many clubs and voluntary associations in Willoughby feature a proud history, and on 1 February 2025 the Northbridge Amateur Swimming Club celebrated its centenary. Founded in 1925, the Northbridge Amateur Swimming Club is based at the much-loved Northbridge Baths and welcomes members of all ages and swimming abilities. I am particularly proud of my own family's connection to the history of this club. My great-grandfather, Harry James, was a founding member and coached the club's men's swimming team, who won the 1930-31 EL Sanders Cup. As the club celebrates its 100 years, it can be very proud of its longevity and all it has achieved, with helping several generations of locals to swim, and contributing so much to enhancing the health, fitness and character of our local community. I congratulate the President of the Northbridge Amateur Swimming Club, Kym Stracey, and all the club's office holders, members and supporters over the years on reaching this impressive milestone.

MARONITE COLLEGE OF THE HOLY FAMILY

Ms DONNA DAVIS (Parramatta) (22:42): It was wonderful to attend the opening of the Maronite College of the Holy Family's [MCHF] new H block. Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay performed the blessing of the completely renovated learning centre for K-1 students. Perfectly positioned to catch the morning sun, students have already settled into the cutting-edge learning spaces in the three-storey H block building, featuring nine newly renovated classrooms, a staffroom, administration offices and a play area. Families choose to send their children to MCHF to be educated in the Maronite Catholic tradition and to practise the school's values

of resilience, collaboration, integrity, compassion, respect and faith. Those values are reflected in the students and graduates throughout our community. Congratulations to Executive Principal Sister Margaret and the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family, especially Sister Irene, for their passion in educating the youth of this parish and their advocacy for the investment in H block, and to the MCHF Board for steering the project to completion. I am sure there is no better place for their littlest learners to start than in H block.

ST GEORGE HOSPITAL GRADUATES

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley) (22:43): Tonight I share some wonderful news for our community. St George Hospital has recently welcomed a number of new graduates, with 118 new interns joining the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District. The graduates will receive supervised practice and on-the-job training in one of the best hospitals in all of New South Wales. That will support the increased demand for health care in our local community, which is so important as our area continues to grow and change. The graduates will be employed under a two-year contract, gaining invaluable experience as they rotate across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas. I am sure that the work will be highly rewarding. St George Hospital truly is one of the finest medical institutions in the State, and I am so glad to know that we continue to receive the best of the best in terms of medical staff. I congratulate all the 118 newly admitted graduates as they embark on their journey.

BANKSTOWN VIETNAMESE COMMUNITY LUNAR NEW YEAR

Mr JIHAD DIB (Bankstown—Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Youth Justice) (22:44): I was honoured to join the local Vietnamese community at Huyen Quang pagoda, a beautiful Buddhist temple in Bankstown, to celebrate Lunar New Year. The festivities were filled with joy, tradition and togetherness as families gathered to welcome the new year. I was touched to see my local community coming together to honour this cherished tradition. I had the privilege of meeting the Most Venerable Master Thich Bon Dien, the founder and abbot of the pagoda, as we enjoyed the festivities together. His leadership and dedication to preserving cultural traditions were truly admirable. The festival also featured a spectacular fireworks display and an enchanting dragon dance that captured the spirit of the celebration. As the ceremony concluded, everyone gathered around tables to share a meal, enjoying delicious food while celebrating and embracing the festive spirit together. I am grateful to the Vietnamese community for hosting such a memorable event. Its hospitality reflects the strong sense of togetherness that makes our community so special. I wish everyone a blessed Lunar New Year, and I look forward to celebrating more of these cherished traditions in the future. As they say, chúc mừng năm mới.

ESTELA DALSOCHIO DIPP AND WILTON LOPES FEITOSA

Mr JORDAN LANE (Ryde) (22:45): I ask the House to join me in congratulating Estela Dalsochio Dipp and Wilton Lopes Feitosa, who celebrated their ninth wedding anniversary in December. Estela has asked to share these heartfelt words in Parliament:

Happy 9th Anniversary! Nine years... wow! We've had so many incredible moments, building our little world together and creating memories that will last forever. And yes, we've also had our share of tough times, we've faced challenges, been knocked down a few times but still coming out stronger every time. You've been my rock, my partner in crime and the one and only that I want to hold on to during my most difficult moments. I love you! And I am so grateful for the good, the bad and everything in between. You make life better, no matter what it throws our way. Here's to another 9 years, and beyond... of love, laughter and handling all what life brings to us. Love you.

Estela and Wilton's example is one that we can all aspire to, a lifetime of partnership and the building of an enriching legacy. I congratulate Estela and Wilton on their ninth wedding anniversary.

KEITH DONNELLY

Ms KYLIE WILKINSON (East Hills) (22:46): I congratulate Keith Donnelly, who was recognised as a finalist in the Health and Wellbeing category of City of Canterbury-Bankstown's 2025 Australia Day awards. His outstanding initiative, Keith's Closet, is dedicated to supporting individuals accessing mental health services. Keith's Closet provides essential clothing, toiletries and household items to individuals upon admission or discharge from mental health facilities, helping them to regain dignity and confidence and to reintegrate into society. Since its inception, Keith's Closet has assisted over 1,600 individuals, making a significant difference in their lives. Keith's commitment goes beyond providing material support. He also organises annual soccer gala days in Panania, which I have enjoyed attending. These events are not only fun for all ages to participate in but also raise much-needed funds for this worthy charity. I congratulate Keith Donnelly and the entire Keith's Closet team on this well-deserved recognition. Their work continues to transform lives and strengthen our community.

SHARON WILLIAMS

Mr TIM JAMES (Willoughby) (22:47): I am proud to acknowledge Sharon Williams for her outstanding contributions to business, branding and mentorship, both locally in Willoughby and indeed across Australia. As

the founder of Taurus, an award-winning marketing and communications agency, Sharon has built a reputation as one of the country's leading public relations strategists, working with CEOs, boards and entrepreneurs to grow their brands. Beyond her professional achievements, Sharon is deeply committed to mentoring and philanthropy. She has guided countless young professionals into leadership roles, and her contributions to many causes have been widely recognised, including with Public Relations Institute of Australia's Golden Target award for her work on the Clean Up Australia campaign. Sharon's dedication has now been recognised with an Australia Day honour, a well-deserved acknowledgement of her impact in business, mentorship and the community. A proud member of the Willoughby community, Sharon's leadership and commitment to giving back are truly commendable. I congratulate and express my pride in and appreciation for Sharon Williams, OAM, on this outstanding achievement.

Private Members' Statements

WESTERN SYDNEY SCHOOL INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms LYNDIA VOLTZ (Auburn) (22:49): I speak about the fantastic work the New South Wales Government has been doing over the past two years in delivering the vital school infrastructure that Western Sydney has so badly needed. My electorate was very fortunate that the Minister for Education, Prue Car, visited us early on and we started construction at Birrong Girls and Birrong Boys high schools. The good news is that the teachers at Birrong Girls High School were already able to access the new teacher facilities and administration areas as term 1 started. Students at Birrong Boys High School should expect the completion of stage one—block N and block I hall upgrade and associated external works—by mid-March, and completion of stage two—blocks A, D and G—by early April. That will include refurbishment works within block A, the general learning area; block D, administration; and block G, music, science learning and art. That is exciting news because Birrong Boys High School will have state-of-the-art science labs where year 11 and 12 students from both schools will work together in co-ed classes.

At Birrong Girls High School, stage one completion, scheduled for mid-March, will include block A and block J, which will have teaching blocks and the big new hall, which is great because that old hall was far too small even when I went to the school. Stage two, which will be completed in late March, a bit earlier than stage two at the boys school, covers the refurbishment works in block H of the new art and library areas. I hope that the expensively framed classical prints that we gave to the school when my father went into a nursing home go up because I know that Birrong Girls High School has got quite the artwork collection for the new arts area. It is a good re-use of artwork. If anyone has some significant works, they should think about giving them to their local high schools, where they can be used.

We have not even reached the two-year mark, but I note for the House some of the other school projects being done in Western Sydney by the New South Wales Government. New builds or upgrades are underway at Darcy Road Public School; Northmead Public School; Northmead Creative and Performing Arts High School; Eagle Vale High School; Jordan Springs High School; Dundas Public School; the new Leppington and Denham Court high school; Tallawong High School; The Ponds High School; Katoomba High School; Cambridge Gardens Public School; Kingswood Public School; Greenway Park Public School; Dalmeny Public School; Gledswood Hills High School; the fast-tracked Melonba High School; Melrose Park High School; Melrose Park Public School; Box Hill Public School; Tallawong Public School; Austral Public School; Rouse Hill High School; Leppington Public School; Nirimba Fields Public School; Wentworth Point High School, which we waited a decade for under the previous Government—the member for Parramatta will be cheering; and Wentworth Point Public School. On top of that, because that is an extensive list—

Dr Marjorie O'Neill: There's more.

Ms LYNDIA VOLTZ: There are always more. Across Western Sydney there will be 50 new public preschools. In my area there will be a new preschool at Birrong Public School; Blaxcell Street Public School in Granville; Cabramatta West Public School; Carramar Public School; the Carter Street precinct, which the member for Parramatta and I fought very hard for; Chullora Public School; Curran Public School at Macquarie Fields; Fairfield West Public School; Granville East Public School; Granville South Public School; Guildford Public School; Guildford West Public School; West Lansvale East Public School; Sherwood Grange Public School; Shortland Public School; Villawood North Public School; and, top of the pops, Yagoona Public School, where, in my day, the Yellow Pages had ads that stated, "Go down to Yagoona for a schooner." It is one of our favourite parts of the world. School infrastructure had been overlooked in Western Sydney for so long, but the New South Wales Government is now getting on with this extensive list of school infrastructure projects. It is a terrific effort.

RYDE ELECTORATE HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE STUDENTS

Mr JORDAN LANE (Ryde) (22:54): I ask the House to join me in acknowledging the success of a number of high achievers in Ryde who attained a band 6 in the 2024 Higher School Certificate. Completing the HSC is a significant milestone and reaching the highest performance band is a testament to those students' perseverance and determination. Academic success does not happen in isolation. Behind every student's result is a network of dedicated teachers, supportive families and encouraging peers. Their achievements are not just personal milestones but also a reflection of the strong educational culture fostered in Ryde.

From Epping Boys High School, I note the following students who achieved a band 6: Jacob Watson for ancient history and modern history; Christopher Whalan for chemistry, economics, mathematics advanced and physics; Liam Hilliger for economics, information processes and technology, and software design and development; Matthew Poon for economics, mathematics advanced and mathematics extension 1; Henry Hall for English advanced and English extension 1; Jeffrey Lin for English advanced; Alex Yim for mathematics advanced and mathematics extension 1; and Liam Cleland for mathematics standard 2. I also note the following students from Holy Cross College who achieved a band 6: Chris Cagica for business studies, mathematics advanced and studies of religion 1; Rhys Buenaventura for mathematics advanced; Christopher Abi-Saab for mathematics standard 2; James Tasiovasilis for mathematics standard 2; and Nikolai Assadi for mathematics standard 2.

I note the following students from Marist College Eastwood who also attained a band 6: Charles Ward for ancient history, legal studies and mathematics standard 2; Peter Menassa for ancient history and mathematics standard 2; Edwin Savazian for business studies; Joshua Byrnes for English standard; Jayden O'Donovan for personal development, health and physical education, and mathematics standard 2; Nicholas Lillcrap for personal development, health and physical education, and studies of religion 2; Oliver Smith for mathematics advanced, mathematics extension 1, personal development, health and physical education, and studies of religion 1; Harrison Kerley for mathematics standard 2; Matthew Parks for mathematics standard 2; and Matthew Ou for studies of religion 1.

From Ryde Secondary College, the following students achieved a band 6: Mikayla Trieu for biology, English advanced, geography, Indonesian continuers and mathematics standard 2; Isaiah Lee for business studies, and personal development, health and physical education; Vedran Toshevski for business studies, community and family studies, economics and Macedonian continuers; Brooke Harris for community and family studies, textile and design, and visual arts; Ella Marcellino for community and family studies, English advanced, English extension 1, English extension 2 and legal studies; Hilary Yim for community and family studies, mathematics standard 2, music 1, and textiles and design; and Nate Killiby for community and family studies, English advanced, entertainment industry, personal development, health and physical education, and mathematics standard 2.

Other students from Ryde Secondary College who achieved a band 6 include: Emily Zhang for design and technology, economics, English advanced and Indonesian continuers; Elettra Olivos for drama; Justin Chen for engineering studies, mathematics extension 1, mathematics extension 2 and physics; Jera Stephens for English advanced, English extension 1, geography, modern history, and society and culture; Marko Pejoski for English advanced, English extension 1, English extension 2, entertainment industry, music 2 and music extension; and Jessica Tsang for entertainment industry and mathematics standard 2. Last but not least, I acknowledge Alise Monden from Marsden High School, who achieved a band 6 in ancient history and legal studies.

All of those students have excelled across a diverse range of subjects, reflecting the breadth of academic talent in Ryde. Their achievements will open doors to future study and career opportunities, and I have no doubt that they will go on to make valuable contributions in their respective fields. Whether they pursue further education, enter the workforce or take time to explore their interests, their results in the HSC have set them up for success. I take the opportunity to congratulate them once again on their hard work and dedication. I also extend my appreciation to the educators, mentors and family members who played such important roles in their success. The efforts of the students are commendable, and I look forward to seeing what they accomplish in the years ahead. Finally, I thank the House for bearing with me; that was a very long list but it is a testament to the success of the students in the Ryde electorate.

Dr MARJORIE O'NEILL (Coogee) (22:59): I join the member for Ryde in congratulating his HSC students who excelled, and all HSC students who excelled during that period. But, as someone who ran undergraduate courses at the University of Technology Sydney, I say to those students who woke up and did not necessarily get the mark they wanted that there is more than one way to skin a cat. I need them to know that the HSC does not define them. I say to those who may have felt like they did not do their best that their resilience and hard work is what actually matters. If they put their mind to it, they will also get to where they want to go.

MAITLAND FLOOD SEVENTIETH ANNIVERSARY STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE

Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland—Minister for Regional Transport and Roads) (23:00): This month we mark the seventieth anniversary of the devastating floods in Maitland in 1955. This is a time for us to reflect, remember and recognise the resilience that defines our community of Maitland. The events of February 1955 remain one of the most significant natural disasters in Australian history, shaping the identity of Maitland and the wider Hunter Valley and also becoming the first event of the State Emergency Service. Everyone who was in Maitland and surrounds at the time has their own unique flood story. Those individual experiences are still fresh in their minds, and I am so grateful for the stories that many people in our community have shared, not just with me but with countless authors who have studied these floods and made documentaries about them over time.

In late February 1955, unprecedented rainfall caused the Hunter River to swell beyond its banks, turning the region into an inland sea. Maitland bore the brunt of the catastrophe. The floodwaters inundated the city, forcing the evacuation of thousands and leaving widespread destruction in their wake. At its peak, the flood measured over 12.1 metres at the Belmore Bridge gauge—an unimaginable volume of water that tore through homes, businesses, and farmlands. The statistics from that time are staggering. More than 40,000 people were displaced across 40 towns. Approximately 5,200 homes were inundated, and 58 were completely destroyed. Tragically, 24 people lost their lives.

The human toll was immense, not only in the loss of those loved people but also in the emotional and economic hardships and trauma that followed. Yet, in the face of devastation, the spirit of Maitland shone through. Ordinary people became heroes, neighbours helped neighbours, and volunteers from across the State arrived to assist in the rescue and recovery efforts. The bravery of those who waded through chest-high waters to save others, the resilience of families who rebuilt from the ruins over many generations and the generosity of those who gave what they could—all of those stories form the backbone of Maitland's history. The flood also led to major changes in flood mitigation and emergency planning. The Hunter Valley Conservation Trust, which was established in 1950, five years before the flood, took on a crucial role in managing flood risks, land degradation and conservation efforts.

Since then, significant investment has been made in levee systems, warning technologies and emergency response strategies to protect communities from future disasters. As I said, we saw the establishment of the State Emergency Service—the orange SES—out of these floods. As we reflect on this anniversary, we honour those who lost their life, those who endured the hardship, and those who helped to rebuild Maitland and the wider Hunter Valley to what it is today. We acknowledge the progress that has been made in flood management and mitigation, but we also recognise that climate change presents new challenges. Extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and severe, highlighting the need for continued investment in sustainable infrastructure and, most importantly, disaster preparedness.

The lessons of 1955 must not be forgotten. We must remain vigilant, ensuring that future generations are equipped with the knowledge, resources, and support to weather any storm or any flood. As the local representative of the people of Maitland, I remain dedicated to ensuring that Maitland continues to grow and thrive while always respecting the lessons of our history. I also congratulate and thank all of those who take the time to volunteer for the SES. It is such an important role that we can play in our community by volunteering, but also helping people when they are facing floodwaters is an incredible task.

These events do not happen on a bright, sunny day. It is often in the middle of the night. Our volunteers are called away from their families to attend incredibly dangerous situations, often while their own homes or their own families are at risk. I respect all SES volunteers in our communities right across this State. The seventieth anniversary of the Maitland floods is a time to remember, reflect and reaffirm our commitment to a strong and resilient Maitland, and to a strong and resilient New South Wales, that can weather the storms ahead.

MID NORTH COAST YOUTH CRIME

Mr GURMESH SINGH (Coffs Harbour) (23:04): Growing up on the Mid North Coast of New South Wales could only be described as idyllic. We all knew our neighbours, and they knew us. The locks on our roller doors did not work—irrelevant anyway, because they were often left open. Our house, like almost every house in our town, did not have a fence. Doors were left unlocked and crime was basically non-existent. But, for many years now, our way of life in country towns has been under attack. People who once felt safe in their own homes now live in communities with security cameras on every building, fences around every property and nightly stories of youth crime running out of control.

Community members are quite understandably frustrated that their hard-earned wages are having to be spent on repairing doors, replacing car keys, installing security cameras and paying insurance excesses, not to

mention escalating insurance premiums. The official Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research statistics do not tell the whole story, but they do paint a very concerning picture on the Coffs Coast. Motor Vehicle thefts are up 35 per cent in two years and sit at double the State average. Break and enter offences are 64 per cent higher than the State average. A Mid North Coast police officer recently put into words the frustration being felt by many in the Police Force when he said:

There is a small group of about 20 teenagers ... who have become hardened criminals.

They are emboldened, you may even say helped, by soft magistrates who refuse to lock them up.

These kids are armed and very dangerous.

Night after night, we see the same teenagers (who are mostly already on bail for similar offences) committing violent break ins. We lock them up, and they're bailed the next day by a magistrate.

And guess what? They're back to being criminals that night.

They aren't just joyriding in stolen cars.

These teenagers arm themselves with axes and machetes, sometimes firearms. They break into homes and terrorise their victims. They steal cars and speed down the wrong side of highways at over 200km/h.

They ram police cars, assault cops, cut open their victims and put the entire community at risk. This is not a "spike" in crime or a one off incident. This is happening almost every night.

Most galling, these kids film themselves doing this so they can put it on social media for likes. There is no question of guilt. We have the evidence. It is categorically clear who our offenders are. It's also clear why they offend: they have no fear of consequences ...

These teens get one, two, three, a dozen strikes before they sniff a consequence. They get the lightest slaps on the wrist for the most violent crimes.

The bail statistics back this up. If bail conditions were breached, bail was continued 83 per cent of the time despite the breach. That is a record-high statistic. The statistics back up what the police officer said: We need to be tougher on repeat offenders. Is it not common sense that bail should be refused if the accused is already on bail for serious offences? Laws passed last year still allow courts to grant bail to a person aged 14 to 18 who commits a serious offence if the court believes they will not offend again, despite having just reoffended while on bail. Reviewing this loophole warrants a thorough reassessment.

Another area that warrants reassessment is the legal doctrine of doli incapax. The doctrine presumes that children aged between 10 and 14 are not sufficiently developed to understand the difference between right and wrong in a criminal sense. Most of the young offenders in the security videos are covering their faces and run away when confronted by the law or by landholders. They almost always know what they are doing is seriously wrong. It can be almost impossible for the prosecution to demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that the child knew their actions were seriously wrong in a criminal sense. Reversing the onus of proof so that the defence has to prove doli incapax would bring us into line with countries like England for this age group.

Another area to explore opportunities for improvement is to place significant weight on the impact of the offence on the victim as an aggravating factor when sentencing. Giving victims of crime greater weight in sentencing will mean that the harm they faced is taken into account when the sentence is determined. We all want to live in safe communities, and nobody wants a generation of young people going down a criminal path. I will continue to support and advocate for the many very effective youth justice interventions that are successful in changing young lives. But when they do not work, we need tougher laws. We have to act now and heed the warning in the letter of the police officer that I quoted from earlier:

Unfortunately, someone is going to die—an innocent community member or one of these teenagers.

BLACKTOWN ELECTORATE AND COST OF LIVING

Mr STEPHEN BALI (Blacktown) (23:09): I update the House on activities in the Blacktown electorate under the New South Wales Labor Government. Unfortunately, Sydney is probably one of the most tolled cities in the world, but this Government has introduced a \$60 cap. The Blacktown electorate is benefiting from over \$1 million being refunded per quarter, which means rebates going to at least 3,300 motorists. Cost-of-living pressures, like in most places across Australia, continue to mount, and it was great to see a 0.25 per cent decrease in the interest rates announced yesterday. As well as the toll relief delivered by this Government, bulk billing incentives for GPs have ensured that more GP clinics allow patients to be covered by Medicare. The First Home Buyers Assistance grants introduced by Labor have also provided greater assistance compared with the Coalition's "forever" land tax. This Government's energy rebates amounted to about \$435 million, covering \$250 rebates for families and seniors, and \$350 rebates for low-income earners and people with medical conditions. Those rebates are in addition to the Australian Government's \$300 energy rebate.

The parliamentary inquiry into essential worker housing also came to Blacktown, where not many inquiries have been held. The member for Penrith is in the Chamber. We have attended a few inquiries about tolls, which

I even presented to many years ago. I give huge thanks to the staff of the parliamentary inquiry into essential worker housing. It was the first time that we ran concurrent sessions where we invited people from the community, and I encourage all members to have a crack at that. About 30 people from Blacktown attended. They were taken to a room where parliamentary staff went through the procedures of what to submit and how, how to write up a plan, and what would happen if they were called as a witness. Those people returned to the inquiry to watch more of the sessions, and they ended up hanging around. I have been on quite a few inquiries in the past two years, but I have never seen 30 or 40 people sitting in the inquiry for so long. It was good to see everybody. The feedback was that they loved how well the parliamentary staff presented the material in a concise way, and how they encouraged them to make submissions in the future now that they know where the website is and what to look for.

I also update the House on the good, the bad and the ugly of health in Blacktown. Emergency attendances at Blacktown hospital are at 17,069 compared with 15,179 for the quarter we came to Government, and 8,700 in 2011. Patients in the T2 category must be seen within 10 minutes. That emergency list has improved from a low of 16.5 per cent when the Coalition left office, to 22.4 per cent now. That is a very low figure, but it is improving. When Labor lost office in 2011, 85 per cent of T2 emergency patients were seen on time. The Coalition built a shiny new Blacktown hospital, and that 10-minute target fell from 85 per cent to 16 per cent, which is extremely bad. Waiting lists are down to zero compared with reaching a high of about 400 or 500 patients. I appreciate the improvements happening in the Blacktown area under a Labor Government.

CENTRAL WEST ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr PHILIP DONATO (Orange) (23:14): With a heavy heart I acknowledge the devastating toll that road accidents have taken across our State. In recent weeks there has been a series of fatal collisions, particularly in the Central West of New South Wales. For every life lost, and the trauma experienced by families and communities, it is simply heartbreaking. I acknowledge the Minister for Regional Transport and Roads' commitment to reducing road trauma on our country roads. The Minister has overseen the implementation of a number of safety measures on State-managed roads across my electorate and the broader Central West.

The Minister has been unwavering in her advocacy and delivery of the Government's Towards Zero strategy. Unfortunately, a number of my local roads do not necessarily benefit from those safety enhancements. Country-based local councils' budgets are constrained and their financial limitations make it difficult enough to maintain, let alone enhance, roads, or to eliminate or mitigate some potential or obvious risks. Two serious collisions occurred on the same road in the space of just 24 hours, one of which involved a fatality. Just before 6.00 p.m. on Sunday 9 February 2025, emergency services were called to Lake Canobolas Road in Nashdale, about eight kilometres west of Orange, following reports of a single-vehicle crash. A car was found to have left the road, rolled over an embankment and crashed into a tree. Despite the efforts of first responders, an adult female passenger died at the scene. That was another tragic loss of life, and the effect will resonate through the victim's family and loved ones and across my community.

Lake Canobolas Road is a narrow, winding road through the scenic foothills of Mount Canobolas. The road leads to Lake Canobolas, which is a popular tourist destination for locals and tourists alike to picnic, swim, paddle, fish, and appreciate the peaceful atmosphere and unparalleled vista. The road leads to a number of popular walking trails in the adjacent Mount Canobolas State Conservation Area. It also services the Scouts camp and Ngurang-gu Yalbilinya educational facility. Lake Canobolas Road also services a substantial number of agricultural properties, vineyards, orchards and residential properties. Necessarily, agricultural vehicles and equipment travel across and along this narrow and hilly road, with many blind spots limiting and obscuring vision of the increasing number of drivers appreciating this tourist trail. Add to that the many cyclists who are drawn to the challenging topography the road beckons them to ride through and another fatal collision on such a road is just a matter of when. I have it on good authority from a local orchardist resident in his senior years, who has lived in the area for most of his life, that this fatality was not the first. In fact, he can recall four on this stretch of road over his time living in the area.

I acknowledge that following those collisions and tragedy, Transport for NSW undertook a safety assessment of Lake Canobolas Road that considered factors such as location, crash history, road environment, the number of access points, road usage, and traffic mix and traffic volumes. It has recommended that a reduced speed limit be implemented and signage be erected. Whilst this speed reduction may somewhat lessen the potential for collision and reduce fatalities, more needs to be done to enhance the safety measures of this busy local roadway. I take this opportunity to recognise the first responders who face tragic events such as the fatal collision I referred to. We cannot forget the importance of supporting the emergency services and healthcare professionals who are exposed to the stark and graphic horrors of fatal collisions.

Finally tonight, let us not only mourn the lives lost, but also commit ourselves to a future where fewer families will experience the same grief. We owe it to those we have lost, their families and every member of our community to make our roads safer. This tragedy is not just an individual loss; it is a loss for all of us.

CENTRAL COAST HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

Ms LIESL TESCH (Gosford) (23:19): I thank the Central Coast Council staff for the incredible work they do to support people who are sleeping rough in my community. The Central Coast has had a really challenging time and will continue to have a challenging time regarding homelessness. I thank Melanie Smith, the director of community and culture at the council, for her leadership in this space. I thank also the councillors, rangers and other council staff in the homelessness space for the work they have done over the past couple of months to identify and work with people who are sleeping rough. Homelessness on the Central Coast occurs in a context of housing stress and a number of demographic aspects of our community. The Central Coast is home to a very high rate of seniors and pensioners. There are lots of people living on Centrelink support. We have a high concentration of low-income renters. Post-COVID, many households from Sydney are seeking affordable housing in our community. That puts more pressure on housing availability across the Central Coast. There are also lots of people living with socio-economic vulnerabilities across the community.

The Federal electorate of Robertson has the most stressed renters in the country, with 95 per cent of households under pressure. Nationally, housing affordability has declined sharply, with just 10 per cent of properties deemed genuinely affordable in September 2023. Large populations on the Central Coast are finding it hard to make ends meet, with 40,344 tenants across the community. Based on statistics from previous years, it is predicted that this year on the Central Coast there will be 6,600 homeless people. That is a large number of people to deal with in a relatively small community. Some 1,502 individuals were listed on the housing register in the Gosford electorate as of 31 December 2024. With the State average rate for homelessness at 0.02 per cent, Gosford came in at 1.4 per cent. In July 2024, in the community where I live and where my office is located, Woy Woy, the average rate was 4 per cent.

Housing stress and homelessness are very real parts of my community. Central Coast Council is working to address the issue. In the December-January period, the council received 141 complaints from across the community about rough sleepers. The council responded to reports about individual rough sleepers at a number of locations across the coast. In The Entrance electorate, a large number of rough sleepers have been residing at Picnic Point as a result of the closure of the El Largo caravan park. The waterfront reserve has faced a particular problem, and a recent investigation has prompted a bit of a clean-up of the area. Council staff have also responded to requests from private individuals seeking help for themselves. The council is supporting those people.

I also thank the specialist homelessness services across the coast that are working very closely with the council to try to support our rough sleepers and transition people out of rough sleeping. In my community, a group of people has been working to support the people who have been living at Blackwell Road. They will transition into social housing after living in caravans across my community. They have upset locals, but they are in a very difficult situation. The two children have been attending school and have moved into social housing. Realistically, we need to make sure people feel safe in their communities. But everybody deserves a place to live. It has been a gentle journey. Most Central Coast councillors understand that, but a couple of councillors really do not understand the complexity of rough sleeping and have been trying to move people along. There is a challenge when people sleep in the lovely beach car parks for the tourists because it does not give the right impression. The council has been working really hard to get those people to move to more suitable places with more support.

I thank Pacific Link Housing, our community housing provider, and Coast Shelter for the incredible work they have been doing. I encourage our community housing provider and our homelessness service to continue to apply for funding from the \$30 million Homelessness Innovation Fund. Round three will be open very soon. In closing, I refer to one of our fabulous homed homeless people, Lawrence Doyle, who came to me in 2019. He did not have any ID. He needed a hernia operation. We found him a home, and he set up two businesses. At the moment, he is unwell in hospital. I visit him on a regular basis and will speak at his funeral. He is one of my successful homed people. If we give people dignity and a home, they can turn their lives around.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Ms Donna Davis): That was a lovely story from the member for Gosford.

OATLEY ELECTORATE WATER QUALITY TESTING

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley) (23:24): I inform the House of the current status of the Beachwatch program. Until recently it provided water monitoring services for swim sites around the Sydney coastal area, including in my electorate, at no cost to local councils like Georges River Council in Oatley. Since 1989 the Beachwatch program has tested for pollution and contamination at many sites, including two in Oatley. Perhaps

most importantly, it tested for all forms of bacteria, including faecal matter. That important service allowed local residents to make informed decisions about whether the water quality was good enough to swim in.

That was of exceptional importance for the Georges River, especially around Oatley Bay Baths and Jewfish Bay Baths, which currently fall under the program. If the water quality was poor, one would not get into the water. It was as simple as that. However, soon residents will not have that certainty thanks to the New South Wales Government, which has decided that the health of local swimmers is not important anymore. Last year the Department of Planning and Environment wrote to local councils, including Georges River Council, to indicate that the Government has made Beachwatch an opt-in, fee-for-service program, meaning local councils must now fund the service.

From 1 July 2025 the Beachwatch program will no longer be funded by the Government and will move to a user-pays model. Georges River Council maintains that it will not be able to afford the service without pushing the cost to local ratepayers. This vital service, which has monitored water quality for over 35 years, will cease testing within the Georges River, potentially leaving swimmers exposed to hazardous pollution and contaminants. That will have real consequences on my community. Recently, on 10 and 17 January this year, water quality was rated bad at Oatley Bay Baths and poor at Oatley Bay and Jewfish Bay Baths. Swimmers were urged to enter the water at their own risk, which is proof that water quality testing is important to the health and safety of our local community.

I wonder whether parents in this Chamber would put their children in the water if they did not know it was safe. This is another chapter in the Government's growing record of broken promises, and the list grows longer each day. Local councils and people in my electorate were completely blindsided by the news that the cost of the Beachwatch program would be passed on to councils. We must consider also the precedent that the decision sets. If the Government is willing to cut a program as vital as water safety, what will it cut next? Other public health and environmental programs may be deemed to be non-essential and cut because the Government cannot manage its budget. Unfortunately, this is a cost-cutting measure rather than a policy decision made in the interests of public wellbeing. Time and again, the Government has tried to shift financial responsibility away from the State, forcing councils and ratepayers to bear the burden or suffer the consequences.

The Government does not seem to be able to get its priorities straight. When in government, the Opposition committed \$18.5 million over 10 years to expand the Beachwatch program and provide more services to councils, particularly regional councils, because members on this side of the House know that Beachwatch plays a very important role in our community. It ensures that everyone who wants to enjoy the water can do so, whether they are swimming, boating or fishing at one of our many baths in the local area, or even walking at one of our parks. This vital service must stay. It was a bad decision for all involved, and my community will not rest until the Government reverses its cuts to the program. The Georges River area is a beautiful asset for our community, and we want to ensure that future generations can enjoy it for many years to come.

RANDWICK HIGH SCHOOL

Dr MARJORIE O'NEILL (Coogee) (23:28): I update the House on the status of Randwick High School, which was a massive commitment by the Government. To give the history, Randwick High School opened this year and was formerly known as Randwick Girls and Randwick Boys. For more than a decade the community had called out for the two schools to be amalgamated into a co-ed school. Within my recent memory, three surveys all indicated that the broader community wanted the schools to amalgamate. The former Liberal Government refused to acknowledge or accept any of those recommendations, but the Labor Government under Prue Car said, "Let's do this." We knew it was what the community wanted, and so we did it. A week and half ago, Randwick High School opened. I was talking about it in the community and former Labor member Paul Pearce spoke about it as well. The community was calling for the amalgamation when he was a member more than a decade ago, so the idea has been around for a very long time, and the Minns Labor Government has delivered on it.

This year has seen a 30 per cent increase in year 7 enrolments. Previously 40 per cent of children from Coogee Public School and Rainbow Street Public School went on to a public high school. Now 70 per cent of their children have enrolled in Randwick High. It shows that if members listen to their community, are guided by them and build the infrastructure they want—particularly when it comes to education—they will turn up. I am completely overwhelmed by the 30 per cent increase in Randwick High School's enrolment. I was pleased to see it. One of my biggest fears was that we would make the decision based on community consultation and then people would not turn up, so it was great to see that the overwhelming majority of the community are on board with it.

The feedback from the teachers and the school community so far—as I said, we are into week two—is that people are absolutely overwhelmed and overjoyed by the new school and the amalgamation. Last week the school had its swimming carnival. One of the teachers called me up and said, "I need you to know about this school

carnival. In previous years we would have a couple of kids wanting to participate or maybe a handful of kids wanting to compete. This year the school spirit was completely electric. Every single kid got in and had a swim and all of the teachers competed against each other." It is testament to what I will call the vibe. The spirit of the school has completely changed because the school now reflects the deep desires of our community. I am so looking forward to seeing where we go with this.

The Government has committed to significant upgrades to the school, which have only just begun. We have done the toilets so far, but there is a lot more to come over the next few years. I thank the former principal, Lance Raskall, for his leadership and guidance during the past two years of some sections of the school community who had concerns about the amalgamation. I get it; they loved their school. But those concerns have now been alleviated. I also acknowledge the current principal, Belinda Conway, and thank her for her leadership. The 30 per cent increase in enrolments at the school is testament to the fact that when members are guided by the community—when they say that they want public education and we give them what they want—they will turn up.

BATHURST ELECTORATE AGRICULTURAL SHOWS

Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst) (23:33): Agricultural shows and fairs are the lifeblood of regional New South Wales, showcasing our finest livestock, produce and craft. In regional New South Wales, our shows are a reminder of why our communities are great places to live. Those shows are also the largest community events that we may see in a number of our different communities. Rydal and Oberon held their shows recently. The Royal Bathurst Show is next, followed by the Rylstone Kandos Show and the Sofala Show, which will be on this weekend, followed by the Lithgow and Blayney shows next month. The Royal Bathurst Show in May is where locals from across the region will come together later in the year.

Oberon celebrated its 125th show. It was a momentous occasion for the town, and it was marked by the burying of a time capsule. That country show continues to grow in size, with more stallholders and visitors walking through the gates each year. I congratulate the show's president Glen Stewart, secretary Meg Low and all the various volunteers who make up the committee on a job well done pulling off another successful event. The Oberon Show is home to the world's richest quick shear competition, with \$45,000 in prize money up for grabs. Shearers and farmers from across Australia, and even internationally—with a few New Zealanders coming over this year—compete in knockout rounds to be the fastest person to shear a sheep.

In the semifinal heat, I witnessed competitors shear an entire sheep in less than 30 seconds, with the quickest being under 21 seconds. The winner, Jack Fagan, took out the prize money with a shear of 19.78 seconds. As part of the win, Fagan will now join the Wagga Wagga Speed Shear team on a trip to Wales later in the year. I give a special congratulations to Oberon local Claudia Humphreys, who I presented as the winner of the Young Woman of the Year for Oberon, and runner-up Claire Mawhood. They are two inspiring young ladies who put up their hands to represent Oberon in the Young Woman competition. Claudia will move forward into the zone finals next year and has a shot at competing for the major title at the Sydney Royal Easter Show.

This year was a little tricky as well, with a neighbouring show in Rydal held on the same day as Oberon's. Often these communities work in unison to assist in the running of each town's show. This year their time and resources were divided. Nevertheless, the community spirit shone through and both events went off without a hitch. In Rydal the focus was on the hotly contested scone competition, followed closely by which farmer will take home the bragging rights accompanied by the title of best wool exhibit. Large crowds gathered for the official opening and the prize ceremony that closes the Rydal Show. I congratulate Dan and all of his volunteers on putting on another successful show. The Rydal Show celebrated 102 years and commemorated former volunteers who had given their time in the past, including Ian Litchfield, who has served on the show committee and as a chief steward since the 1960s. The dedicated show societies behind each of these events do an incredible job every year to ensure their show runs as smoothly as possible.

Up next on the calendar is the fantastic Rylstone Kandos Show, which always falls on the same weekend as another fantastic little show at Sofala. Together, the two events provide a weekend of entertainment and fun in the mid-west. Tourists and competitors come out for a weekend of good old country fun, spending Saturday in Rylstone and Kandos, before camping along the Turon river and seeing the best of Sofala on Sunday. In March the Lithgow Show will bring the worlds of art, craft and entertainment together, with many different artists and creators sharing their creations and talent. It is a great family day out. I am also looking forward to Blayney Show, which will be held on 22 March, followed by the Royal Bathurst Show.

Well over 800,000 people attend the Sydney Royal Easter Show each year. If even half that number came to the bush for our shows, the economic impact and awareness of the regions would be off the charts. Agricultural shows play a vital role in promoting agriculture, stimulating the local economy, building community bonds, preserving cultural traditions and encouraging healthy lifestyles in regional areas. They serve as a valuable

platform for education, commerce and social interaction, contributing to the overall development of the community.

I implore those living in the city to make the drive across the mountains, to the fresh air and beautiful landscapes, and to experience country hospitality this show season. They may meet the farmer that made their mince, chat to the cook that won best chutney, share a cuppa with a sheep shearer or join the crowd watching some of the best showjumpers in the State. And whether it is to taste the best teacake in the county or to see the largest pumpkin or the meatiest cow, this is the only place in the State where the best of the bush is on show for all to see. It is the only way to experience what we are so passionate and proud of in our communities.

Dr MARJORIE O'NEILL (Coogee) (23:38): As Parliamentary Secretary, I respond to the statement of the member for Bathurst. I share his passion for country shows. However, the member missed the Crookwell Show, which was held the weekend before last. Given the member's love of chutneys and fig jams, I note that my older sister and her daughter placed first for their fig jam. Their pickles and chillies came second. My older sister is also the back-to-back winner of the potato peeling competition at the Robertson Show. Members will be able to catch me at the next Robertson Show if they are able to weather the cold. Hopefully, my sister will be a third-time winner.

STRATA HOUSING REGULATION

Ms MARYANNE STUART (Heathcote) (23:39): After a decade of inaction by the previous Liberal-Nationals Government, we have inherited a housing crisis in New South Wales. Too many in our community, particularly young people and essential workers like nurses and teachers, cannot access well-located homes near their work and family. The Minns Labor Government knows that the most effective way to combat the housing crisis is with long-term solutions that address housing supply. That is why the Government is working hard to drive new housing supply into the market through comprehensive planning reforms that will make it possible for people to purchase their first home in New South Wales. The Government's reforms will enable the delivery of well-located, well-designed and well-built homes close to transport, jobs, services and community amenities. Its plans will also help to deliver more diverse housing types so that everyone has the opportunity to live in a home that is affordable and meets their needs.

Strata homes form a large sector of the diverse housing types the Minns Labor Government will continue to deliver for the New South Wales population. More than 1.2 million people live in strata schemes across the State. More and more people are choosing apartment or townhouse living. That is the case in Heathcote, where strata living is also on the rise. Many new home owners will be moving into the strata apartments that will soon be fully constructed just across the road from my electorate office in Engadine. I look forward to welcoming new constituents who may be moving from elsewhere in New South Wales to the beautiful Heathcote electorate. The new residents will be able to enjoy natural gems such as the Royal National Park—the second oldest national park in the world—beaches, waterways and the Illawarra escarpment.

The Government is making sure that those new residents, like all people in New South Wales already living under strata schemes, can feel safe in and enjoy their own homes as much as the unique environments we are so lucky to have across the State. For too long the regulation of the strata sector has been too weak, leaving many residents at the whim and fancy of strata agents and owners' corporations with limited rules to follow. The Government wants to grant home owners under strata schemes power over their own homes so they can properly defend against bad actors in the strata sector.

Some of the reforms that have allowed for fairer and more transparent strata schemes include introducing stricter rules on matters such as commissions and conflicts of interest and increasing the penalties that can be imposed on strata agents; ensuring competitive pricing for goods and services, as all owners' corporations, regardless of size, are obligated to obtain two quotes when expenditures exceed \$30,000; intervening in dysfunctional strata schemes by providing NSW Fair Trading with the ability to request that the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal appoint a compulsory strata managing agent to aid in managing dysfunctional strata schemes; promoting sustainability infrastructure in strata schemes by removing barriers and prioritising sustainable action during formal proceedings; imposing a statutory obligation for building managers to act in the best interests of the owners' corporation; and imposing a statutory duty on owners' corporations to repair and maintain their common property to ensure safety, functionality and value.

I have been made personally aware of the detrimental effects of weak strata regulations by my constituents, so I know just how important the Government's reforms are. One individual has been relentlessly seeking justice on behalf of other residents. I commend them for showing the bravery and initiative to come forward in spite of the abuse, bullying and fearmongering of the strata manager. I was appalled at their account of paying thousands of dollars in levies to a strata manager who did not pay the bills for services that needed to be delivered, such as water and garbage collection. I look forward to the impact of the Government's strata reforms, which will hold

bad actors accountable and keep good residents safe. I congratulate the Minns Labor Government on its ongoing work to combat the effects of the housing crisis and to provide diverse residences to increase housing supply. I also congratulate the Government on its commitment to support home owners in the rapidly growing strata sector.

PALESTINIAN FILM SCREENING

Ms JENNY LEONG (Newtown) (23:44): Earlier this month I joined community members, activists, trade unionists, academics and creatives at Dendy Newtown for the film premiere of *Palestinians Don't Need Sidewalks - Genocide, Resistance, Complicity*. I acknowledge the filmmakers, John Reynolds and Jill Hickson, who, through this film and Dare to Struggle's previous film, *Palestine Under Siege*, have played a critical role in amplifying the confronting and inhumane violations of human rights of Palestinian people. I acknowledge the Hebron Human Rights Defenders for its contribution of footage to the film.

At the premiere, I had the privilege of speaking alongside Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah, an award-winning author, academic and human rights advocate. I take this opportunity to express my solidarity with Randa during a time when many are seeking to obstruct and silence her critical academic work. I extend that solidarity to all others who are facing unjust consequences in response to their opposition to genocide and their commitment to a free Palestine. Given the attempts of Federal Minister Jason Clare, inspired by the Murdoch press, to silence Randa, I put on record some excerpts from the speech that she gave in Newtown ahead of the film screening. She said:

Today, according to Gaza's Government Information Office, there are 61,709, confirmed people obliterated from the face of this planet. I won't say dead or killed or passed away. I say obliterated. They were breathing, planning, dreaming, playing, loving, joking, reading, writing, teaching, caring, nursing, flesh and bone and soul one minute, gone forever the next.

Statistics are cold. They make us forget what is at stake. Not the humanity of the victims. Not the inhumanity of the killers. But the moral burden placed on the witnesses. On us.

Randa continued:

There is a ceasefire in theory but Israel has not ceased its fire, its apartheid, its colonialism, its genocide.

When I say at least 14,222 people are still believed to be trapped under the rubble, when I say 17,881 children, including 214 newborn infants, have been obliterated from the face of this planet, I am not reciting facts. I am daring each and every one of us to hear this and ask: what can I do?

How can I move from passive witness to active human? How do I take these numbers and honour each and every life behind them? How do I not succumb to despair? Despair is the dividend of imperialism, colonialism and capitalism. To despair is learned helplessness. Refuse it.

Randa went on to say:

Gaza has, in the words of my formidable friend Dr Paula Abood, been the book of revelations. It has revealed the world unto itself.

She continued:

But it has also revealed the power of revolutionary love, of having the courage to dare to dream the world can be different. I genuinely, sincerely believe this. I know it's hard to imagine an alternative to the world we live in today where every aspect of our lives are controlled, surveilled, subordinated to capitalist forces. Watching the footage in this film you might think 'how can this be overcome'?

But if you think that, if you truly believe you are a prisoner to your oppressor's imagination, then I pity you. The point is not to mobilise and organise for utopia. The point is not even to plan and organise on the condition you will see the fruits of your labour. The point is to stop being selfish. To understand that revolutionary love means loving those in front of you and those to come. Those you know and those you don't. Above all that when we say and work for a free Palestine what we are doing is freeing ourselves.

I thank Randa for her words and her strength. Documentary films like *Palestinians Don't Need Sidewalks - Genocide, Resistance, Complicity* are so crucial, as are screenings like the one we held in Newtown to bring the community together. I also acknowledge the three people who we followed through the film, Peter Slezak, Rand Darwish and Lee Rhiannon, as well as Paul McAleer, who emceed the event at Dendy Newtown. We know that there is no peace without justice, so let us continue in the struggle for justice for Palestine. Let us continue until Palestine is free.

AUSTRALASIAN WATER RESCUE CHALLENGE

Ms KAREN McKEOWN (Penrith) (23:49): I am pleased to inform the House that I met recently with VRA Rescue NSW commissioner Brenton Charlton. As it happens, he is a Penrith boy and a Penrith Panthers supporter and, I must admit, he had my attention instantly. In his capacity as vice-president of Australasian Rescue Organisation [ARO], he and I discussed the upcoming Australasian Water Rescue Challenge and the inaugural Australasian Rescue Boat Challenge held from 12 to 14 March at the Penrith Whitewater Stadium. The Australasian Rescue Organisation is the peak body in the region for the development and exchange of information, knowledge and skills across all facets of rescue. Its members include emergency services agencies and

organisations and their members, as well as affiliates and stakeholders within the rescue industry. As a founding member of the World Rescue Organisation, the ARO provides independent collaborative opportunities for emergency services from across the region and the world, including multi-agency training exercises and learning pathways to emergency and rescue organisation events worldwide.

Following a number of devastating floods across Australia and the region in recent years, ARO brought together the region's best water rescue trainers, assessors, challenge management teams and participants across emergency services agencies and organisations for the annual Australasian Water Rescue Challenge 2024. In a first for the region, ARO will this year also host the inaugural Australasian Rescue Boat Challenge, providing an opportunity for on-water operators and in-water operators to come together in a swiftwater boat challenge in a level 3 swiftwater environment. ARO rescue challenges are open to member agencies and partner agencies within emergency services.

The aims of the challenges are to equip water rescue professionals to share techniques across land-based, on-water, in-water and over-water rescue disciplines and to provide a platform to allow for information exchange, peer learning and effective feedback. They are real-life, scenario-driven exercises, simulating high-risk flood and swiftwater rescue operations to test and refine emergency response strategies. More than just a competition, these challenges serve as a symposium of knowledge-sharing and collaboration, where agencies come together to exchange expertise, develop unified rescue methodologies and enhance interoperability. Through hands-on training, scenario-based drills and inter-agency teamwork, participants gain invaluable insights that strengthen disaster response capabilities across all emergency services. It is these capabilities that all of our communities come to rely on.

Following the successful challenge last year, participating teams included the NSW Police Force, NSW State Emergency Service, Fire and Rescue NSW, VRA Rescue NSW, NSW Ambulance, Surf Life Saving NSW, Marine Rescue NSW and Queensland Fire Department. These events are of strategic importance for a number of reasons. They strengthen multi-agency collaboration when teams work across emergency services disciplines to simulate large-scale flood response efforts. They enhance real-world preparedness when challenges replicate the high-risk flood scenarios encountered in recent Australian disasters. They improve technical proficiency when operators refine critical rescue techniques, tactical decision-making and teamwork. They encourage cross-agency skills sharing and facilitate an exchange of best practices and experiences between agencies with diverse expertise. They also showcase excellence when agencies compete for recognition as leaders in flood rescue operations.

It is important to integrate full-time and volunteer rescue services, law enforcement, emergency medical personnel and marine rescue teams because participants gain a broader understanding of each agency's roles, operational protocols and best practices in high-risk water rescue scenarios. I look forward to welcoming all members to Penrith.

CAMMERAYGAL HIGH SCHOOL

Mr TIM JAMES (Willoughby) (23:54): I rise just before midnight this evening to address the core issue of schools in my electorate, specifically the concerning situation at Cammeraygal High School where local families are now being told their children cannot attend their local public high school. Cammeraygal High School, based in Crows Nest and North Sydney, is at capacity. It is a fine school that we are proud of, but it is no longer able to accept additional enrolments this year. This situation has left many local families in limbo and scrambling to find a local alternative before the start of the school year. Families assumed, rightly, that they would have a place at the local school if they lived in the school's catchment. Fair enough. Instead, these students are being forced to enrol at Mosman High School, an option that is both geographically distant and practically untenable for many. This situation should never occur and, sadly, is representative of the real impact of a government that is failing to plan, failing to invest in our schools and failing the families and students of Willoughby.

Every family, every child, deserves the certainty of a place at a local public high school. This is not an unreasonable expectation. Local families have told me that Mosman High is too far, too distant and too disconnected from them. It is not local. The daily commute to and from Mosman will put an enormous strain on families, taking valuable time away from their child's education, family time and wellbeing. School friends will be often too far away. This is no solution. It is part of a broader failure of the Minns Labor Government to address the need for adequate school infrastructure as our community grows.

The suburbs within Cammeraygal High School's catchment—including Crows Nest, St Leonards, Cammeray, Northbridge and Castlecrag—within the Willoughby electorate are growing rapidly. Thousands of new dwellings will be built within the coming years, meaning thousands of extra children needing places at our local schools. In Crows Nest and St Leonards alone, 3,255 new dwellings are planned as part of the Government's

transport oriented development plans. Yet, despite its density drive, the Government has no plan to expand local education infrastructure.

The former Liberal Government recognised the growing demand for schools and had a well-resourced plan to invest in a new high school in St Leonards. Planning was well underway for the preschool to year 12 St Leonards education precinct that would have included a new high school. Shockingly, the Minns Labor Government has quietly scaled back these plans. What was once a comprehensive preschool to year 12 precinct has now been reduced to a K-6 primary school, and no updates or details have been provided whatsoever regarding its status. There is no timeline, no funding, no plan and not even communication to the office of the local member or the community, more importantly.

There has been no assurance that the growing demand for local educational options will be met. The Minns Labor Government has, frankly, treated the community with contempt on this. Attempts to ascertain what is happening with this school are met with silence from the Minister and the Government. Come clean. Let us know what is going on. Our community deserves to know what is happening here or, more to the point, what is not happening here. Instead, we have a government that has upzoned large parts of our community without plans for the supporting infrastructure.

If you want to grow our communities, then you have to invest in the infrastructure to support them. This is basic. But it is not happening in Crows Nest or St Leonards. The Government's delay means a new school would not be built for a number of years even if construction got underway tomorrow. There is an immediate short-term challenge. The department and the Minister must implement a plan to boost short-term capacity so that children are not left behind. The Minns Labor Government must commit to building a new high school in St Leonards. The high school is a necessity based on the very real growth we are experiencing in our community. The Government cannot continue to delay. Every year it puts off this project, more families will be forced to send their children to schools outside our area, making life harder for parents and depriving students of the local education they deserve.

The former Liberal Government understood the importance of planning for the future. The upgrades to nearby Chatswood High School, the construction of Cammeraygal High School 10 years ago and the commitment to an education precinct in St Leonards were all designed to ensure that local public education infrastructure kept pace with local growth. It is deeply disappointing that the current Government has chosen to ignore my community and has dropped the ball on the pipeline of education investment. Local families are now paying the price for this failure, and it is simply unacceptable. We cannot afford to wait any longer for action. I call on the Minns Labor Government to immediately announce a concrete plan to build a new local high school to serve our growing community. We need a solution now, one that ensures every child has access to high-quality, local public education.

PORT STEPHENS ELECTORATE SCHOOL LEADERS

Ms KATE WASHINGTON (Port Stephens—Minister for Families and Communities, and Minister for Disability Inclusion) (23:59): As it turns midnight, I would like to share a hot tip with the House: Spending time in a school hall full of insightful student leaders is one of the best ways you can spend your day. When I hosted my first School Leaders Morning Tea in 2019, I had no idea how it would go. Once we had jumped in, there was no way we were not going to do it again. The kids were amazing and the buzz was big. Since then, we have kept the same simple format. The purposes also remain the same: to congratulate the kids, to get them to connect across schools and to inspire them to think about what good leadership looks like.

Local schools take turns to host the event. This year we went to beautiful Tomaree High School, nestled in the bush at Salamander Bay. Almost 200 student leaders turned up from every primary and secondary public and independent school in Port Stephens and were accompanied by their terrific teachers and principals. They were all in for a real treat, because my guest speaker this year was someone very special. It was a person who has faced a lot of adversity and achieved enormous success. Before I introduced my guest speaker, we were surrounded by the sounds of didgeridoo and clap sticks as the Tomaree High School Cultural Group performed a powerful acknowledgement of country. We were then treated to a stunning vocal performance by talented year 12 student Reannah Hyland.

Principal Paul Baxter welcomed us all to his school and then it was time to hear from the kids. I wanted to hear what good leadership looked like for them, so I asked what words they would use to describe a good leader. What I heard next confirmed how thoughtful our young people are. They said kindness, empathy, respect, persistence, dedication, integrity and so much more. These insights did not only come from the secondary students. The primary students were also speaking of integrity, honesty and all of the good stuff. What came next made us all think bigger, because two-time world champion boxer Billy "the Kid" Dib had come to town. Billy might be

familiar to most of the members here, especially to a very dear friend of all of ours, the Minister for Emergency Services.

I am very grateful to the Minister for convincing his little brother Billy to come to Port Stephens to inspire these student leaders, and inspire he did. Billy Dib's infectious warmth and honesty disarmed us all as he described his struggles as a student and the important role a teacher had played in his life. From being a chronic asthmatic and bullied young boy, Billy turned to boxing to build confidence and became a two-time world champion. He subsequently won the biggest fight of his life by beating stomach cancer. Billy's story of overcoming adversity and staying true to his dream inspired the students. They heard loud and clear from a world champion that it is important to reach out for help like Billy did when he needed it. They learned that it is important to show your emotions and that it is okay for boys to cry like Billy does. They heard that no-one becomes a champion or a leader on their own.

After hearing from Billy, the students definitely picked up some important life lessons. The one that they kept repeating to me was the importance of not giving up. For a bit more inspiration on the day, Tomaree High School's Foreshore Cafe, which was backed up by the school's support unit students and staff, delivered up a delicious morning tea. Billy and I then awarded every student a certificate of leadership and urged them all to dream big like Billy did, and to embrace their greatness and go for it. I thank Tomaree High School for being a wonderful host school. I also thank Principal Paul Baxter, the wonderful student leaders, and Joe Williams, who made everything work on the ground. I thank District Commander Superintendent Wayne Humphrey, Inspector David Donovan and Sergeant Leanne Mann for joining us so that students could see that everyone across our community has their backs.

I also thank my wonderful team who make this event happen each year. They go above and beyond the busy work that usually happens in an electorate office. I know they love it as much as I do, but I appreciate the additional time and effort that they spend pulling this together. I thank Rachael, EJ, Rachel and Ruby for their energy and effort. I love this event so much because I can see the impact it has on our very impressive local student leaders. I thank Billy Dib for being an incredible inspiration and for bringing his infectious energy to inspire the leaders of the future. Finally, and most importantly, I congratulate all of the Port Stephens 2025 student school leaders. I wish them every success on their leadership and education journey. From everything I saw this week, and from the students I met, I can say with my hand on my heart that our future is in safe hands.

TRANSGRID HUMELINK PROJECT

Dr JOE McGIRR (Wagga Wagga) (00:04): There is a lot of discussion about energy costs in our cost-of-living crisis, and fair enough. Many people are struggling with their power bills, and there is always much discussion about how much tax we pay and how our government uses our taxes and our money. What most people do not realise is that we are essentially being charged for electricity infrastructure—effectively a tax for public facilities—without our agreement or representation. How is that happening? Members of this House will have heard me speak on the issue of Transgrid and the HumeLink project that is cutting a swathe through my electorate and the Snowy Valleys region. They will have heard me speak of the need for undergrounding, social licence, community benefit and the fact that major renewable energy projects, as needed as they may be, are impacting communities with barely any input from government.

Transgrid operates in a system, and I will talk about that system that essentially taxes us and imposes infrastructure with little to no transparent input from government or the public. An example that illustrates this is another Transgrid project, Project EnergyConnect, the interconnector being built between South Australia and New South Wales. The project affects the western part of the Wagga Wagga electorate. It has recently been revealed that the total cost of Project EnergyConnect has nearly doubled. The Australian Energy Regulator [AER] approved the original expenditure for the project in 2020, with an increase in 2021 after "rigorous assessments" to \$1.82 billion for the New South Wales section. In the revision of costs, Transgrid has come up with a new budget for the New South Wales section of the project of \$3.6 billion. There is no doubt that there are reasons for that—COVID and supply chain costs, no doubt.

But the question is how will that be funded? The answer is by charging electricity consumers. Who will check that? The regulator will. But what option does the regulator have but to approve it? The project is well and truly underway. Despite the fact that the increase must significantly affect the cost-benefit analysis of the project on the basis of which the original project was approved, we are now stuck with this new cost. Have any consumers been asked? Who is being held to account for that? It is essentially like a tax without representation. As Ted Woodley, energy commentator and expert, has written online on RenewEconomy:

This latest blowout has followed the well-established five-stage process being applied by the proponents of major transmission projects:

Stage1: gain government endorsement for a "critical" project based on exaggerated benefits and a ridiculously underestimated cost.

Stage 2: obtain regulatory approval, after a thorough assessment and a small shaving off the submitted cost, and start construction.

Stage 3: discover that costs have blown out unforeseeably and re-negotiate the construction contract at a much higher fee to keep the contractor on the job.

Stage 4: re-emphasise the criticality of the project for the energy transition and get the AER's rubber-stamp and/or government approval to complete the project.

Stage 5: repeat Stages 3 and 4 as many times as possible.

Another issue that Transgrid cannot seem to explain is the detail of its community benefits packages, and I do not mean the list of business-as-usual developments that the company is trying to pass off as added boons for the communities it is affecting. In correspondence to me from the Hon. Chris Bowen, MP, Commonwealth Minister for Climate Change and Energy, the Minister noted that the AER is independent of Australian and State and Territory governments. He also noted that in its determination in relation to social licence, the AER noted that Transgrid is sufficiently equipped to meet its social licence. But he added:

Transgrid has not genuinely and collaboratively engaged with key stakeholders such as local government to date and flagged it expects Transgrid to engage with communities in a genuine, meaningful and respectful way.

Meeting community needs and building ongoing relationships of trust will be pivotal to the timely delivery of HumeLink, which will benefit both consumers and the energy system as a whole.

The opacity of the approval process for renewables infrastructure is a recipe for shortcomings, with the consumers the last line in a series of murky approvals. What is clear—unlike the process of decision-making, which is as clear as mud—is that consumers get little or no say. They pay at the end, and if they are in the path of the projects they pay a significant price during construction. It is government outsourced by privatisation, taxation without representation and community engagement in name only.

COAST SHELTER

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal) (00:09): I take this opportunity to acknowledge the incredible work of Coast Shelter and its dedicated volunteers, who provide unwavering support to the most vulnerable members of our community on the Central Coast. I had the privilege of joining the team for Coast Shelter's Christmas lunch on Christmas Eve. It was a truly humbling experience to roll up my sleeves and don a Coast Shelter apron, along with so many wonderful volunteers, and witness firsthand the incredible impact that that service has on those in need. Everyone who attended was welcomed with warmth and served a delicious Christmas meal with all the trimmings. More importantly, they were given a place to feel valued and connected. It was a powerful reminder that anyone can find themselves in vulnerable circumstances and that no-one should have to spend Christmas alone.

Coast Shelter is well known across the Central Coast for the invaluable support it provides. The team of passionate employees and volunteers dedicate countless hours each week to ensure that meals, mentoring, crisis accommodation and other essential services reach those who need them most. Every Thursday a group of remarkable women donate three hours of their time to cook and serve nutritious meals, simply for the joy of giving back to the community. Their commitment, along with the generosity of many others, is what makes Coast Shelter such a lifeline for so many on the coast.

The spirit of giving was truly alive during Coast Shelter's Christmas appeal, which raised an astounding \$89,443, far surpassing the initial goal of \$50,000. From individuals and businesses to children and community groups, donations poured in, demonstrating the generosity and compassion of the Central Coast. Those funds allowed Coast Shelter to provide Christmas hampers, toys, food, clothing and even experiences to hundreds of families and individuals who would have otherwise gone without. More than 500 Christmas food hampers were distributed to families, young people and individuals staying in Coast Shelter's refuges or receiving support through transitional housing. Hundreds of toys, gift cards and pieces of sporting equipment found their way into the hands of children who deserved a joyful Christmas morning. The generosity was so overwhelming that even partner organisations like Uniting, Bungree, the amazing Glen for Women and Glen for Men, CatholicCare and Pacific Link were able to collect donations to further spread the Christmas spirit.

That generosity is best exemplified by incredible volunteers like Paul Mikkelsen, who has been serving at Coast Shelter for an incredible 22 years. Recently, he was jointly awarded the Central Coast Council Australia Day Volunteer Award for his longstanding commitment. Every Tuesday, Paul prepares meals, provides a calming presence and spreads kindness to everyone he encounters. His selfless dedication extends beyond the kitchen. He also assists with Christmas meal preparations and food rescue collections, ensuring Coast Shelter has the necessary ingredients to continue serving those in need. Paul's impact is immeasurable, and he embodies what community service is all about—one meal, one act of kindness at a time. And he makes a cracker of a potato salad.

Coast Shelter's contributions to the Central Coast community are profound. As the largest provider of meals to those in need in our region, it served over 50,000 meals last year alone. Its crisis accommodation services provide over 200 beds each night, offering safety and support to those escaping domestic violence or experiencing homelessness. Unfortunately, the demand for those services has only increased, with a 55 per cent rise in requests for emergency accommodation and domestic violence support in the past year. Christmas is by far the busiest and most challenging time for Coast Shelter, but it is also a season of immense generosity and community spirit. Last Christmas more than 250 people attended the community lunch and dinner sittings, managed entirely by volunteers. Thanks to organisations like StreetSmart and the overwhelming support of the community, Coast Shelter was able to make the festive season a little brighter for those struggling with financial stress and homelessness.

The dedication of CEO Lee Shearer and the entire Coast Shelter team to ensuring that no-one missed out on the spirit of Christmas—including me—was nothing short of extraordinary. I thank every person who donated, volunteered or supported the Christmas appeal in any way. Their generosity and kindness has had a real and lasting impact. Whether it was through financial contributions, the donation of food and gifts, or the gift of time, they played a role in bringing hope and joy to those who needed it most. As we move into another year, I encourage everyone to continue supporting Coast Shelter's mission. The need in our community is ongoing, and every act of kindness—big or small—helps to break the cycle of homelessness and domestic violence.

Coast Shelter has been a true beacon of hope for over 30 years and, with the continued support of the incredible community, I have no doubt that it will keep making a huge difference to the lives of those who need it most on the Central Coast. I again extend my personal thanks to the team at Coast Shelter for allowing me to be the clumsy kitchen hand on Christmas Eve. It was a pleasure to be able to provide meals and support to people, and Coast Shelter made their day that much more special.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to standing and sessional orders, at 00:14
on Thursday 20 February 2025 until 10:00 the same day.**

Written Community Recognition Statements

According to Standing Order 108A, the following written community recognition statements were submitted.

BEARS OF HOPE - COMMUNITY GROUP OF THE YEAR AWARD

Mr MARK HODGES (Castle Hill)—I would like to acknowledge and congratulate Bears of Hope, who were recently recognised as Community Group of the Year at The Hills Shire Council's Australia Day Awards. It was an honour to celebrate their invaluable contributions to supporting families through pregnancy and infant loss. Bears of Hope provides vital support services, including fee-free counselling, support groups, and community events, ensuring grieving families do not face their loss alone. They also deliver educational sessions to hospitals, equipping healthcare professionals with the resources to better assist affected families. Additionally, their donation of bears, resources, and cuddle cots offers comfort and creates cherished moments for families navigating profound grief. The importance of organisations like Bears of Hope cannot be understated. Their work provides a compassionate support network for families during an incredibly difficult time and fosters greater awareness and understanding around pregnancy and infant loss. Their dedication to breaking the silence surrounding this issue has transformed countless lives, bringing hope and healing to many. Congratulations again to Bears of Hope on this well-deserved recognition and thank you for your ongoing commitment to supporting families in our community.

THE HILLS SES AWARDS 29 JANUARY 2025

Mr MARK HODGES (Castle Hill)—I recognise The Hills Unit of the NSW State Emergency Services. The Hills SES Unit held their Annual Presentation Ceremony on 29 January 2025. The following awards were presented: Five Year Service Award: Young Huang, Chris Ward, Peter Miles, Carly Kirk, Ryan Barton, Ian Gibson, Brett Heckenburg, Eashan Vijayakumaran, and Adarsh Gowda. National Medal (Bushfires): Josh Hill and William Agiomamitis. Australian Capital Territory Emergency Medal (Bushfires): William Agiomamitis. Local Commendation: Andy Williams, Blake Crawford, Colin Fitton, Delma Parker, Faulkner McDonald, Guy Guan, Ken McWhinney, Leanne Pereira and Mark Yates. Local Certificate of Appreciation: Chris Ward, Christian Milazzo, Damien Hofman, John Hill, Lois Perry, Malcolm Liston, Margaret Hilton, Matt Feray, Neville Inglis, Nicky Hill, Peter Dadd, Peter Reid, Reuben Adlington, Rolanda Wang, Sally Butler and Thomas Lipping. Lastly, SES Life Membership: Tim Randall, Ray Marvin, Damien Hofman, Colin Fitton and Evelyn Lester. I thank all members of the SES for their commitment and selflessness to service.

MR ALAN SWAN

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama)—Today the Parliament of New South Wales recognises an outstanding local Jamberoo resident, Mr Alan Swan. Mr Alan Swan is a much-loved Jamberoo local whose dedication to both fitness and community shines through in everything he does. In 2022 his small gym, Swan Athletics, topped the fundraising efforts in Australia for Gotcha4Life's 24-hour row, raising nearly \$18,000 - more than any other participating club nationwide. Thanks to his team's efforts, the Foundation's mental health program is now making a lasting impact in Jamberoo. Alan's contributions extend beyond the gym and into the surf, where he plays a vital role in the Kiama Surf Lifesaving Club. His journey highlights the importance of surf lifesaving clubs in keeping beaches safe. Alan's experience reflects the diverse range of people who come together to make the club a success and the opportunities available for everyone, regardless of background or skill set. The Kiama Surf Lifesaving Club not only saves lives but also builds lasting friendships and strong community ties and Mr Alan Swan embodies the club's tremendous community spirit. Thank you Mr Alan Swan.

MR GREG MARTIN VALE

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama)—Today the Parliament of New South Wales recognises an outstanding local resident, Mr Greg Martin Vale. Mr Greg Martin Vale, a well-known local artist, has been exhibiting at The Old Fire Station in Kiama, showcasing his latest art works. Recently, Greg won the Jean Hanson Memorial Award at the Kiama Show, along with "one or two" first prizes. However, he insists the real value of the show isn't the awards but the exposure and connections it brings. One such example is a customer who, after seeing his work at the show recently reached out to purchase a canvas print. Greg also made an impact in an unexpected category at the Kiama Show - cleaning up in the plant section! Every February and October (usually over the long weekend), Greg holds an exhibition at The Old Fire Station. Again, for him, it's about visibility and reaching a wider audience. But beyond his own work, Greg is passionate about the broader arts scene in Kiama. He believes the town desperately needs a designated year-round art gallery to boost tourism and support local creatives. Congratulations to Mr Greg Martin Vale.

GERRINGONG LIONS CLUB

Mr GARETH WARD (Kiama)—Today the Parliament of New South Wales recognises the Gerringong Lions Club. Gerringong locals were revved up and put on a spectacular day as they enjoyed the Gerringong Lions Club Car Show & Motor Fest which was held at Michael Cronin Oval in Gerringong last Saturday, 15th February 2025. The event, proudly sponsored by Kiama Council, Power FM, Gerringong Automotive, Prized Pieces, Shannon's Insurance, and Bowden's Car Care Products, put on a tremendous display of over 300 cars enjoyed by many local and visiting car enthusiasts. Most importantly, all proceeds from the event went directly to The Lions Childhood Cancer Research Foundation. Last year, the Gerringong Lions Club donated \$15,000 to the cause, and with strong support from the Gerringong community and participants, they hope to match or exceed that amount this year. Trophies were awarded for: Best in Show, Best Classic Car and the Best Modified Car. Adding to the event excitement was that the NSW Police Force showcased a Highway Patrol vehicle. I also acknowledge and thank Stefanie Allison from the Gerringong Lions Club for organising the event logistics.

UNSTOPPABLE EXHIBITION

Mrs JUDY HANNAN (Wollondilly)—Thursday 9 January saw the official opening of the Unstoppable exhibition at the Bradman Museum and International Cricket Hall of Fame, and it was my honour to attend the opening. Unstoppable celebrates the rich history of women's cricket in Australia from the 1800s to the present day. The multimedia exhibition explores the stories and moments that shaped this rich history, especially the determination, excellence and passion of resourceful and talented women that stood against periodic negativity and inspired millions in the process. They forged ahead, were unfunded and yet, were unstoppable. The opening was conducted by Greta Bradman and Alex Blackwell, former captain of the Australian women's team. The Board and volunteers at the Bradman Museum have our appreciation and our thanks. This exhibition shines the light on untold stories and I encourage all cricket tragics to visit the exhibition at the Bradman Museum.

HARBISON BURRADOO

Mrs JUDY HANNAN (Wollondilly)—Harbison, Burradoo, Southern Highlands has been awarded a \$27.5 million federal grant, the largest in the latest Aged Care Capital Assistance Program round, to fund Stage 2 of its redevelopment. The project, set to begin early this year, will construct a modern 72-bed aged care facility and dementia respite service, addressing a critical shortage in the Southern Highlands. Harbison CEO David Cochran emphasised the impact of this funding, highlighting plans to replace the outdated 1950s hostel and create over 50 skilled local jobs. On December 19, facility residents gathered with the Hon. Stephen Jones MP, Member for Whitlam, Harbison CEO David Cochran, board chair Dr Mark Wilson and me to hear about what the funding means for Harbison. I was honoured to attend the announcement. I shared emotional anecdotes about families

forced to relocate loved ones due to limited local facilities, expressing optimism that the expansion will allow couples and families to remain close. The redevelopment aligns with Harbison's 10-year plan, "Harbison 2034," which aims to revolutionise aged and dementia care. The announcement was celebrated as a milestone in improving health services and enhancing the lives of Southern Highlands residents.

HAPPY 100TH BIRTHDAY EVELYN CANNON

Mrs JUDY HANNAN (Wollondilly)—I had the pleasure of visiting Mrs Evelyn Cannon in early January to personally congratulate her on reaching the incredible milestone of 100 years. As a loving mother and great-great-grandmother, Evelyn has given her family the gift and love of classical music, nurturing a deep interest in the Arts and helping to make a significant impact on the Wollondilly community. During my visit with Evelyn, in preparation for the upcoming week of celebrations with family and friends, I brought along a collection of certificates to present to her. These included certificates from notable figures such as the Governor of New South Wales, the Premier of New South Wales, and the Speaker of the NSW Legislative Assembly. My certificate will be included in this wonderful collection, which features His Majesty The King. It was a pleasure meeting Evelyn and hearing about her sister's own centennial celebration in the UK. Evelyn, we wish you the happiest of birthdays. I hope you continue to enjoy good health and happiness in the years to come.

ZAC CHANDLER

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla)—I congratulate Yowie Bay student Zac Chandler who has made his Hollywood debut in the horror thriller *Wolf Man*, just after finishing primary school. Zac grew up dreaming of winning a part in a major Universal Pictures film and just as he was about to start year six he was offered the role of Blake in *Wolf Man*. Then while his schoolmates were in the classroom, 12-year-old Zac was realising that dream spending part of last year filming in New Zealand. Zac has developed his acting through weekly classes at the Young Actors Assembly at Miranda, showing incredible dedication to developing his craft. His big moment on the red carpet for the movie's premiere in Hollywood in January was cancelled at the last minute because of the wildfires in California, before his family was evacuated from its hotel the next day. Zac said he was really affected by the devastation of the fires and set out on a mission to help, holding a screening of *Wolf Man* in Miranda for the wildfire charities. I congratulate Zac on achieving his dream and then making the most of it to help others in need.

TEX HORDER

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla)—I congratulate Tex Horder of Cronulla, who at just eight years old took on a nine kilometre swimming challenge to raise funds and awareness for the National Breast Cancer Foundation. He was inspired to do the swim by his mother Simone who was receiving treatment for breast cancer and the distance of his swim represented the nine deaths in Australia every day from breast cancer. Tex said the swim was "for the mothers, sisters, daughters, friends and loves ones who are impacted by this devastating disease." Tex became a regular sight in the pool at Caringbah as he ticked off the kilometres completing laps after his Friday swimming lessons and during sessions on the weekend with family and friends. He started out with a goal of raising \$500, but thanks great support he soon upped the target to \$2,000 and then couldn't believe it when he went on to raise more than \$11,200. Tex's efforts have propelled him second on the Foundation's 'Swim For Breast Cancer' leaderboard. Tex showed amazing resilience and dedication to complete the swim and smash his fundraising target and his family and friends are justifiably proud. Well done Tex!

ALBURY AWARD WINNERS

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY (Albury)—I would like to congratulate the following individuals and groups who were recognised at the Albury Awards on Saturday, January 27, 2025. Citizen of the Year: Richard Hendrie, mental health advocate and inaugural chair of the NSW Health Consumer Council. Young Citizen of the Year: Oliver Baitch, Albury Youth Mayor, known for his proactive advocacy for young people in our city. Senior Citizen of the Year: Heather Webb, serving the Carevan Foundation for 14 years and an active member of the Murray Gardens Retirement Village committee. Volunteer of the Year: John Oswald, dedicating 20 years to fundraising and coordinating events for Country Hope. Community Group of the Year: Albury SES, whose volunteers are available 24/7, responding to emergencies, floods, storms, and rescues. Active Citizen of the Year: Peter Harper, visionary behind the Hume and Hovell Explorers Bike Ride, connecting Albury to Werribee through historic monuments. Creative Citizens of the Year: Kara Chanter, founder of End of Life Challenges, and Mathew Ralston, passionate fundraiser for the Cancer Foundation. Environmental Citizen of the Year: David Petrovic, for his decade-long work improving biodiversity through Woolshed Thurgoona Landcare Group. Thank you to each of you for your dedication and service.

ALL COAST SWIM STARS

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong—Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty, Minister for Gaming and Racing, Minister for Veterans, Minister for Medical Research, and Minister for the Central Coast)—Congratulations to All Coast Swim Stars at Charmhaven for being awarded Swim School of the Year for Marketing, Promotion and Customer Service and Swim Safer Swim School of Excellence at the National Swim Industry Awards, presented by the peak governing bodies of the swim industry. At the heart of this swim school are co-founders Mandy and John Blake, who are passionate about teaching families the skills they need to stay safe and confident in and around water. Alongside their dedicated team, they strive to create a supportive and encouraging environment that fosters a lifelong love of swimming and helps individuals reach their full potential in and out of the pool. The couple have actively launched a creative campaign with the theme of First Responders by reaching schools, community events, and local groups to educate families about essential water safety skills. Their mission is to inspire families and equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to stay safe around water. Being recognised at a national level for outstanding contributions motivates the swim school to continue their focus on creating safer swimmers, stronger families, and a more water-smart community.

COLLEEN MICHAEL

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong—Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty, Minister for Gaming and Racing, Minister for Veterans, Minister for Medical Research, and Minister for the Central Coast)—I would like to acknowledge Senior Electorate Officer Colleen Michael who has been working alongside me in the Wyong electorate for the past 15 years. Mrs Michael is skilfully navigating diverse interactions with empathy and attention to detail, ensuring that constituents feel valued and understood in their concerns. Demonstrating exceptional work ethic and attention to detail ensured that she consistently met and exceeded expectations, making her a valuable asset to the office team. In the 1990's Mrs Michael began her career in the office for Richard Amery Member for Mount Druitt, continuing her role in the Ministry office in 1997. Her career followed Marie Andrews Member for Gosford, Deb O'Neil Federal Member for Robertson and Senator, Paul Crittenden Member for Wyong and started her role when I was elected in 2007. Congratulations to Mrs Michael for a significant achievement, highlighting both her 15-year milestone and her extensive 30+ years of community involvement.

SWIM BROTHERS

Ms JULIA FINN (Granville)—I was pleased to attend the Swim Brothers mini documentary at the Bryan Brown Theatre on 10 December 2024. "The Journey", is a great documentary about establishing Swim Brothers, a community focused, inclusive swimming program that's making a difference! My community has been touched by 4 drowning deaths of boys and young men in the last few years. It's heartbreaking. Many new migrants don't know how to swim and many of us who grow up inland don't know how to read the beach and avoid rips. Swim Brothers has created an inclusive space for boys and young men to learn to swim and some have gone on to become Bronze Medallion qualified surf lifesavers at Wanda Surf Life Saving Club. Congratulations Feroz, Omar and the entire Swim Brothers team. I look forward to seeing your group grow and continue making a difference in this space.

AUSTRALIA DAY 2025 HONOURS LIST

Ms JULIA FINN (Granville)—Mr William Henderson was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in the General Division for his service to football. He is a stalwart of the Granville and Districts Soccer Football Association, a former Socceroo 1954-1956 and represented Australia at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. He played for Granville Magpies 1948-1956 for Granville Kewpies 1947 and Granville Waratahs 1942-1946. Dr Graeme Gwilliam was awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia in the General Division for his service to engineering and to the community. He held many roles at the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, was Justice of the Peace for over 50 years and Assistant Commissioner at Scouts NSW. We also remember him as the Head, Electrical Engineering Section at Granville TAFE 1984 -1997 My congratulations to Mr William Henderson and Dr Graeme Gwilliam for their lifetimes of contribution to our community.

LUNAR NEW YEAR 2025

Ms JULIA FINN (Granville)—Lunar New Year's Day, 29 January 2025, was the first day of the Year of the Snake. I send my best wishes to Asian Australians who celebrate this important day. The Lunar New Year is celebrated by more than 1.5 million Australians, mostly from the Chinese, Korean and Vietnamese communities, coming together to celebrate culture and traditions. On 1 February I attended the City of Parramatta's lunar new year celebrations at Parramatta Square and I represented the Hon John Graham MLC, Minister for the Arts at the NSW Government's lunar new year celebration at the Museum of Contemporary Art on 4 February. The Year of the Snake is a time for transformation, growth, and strategic action. By embracing the Snake's wisdom and adaptability, we can make the most of this dynamic year and work towards success.

ROSEMARY KING – FINALIST FOR LOCAL HERO AWARD BURWOOD

Ms JO HAYLEN (Summer Hill)—I would like to congratulate Rosemary King, a resident in my electorate of Summer Hill, for being a finalist in the 2024 Westfield Local Hero Burwood awards. Rosemary tirelessly dedicates her time helping pensioners and people experiencing homelessness at St Paul's Burwood Parish Pantry. She assists around 200 people weekly with nutritious food, and advocates for those in need. Rosemary has been volunteering for over 11 years as a lay minister and is passionate about giving back to her community. Rosemary is also a strong advocate for affordable housing and in 2021 was awarded a Community Service Award by the NSW State Government. The commitment of advocates like Rosemary has never been more important for breaking down social isolation barriers and building community connections, and I congratulate Rosemary on being recognised for her efforts. Thank you, Rosemary, for all you do for those doing it tough in our local community.

INNER WEST COUNCIL LUNAR NEW YEAR

Ms JO HAYLEN (Summer Hill)—Congratulations and thank you to Mayor Darcy Byrne, General Manager Peter Gainsford and all the team at Inner West Council for putting on such fantastic celebrations of the Lunar New Year. Lunar New Year, also known as Chinese New Year or Spring Festival, is celebrated by Central and South-East Asian diaspora all over the world, with a significant community here in the inner west. It has origins that can be traced back around 3,500 years to ancient China and the festival holds deep importance in Chinese culture. Welcoming in the Year of the Snake there was a fun and exciting program of events that covered lion dancing, drum performances, lantern and painting workshops. The Dusk Parade was a particular highlight. The Year of the Snake is associated with rebirth, regeneration and the pursuit of love and happiness. One of the many great features of living in the inner west is our vibrant and lively culture and celebrating the many important milestones and traditions from all our diverse backgrounds. Thank you to all the team at Inner West Council and all the people who held events and contributed to making the year's celebrations so wonderful.

BIG STAGE BECKONS ON BREWERY

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY (Albury)—I would like to congratulate Murray Towns Brewing Company, which has made a significant impact on our local craft beer scene. This boutique brewery has gained recognition for the Up-and-Coming Brewers Bar at the 2025 Great Australian Beer [GABS] SpecTAPular Festival 2025, which will showcase two beers, "Sue Pale Ale" and "Nagging Sal". In addition to these two craft beers, the team at Murray Towns Brewing Company also have four other beers, an English Bitter called "The Ashes", a Session Ale – "Smooth Operator"- a "Stout – Red Belly Blake", and an Indian Pale Ale [IPA] – "A Beer with No Name", all have been a hit among beer lovers. I wish Murray Towns Brewing Company all the best in the 2025 Great Australian Beer SpecTAPular [GABS] Festival, which will be held in April this year.

BETTER COMMUNITY, WHOLESOME COMMUNITY

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY (Albury)—I would like to congratulate owner Rachael Hart from Olive Health Foods (Albury), along with Naturopaths Zoe Vernon and Emma Davis on the exciting expansion of their business operations. Recognising a significant gap in our town's support for physical, mental, and emotional health, they have taken steps to provide a much-needed service to our community. Their business has seen the addition of two new consultation rooms, and the introduction of a large herbal dispensary. This will allow them to create individualised formula for each patient. The expansion was made possible in part by a generous \$7,500 grant awarded to Rachael Hart by Business Women Albury Wodonga. With their expanded capacity the business will be able to treat a range of conditions including allergies, intolerances, hormone imbalances, migraines, degenerative illness, fertility, digestion, depression and anxiety. Well done, Rachael, Zoe and Emma for your dedication to helping our community have easier access to healing and education.

CITY OF WOLLONGONG AWARDS

Mr RYAN PARK (Keira—Minister for Health, Minister for Regional Health, and Minister for the Illawarra and the South Coast)—I would like to extend my congratulations to the winners of the 2025 City of Wollongong Awards. Malika Elizabeth Reese was named Citizen of the Year for her tireless contribution to community across the Illawarra, campaigning as an advocate for victim-survivors of violence and enriching lives through the creative arts. I also want to acknowledge the Senior Citizen of the Year, Karim (Ken) Habak OAM. Ken has been the Chair of the Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra since 2001, and under his long-running stewardship the MCCI has expanded its work promoting inclusivity and cultural understanding across to Canberra and through the Shoalhaven. The 2025 Young Citizen of the Year, Jack Brown, has been recognised for his work as director of Talk2MeBro, a charity dedicated to reducing deaths from suicide, that he has grown since its founding in 2018. These awards are a recognition of the incredible talent, compassion and

intelligence contained within and demonstrated by the diverse citizens of the Illawarra region. I congratulate all the winners on their achievements.

ALEX CABAN

Mr PHILIP DONATO (Orange)—Mr Speaker, I am delighted to announce that Alex Caban has been awarded a prestigious scholarship to live and study at St Andrew's College within the University of Sydney in 2025. After graduating from Kinross Wolaroi School in 2024, Alex will pursue a Bachelor of Engineering Honours in Aeronautical Engineering. This scholarship is one of only 40 awarded across Australia this year and is granted to exceptional students from rural and regional communities. Alex has a clear vision for his future, aspiring to become an aerospace engineer and contribute to the international space industry. In addition to his academic pursuits, Alex is excited to immerse himself in the performing arts community at St Andrew's, where he plans to spend time performing and practicing music. Alex has shared that growing up in a rural community has taught him the invaluable lessons of resilience and hard work, qualities that will serve him well as he embarks on this chapter. I would like to congratulate Alex on this incredible achievement and wish him all the best as he continues his studies and works toward his goal of making a significant impact in the field of aerospace engineering.

RHONDA HARPLEY

Mr PHILIP DONATO (Orange)—I would like to congratulate teacher Rhonda Harpley on her remarkable achievement of 40 years of service at Parkes East Public School. This milestone is a testament to her passion and dedication to education. Miss Harpley, who grew up in Eugowra, began her teaching career at Schofields in Sydney but after three years, applied for a transfer to return the country. She was given the opportunity to start at Parkes East Public School, where she has stayed ever since. What Miss Harpley loves most about teaching is watching her students learn and grow. During those four decades, she has seen significant changes in education, especially with the rise of technology in classrooms. She has also enjoyed teaching the children of former students, including the school's current assistant principal, making her a stalwart of the Parkes community. Miss Harpley should be proud of her long career and the positive impact she has had on her students' lives. Her passion for teaching continues and she remains committed to her role at Parkes East. Her significant years of service are an inspiration, and I thank her for this amazing service.

SUE GERSBACH

Mr PHILIP DONATO (Orange)—I would like to congratulate teacher Sue Gersbach on more than 40 years of service at Parkes East Public School. This is a remarkable milestone that highlights Mrs Gersbach's passion and dedication for the education system. As expected in a career spanning four decades, Mrs Gersbach has seen many changes in classrooms, but has moved with the times. She discovered her passion for teaching as a Sunday school teacher, going on to study and then start her career at Wellington before a stint at West Dubbo. Eventually she secured a position at Parkes East Primary where she has become a beloved member of the faculty. Mrs Gersbach has demonstrated her belief in the importance of sharing knowledge and this has had an enduring impact on her students. She's seen teaching methods change, from chalkboards to interactive whiteboards, and witnessed class sizes shrink from nearly 50 to 20 or 30 students. Mrs Gersbach should be proud of her role in shaping the lives of so many children. Her dedication in a professional that is not without its challenges is inspiration. I thank her for her dedication and commitment.

HAYLEE BURKINSHAW

Dr JOE McGIRR (Wagga Wagga)—The recognition of Wagga Wagga's Haylee Burkinshaw as Young Citizen of the Year shows once again that the future of the city is in good hands, thanks to the stellar contribution of our young people. The award, announced on Australia Day, is fitting recognition of a remarkable young woman who began her community service at the age of just 13 when she raised more than \$1000 in the World's Greatest Shave. While still at school, Haylee helped to unite the school community after the death of beloved teacher Ron Anschuetz and raised money for Mr Anschuetz's family. At the end of year 10, Haylee became the inaugural recipient of a peer-voted award established in Mr Anschuetz's name. After school, she continued her community service, entering the Miss Wagga Wagga Quest and raising funds for charities. Crowned Miss Community Princess in 2023, she represented her hometown at Wagga's sister city, Leavenworth, USA. She has been active in Rotaract, the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards and continues to support community and charitable causes – all by the age of just 25! Haylee's citizenship award is a testament to her compassion, drive and vision. Thank you, Haylee, and congratulations on your well-deserved recognition.

ROBERT WATSON

Dr JOE McGIRR (Wagga Wagga)—Congratulations to Tumut's Robert Watson whose dedication to veterans has been recognised with a life membership of the Returned and Services League of Australia. As a

member of the Tumut RSL Sub-branch since 1984 and branch president since 2016, Mr Watson has worked in support of those who have served for more than 40 years. As the son of a World War Two veteran who died too young, Mr Watson learned that veterans and their families often missed out on the support they need and was inspired to make a difference. Well known for leading local Anzac Day marches, the former Reservist has long advocated for the welfare of local veterans and has an unshakeable commitment to preserving the memories of those who made the ultimate sacrifice. Mr Watson's wife, Christine Watson, is also a strong supporter of the RSL and has been presented with a Certificate of Appreciation for her contribution to the sub-branch. Our society owes a great debt to those who have served, and the contribution of Mr and Mrs Watson is great testament to their care, dedication and determination to make a difference. Thank you to Robert and Christine Watson for your extraordinary work.

SHANE HERRINGTON

Dr JOE McGIRR (Wagga Wagga)—It is a source of pride for Australia to be the home of the world's longest continuing culture, a story that dates back thousands of years and continues today. Sharing that story is a great responsibility and one who has done more than most in that area is Tumut-born and Brungle-raised Wolgalu-Wiradjuri man, Shane Herrington. Shane's incredible contribution to the preservation and sharing of First Nations' culture has been recognised with a Ray Kelly Award which honours Mr Kelly as the first Aboriginal Cultural Sites Officer with the NPWS. Shane, who has been closely connected to his heritage since childhood, has provided cultural education to about half a million people through his roles with the NPWS and Heritage NSW. In doing so, he has ensured the skills, knowledge and beliefs of generations long past will resonate into the future. He says the award recognises a great team effort by his colleagues and community members across the state and that all should share the credit. But individually, Shane has been a champion of cultural awareness, and his award is well deserved. Congratulations, Shane, and thank you for doing so much to preserve a story that will live on forever.

JACK BRITZ

Ms ANNA WATSON (Shellharbour)—I would like to acknowledge the achievement of Jack Britz, from 1st Shellharbour Scout Group, for being awarded an Australian Scout Award that was presented at the Baden Powel Activity Centre in Pennant Hills in October 2024. Jack has completed 10 years of scouting in Australia and on behalf of the Shellharbour electorate, I would like to congratulate Jack on this wonderful achievement.

JORDAN SPENCE

Ms ANNA WATSON (Shellharbour)—I would like to acknowledge the achievement of Jordan Spence, from Lake Illawarra High School, who received an award at the Illawarra Schools Excellence Vocational Education and Training Awards 2024. Jordan received the award for Hospitality and Business Services. On behalf of the Shellharbour electorate, I would like to congratulate Jordan on this wonderful achievement.

OSCAR BALATTI

Ms ANNA WATSON (Shellharbour)—I would like to acknowledge the achievement of Oscar Balatti, from Lake Illawarra High School, who received an award at the Illawarra Schools Excellence Vocational Education and Training Awards 2024. Oscar received the award for SBAT Electrotechnology. On behalf of the Shellharbour electorate, I would like to congratulate Oscar on this wonderful achievement.

SAPPHIRE COAST TURF CLUB

Dr MICHAEL HOLLAND (Bega)—Congratulations to the Sapphire Coast Turf Club (Bega Valley) on holding its 150th Bega Cup Race. Sapphire Coast Turf Club is located on a picturesque 300 acre site on Sapphire Coast drive at Kalaru, between Merimbula and Bega and very close to Tathra. It is described as the jewel of country racing. It is one of the newest and most modern country racecourses in NSW with great spectator facilities. Patrons can enjoy an unobstructed view of the racing action from most parts of the course including the members, reserve and function centre and from the large, banked lawn areas. The \$80,000 150th Bega Cup run over 1600m was held on February 2nd 2025. It was won by "direct fire" ridden by winning jockey Amy McLucas and trained by Kembla Grange trainer Theresa Bateup. According to organisers it was a sensational carnival. Estimated to be biggest one they've ever held. It hosted approximately 1500 people over 2 day event with close to half the attendees coming from out of town. Well Done Sapphire Coast Turf Club

MISS CHRISTINA MAO

Mr TRI VO (Cabramatta)—Congratulations to Miss Christina Mao, a recipient of the Australian South East Asian Network - ASEAN Founder's Award [AFA] 2024. Christina, a first-generation Australian with Cambodian and Khmer Krom heritage, has made significant strides in fostering trust and unity among diverse ethnic groups. Born and raised in Cabramatta, she holds a university degree and works with the State Government

while actively contributing as an ASEAN Youth Ambassador. Christina's dedication to intercultural dialogue and her role as a Public Officer for the Kampuchea Krom Cultural Centre of NSW Inc. highlights her commitment to promoting Australian values. Since joining ASEAN in 2018, she has become a prominent advocate for youth whose parents have experienced trauma in their homelands. Her efforts include representing youth voices on various panels and facilitating discussions on democracy and human rights. Her work has led to increased engagement from diverse communities and has amplified ASEAN's goals of promoting unity in the community. Christina's contributions have inspired more parents to involve their children in ASEAN's initiatives, enhancing the organization's role in fostering intercultural understanding and collaboration.

REMEMBRANCE DAY 2024

Mr TRI VO (Cabramatta)—On the 11th of November 2024, I had the privilege of attending the Remembrance Day service at the Cabra-Vale Diggers Club. It was a deeply moving occasion where we gathered to honour and remember the courageous men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of our country in all wars and armed conflicts. We paused to reflect on those who lost their lives, went missing in action, or were wounded, and also those who continue to live with the impact of their service. Their bravery and commitment to our nation's security are immeasurable, and it is because of their sacrifices that we are able to live in a safe and peaceful environment. The ceremony was not just about remembering the fallen but also recognizing the families who have carried the weight of their loved ones' sacrifices. Their strength and perseverance are equally deserving of our respect and gratitude. Attending the service was a poignant reminder of the importance of preserving the legacy of these heroes. It was an honour to stand alongside fellow Australians and reflect on the freedoms we enjoy, lest we forget.

AUSTRALIA DAY COMMUNITY AWARDS CEREMONY 2025

Mr TRI VO (Cabramatta)—It was great to be at the 2025 Australia Day Community Awards Ceremony this morning, organised by Fairfield City Council. The event was a wonderful celebration of the incredible individuals and community groups who have made significant contributions to our local area. It was heartening to see so many dedicated people recognised for their selfless efforts in improving the lives of others and enriching our community. The ceremony highlighted the diverse and vibrant spirit of Fairfield, showcasing the commitment, passion, and hard work of those who continue to make a positive difference. From volunteers and community leaders to organisations working tirelessly behind the scenes, this ceremony was a reminder of the importance of community spirit and the impact of collective efforts in creating a better future for all. I had the privilege of learning more about the meaningful work these individuals and organisations do every day. These awards are a fantastic way to acknowledge the unsung heroes in our community and ensure their contributions are celebrated. I want to extend my heartfelt congratulations to all the nominees and award recipients and thank them for their unwavering dedication.

RUBY SPARKS

Mrs TANYA THOMPSON (Myall Lakes)—I would like to recognise Ruby Sparks, a Year 12 graduate from Great Lakes Senior College, Tuncurry. Despite facing significant health challenges, including extended hospital stays and surgeries during her HSC, Ruby's was determined to succeed. Her hard work paid off with an impressive ATAR of 93.85, and a high score of 48/50 for her English Extension 2 major work, a moving poem that commemorates the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. Ruby's journey has not been easy, with frequent hospital visits and adjustments to her lifestyle. Yet, through it all, she continued to excel academically. She is now set to begin a degree in law and business management at the University of Queensland, a fantastic achievement given the obstacles she has faced. I congratulate Ruby for her achievements, and for the strength she has shown through her challenges. I look forward to seeing her continued success in the years ahead.

UNCLE WILL PAULSON

Mrs TANYA THOMPSON (Myall Lakes)—I would like to acknowledge Uncle Will Paulson, a Biripi Elder, for his leadership in the Koala Hackathon, an initiative aimed at creating conservation efforts for our local koala populations in the Mid-Coast region. Uncle Will brought together young people, encouraging them to connect with Country and take an active role in protecting Gulawayn, the koala, a precious icon of our community. The Hackathon, guided by the motto "Keep the Koala Vibe Alive," challenged senior students from six local high schools to come up with innovative solutions to increase the koala population in our area. This event, was held at Taree Universities Campus, with support from MidCoast Council, Hunter Local Land Services, TIDE, and others. I commend Uncle Will for strengthening conservation, impacting on both the environment and the minds of future generations.

GREAT LAKES WOMEN'S SHELTER

Mrs TANYA THOMPSON (Myall Lakes)—I would like to acknowledge an amazing achievement by our Great Lakes Women's Shelter. Through their involvement in the Return and Earn program, the shelter has reached an impressive milestone: collecting one million cans and bottles, raising \$100,000 in the process. This accomplishment has been made possible through the support of local businesses, Rotary and Lions clubs, and many individuals in the community. The shelter has established collection points across two caravan parks and Club Forster, where volunteers sort and transport containers to the local depot. These efforts have become a steady source of funding, contributing to the shelter's daily operations, which include providing emergency accommodation and support for women and children escaping domestic and family violence. The funds raised are essential in ensuring the shelter continues its important work, with a portion of it directly supporting a part-time worker who provides specialist domestic violence and family support services. Congratulations to all involved and thank you for your ongoing support of this valuable service.

SAMRAT KIRRON

Mr STEPHEN KAMPER (Rockdale—Minister for Small Business, Minister for Lands and Property, Minister for Multiculturalism, and Minister for Sport)—I take this opportunity to recognise the musical talent of Mr Samrat Kirron and congratulate him on the creation of his first music video clip. Mr Kirron, a regular performer in the Nepalese community, has become an overnight music sensation with his lively dance track, Yo Mayalai Phakauna, which means 'to woo/entice this love'. The song's video clip has impressively reached over 150,000 views on YouTube. Samrat has performed in over thirty concerts in the Nepalese community. The video's success is attributed to Samrat's creativity and passion for music, the dedication of his team and incredible support of the Nepalese community. I wish Mr Kirron nothing but the best on his future musical endeavours.

ROCKDALE SALVATION ARMY

Mr STEPHEN KAMPER (Rockdale—Minister for Small Business, Minister for Lands and Property, Minister for Multiculturalism, and Minister for Sport)—I would like to recognise the generous acts of the Rockdale Salvation Army as they continue to support and care for families who are struggling to afford the essentials. The Salvation Army in Rockdale Centre is a charitable organisation that provide wraparound support services. Recently, they have demonstrated wonderful acts of kindness in the community by selling food and other essentials at bargain prices to families in need. With no paid staff, these efforts and initiatives are run by a team of selfless and hardworking volunteers who not only show dignity and generosity, but also shape and represent a stronger, more positive and inclusive community within the Rockdale area. On behalf of our community, I would like to sincerely thank the Rockdale Salvation Army on their hard work to combat poverty and in supporting those in need within our Rockdale community.

JULIE REDFERN

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal)—It is an absolute privilege to stand here today to acknowledge and celebrate the remarkable achievements of Professor Julie Redfern of Terrigal, who has been appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for her significant contributions to cardiology, allied health, research, education, and the community. Julie's dedication to improving public health is truly extraordinary. As Director of the Institute for Evidence-Based Health, a Leadership Fellow with the National Health and Medical Research Council, and a Professor of Public Health, she has played a critical role in advancing cardiovascular research and rehabilitation. With over 250 scientific papers to her name and leadership roles on multiple research projects, her work has had a lasting impact both in Australia and globally. Beyond her contributions to science and medicine, Julie is a passionate volunteer. As a dedicated surf lifesaver with Terrigal Surf Life Saving Club since 2011, she has been recognised as Club Person of the Year and Volunteer of the Year for both the club and Surf Life Saving Central Coast. Julie, your tireless efforts in research, education, and community service inspire us all. Congratulations on this well-deserved honour, and thank you for your outstanding contributions.

KAREN DOUGLAS-MAKE

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal)—It is an honour to be here today to recognize and celebrate the remarkable achievements of Dr. Karen Douglas-Make, who has been awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia [OAM] for her outstanding service to medicine as a general practitioner and her deep commitment to the community. Karen's contributions to healthcare span nearly four decades. Since moving to the Central Coast in 1986, she has been a dedicated GP in Terrigal and Avoca Beach, quickly becoming a leader in her field. Her exceptional service was recognized when she was named General Practitioner of the Year for NSW and the ACT in 2021. Beyond her clinical work, Karen has been a driving force in women's health, serving as the Women's Health Coordinator for the Central Coast Division of General Practice for over 20 years. She has played a vital role in medical education, mentoring future GPs as a GP Registrar Supervisor and contributing to numerous

advisory panels and councils. Her passion for community service extends beyond medicine—Karen has been an active member of Avoca Beach Surf Life Saving Club since 1986. Karen, your dedication to healthcare and community service is truly inspiring. Congratulations on this well-deserved honour!

VANESSA MCKEON

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal)—I would like to celebrate the outstanding achievements of Central Coast Physie and Dance at the 2024 Australian Physie and Dance National Championships. I would like to extend my congratulations to my constituent, Vanessa McKeon, who triumphed in the Masters Ladies Over 50s category, securing her eighth national title. This is an extraordinary accomplishment and a true testament to Vanessa's dedication, passion, and commitment to excellence in her sport. Her success is an inspiration to all, proving that hard work, perseverance, and love for dance can lead to remarkable achievements. I also want to acknowledge the incredible performances of Torah Gaudin, who was crowned National Champion in the five-year age group, and Summer Johns, who claimed the title in the Open Elite Section 3. Additionally, I commend the 19 club members who qualified for the national final in their respective sections. Their success reflects not only their individual dedication but also the unwavering support of the Central Coast Physie and Dance community, whose teachers and mentors foster an environment of encouragement and excellence. Congratulations once again to Vanessa and to all who proudly represented Central Coast Physie and Dance—your achievements make our community incredibly proud!

GUYRA LAMB AND POTATO FESTIVAL

Mr BRENDAN MOYLAN (Northern Tablelands)—I recognise the Guyra community on their annual Lamb and Potato Festival, which promotes the Guyra area, whilst providing valuable support to community organisations. The festival includes an array of stalls, Show and Shine and CWA Art Exhibitions, antique machinery display, along with Lamb sculpture display, created locally by community groups. I congratulate all involved in hosting this event, which I had the pleasure of attending. Special thanks to President Steve Mephram and committee members driving this event, including: Julie Gittoes, Chris Bell, Vicki Bell, Deborah Little, Ian Russell, Jim O'Neill, Michelle Stanley, Gwyn Pearson, along with patrons Gladys Wilson, Geoff and Bertha Reeves, Betty Sheelah and Julie Gittoes. Thanks also to the 35 local voluntary community groups, for staging and providing night watch over the two days of festivities. I commend all involved in the success of the festival, who have given their time and effort, ensuring its longevity and for putting Guyra on the map. Thank you for taking the opportunity to give back to the community, with local voluntary groups being the worthy recipients of the \$35,000 raised by the festival.

RECOGNITION OF ANNETTE COWIE

Mr BRENDAN MOYLAN (Northern Tablelands)—I recognise Professor Annette Cowie University of New England, for winning the Innovation in NSW Public Sector Science and Engineering award, at the Premier's Prizes for Science and Engineering event and presented by Premier Minns. This award recognises excellence in these fields and rewards leading researchers for their cutting-edge work, which has generated economic, environmental, health, social or technological benefits for NSW. I congratulate Annette on this prestigious award and as a Climate Scientist, for a significant contribution to the field of science. That is, though many years of research, policy making, advising and leadership, as well as influencing decision making around climate and land management policies both domestically and globally. At the back of such accomplishments, Annette has been nominated and shortlisted to win the 2025 NSW Women of the Year awards. I commend Professor Cowie for this award, for such valuable contribution to science and the consequential improvements made to the lives of others, as a result of Annett's shared expertise. We wish Annette well in the NSW Women of the Year announcement in March!

GLENN AND RACHEL FERNANCE

Mr BRENDAN MOYLAN (Northern Tablelands)—I recognise the achievements of Glenn and Rachel from Bellata, on being named northern region winners of the Suncorp Bank AgShows NSW Championship Dryland Field Wheat Competition, announced at Dubbo recently. I congratulate the Glenn and Rachel not only on this accolade, but also on adding to a list of farming accomplishments, previously winning the Northern Region Wheat Competition in 2018, the NSW Farming Excellence Award in 2021 and the State Durum winner in 2021. I commend Glenn and Rachel on their hard work and contribution to the wheat industry, with this award underscoring their commitment to excellence and innovation in wheat cultivation.

ROLAND DAVIES

Mr JAMES GRIFFIN (Manly)—Mr Speaker, I draw the House's attention to the outstanding community work undertaken by Freshwater local Roland Davies for his remarkable contribution to the community and our local environment through his initiative, Emu Parade. Over the past year, Roland has organised more than

60 beach clean-ups from Shelley Beach to Palm Beach, with over 2,000 locals pitching in to help. These events not only make a tangible difference to the health of our oceans and marine life, but also create a real sense of community. People connect, engage in conversation, exchange ideas, all while uniting over a cause that could not be more pressing. If this isn't enough of an incentive, volunteers are also treated to a free coffee from his repurposed firetruck-turned-barista truck, which runs on recycled cooking oil! Thanks to Roland's passion and dedication, our beaches are cleaner, and more people are thinking about how to protect them. It's no surprise that the Northern Beaches Council has honoured Roland with at this year's 2025 Australia Day Awards for Outstanding Community Service. Congratulations, Roland, and thank you for all you do.

MANLY FISH MARKET 30TH ANNIVERSARY

Mr JAMES GRIFFIN (Manly)—Mr Speaker, I rise to acknowledge Manly Fish Market, a beloved institution in the Manly community which celebrated its 30th anniversary last December. Since opening its doors in 1994, this family-owned business has become a cornerstone of the local area, drawing in locals and tourists with their high-quality seafood and the best fish and chips Manly has to offer. Located just seconds from the beachfront, Andrew and the team at Manly Fish Market exemplify what it means to be a successful local business, and their constant and loyal patronage over the last thirty years reflects this. I congratulate Manly Fish Market on this incredible milestone and thank them for their ongoing contribution to the Manly community.

ROSALYND O'SHANNASSY AND THE WHITEBRIDGE BALIREH LANDCARE GROUP

Ms JODIE HARRISON (Charlestown—Minister for Women, Minister for Seniors, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault)—Rosalynd O'Shannassy is a true stalwart of the Charlestown electorate community. I was honoured to name her Charlestown's 2022 local woman of the year for her support of the Westpac Rescue Helicopter service, and I am thrilled to report to the House that Rosalynd was one of more than forty individual and Landcare groups recognised at the 2024 Environmental Excellence in Landcare Awards. The awards celebrate the tireless efforts and consistent achievements of volunteers across Lake Macquarie, and Rosalynd's Whitebridge Balireh Landcare group took out a Newcomers Group Award—recognising the phenomenal progress they've made over the past twelve months. Her incredible journey of healing through her work with the Whitebridge Balireh Landcare group shows the power of nature and the value and strength of older people. Her dedication and leadership are truly an inspiration. I want to thank Rosalynd for her leadership of the Whitebridge Balireh group, and acknowledge and congratulate all those involved in the group's work.

ALISON FERGUSON

Ms JODIE HARRISON (Charlestown—Minister for Women, Minister for Seniors, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault)—It was our last southerly buster, though of course we didn't know it then. So begins 'The Last One', a short story written by Eleebana local Alison Ferguson. A beautiful, elegiac piece reflecting on the impacts of climate change, 'The Last One' won the Newcastle Herald's 2025 Hunter Short Story prize. The story is emotive and evocative. The first time you read it, the twist at the end comes as a genuine surprise. As you read it again, however, you start to see how the author is trying to warn her nameless protagonist. It is a powerful piece of writing. Alison is a retired speech pathologist and academic, who completed a Bachelor of Arts in writing in the 1970s. She has written a number of award-winning stories across a range of genres, including horror, crime and science fiction. Her 'Fragments of Meaning' received a Special Commendation at the Scarlet Stiletto Awards in 2018, was included in an anthology for the Newcastle Short Story Award put together by the Hunter Writers Centre. She has also served as an editor, bringing together the Lake Macquarie-focused anthology *Beneath the Surface* in 2020. Congratulations on this well-earned recognition.

PROFESSOR MATT DUN

Ms JODIE HARRISON (Charlestown—Minister for Women, Minister for Seniors, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault)—I am pleased to report to the House that a University of Newcastle research team, led by Charlestown electorate-based cancer researcher Professor Matt Dun, has secured a \$2 million grant to develop treatments for diffuse midline glioma. This disease, DMG as it is known, is the most lethal form of childhood cancer, responsible for more childhood and young adult cancer-related deaths than any other. Most diagnosed with DMG live less than a year on average after diagnosis. Over many years of research on the part of Professor Dun and his team, key genetic influences have been discovered which could act as targets for drugs developed to treat DMG. Unfortunately, the team's extraordinary work has so far had limited success in developing treatments with long-term survival benefits. With this funding from the NHMRC Medical Research Future Fund, the team will launch the Sequential & Temporal Therapeutic Agility for the Treatment of Diffuse Midline Glioma project. Utilising cutting-edge technologies and drawing upon a wide range of scientific disciplines, this project will aim to improve outcomes for children diagnosed with DMG. My congratulations to Professor Dun and his team, and my every hope for their success.

FINEST FILO CUISINE LOLA REMY'S

Ms PRUE CAR (Londonderry—Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Early Learning, and Minister for Western Sydney)—It brings me immense joy to recognise the incredible contribution of Lola Remy's to our community. Their vision of bringing authentic Filipino cuisine to our region is not just about delicious food, it's about sharing culture, stories, and family traditions that enrich us all. From classic dishes like Adobong Manok sa Gata to their delightful Lechon Pork Belly, Lola Remy's has introduced another culinary delight to our local area. Their commitment to quality and authenticity, paired with a welcoming environment, has made them a standout destination for dining, takeaway, and even shopping for unique Filipino goods. Congratulations to the Bermudez family for turning their dream into reality and for inspiring local businesses with their resilience and innovation. To everyone at Lola Remy's, thank you for adding a vibrant and flavourful chapter to our community. I look forward to seeing Lola Remy's flourish and continue to bring people together through the joy of food. Congratulations!

ARLENE BLENOWE HAS SIGNED WITH GFL

Ms PRUE CAR (Londonderry—Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Early Learning, and Minister for Western Sydney)—I am thrilled to congratulate a remarkable athlete in our community, Arlene Blencowe. This incredible woman is a proud mum from Jordan Springs has officially joined the Global Fight League representing Team Dubai in the Bantamweight class. After over a decade of competing with Bellator MMA, Arlene continues to break barriers and set an inspiring example of determination and resilience. Arlene's journey showcases her unrelenting passion for the sport and her ability to balance a successful professional fighting career with family life. It's no surprise that she's taken on this new challenge with the same drive and grit that have defined her career. Arlene, I am so proud of you and can't wait to see you shine on this new stage. You've already inspired so many and I know your journey with the GFL will continue to motivate others to pursue their dreams. Congratulations, Arlene, and best of luck in your upcoming fights.

ST MARYS DIGGERS AND BAND CLUBS CHRISTMAS INITIATIVE

Ms PRUE CAR (Londonderry—Deputy Premier, Minister for Education and Early Learning, and Minister for Western Sydney)—It's pleasure to recognise the spirit of giving shown by the incredible team from St Marys Diggers & Band Club during Christmas last year. Under the leadership of CEO Marlene Shipley, this dedicated group went above and beyond to make Christmas brighter for our community. Initiatives such as the gift-wrapping station at Penrith Westfield is a testament to their generosity and community spirit. Through their volunteer efforts, the not only brought smiles to shoppers during the busy holiday season but reminded our community of the power of connection and kindness. Part of the 'Our Community Cares' program, they exemplified the values of unity and support that define our community. To Marlene and the entire team, thank you for leading by example and for showing us the joy that comes from giving back. Your efforts truly embody the spirit of compassion. Congratulations on your outstanding work.

MARK PAUSCHMANN – PARRAMATTA MARIST HIGH SCHOOL

Ms DONNA DAVIS (Parramatta)—I would like to acknowledge the service of Mr Mark Pauschmann who has served as the Principal of the Parramatta Marist High School since 2018. During his time at the helm of Parramatta Marist, Mark proved to be a great visionary who has the ability to integrate the right leadership towards the right cause, and who is highly regarded by the community and leaders of the Diocese of Parramatta. I want to particularly acknowledge Mark's leadership at Parramatta Marist, a school that reflects the diversity of the community it serves. I applaud Mark's commitment to keeping the values of faith, compassion and service at the forefront while performing his role as the principal. A good Principal determines a school's success or failure, and it is under Mark's strong leadership that the Parramatta Marist High School flourished. Since January 2025, Mark has continued his Marist leadership in a new role as the Executive Director of the Marists of Champagnat Star of the Sea Province to facilitate cohesion, collaboration, and consistency in missions across the province. I wish Mark all the best on this new journey.

SACRED SYNDICATE RIDES FOR CAN ASSIST

Ms STEPH COOKE (Cootamundra)—I wish to congratulate The Sacred Syndicate Social Motorcycle Club SMC for another successful Barry Coulton Memorial Ride. The Sacred Syndicate Social Motorcycle Club, annually hosts the Barry Coulton Memorial Dice Run, a charity motorcycle event honouring the late Barry Coulton an original member of the club who lost his battle with cancer almost 7 years ago. This year Barry's family again chose to donate all funds raised to Can-Assist in Harden Murrumburrah. The event commenced with a BBQ breakfast at Roberts Park in Harden, followed by a scenic ride with four stops: the Terminus Hotel in Temora, the Sport and Recreation Club in Coolamon, the Family Hotel in Cootamundra, and concluded at the Harden Country Club. At each stop, participants enjoyed raffles and a major raffle drawn at the final venue. The 2025 run saw

53 bikes and 83 registrations, raising a substantial \$6,187.70 for CanAssist. The Sacred Syndicate SMC's dedication to community service through events like the Barry Coulton Memorial Run, highlights the club's commitment to supporting local causes and honouring the memory of Barry Coulton. Congratulations to all involved.

THE NEXT GENERATION OF RURAL FARMING

Ms STEPH COOKE (Cootamundra)—I had the pleasure of catching up with Tom and Murray Norman of Illabo a few weeks ago on their property in Illabo to discuss the work the Norman family are doing to support sustainability in agriculture. Tom, a dedicated fifth-generation farmer, is a source of inspiration with his unwavering commitment to the agriculture industry. His deep understanding and knowledge are a testament to the guidance he has received from his father Murray and grandfather Ray. Tom is leading the next generation of farmers into reshaping the future of agriculture in Australia using carbon-neutral green ammonia, which he advises is a more environmentally friendly alternative to grey ammonia, as a broadacre crop fertiliser, a method his grandfather Ray has been using for over 30 years. Tom's work is not just local, but global. He is one of five recently selected from across Australia and New Zealand to showcase his work at the upcoming EvokeAG 2025 Conference in Brisbane. Well-done Tom, in your work to support our vital agriculture industry which is very strong and at the heart of the Cootamundra electorate.

THANKS FOR YOUR SERVICE, KEVIN MORRIS

Ms STEPH COOKE (Cootamundra)—The Barellan and District War Memorial Club was the venue for the Retirement Dinner to thank Kevin Morris for his years of dedicated service to the Narrandera Shire Council and the community it serves. Kevin's has demonstrated exceptional leadership as the President of the Barellan Show Society and as a long-serving Councillor. He and his partner, Louise Mulligan, a former Narrandera Citizen of the Year, created a dynamic partnership within the community organisations which they have volunteered their services. Kevin chose not to recontest his seat at the recent Council Elections but his legacy of 20 years as a Councillor in the Narrandera Shire Council will stand the test of time. On Australia Day this year, Kevin was named the Narrandera Shire Council's Citizen of the Year for his quiet yet impactful contributions that have made a lasting difference in the lives of many. His superpower is organising community events and advocating for the needs of Barellan and surrounding rural areas.

CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

Mr MICHAEL KEMP (Oxley)—The Kempsey Australia Day Awards recognise the selfless acts of individuals in our community who dedicate their time and efforts to benefit others. This year, the announcement of the Citizen of the Year award was presented to Maree Tyne, a proud local from Willawarrin, a small yet resilient town that has faced its share of challenges. Willawarrin has seen its community come together in the wake of devastating fires and other hardships that have tested its strength. Through it all, Maree has been a beacon of support, embodying the spirit of unity and service. Maree was honoured for her extraordinary dedication and fundraising efforts for numerous community groups throughout the Willawarrin area. Over the years, she has consistently demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the betterment of her community, often going beyond measures to ensure that local initiatives and events are supported. Maree's countless efforts have made a real difference in the lives of so many people. Being named Citizen of the Year is a well-deserved recognition of the impact she has had. I extend my heartfelt congratulations and wish you continued success in all future endeavours.

JORJA BARNETT

Mr MICHAEL KEMP (Oxley)—I rise to recognise an outstanding achievement by Jorja Barnett from the Macleay Valley. A former St Paul's College student, Jorja achieved the highest HSC marks in the state for Primary Industries, an incredible testament to her dedication and passion for agriculture. Growing up on a beef cattle farm and working part-time on a dairy farm, Jorja has agriculture in her blood. Her success reflects her hard work, her family's support, and the guidance of her teacher, Graham Bramley, at St Paul's College. Jorja's excellence extends beyond the classroom. She earned the prestigious Waverly Station Scholarship at the Upper Hunter Beef Bonanza and is now part of Ag Career Start, a 12-month gap-year program, working on a sheep farm at Coolabah. Her journey proves regional students can excel on the state's biggest stage. At a time when we need young people in agriculture, Jorja leads by example. Her success highlights the importance of investing in regional education and ensuring all students have the opportunities they need to thrive. Congratulations, Jorja, you've made your family, school, and community proud. We look forward to seeing all you achieve in the future!

WAL TYSON RECEIVES OAM FOR SERVICES TO BELLINGEN SHIRE

Mr MICHAEL KEMP (Oxley)—Bellingen is proud to celebrate the remarkable achievements of Walter Tyson, a longstanding and dedicated member of our community. At 89 years of age, Mr. Tyson was awarded the Order of Australia Medal [OAM] in recognition of his exceptional services to the Bellingen Shire. For over six

decades, Mr. Tyson has been a pillar of community service in Bellingen. His dedication to improving the lives of others is most evident in his 50 years of involvement with the Bellingen Lions Club, where he served as president in 1978 during the development of the first swimming pool in the Shire. His tireless commitment to local initiatives also led him to organise the Bellingen Eel Fishing Championships for 33 years, providing a beloved school holiday activity for children across the region. The OAM is a fitting tribute to a man whose life has been dedicated to building a stronger, better Bellingen, this recognises his decades of volunteer work, his involvement with the Bellingen Lions Club, his efforts in organising community events, and his long-standing commitment to improving the Bellingen Shire. Congratulations to Walter Tyson OAM.

LUKE O'SHEA

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla)—I congratulate Cronulla's country music artist Luke O'Shea on winning another Golden Guitar Award and his induction into the 'Galaxy of Stars' at the Country Music Awards in Tamworth. He was presented with his 17th Golden Guitar award for the music video of his song 'Dharawal' that he says was written directly from his heart. Luke said having been fortunate to live on Dharawal country his whole life it's very satisfying to be able to share the love and gratitude he has for it through song and film. The Galaxy of Stars was launched more than 20 years ago by Tamworth Regional Council to honour artists who've made a significant contribution to Australia's music industry. Announcing Luke's induction, Tamworth Country Music Festival Manager Barry Harley said "Luke is a unique and exceptionally talented musician and songwriter who is a very deserving recipient of this special honour. His music speaks to the heart and soul of Australia." Luke's achievements are a testament to his talent and dedication as a singer-songwriter and storyteller. I congratulate him again on these honours and for sharing about our beautiful part of Australia through music.

BATHURST DESTINATION EVENT OF THE YEAR - THE 155TH ROYAL BATHURST SHOW

Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst)—I Congratulate the Members of the Bathurst Agricultural, Pastoral and Horticultural Society on being awarded the Bathurst Destination Event of the Year Award at the recent Australia Day Celebrations. The Royal Bathurst Show is staged annually and follows a long standing traditional platform which creates an exceptional experience for the local community and visitors alike. Demonstrating a high level of organisation and innovation in planning and execution the 155th Royal Bathurst Show once again made a significant contribution to Bathurst as a must-visit destination. Highlighting excellence in agriculture, horticulture and pastoral activities the Bathurst Royal is a major community and regional event and celebrates these pursuits along with Arts, Crafts and traditional skills such as woodchopping, shearing and livestock handling. The commitment of the Society requires endless hours of dedication to ensure that this is a major regional event which promotes broad aspects of the growth and development of the Bathurst area. It is a pleasure to recognise the ongoing and incredible endeavours of the Society and to congratulate them on their success and achievements on behalf of their community.

PHOEBE HINDE

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley)—Speaker, I rise to congratulate Phoebe Hinde from Georges River College Oatley Senior Campus, who is featured in the ARTEXPRESS art show at the Hazelhurst Arts Centre in Gympie. ARTEXPRESS is a prestigious exhibition featuring young artists from all over New South Wales. This year, it featured 50 outstanding HSC artworks, including those done by students in the St George area. Phoebe's artwork was titled Sharkbait, exploring the experience of anxiety and how this impacts everyday life. Her artwork involves a series of digital prints in a small book, illustrating the journey of a girl named Shrimp as she deals with the 'sharks' or anxieties around her. To display your HSC major work is no small feat and I am sure there is a fantastic career ahead for Phoebe in the arts. There is some tremendous talent in the St George area, and we are so proud of everyone who contributes to our local art scene. ARTEXPRESS is still showing until April 13, so I encourage everyone in our community to check it out and support local art. I would like to congratulate Phoebe once again and wish her the very best in her future endeavours.

VIETNAMESE TET FESTIVAL

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley)—Speaker, I rise to thank the Vietnamese Community in Australia Inc. who recently hosted the Tet Festival in Fairfield. It was a fantastic opportunity to join with my Parliamentary colleagues to take part in the celebrations. The Tet Festival celebrates the beginning of the new year in the lunar calendar and of course, this year, we celebrated the Year of the Snake. The event was very well-attended, with thousands of families of Vietnamese heritage coming out to enjoy the celebrations. There was truly so much to do and see! It was great to see people enjoying traditional foods, taking part in traditional dances and ceremonies and embracing their cultural heritage. We are so blessed to live in a multicultural society where events like this aren't just possible – they're cherished by the rest of the community! Did you know that New South Wales is home to some of the biggest Lunar New Year Festivals outside of Asia? I would once again like to thank the Vietnamese

Community in Australia Inc. for the work that they do in promoting cross-cultural tolerance and cohesion within our State's Vietnamese community. I sincerely look forward to attending next year.

CANREVIVE LUNAR NEW YEAR PARTY 2025

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley)—Speaker, I rise to thank the team from CanRevive, who recently hosted their Lunar New Year Party 2025. I must say, it was such an enjoyable event. It was fantastic to join with some of my Parliamentary colleagues, as well as many friends who I haven't seen in a long time, to bring in the Year of the Snake. We enjoyed some fantastic food, as well as some great cultural performances, including singing and dancing, from some of the CanRevive voluntary instructors. CanRevive is a local support group that provides a safe and compassionate space for cancer patients. It offers individuals the opportunity to share their joys and struggles, while connecting with others who are in similar situations. Cancer impacts millions every year, including many in our community however thanks to the support of organisations like CanRevive, support networks do exist and can be incredibly useful to those going through this terrible disease. I would like to thank President Eric Yeung for his work in this space over the last few years. I look forward to working alongside CanRevive into the future.

MICHELLE SWAAN

Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst)—I Congratulate Michelle Swaan on being awarded the Volunteer of the Year Award announced at the Oberon Australia Day Ceremony. Michelle is a committed volunteer who has given an incredible level of dedication and commitment to a number of community groups and organisations in the Black Springs area. Those that have benefited from Michelle's contribution include the Black Springs Rural Fire Brigade, the Community Association and the Public School's P & C. holding organisational roles such as Captain of the Fire Brigade and Secretary of the P & C. Michelle has also assisted with numerous fundraising events and also played a large role in advocating for better mobile connectivity for her community. Currently Michelle is involved with a community group who are working with a landscape architect to develop a master plan for the Black Spring area and is a member of the Black Springs Community Hall Committee which advocates for ongoing development and upgrade of the facility. Michelle's ongoing endeavours are widely known and recognised and this Award is a wonderful acknowledgement of her contribution to the community. Congratulations to Michelle Swaan – the Oberon Volunteer of the Year.

BATHURST HALL OF FAME EVENT OF THE YEAR MOUNT PANORAMA PUNISH

Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst)—I congratulate the Mount Panorama Punish as an Event which has now been inducted into the Bathurst Hall of Fame following three previous years of recognition as the Event of the Year. This honour reflects the tireless commitment, creativity, and passion to deliver an outstanding event that very much enriches the Bathurst Region. The level of dedication and planning requires endless hours of contribution by volunteers to ensure the delivery of an outstanding event. Staged at the iconic Mt Panorama 'The Punish' is one hot lap, a foot race or running race around the Mount and attracts runners from all over Australia. Attracting a much broader audience than just motoring fans, once again the challenge of the Mount through the 'Punish' highlights the trials and contests encountered at the famous sporting circuit from a different perspective. I congratulate the group involved who undertake to organise this outstanding community event and on their inclusion and recognition in the Bathurst Hall of Fame.

BROKEN HILL KIOSK AUXILIARY VOLUNTEERS

Mr ROY BUTLER (Barwon)—In 2024, the Kiosk Auxiliary donated \$161,313.30 to the Broken Hill Hospital to buy equipment for use across its services. The donation was used to purchase the following items: \$70,215 for Ophthalmology equipment in specialist clinics. \$64,372 for defibrillators including one with advanced monitoring capabilities. \$13,915 for an ECG machine for the Oncology Unit. \$6,240 for 20 new patient handsets for nurse calls and television control. \$2,380 for an instrument trolley for the Dialysis Unit. \$4,180 for a vital signs monitor for the Surgical Ward. This equipment is vital for the Far West and assists the health workforce to deliver high quality care. This generous contribution from the Kiosk Volunteers is part of their ongoing support for the Broken Hill Hospital. This is not the first time the Kiosk Auxiliary Volunteers have made a significant donation to purchase much needed specialist equipment. This is an incredible service, and I commend the Kiosk Auxiliary Volunteers for their continued dedication.

CHATSWOOD YEAR OF THE SNAKE FESTIVAL

Mr TIM JAMES (Willoughby)—Willoughby always celebrates the Lunar New Year with great spirit and energy and to usher in the new Year of the Snake, I was delighted to take part in the Chatswood Lantern Parade on 1 February. With a spectacular display of lanterns, performances, animals of the zodiac, music and flags, it made for a colourful and vibrant procession. As it does every year, the lantern parade brought the streets of Chatswood alive with 10,000 enthusiastic onlookers. The parade was accompanied by Chinese dancers in

traditional costumes, marching bands and performers. It was truly a spectacle of light, colour and community spirit that spread the joy of the New Year throughout our community. I would like to thank Willoughby City Council for all its work behind the event, together with the sponsors, ACY Securities, SBS50 and the Orchard Hotel. Gong Xi Fa Cai to all in Willoughby and beyond!

WILLOUGHBY CITIZEN OF THE YEAR – STEVE LOCKWOOD

Mr TIM JAMES (Willoughby)—I acknowledge Steve Lockwood on his recognition as 2025 Willoughby Citizen of the Year and for his outstanding contribution to the community. Among other local contributions, Steve leads the much loved Bonzer Ukulele and Singing Kollektive (BUSK). For ten years, BUSK has brought ukulele enthusiasts together, providing joyful performances for local community groups. Under Steve's leadership, the group has created a welcoming space where people can experience the joy of making music with others. With over 40 years of experience in music, Steve's passion for community engagement has enriched Chatswood's cultural life. His well-deserved recognition as Citizen of the Year is a testament to his dedication.

LIFELINE HARBOUR TO HAWKESBURY SYDNEY – COMMUNITY AID PROGRAM VOLUNTEERS

Mr TIM JAMES (Willoughby)—I acknowledge Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury Sydney's Community Aid Program Volunteers for receiving the Willoughby Cultural and Community Development Award. Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury Sydney has long been a pillar of support for individuals in crisis offering vital services to those in need. The Community Aid Program Volunteers play an essential role in providing practical assistance companionship and care to some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Their work extends beyond crisis support with their Northbridge store serving as both a community hub and a vital fundraising source for their programs. Through this store and their wider outreach efforts they continue to provide much-needed assistance to people facing hardship. Their dedication and selflessness embody the spirit of community service and their work has made a meaningful difference in the lives of many across Willoughby. This well-deserved recognition highlights the impact of their commitment and generosity. I congratulate the team at Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury Sydney and all their volunteers on this outstanding achievement and thank them for the vital work they do every day.

YOUNG CITIZEN OF THE YEAR – RUBY BECKENHAM

Mr RICHIE WILLIAMSON (Clarence)—Congratulations to Ruby Beckenham, Richmond Valley's Young Citizen of the Year. Ruby is in Year 12 at Casino High School and volunteers with Casino Lions Club and Casino's Own Wireless/COW FM. Ruby is involved in her school SRC where her proactivity and hands-on approach are always evident. Ruby is a keen helper at fundraising events, getting involved in theme days and school socials, and presenting student notices at school assemblies. Ruby maintains a strong academic record and was awarded the prestigious ADF Long Tan Award in Year 10, recognising leadership, friendship, and respect. Alongside her schooling, Ruby is undertaking a school-based traineeship with Richmond Valley Council whilst completing a Certificate III in Business. Ruby's strong sense of community encouraged her involvement with the Casino Lions Club where she fundraised for a Lions Youth Exchange to the USA, and since then has helped with many community events. Ruby's interest in radio saw her get a start at COW FM at the age of 11. Ruby co-hosted a show for 12 months before taking over the show by herself and has been bringing a bubbly voice to the Casino Community ever since. Congratulations Ruby.

RVC YOUNG VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR – SHAE FULLER

Mr RICHIE WILLIAMSON (Clarence)—My congratulations go to Shae Fuller, Richmond Valley's Young Volunteer of the Year. Shae is an enthusiastic and dedicated young lifesaver, acting as a patrolling member and an age manager for Evans Head-Casino Surf Life Saving Club. Shae's passion for surf lifesaving is evident from her willingness to continually learn new skills while mentoring others, all while ensuring the safety of the public on the beach. Shae joined the surf lifesaving club at nine years old and has always sought out opportunities to expand her skills and increase her confidence. Since starting, Shae has taken part in many development programs and welcomed guidance and support from other members. Shae's lifesaving commitments take place alongside working part-time and studying for her HSC. Leading by example, Shae consistently demonstrates a high level of dedication to the community and inspires her peers to not only take up surf lifesaving, but to embrace the spirit of volunteering. In recognition of her commitment and dedication throughout the season, Shae was also awarded her club's Rookie of the Year award. Congratulations Shae on a fantastic achievement. Keep up the great work!

RESCUE SQUAD MEMBERS RECEIVE MEDALS FROM COMMISSIONER

Mr RICHIE WILLIAMSON (Clarence)—Congratulations must go to Matthew Jackson and Donna Wray, two Casino VRA Rescue squad members who were awarded medals by VRA Rescue NSW Commissioner

Brenton Charlton. VRA Rescue NSW is a volunteer-based organisation that plays a crucial role in providing emergency rescue services throughout New South Wales 24/7, 365 days a year. Long service and good conduct medals were presented and awarded by Mr Charlton to Mr Jackson and Ms Wray, highlighting their dedicated service of over ten years. Mr Jackson has served 18 years, and Ms Wray has served 11 years - both remarkable achievements. During his visit, Commissioner Charlton talked with the squad about improvements to vehicles and equipment, training, and important advancements in data reporting. Following the award presentation, the entire Casino squad, Commissioner Charlton and operations manager for the region, Paul Cowles, enjoyed dinner at the Clydesdale as a thank you for the squads' outstanding contributions to the community. Well done to Mr Jackson and Ms Wray and thank you to all the squad members for the important work you do within the community.

ISABELLA STEWART

Mrs TANYA DAVIES (Badgerys Creek)—I congratulate and commend Penrith Anglican College graduate Isabella Stewart on having become the 2024 DUX of the College with an extraordinary ATAR of 97.4, which puts her among the very top of our state's 2024 graduates. I'm pleased to learn that Isabella intends to study a Bachelor of Paramedicine with Western Sydney University whilst continuing with her casual employment as an AIN at Nepean Hospital. She also intends to join a local community theatre group as part of her enjoyment of performing. I also congratulate and commend Isabella's fellow Penrith Anglican College graduates who achieved an ATAR of 90; Erin O'Shannessy, 97.0, Toby Gange, 97.0, Isabella Robson, 96.3, Leah Tomarchio, 96.25, Ava Kobus, 94.75, Timothy Batcheldor, 93.50, Mysa Tariq, 92.70, Elissa Ferguson, 92.05, Ava Toland, 90.90. I extend my congratulations and commendations to the staff and parents who supported the students. I wish all students the very best in their future endeavours.

MILES HARROLD

Mrs TANYA DAVIES (Badgerys Creek)—I congratulate and commend Mulgoa local Miles Harrold for proudly representing Australia at the Under 23 World Rowing Championships in Canada in August 2024. Miles and his crew competed for our nation against the world's best in the Under 23 Men's Coxed Four event. They qualified for the final and finished 4th, just short of a medal. This is an outstanding achievement, and I have no doubt it's an important milestone in a journey that will see Miles bring home an international medal for Australia in the future. Miles has been rowing for almost a decade and has commenced competing in the open-age group. He recently achieved great results competing as an open-age athlete in the 2025 NSW Rowing Championships. He was also announced as the February 2025 Penrith valley Sports Foundation Senior Sports Star. I congratulate Miles Harrold on his amazing achievements and wish him continued success.

ORAN PARK ROVERS FOOTBALL CLUB

Mrs TANYA DAVIES (Badgerys Creek)—I wish the Oran Park Rovers Football Club the very best for season 2025 as they approach the commencement of the season this April and I congratulate them for a successful 2024 season. Last season saw their club increase the number of players across their 103 teams from an already remarkable number of 1200 to a new total of 1300. The club had the greatest number of female football players in the local competition. I'm pleased to see the enthusiasm to represent the Oran Park community has continued this year, with pre-season training now underway. I thank the players, coaches and all volunteers at the club for representing our community with pride and wish them the very best for this season as we look forward to a victorious 2025.

RIVERWOOD COMMUNITY CENTRE 50TH ANNIVERSARY GALA DINNER

Mr JIHAD DIB (Bankstown—Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Youth Justice)—Congratulation to Riverwood Community Centre on celebrating 50 years of service to the people of Canterbury-Bankstown. For five decades, Riverwood community centre has been a pillar of support our community. It has fostered a foundation of cohesion in our local community, providing a range of services for more than 25 000 residents since its doors opened in 1974. The centre has been at the forefront of support for those who need it in our community, creating a space to empower everyday Australians including families, young people and the elderly as well as being a lifeline for refugees and those facing homelessness. Riverwood community centre has continuously endeavoured to break down barriers that face our community. Its dedication to ensuring its services is accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of our community not only provides immediate assistance but also long-term support to help individual rebuild their lives. I thank the community centre's chairperson Pauline Gallagher and all members, staff and volunteers for their unwavering commitment and support to the community. I wish the Riverwood community centre continued success in creating a stronger, more connected community in the years to come!

RIVERWOOD COMMUNITY CENTRE'S AUSTRALIA DAY HONOUR

Mr JIHAD DIB (Bankstown—Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Youth Justice)—On 24 January, I joined our community at that Bryan Brown Theatre in Bankstown to celebrate Canterbury Bankstown Council's Australia Day Awards. This year, Riverwood Community Centre has been named the '2025 Community Organisation of the Year'. The award celebrates Riverwood Community Centre's 50 years of service. Riverwood Community Centre promotes well-being and inclusion through its support services, assisting over 26,000 people through programs in aged care, youth engagement, children's services, and emergency relief. In collaboration with Canterbury Bankstown Council, Riverwood Community Centre established a Food Hub to address the cost-of-living crisis by distributing to over 7,300 families last year. Riverwood Community Centre is a cornerstone of our community, bringing everyone together, no matter where you pray, what language you speak or how much you have in your bank account. Riverwood Community Centre's Annual Spring Festival, NAIDOC Week Celebrations and the Family Interfaith Festival, are events that bring families together to celebrate each other. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Riverwood Community Centre opened their doors and provided vaccines and hampers to our most vulnerable. Their work is commendable, and I congratulate Riverwood Community Centre on this exceptional achievement.

SAM THE PAVING MAN

Mr JIHAD DIB (Bankstown—Minister for Customer Service and Digital Government, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Youth Justice)—I would like to acknowledge the extensive contribution of Sam the Paving Man in shaping our community and city's history over the last 35 years. Sam's craftsmanship has helped produce Sydney's most iconic developments including the likes of the Opera House, Sydney Olympic Park, Star Casino, Barangaroo and Pitt Street Mall. Sam Harb's legacy is built on a foundation of passion and unwavering dedication. Having grown his company through a firm commitment to quality, innovation and organisation, Sam has continuously worked to raise the bar for excellence in Australia's paving industry. His diverse range of services and vast portfolio consistently set new standards in shaping the future of Australia's paving industry. Beyond his craft, Sam has also played a crucial role in supporting local employment and skill development, fostering opportunities for tradespeople and young people alike. His work has consistently paved the way in building a culture of talent across generations. The history and value of Sam's story serves as an enduring inspiration for businesses across my local community. I thank Sam for his service throughout the last three decades and wish them continued success.

ABHS ARTEXPRESS

Mr JAMES WALLACE (Hornsby)—Asquith Boys High School is one of the many exceptional schools in the Hornsby electorate. Over the years, students at Asquith Boys High School have consistently represented themselves, their teachers and their school with distinction. Every year, the Art Gallery of NSW features a collection of the most exceptional HSC major works through the ARTEXPRESS exhibition. Each year, less than 300 artworks are shortlisted, and just a handful are selected to be included as part of the exhibition. Following the 2024 HSC, three of the seven Visual Arts students at Asquith Boys were shortlisted for ARTEXPRESS. The artworks of one of those students, Charlie Maher, is now being displayed as part of that exhibition. Charlie's artworks perfectly capture his time growing up in Cowan. In reflecting on his work, Charlie said his artworks represent "local front and back yards where I played growing up, as well as the important community places of the fire station and community centre." Charlie's artworks will be on display at the Art Gallery of New South Wales until April 27. Congratulations Charlie. This is an exceptional achievement and the Cowan community is very proud of you.

WEST PENNANT HILLS CHERRYBROOK ROTARY CLUB

Mr JAMES WALLACE (Hornsby)—Our community in Cherrybrook and West Pennant Hills is blessed by so many who volunteer their time. I commend members of the Rotary Club of West Pennant Hills and Cherrybrook, whose tireless efforts make a profound impact. This dedicated organisation plays a pivotal role in supporting those who need it most. They maintain transition housing for victims of domestic violence, offering a safe haven for women rebuilding their lives. Through supporting the Helping Hearts Survive initiative at Dural and the Rescued and Reused project at Arcadia, they provide nutritious meals and clothing to those struggling to make ends meet. They also support families affected by homicide, offering support to children at Grace's Place during their most challenging times. At Christmas, the Rotary Club's Tree of Joy initiative collects over 1200 gifts through the generosity of our community, brightening the holiday season for countless individuals. Their fundraising efforts, including book sales and Bunnings BBQs, ensuring vital community programs continue year-round. The Rotary Club of West Pennant Hills and Cherrybrook is greatly appreciated for their ongoing dedication to uplifting those in need and making a lasting difference in the lives of so many.

UKI EXHIBITION REIMAGES THE CONDONG SUGAR MILL

Ms JANELLE SAFFIN (Lismore)—I wish to warmly congratulate artist Michael Maleedy on his new exhibition, 'The Sugar Mill: Real and Imagined', now showing at Art Post Uki. The Tweed Valley Weekly's Julia Collingwood described it as a delightful, playful and intriguing exhibition of a local landmark, the Condong Sugar Mill. It examines the mill as we see it today, then travels to the real of the imagined, Julia wrote. Artist Michael Maleedy told The Weekly: "I have sought to capture the unique interplay between the mill's angular structures and the billowing beauty of the steam rising from its chimney – a dynamic expression of power, motion and industrial artistry. "These paintings reflect my deep admiration for how this landmark shapes not only our physical surroundings but also our collective imagination." Born in Northern England in 1950, Michael came to Australia overland via the Hippie Trail and settled in one of the first lifestyle communities in Uki. He later lived in Canberra, studying visual arts at the Australian National University. Michael Maleedy returned to Murwillumbah about a decade ago, and the local arts and culture scene is richer for having him back. The exhibition closes on March 26.

NIMBIN SCHOOL OF ARTS TREASURED BY LOCALS

Ms JANELLE SAFFIN (Lismore)—The cultural significance of Nimbin's School of Arts, opened on 24 September 1904, was highlighted in an article penned by Sue Landers in The Nimbin Good Times February edition. 'Historic heartbeat of the Nimbin School of Arts' underlined how this iconic institution has been lovingly cared for by volunteers, who have dedicated their time and energy to keeping the arts alive in the Northern Rivers. Sue wrote that the hall thrives under the stewardship of a nine-member committee. "Among these unsung heroes, three stand out for their extraordinary commitment: Tony Gibson (secretary), David Hallett (president) and Carole Barrett, who have each contributed over 30 years of service." I add my thanks to this trio and to committee members, present and past, who have ensured the continuity of this vibrant hub for musical performances like the Blue Moon Cabarets, art exhibitions and community gatherings. Sue Landers delved into the Nimbin School of Arts' history from when Hugh McKinnon Thorburn donated a heavily forested site for the project. Two hundred attendees travelled in from the bush dressed in their finest for a picnic in the back paddock followed by dinner and dancing in the hall.

TYWANA CALDWELL ARTIST FOR LISMORE'S RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

Ms JANELLE SAFFIN (Lismore)—I warmly congratulated local artist Tywana Caldwell who has been chosen by Lismore City Council to have her artwork featured throughout its upcoming Reconciliation Action Plan. Tywana's artwork, titled Ngulliboo, the Bundjalung word meaning 'all of us', symbolises the RAP and its vision. In a Council media release, Tywana says: "I am a proud Bundjalung women from the Widjabul Wia-bal people here in Lismore. My family is from here, it's my community and this is where I grew up and still currently live. "The artwork is a representation of my interpretation of what I think Lismore stands for. The things that shaped my belief in why I think Lismore is really beautiful. It's beautiful to share because it is about our community, about Lismore, about the people here," the artist says. Lismore City Council is working on its fourth Reconciliation Action Plan. Currently in the community consultation phase, the RAP will develop a framework outlining practical actions Council will take to strengthen relationships, respect and opportunities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. I commend Council on supporting young people like Tywana Caldwell and nurturing her artistic talent in this high-profile way.

ROD TOWNEY

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS (Dubbo)—Speaker, I would like to acknowledge a highly respected Aboriginal Leader in our community, Rod Towney, who was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia [OAM]. Recognised as part of the Australia Day Honours List on 26 January 2025, Rod was honoured for his contributions to the Indigenous community of NSW. Rod has spent decades advocating for Indigenous rights and Local Government representation. His leadership spans multiple organisations including the NSW Aboriginal Lands Council, Three Rivers Regional Assembly, and the NSW Local Government Aboriginal Network. His influence and expertise also expanded into the education sector, where he served as a Senior Manager for Aboriginal Engagement at TAFE NSW Western Institute from 2005 to 2019. Rod's advocacy and dedication has seen him previously recognised with being named Indigenous Councillor of the Year in 2009 and the Public Service Medal for his work in Indigenous Affairs in 2015. Congratulations Rod on being awarded this prestigious OAM. This recognition underscores your lifelong commitment to improving opportunities and outcomes for all Indigenous people. Thank you for all you have achieved and continue to achieve. Your passion and commitment are truly inspirational.

NARROMINE HIGH SCHOOL

Mr DUGALD SAUNDERS (Dubbo)—Speaker, I would like to congratulate Narromine High School who are the recipients of the 2025 Royal Agricultural Society of NSW Youth Group's All Roads to the Royal

program. This program provides an all-expenses paid, action packed four-day itinerary at the Sydney Royal Easter Show for forty students from a remote NSW high school. Since its inception five years ago, the program has inspired, educated, and created opportunities for two hundred students from regional NSW schools – opportunities they may have only dreamed of otherwise! To be considered for this unique program the school was required to be able to meet a set selection criteria, and undergo a detailed assessment process, including a carefully reviewed application form. They were also had the opportunity to submit a short video showcasing why they should be selected. In addition to offering students hands on experiences across various agricultural enterprises, the program also benefits teachers by providing valuable educational reference points to use in their classrooms. This ensures the entire school community can continue to benefit for years to come! I know it is going to be an incredible experience for the students, I look forward to seeing them at the show.

JORDAN MAILATA

Ms KYLIE WILKINSON (East Hills)—I would like to congratulate a truly inspiring individual, former Condell Park High School student, Jordan Mailata, the first Australian to play in a winning Super Bowl team. Through relentless hard work, determination, and an unwavering commitment to his craft, Jordan has reached one of the pinnacle achievements in sports. Jordan's journey from his roots as a local Rugby League talent to playing in the American Super Bowl for the Philadelphia Eagles a few weeks ago is nothing short of extraordinary. Swapping one green uniform for another, he now stands proudly as a Super Bowl LIX champion. This achievement is not just a victory for Jordan, it's a triumph for our entire community. His success exemplifies the power of dedication, belief, and the idea that no dream is ever too big. Jordan has shown us all that with perseverance, anything is possible. Congratulations again Jordan. You have made us all incredibly proud, and you've certainly put Condell Park - and all of NSW - on the map in the world of sport. Your achievement is an inspiration to us all. I can't wait to see where your career takes you.

WILSON LEE

Ms KYLIE WILKINSON (East Hills)—I would like to congratulate, Wilson Lee, the well-deserved winner of my January Sporting Photo competition and outstanding local sportsperson. Wilson is an active player in one of Australia's fastest-growing sports – dodgeball. His team, the Crypto Knights play regularly at the Morris Iemma Indoor Sports Centre and recently competed in a dodgeball tournament in Malaysia. Not only is Wilson a regular dodgeball player - and fantastic photographer - he took part in the Lunar New Year Dragon Boat Races in January. He joined more than 3,000 paddlers on the waters of Cockle Bay Wharf to compete. The race featured 12-meter-long, decorated dragon boats, cutting through the water to the rhythmic beat of drummers. Wilson not only competed but also helped organise a corporate crew for the event. As a thoughtful gesture, he even gifted me a team singlet. It was a pleasure to meet Wilson last week to present him with his prize and chat to him about his sporting endeavours. Wilson's passion, energy, and commitment to these sports is inspiring. He is a fantastic role model for our community.

BANKSTOWN BUSHLAND SOCIETY

Ms KYLIE WILKINSON (East Hills)—Congratulations to the Bankstown Bushland Society for being awarded the Jack Munday Environment and Heritage Award this year at Canterbury-Bankstown Council's Australia Day awards ceremony. Since the Society's establishment in 1988 it has been a steadfast advocate for the preservation of bushland in the Canterbury-Bankstown area and the Georges River catchment. Thank you to all the hard-working volunteers who do such important work taking care of our green spaces for the benefit of everyone in our community. Through dedicated efforts such as study walks, site inspections, and volunteer bush regeneration, they have significantly contributed to identifying rare and threatened plant species and providing an independent voice on environmental issues. The Society's unwavering commitment to safeguarding native vegetation and promoting environmental awareness has made a lasting impact on our community. Their tireless work ensures that future generations can continue to enjoy and appreciate the beauty of our local bushland. Thank you to the Bankstown Bushland Society for all you do for our community's natural environment and your dedication to environmental stewardship and heritage preservation. This is well-deserved recognition of the work of your volunteers over many years.

NEWTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENT LEADERS

Ms JENNY LEONG (Newtown)—On behalf of the Newtown electorate, I would like to recognise the 2024 Newtown Public School Student Parliamentarians and their contribution to the school community. The 2024 Student Parliament includes Ayla Carroll (Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students), Harriet Wedge (Department of Arts and Community), Mike Mishchenko (Department of Student Representative Council), Amelia Semple (Department of Library), Billy Hunter (Department of Media and Communication), Roman Gudelj (Department of Technology), Adrian Racolta (Department of Health and Wellbeing), Julian Williams (Department of Management) and Violet Black (Department of Sustainability). Representing your

school is a highly rewarding way to contribute to the strength and wellbeing of our community - whether at school, in our neighbourhoods, or around the world. It has been so wonderful to see these Student Leaders enact some incredible initiatives over the past year. I acknowledge Newtown Public School's 2024 Student Leaders, and thank them for their contributions to the school, their community and beyond.

RYDE PROFILE IN COURAGE AWARD: JOSEPHINE MOURANI - ST KEVIN'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Mr JORDAN LANE (Ryde)—Mr Speaker, I ask the House to join me in congratulating Josephine Mourani, who is St Kevin's Catholic Primary School Eastwood's recipient of the 2024 Ryde Profile in Courage Award. This esteemed recognition celebrates Josephine's remarkable strength in overcoming challenges and standing by their principles to make a meaningful impact within their school community. By prioritising what is right over what is easy, Josephine has exemplified integrity, leadership, and compassion. Navigating the complexities of youth while remaining steadfast in one's convictions is no small feat. Josephine's courage has not only advanced the values of fairness and justice but also inspired their peers and educators alike. Their actions remind us of the power of a single individual to foster, change and uplift those around them. On behalf of the Ryde community and this House, I commend Josephine for their extraordinary efforts and wish them continued success in all future endeavours. May their courage and determination continue to shine brightly, encouraging others to follow their example. Congratulations, Josephine, on this well-deserved recognition. Always be courageous.

RYDE PROFILE IN COURAGE AWARD: JAXTON TJAN - DENISTONE EAST PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr JORDAN LANE (Ryde)—Mr Speaker, I ask the House to join me in congratulating Jaxton Tjan, who is Denistone East Public School's recipient of the 2024 Ryde Profile in Courage Award. This esteemed recognition celebrates Jaxton's remarkable strength in overcoming challenges and standing by their principles to make a meaningful impact within their school community. By prioritising what is right over what is easy, Jaxton has exemplified integrity, leadership, and compassion. Navigating the complexities of youth while remaining steadfast in one's convictions is no small feat. Jaxton's courage has not only advanced the values of fairness and justice but also inspired their peers and educators alike. Their actions remind us of the power of a single individual to foster, change and uplift those around them. On behalf of the Ryde community and this House, I commend Jaxton for their extraordinary efforts and wish them continued success in all future endeavours. May their courage and determination continue to shine brightly, encouraging others to follow their example. Congratulations, Jaxton, on this well-deserved recognition. Always be courageous.

RYDE PROFILE IN COURAGE AWARD: GABRIELLA IPPOLITO - KENT ROAD PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr JORDAN LANE (Ryde)—Mr Speaker, I ask the House to join me in congratulating Gabriella Ippolito, who is Kent Road Public School's recipient of the 2024 Ryde Profile in Courage Award. This esteemed recognition celebrates Gabriella's remarkable strength in overcoming challenges and standing by their principles to make a meaningful impact within their school community. By prioritising what is right over what is easy, Gabriella has exemplified integrity, leadership, and compassion. Navigating the complexities of youth while remaining steadfast in one's convictions is no small feat. Gabriella's courage has not only advanced the values of fairness and justice but also inspired their peers and educators alike. Their actions remind us of the power of a single individual to foster, change and uplift those around them. On behalf of the Ryde community and this House, I commend Gabriella for their extraordinary efforts and wish them continued success in all future endeavours. May their courage and determination continue to shine brightly, encouraging others to follow their example. Congratulations, Gabriella, on this well-deserved recognition. Always be courageous.

AUSTRALIAN TAIWANESE FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION – LUNAR NEW YEAR

Dr HUGH McDERMOTT (Prospect)—On Sunday 16th February, I was delighted to address our local Taiwanese-Australian community to celebrate Lunar New Year at Zilver Restaurant, Chatswood. New South Wales has a substantial relationship with Taiwan, including trade and investment, education, tourism and people-to-people ties. With a population of more than 23 million people, Taiwan has the 22nd largest economy in the world. We share a commitment to democratic principles, as well as an interest in a rules-based, open, inclusive and stable Indo-Pacific region. Over the past 30 years, the Australian Taiwanese Friendship Association has continued to promote service, education and support for the community, with over 230 active members. At the event, I was pleased to address more than 300 guests from our local Taiwanese-Australian community in attendance, who were also treated to an evening of fantastic food and great company. My heartfelt thanks go out to Kathy Sieh, President, Australian Taiwanese Friendship Association, David Cheng-Wei Wu, Director General, Taipei Economic & Cultural Office in Sydney, and all volunteers, committee and supporters from our Taiwanese-Australian community on a great celebration. Happy Lunar New Year, the Year of the Snake 2025!

AUSTRALIAN EGYPTIAN FORUM COUNCIL - HSC HIGH ACHIEVERS AWARDS

Dr HUGH McDERMOTT (Prospect)—On Tuesday 18th February, as Convenor of the NSW Parliamentary Friends of Egypt Committee, I was pleased to host the annual Australian Egyptian Forum Council HSC High Achievers Awards in the Parliament of NSW. The Awards celebrated the outstanding student achievements from the Australian-Egyptian community in the 2024 Higher School Certificate. This year, over 40 students were acknowledged from schools across Sydney, including St Bishoy College Mount Druitt, St Mark's Coptic Orthodox College Wattle Grove, Al-Faisal College and Presbyterian Ladies College. Together, these students are the future community leaders in Western Sydney and across New South Wales. At the event, I was pleased to address students, teachers, clergy and proud parents from our Coptic and Egyptian Australian community. I was joined by my Parliamentary Colleague Edmond Atalla MP, as well as His Grace, Bishop Daniel, Coptic Orthodox Church Bishop for Sydney and Affiliated Regions. I once again extend my warm congratulations to all students for their academic results, inspiring leadership and enduring community spirit. Congratulations to Michael T. Zaki, President, Amir Salem OAM, Honorary President, and all our volunteers and supporters at the Australian Egyptian Forum Council on another successful event.

TAFE NSW WETHERILL PARK EV CENTRE

Dr HUGH McDERMOTT (Prospect)—I was pleased to join the Hon. Andrew Giles, Federal Minister for Skills and Training and the Hon. Chris Bowen, Federal Minister for Climate Change and Energy, at Wetherill Park TAFE to open the Wetherill Park Electric Vehicle Training Centre. The Wetherill Park EV Training Centre is the result of a \$2.5 million investment by the Commonwealth Government. The new facility will enable training and tertiary qualifications in Electric Vehicles to meet anticipated demand for this new technology. From the heart of the Prospect Electorate, this EV Centre will provide opportunities to support our skilled, local workforce in a competitive new industry. This cutting-edge centre will supercharge the future of manufacturing with advanced training in engineering, transport, and renewable energy. Apprentices will receive hands-on training with latest technology, like smart factories and industrial 3D printing, while forging industry partnerships. Training will also be available to upskill mechanics, in depowering and reinitialising, to perform safe repairs on heavy and light EVs. Thank you to Jason Darney, Executive Director Learning and Teaching, Dan Severino, Director of Learning & Teaching Automotive, Chris Roberts, Western Sydney Automotive Team Leader for creating this opportunity for our Western Sydney community.

WORLD CANCER DAY WALK – PINK SARI INC.

Ms DONNA DAVIS (Parramatta)—On Sunday 9 February, Pink Sari Inc. undertook a Cancer Awareness Walk in Parramatta, to commemorate World Cancer Day. Pink Sari Inc. is a Sydney based non for profit, community volunteer organisation, run by a group of South Asian women volunteers, striving to lessen the impact of cancer within South Asian communities by running education workshops. Walking along the Harris Park Precinct from Jubilee Park to Parramatta Town Hall, Pink Sari Inc. walked to raise awareness about cancer, the importance of screening and early detection for successful treatment, to honour those who have lost their lives to cancer, and to celebrate those who have survived it. Inspiring speakers included Abishek Malik, a tongue cancer survivor. Other cancer survivors, shared stories of their unique cancer journey to over a hundred community members, dressed in their brightest pink attire and pink hats, who walked and danced to the music of an Indian dhol. I congratulate and acknowledge the hard work of the organisers of this event: Abinayalakshmi Meenakshisundaram, Anoop Johar, Aparna Tojoriwala, Dr Rugmini Venkatraman, Rupa Parthasarathy, Dr Usha Salagame, Viji Dhayanathan, Shantha Viswanathan and Padmini Peris.

ELIZABETH DEVLIN – MOTHER TERESA PRIMARY WESTMEAD

Ms DONNA DAVIS (Parramatta)—With great pleasure, I would like to celebrate Elizabeth (Liz) Devlin, a well-known, respected and dedicated educator who served as the Principal of Mother Teresa Primary Westmead from 2018 to 2024. I believe that a principal is not just a role that demands having to practice leadership, but a role that requires calm, composure and the ability to take swift decisions and actions when an unexpected situation arises. Liz is an exemplary leader who commanded all these values and was known for her strong decision-making skills and positive relationships with the school staff, children, parents, carers and parishes. In addition to running the school, she also advocated for a library space in the Westmead Catholic Community Project which not only contributed to improving the education spaces in the local area of Westmead, but at the same time inspired students by becoming a model for them to take forward in their futures. I would like to acknowledge and observe the great work Liz has done in her role, the lives she has helped shape and wish her best of luck in her future endeavours!

CUDGEN SURF LIFE SAVING CLUB NSW COUNTRY CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed)—Cudgen Surf Life Saving Club has had a tremendous result at the recent NSW Country Championships, placing second overall and taking home 73 gold medals. Standout

performances included Under-17 competitor Isabella Tate who won the swim, board, ski and iron events in her division and Hayley Smith claimed gold in the iron and ski events in the open division. Well done to all competitors and to the Cudgen Surf Life Saving Club team for your outstanding efforts at the NSW Country Championships.

ROTARY AUSTRALIA DAY AWARDS

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed)—Congratulations to the deserving recipients of 2025 Australia Day Rotary Community Service Awards. These community volunteers were recognised for their dedication and commitment to helping our community. Recipients included: Kerry Sands from Agape Outreach Inc which is based in Tweed Heads, Jordana Edwards from Agape Outreach Inc and Heart of Women Awards. Edna Gorton from Tweed Palliative Support & Wedgetail Retreat. Well done to all Award winners and thank you to the Rotary Clubs of Murwillumbah and Mt Warning for hosting this year's celebrations.

RHETT MURRAY TWEED DISTRICT RESCUE SQUAD

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed)—Congratulations to Tweed District Rescue Squad [TDRS] volunteer Rhett Murray for receiving an Australia Day Rotary Community Service Award. Rhett joined TDRS in 2006 and has served as Captain and President during his nearly 20 years of service and is currently the Deputy Captain. He also mentors squad members and works as a senior operator. Rhett's time with the squad has seen him assist many people in extremely challenging rescues such as swift water rescues, mountain rescues and car accidents. In October 2024 Rhett received life membership of TDRS for "going beyond the call of duty" in his time with the squad. Thank you Rhett for your service to the Tweed community.

AUSTRALIAN ENDOMETRIOSIS FOUNDATION

Dr MARJORIE O'NEILL (Coogee)—On behalf of the Coogee Electorate, I would like to acknowledge the incredible effort put in by the Australian Endometriosis Foundation in helping young women that are suffering from Endometriosis. The Australian Endometriosis Foundation says that no young woman should go through Endometriosis alone, and offers support and community for all those experiencing this complex and painful condition. Community is important for these young women, as Endometriosis patients often experience medical misogyny, often waiting years to be diagnosed. The community that the Australian Endometriosis Foundation provides creates connection and allows women to reassure and validate each other. It also provides extensive resources to young women. The foundation now has a growing group of over 1000 young women that advocates for changes and their needs. I would like to commend the Australian Endometriosis Foundation for their advocacy and for helping young women with Endometriosis.

THE BEAST MAGAZINE

Dr MARJORIE O'NEILL (Coogee)—The Coogee electorate would like to congratulate the Beast Magazine on 20 years of publishing. January 2025 saw the production of 240th edition of the magazine that services the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney with local news, council updates and local events. The Beast Magazine has for 20 years had shown a commitment to local artists, community groups and well as supporting businesses. As a community magazine it has featured local characters and provided a colourful back drop to the Eastern Suburbs. In a time when local news outlets are under pressure we congratulate the Magazine on its longevity and commitment to the local area.

EMMANUEL SCHOOL NEW PRINCIPAL

Dr MARJORIE O'NEILL (Coogee)—The Coogee Electorate would like to acknowledge Linda Emms for taking on the role of Principal of Emmanuel School. The school announced that the previous Principal of the school, Andrew Watt, will retire his role as the principal of Emmanuel School at the end of 2024, following a 40-year career of service. Linda Emms is a highly respected and experienced educator and leader. We wish Linda Emms the best of luck in her new role, and pledge our support to Emmanuel School and the Jewish community in the Eastern Suburbs.

EAST MAITLAND CWA 75TH ANNIVERSARY

Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland—Minister for Regional Transport and Roads)—I wish to formally recognise and congratulate the East Maitland branch of the Country Women's Association [CWA] on reaching an incredible milestone—75 years of dedicated service to our community. Since its establishment in 1949, the East Maitland CWA has been a cornerstone of support, advocacy, and friendship for women and families across our region. The members of the East Maitland CWA have worked tirelessly through fundraising and charitable initiatives to support rural and regional causes. Their contribution to education, health, disaster relief, and the preservation of local traditions, has had a lasting impact on generations of Maitland residents. The strength and spirit of the CWA lie in its members—women who have given their time, skills, and passion to build a better

community. We honour their achievements and look forward to their continued service in the years to come. I join with the whole community in thanking members past and present for their invaluable contributions to our region and wishing all a very happy birthday.

MAI-WEL GROUP - I AM...

Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland—Minister for Regional Transport and Roads)—Congratulations to the Mai-Wel Group and Maitland City Council for their Walls that Talk "I am..." exhibition. This project brings art into public spaces while celebrating diversity and creativity. Since 1960, Mai-Wel has played a crucial role in supporting people with disability and young people through the NDIS, empowering them with opportunities for employment, independent living, and community participation. Last year's "Walls that Talk" project, "I Am...", showcased the artistic talents of seven Mai-Wel participants who have created stunning headpieces reflecting their personal journeys. Each piece tells a unique story—Michelle's work highlights environmental care, Emma's is a tribute to her pets, Trudi's crown symbolises cultural strength, and Ben's piece embodies his passion for anime and creative writing. Alex drew inspiration from nature, Briety reflected her effervescent personality, and Gabrielle's headpiece was sparkling, inspired by her admiration for Taylor Swift. The project, developed over eight weeks in Mai-Wel's Open Art Studio, allowed artists to explore various materials and techniques under expert mentorship. I commend Mai-Wel for fostering creativity, inclusivity, and meaningful community connections.

MARILYN SECCOMBE, EAST MAITLAND GRANDPARENTS AS PARENTS

Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland—Minister for Regional Transport and Roads)—Congratulations to Marilyn Seccombe for her tireless efforts over the last 12 years as the co-ordinator for East Maitland Grandparents As Parents [GAPs]. Marilyn has been a strong advocate for so many grandparents who find themselves in the challenging position of parenting their grandchildren. Marilyn has demonstrated outstanding compassion, dedication and support for these grandparents and has been a trusted advocate for them with the many government and non-government agencies they interact with, including local Members of Parliament. With around 20 families, made up of 40 children, GAPs has raised funds for annual family holidays as well as providing support and information for grandparents. The care and assistance that Marilyn has brought to her role as co-coordinator has helped ensure that these families have the support systems that they needed to thrive. I sincerely wish Marilyn all the best as she steps away from her role and thank her for her advocacy over the last 12 years.

SITE UNSEEN

Mr TIM CRAKANTHORP (Newcastle)—Local film production company Bad Rev Films has reached new heights, featuring as special guests at the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Awards [AACTA] Festival on the Gold Coast earlier this month. Co-directors Tristram Baumber and Allan Brady, producer Emily Caelli, and actor and producer Zac Garred, were invited to host a panel at the festival to share their experiences filming their new horror comedy, Site Unseen, in Newcastle. Bringing a unique blend of suspense and humour to the screen, this exciting project showcases the incredible skills of Novocastrian emerging artists and filmmakers. Site Unseen and is a fantastic example of Newcastle's growing film industry, and I look forward to seeing the film hit our screens!

GRACE VAN ESVELD

Mr TIM CRAKANTHORP (Newcastle)—I'd like to acknowledge Grace van Esveld, who recently made waves in the Hunter Surf Life Saving community after being named as one of the two Newcastle Permanent Hunter Junior Surf Life Savers of the Year. Grace started her journey with Surf Live Saving as an under 6's member at Cooks Hill Surf Life Saving Club before going on to compete at local carnivals and represent her club at national championships. After earning her Surf Rescue Certificate last year, Grace has continued to give back to her local community as a mentor to the younger nippers kids at her club. Grace's achievements are a testament to her leadership and dedication to supporting the next generation of local surf lifesavers, and I thank her for her contributions to the Newcastle lifesaving community.

RYAN BOUSTEAD

Mr TIM CRAKANTHORP (Newcastle)—I'd like to recognise local lifesaver Ryan Boustead, who was awarded Newcastle Permanent Hunter Junior Surf Life Savers of the Year at the recent Newcastle Permanent Branch Championships. Now a patrolling member of Newcastle's Nobbys Surf Life Saving Club, Ryan has been an active member at local lifesaving clubs since the age of eight. In addition to mentoring younger surf lifesavers, Ryan serves his community through his patrols at Nobbys Beach, and hopes to turn his passion for athletics and lifesaving into a future career as a firefighter. Ryan has played a vital role in supporting the next generation of surf lifesavers, and I thank him for his contributions to the Newcastle life saving community.

FRANCIS O'NEILL

Ms KOBI SHETTY (Balmain)—I would like to acknowledge the sudden passing of Mr Francis O'Neill in January. Francis had an unwavering commitment to social and environmental justice. He took part in protests to save old growth forests where he gained notoriety for disarming police and loggers with his charm and wit. He dodged military blockades in Burma and Bougainville to get photographic evidence out to the wider world, to tell of the atrocities being committed there. He played a key role in the iconic "No War" protest at the Sydney Opera House in 2003. I got to know Francis through his advocacy with Bicycle NSW. We shared a love of bikes and a passion to transform Sydney into a cycle friendly city. He was always eager to collaborate on work to push for bike lanes to make our communities healthier, safer and more sustainable. He never hesitated to share his expertise, or to have challenging conversations with decision makers. I'm so appreciative that I had the opportunity to get to know Francis and be a small part in the work he did to create positive change.

GUNAWIRRA

Ms KOBI SHETTY (Balmain)—Today I recognise the important work of Gunawirra, located in Rozelle, a community-led organisation that supports First Nations mothers, children and communities. For 13 years, Gunawirra has worked alongside First Nations peoples to provide programs that support mothers and children in our community. These programs enable kids to learn in a culturally sensitive way, with the support of school resources and access to speech, art and occupational therapists. Gunawirra also provides mothers with a safe and supportive network of peers and professionals who are there to have yarn. I was very honoured to be able to attend Gunawirra recently to take a look at the progress of their kitchen renovations and to hear about their back-to-school care pack drive for 2025, which provides crucial school supplies to pre-schoolers in regional and remote New South Wales. This organisation represents the very best of our community, and I encourage everyone to get involved in their care pack drive. I thank the many staff and volunteers of Gunawirra for their important work and extend a special thanks to Sonia White and Elijah Duroux for welcoming me to Gunawirra.

ROZELLE CHILD CARE CENTRE

Ms KOBI SHETTY (Balmain)—Today I recognise the important work done in my community by the Rozelle Child Care Centre, with close to forty years of operation. Across that time, the centre has provided a not-for-profit long daycare service for generations of kids in our community. This practice has been informed by the centre's historic and beautiful natural setting in Callan Park, and leading approaches to early childhood education. It was wonderful to be able to visit the Rozelle Childcare centre recently, to see their amazing staff in action with the students. I was pleased to assist this organisation recently through the Community Building Partnership program, which supported the centre's installation of a new awning in their outdoor play area. I hope that the kids enjoy their improved play space when it's complete, and I look forward to continuing to support the important work of the Rozelle Child Care Centre. I thank the many staff and volunteers that make this organisation so special and give particular thanks to the centre's director Dimi Nikoloulis for welcoming me to Rozelle Child Care Centre.

KAREN BOND

Ms JACQUI SCRUBY (Pittwater)—I would like to recognise the outstanding contributions of Karen Bond, a dedicated member of our community whose selfless commitment to Newport has made a lasting impact over the years. Having grown up in Newport, Karen returned over 20 years ago and has since immersed herself in volunteer work, giving her time and energy to numerous local organisations and events. Her involvement spans a variety of roles, from actively participating in school P&Cs, to serving as team manager for both the Avalon Soccer Club and the Newport Rugby Club. Karen has also made significant contributions to both the Newport Chamber of Commerce and the Newport Community Garden for over 10 years. Karen's unwavering dedication to our community is reflected in her ongoing commitment of extensive volunteer work, enriching the lives of those around her. She is a true asset to our area, and it is with great pride that I acknowledge her exceptional service and passion for making Newport a better place for all. Thank you, Karen, for everything you do. If it's on in Newport, inevitably Karen has given her time to make it happen!

MWP COMMUNITY CARE

Ms JACQUI SCRUBY (Pittwater)—I would like to recognise the contribution of MWP Community Care in North Narrabeen, which plays a vital role in enriching the lives of senior residents on the Northern Beaches. The organisation ensures residents remain independent at home, safe, socially engaged and feel valued within their community. It provides essential social support services, including home modifications and maintenance, recreational activities, practical assistance, and importantly fosters meaningful social connections. Their Silver Surfers bodyboarding initiative is an extraordinary example of health, fun and connection to nature. This work is made possible by the unwavering dedication of individuals like Matt Adderton and Chloe Feris,

whose commitment to the well-being of others is outstanding. Matt's vision has been instrumental in driving initiatives that prioritise dignity and respect for all. Chloe's fresh, hands-on approach and empathetic spirit inspire both volunteers and the residents they support, creating an inclusive community where everyone can thrive. Together, their efforts have elevated MWP Community Care's impact, creating a cornerstone of support for senior residents. By addressing both emotional and social needs, Matt and Chloe exemplify the values of community, compassion, and care, ensuring that every individual embraces ageing and is empowered to live with purpose.

FAREWELL KAREN AT AUSTRAL BOWLING CLUB

Mr NATHAN HAGARTY (Leppington)—There are some people whose impact on their community is too great not to be recognised, and for the people of Austral, Karen Butler is unmistakably one of those unique people. Karen has tirelessly contributed to the success of Club Austral as its General Manager over the last 12 years. Club Austral has long been a key establishment in the community, from its great food and memorable Sunday trivia nights to the annual and very lively two up competition every ANZAC Day. I sincerely thank her for her dedication and warmth support to the community and myself personally. Though she will most definitely be missed, her lasting impact on the Austral community means her presence will still be felt. We wish you the best of luck Karen, and celebrate the continuing impact you are set to make in your new venture.

AUSTRALIA BANGLADESH HEALTH FORUM – FATHER'S DAY AFTERNOON TEA

Mr NATHAN HAGARTY (Leppington)—On the 1st of September 2024, I had the honour of attending and speaking at the Australia Bangladesh Health Forum's [ABHF INC] Father's Day event. The event sparked meaningful discussions on the often-overlooked topic of men's health, highlighting the importance of family relationships, and featured inspiring stories from the next generation about their superhero dads. It was a touching reminder of the vital role that fathers play in our lives, and the need to ensure their health and wellbeing are given the attention they deserve. The ABHF serves as a hub for collaboration, professional development, peer support, and advocacy, helping to amplify the voices of Bangladeshi health professionals within the broader Australian healthcare community. Their mission is to foster a strong, supportive network while raising awareness and promoting health initiatives. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to ABHF for creating such an impactful platform. Through their dedication to inclusivity, collaboration, and empowerment, they have built a legacy that benefits not only Bangladeshi health professionals but the broader Bangladeshi community in Australia. Their collective vision is truly helping to shape a healthier future for all.

FUTURE FOCUS HUB

Mr CHRIS MINNS (Kogarah—Premier)—I would like to recognise and commend Elissa Killen and Sarah Halwagy for launching the new tutoring service for students, Future Focus Hub in Mortdale. Mrs Killen of Carlton was previously a caseworker for the Salvation Army before pursuing her love for improving people's lives in the academic space. Ms Halwagy is a former teacher from Peakhurst with comprehensive knowledge of the NSW syllabus. Mrs Killen's and Ms Halwagy's steadfast passion and exceptional skills in education is inspirational and beneficial for our local community. Future Focus Hub offers a supportive space, providing homework guidance and opportunities to build confidence and connect with peers. Education is an integral part of ensuring our children's future and I wish Mrs Killen, Ms Halwagy and Future Focus Hub all the best in their endeavours of improving the academic space in our local St George area.

JOHN POOLE

Mr CHRIS MINNS (Kogarah—Premier)—I voice my commendations and admiration towards the artistic talent of Beverley Park's John Poole. The online art gallery Bluethumb has unveiled Mr Poole as one of the top ten artists to watch in 2025. Bluethumb represents over 20,000 emerging and established Australian artists and is Australia's largest online art gallery! Mr Poole's landscape, still life and portraiture is inspired by places he visits and explores nostalgic Australian themes. After Mr Poole's artistic success in 2023, winning the Best Oil Painting award at the St George Art Society Annual Exhibition, he put his paintings on Bluethumb and has sold nearly 40 works on the platform in a year. I would like to congratulate Mr Poole on this immense achievement and his dedication to his craft.

BAYSIDE WOMEN'S SHELTER

Mr CHRIS MINNS (Kogarah—Premier)—I wish to commend and recognise Bayside Women's Shelter for their support and dedication helping women and families in crisis, providing a home to homeless women and women experiencing family and domestic violence. Through their collaboration with the Women's Community Shelters, another such organisation that provides critical services to women in need, they work with the community to educate people about important issues as well as prevent domestic and family violence. Providing a practical service, through accommodation, food and safe refuge, as well as emotional support to help women rebuild their lives, Bayside Women's Shelter has become a fundamental establishment within the community.

Thank you to the shelter for providing a supportive environment for women of any age, sexuality, cultural and linguistic diversity or disability. Additionally, thank you to the community volunteers who have assisted with decorating the shelter and the organisation of a winsome children's Christmas party. I want to thank the shelters and the volunteers for the indispensable contribution they have made to the community and the helping hand they have given to the women, children and families in need.

ALOYSIUS' SPORTING EXCELLENCE

Ms FELICITY WILSON (North Shore)—I want to celebrate the outstanding achievements of several St Aloysius' students, who have excelled in the sporting arena. Congratulations to Year 12 students Jack and Nicholas on their selection to the CAS Representative Cricket team. They have earned the opportunity to showcase their talents against ISA and GPS teams. Also performing on the cricket pitch, I congratulate Year 10 students Alexander, Leo, and Henry, who have been selected for the U15 CAS Representative Cricket team. I wish them all the best as they play against the Chairman's 15 Year XI in March. In water polo, Year 6 students George, Xander, and Christian, and Year 7 student Zak, represented their clubs at the NSW State Water Polo Championships in December. Congratulations boys on earning bronze medals. Congratulations to Year 10 student Jian for his selection as an Australian Junior Short Track Speed Skater for the ISU Junior World Cup in Canada, which takes place this month. A remarkable achievement. These accomplishments reflect the talent and spirit of Aloysius' students. I look forward to seeing what they achieve in future.

REDDAM HOUSE OFFICIAL OPENING

Ms FELICITY WILSON (North Shore)—Speaker, I am thrilled to extend a warm welcome to Reddam House North Shore as they join the vibrant educational community on the north side of the bridge. My electorate is fortunate to have some of the best public, private, and selective schools in the state and it's exciting to see another high calibre institution enter the fold. It was an honour to attend their official opening earlier this week. I'd like to especially acknowledge the dynamic principals, Dave and Dee Pitcairn, who are spearheading the launch of Reddam House North Shore. I look forward to watching the school thrive under their vision and appreciate their generosity in including me in the opening celebrations. I also want to recognise the tireless efforts of the team behind the scenes, whose hard work made this school's construction and opening a reality. A special thank you to Inspired Education CEO Glenn Andrew, Built Development Director Jono Cottee, and the talented team at both Harry Seidler & Associates and AJC Architects for their contributions to this outstanding school. I am excited to see Reddam House become an integral part of the North Shore community. Welcome!

KIRRIBILLI'S PARENT HOPE PROJECT

Ms FELICITY WILSON (North Shore)—Speaker, I want to celebrate the launch of the Parent Hope Project by the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre and KYDS Youth Counselling Service. It delivers free, local programs designed to empower parents and carers in supporting their children. Although this initiative is in its infancy, it is already providing a much-needed service for my community. My community is close-knit, embodying the common phrase 'it takes a village,' and the Parent Hope Project is providing just that. The program offers a seven-week, manualised approach where parents can collaborate with professionals to discover new ways to connect with their children. As a single mother to two young and boisterous children, I am strongly supportive of initiatives aimed at aiding parents in their journey to better support their children. I commend Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre staff Jo Harvey, Ari Maiti, Dianne McHattan, Roger Hack, Isabella Armstrong, Zak Irfan, Lewis Cavender, William Norrie, Huseyn Zinciri, and Ozan Zincirci, as well as all involved from KYDS Youth Counselling Service, for their incredible efforts in establishing the Parent Hope Project. Thank you for responding to a genuine need in our community.

JANNALI PUBLIC SCHOOL LEADERS

Ms ELENi PETINOS (Miranda)—I congratulate the 2025 student leadership team of Jannali Public School on their appointment. Being democratically elected by your peers is an incredible achievement of which these students should be proud of. I encourage them to make the most of this fantastic opportunity to contribute to their school community and to develop the skills that shape our community - enabling them to be professional leaders of the future. I use this occasion in NSW Parliament to acknowledge Jannali Public School's student leadership team for 2025, namely Captains Gabriella Hogan and Amity Gilbert, Vice Captains Maya Berry, Max Hogan, Lucas King and Owen Martin and Sports Captains Henry Gray, Katie Hotchkiss, Callum Michels, Maddison Ryan, Thomas Elkin, Hayden Henderson, Matilda Green and Joshua Matthews. With the guidance of their incredible Principal Narelle Chaplin, I have every confidence that these dedicated students will capably lead their peers through what will be their most important year of schooling thus far and be role models to their entire school community. I extend my best wishes to these student leaders as they continue to exemplify Jannali Public School's motto of 'Strength in Wisdom'.

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL'S STUDENT LEADERSHIP TEAM

Ms ELENi PETINOS (Miranda)—I congratulate the exceptional student leadership team of Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School [OLSS] on their appointment. Being democratically elected by your peers is an incredible achievement of which these students should be proud. I encourage them to make the most of this fantastic opportunity to contribute to their school community and to develop the skills that shape the community and professional leaders of the future. I use this occasion to acknowledge OLSS' student leadership team for 2025, namely School Captains Monique Kamper and Christian Chang, Vice Captains Charlotte Libbis and Angus Rowland and Prefects Cooper Lieshout, Ava Culbert, Luca Di Biasi, Brennabelle Dela Pena. With the guidance of their hard-working Principal Michelle Bourne, I have every confidence that these dedicated students will capably lead their peers through what will be their most important year of schooling thus far and be role models to their entire school community. I extend my best wishes to these student leaders as they continue to exemplify Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School's motto of 'Living the Gospel values through our actions and attitudes'.

GYMEA NORTH PUBLIC SCHOOL'S STUDENT LEADERSHIP TEAM

Ms ELENi PETINOS (Miranda)—I congratulate the incoming student leadership team of GyMEA North Public School on their appointment. Being democratically elected by your peers is an incredible achievement of which these students should be proud. I encourage them to make the most of this fantastic opportunity to contribute to their school community and to develop the skills that shape the community and professional leaders of the future. I use this occasion in NSW Parliament to acknowledge the student leadership team for 2025, namely School Captains Simone Glasson and Harrison Teen and Vice Captains Chloe Mackay and Tristan Dadley. With the guidance of their incredible Principal, Kirsty Sharman, I have every confidence that these dedicated students will capably lead their peers through what will be their most important year of schooling thus far and be role models to their entire school community. I extend my best wishes to these student leaders as they continue to exemplify GyMEA North Public School's motto of 'service and loyalty'.

KU-RING-GAI CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Mr MATT CROSS (Davidson)—In March 2025, I look forward to hosting the Ku-ring-gai Chamber of Commerce at the Parliament of NSW. I am a proud supporter of our local chamber. Since its establishment in 2009, the chamber has continually supported local businesses, undertaken advocacy and being a strong voice. Many of the businesses are small business. As I often remark, small business is too big to take for granted. This has been done through forums and events that promote collaboration, networking and discussing ideas. Their motto is very relevant, "Connecting the Ku-ring-gai Business Community". I recognise President Adrienne McLean and the committee Michael Adams, Donna Cornford, Dale Crosby, Paula O'Connell and Brian Rubin. I encourage all residents to shop local and support our local economy. This helps create local jobs and economic growth. I am proud to represent the Ku-ring-gai Chamber of Commerce and its members in the Parliament of NSW.

RALPH KERSHLER

Mr MATT CROSS (Davidson)—I recognise constituent and former teacher Mr. Ralph Kershler of North Turramurra in the Parliament of NSW. Ralph is very well known and respected by thousands of students and staff that have attended St Leo's Catholic College in Wahroonga. He started as a teacher in 1987 and recently retired after 35 years. In that time, Ralph undertook leadership positions that included Religious Education Coordinator and Youth Ministry Coordinator. Ralph is most well-known for organising retreats and excursions. This included spiritual retreats for year 11 and 12 students, that included to the Jamberoo Abbey run by the Benedictine nuns, as well as street retreats where students saw and met with our most vulnerable. He helped destigmatise the plight of homelessness. Ralph was instrumental in promoting compassion and empathy to all. I recognise Barbara, Ralph's wife, for all her partnership and support to Ralph and his work over many decades. Thank you, Ralph.

CHANUKAH IN KU-RING-GAI 2024-25

Mr MATT CROSS (Davidson)—In December 2024 and January 2025, I was proud to celebrate Chanukah in Ku-ring-gai with our local and vibrant Jewish community. Chanukah is the eight-day festival of lights that is celebrated with a nightly menorah lighting, special prayers and fried foods. The festival celebrates the rededication of the Holy Temple. I thank Ku-ring-gai Council for erecting a menorah for all to see on the Pacific Highway in Gordon. I was honoured to mark the lead up to Chanukah on 18 December 2024 at the Ku-ring-gai Council chambers. It was wonderful to see and catch up with our local rabbis. I recognise Rabbi Nochum Schapiro, Rabbi Mendy Schapiro and Rabbi Chanoch Sufrin from Chabad House in St Ives; Rabbi Natti Frieder from Kehillat Masada Synagogue; and Rabbi Paul Lewin from North Shore Synagogue. On 25 December

2024, the St Ives Village Green came alive for the first night of Chanukah. I am proud to represent a vibrant local Jewish community in the Parliament of NSW.

PATRICK SHIRVINGTON – 2024 ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

Mr MARK HODGES (Castle Hill)—I congratulate Patrick Shirvington, who was awarded Environmental Citizen of the Year at The Hills Shire Council's Australia Day Awards held on 22 January 2025. Patrick is a highly regarded landscape artist and illustrator, known both locally and internationally for his environmental and artistic contributions. Passionate about the natural world, Patrick works as a bush regenerator for the National Trust, dedicating his time to preserving and restoring local ecosystems. His commitment to environmental education is evident through his nature-journaling workshops for The Hills Shire Council's Environment Workshop program, where he inspires the next generation to connect with and appreciate the environment. Patrick has also served as an artist-in-residence at Bundanoon, Gibberagong Environmental Education Centre, and various schools across Sydney, using his artistic talents to highlight the beauty and importance of the natural landscape. His dedication to conservation and environmental awareness has made a lasting impact on our community. Congratulations to Patrick Shirvington on this well-deserved recognition and thank you for your continued efforts in protecting and celebrating our local environment. Well done Patrick.
