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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday 5 August 2015

The Speaker (The Hon. Shelley Elizabeth Hancock) took the chair at 10.00 a.m.

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I draw the attention of members to the presence in the gallery of approximately 50 students from Mosman Church of England Preparatory School, who are guests of the Minister for Health and member for North Shore. Welcome.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

HEALTH SERVICES AMENDMENT (PARAMEDICS) BILL 2015

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 4 August 2015.

Mrs MELINDA PAVEY (Oxley) [10.12 a.m.]: As many speakers in debate on the Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015 have pointed out, the paramedic profession is voted the most trusted in Australia. According to more than 1,200 Australians surveyed by Australian Reader's Digest in its 2014 Most Trusted Professions survey, paramedics still top the list of professions the Australian community has the most faith in—and so they should. This level of public recognition is well deserved given paramedics perform their duties with the utmost professionalism and compassion without expecting recognition in return.

Currently in New South Wales the profession of paramedic is well regulated but unfortunately there is still no restriction on the title of "paramedic". This is an important issue for paramedics and this bill will make clear the distinction between trained, qualified paramedics and those providing other types of care, including first aid or non-emergency patient transport. It will make it an offence for any person to use the title of "paramedic" if they do not hold the required qualifications. The required qualifications will be set out in regulations under the legislation. As the Minister for Health said before the election:

This is a vote of confidence in the clinical capabilities of our state's paramedics and an acknowledgement of the life-saving role they play in providing out of hospital medical care.

The protection of title will also give patients and their loved ones the confidence that when in the hands of a New South Wales paramedic, they are receiving the very best clinical care.

Most paramedics in New South Wales are employees of the Ambulance Service of NSW. About 3,400 paramedics are employed by the Ambulance Service, which represents around 80 to 90 per cent of all paramedics in the State. As mentioned, paramedics are well regulated in New South Wales. In particular, members of the Ambulance Service of NSW are subject to the NSW Health Code of Conduct. New South

Wales paramedics are also subject to the code of conduct for unregistered health professionals in New South Wales.

The code of conduct sets out a number of standards to protect the safety of the public. This bill seeks to protect the public further by ensuring that only suitably qualified persons can call themselves a paramedic. Importantly, this bill will not impede the recognition of prior learning or the experience in other jurisdictions one may have. The education and training required of paramedics is similar across Australia and will be set out in the regulations. This will allow appropriately qualified paramedics from other jurisdictions that do not protect title to hold themselves out as a paramedic in New South Wales.

Paramedics in this State receive training in a number of institutions across Australia. A degree course has been available in Victoria for a number of years and a friend of mine, Buck Reed—a former paramedic in New South Wales—teaches at the University of Western Sydney. I am also very proud of the work that Charles Sturt University does in training paramedics across the State. It is important to note that paramedics are incredibly well qualified and professional in their work and they have an enormous capacity to further enhance the health of the State's population.

In my time as Parliamentary Secretary for Regional and Rural Health I was particularly proud of some paramedics in the north-west of the State who came together and joined with the local health service, the Hunter New England Health Service, to create a relationship between the two sectors of the health services to ensure that paramedics in a community where there were fewer than 100 transfers a month were able to work in a community health-type setting within that community. It was a very sensible idea; it meant that a paramedic could go into a local pub, for instance, and test the heart rate, blood pressure and cholesterol levels of a patron to prevent an emergency situation occurring.

Having that primary care capacity involving paramedics where there is not a lot of patient transport is a very sensible initiative and some very excited paramedics across the State are pushing for this type of initiative, which is supported by the Government. The Government has a duty of care and responsibility to ensure that we keep people healthy and well in their home environment within their communities so that people do not have to go to emergency departments or have to call triple-0 because they have been unable to get access to the most basic primary care. That is particularly an issue for regional and rural New South Wales and I believe paramedics have a very big part to play in giving country people access to good primary care. As the Minister said in her second reading speech:

Their [paramedics] expertise is second to none and I am pleased the Government is acting to ensure the critical role they play in the health system is protected.

And, I add, also the special qualifications and the extra training they have undertaken to get to that point. This bill will give patients and their loved ones the confidence that when in the hands of a New South Wales paramedic they are receiving the very best clinical care.

Ms KATE WASHINGTON (Port Stephens) [10.17 a.m.]: I speak in debate on the Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015. The Opposition supports this bill and I acknowledge the Government's efforts to support paramedics by ensuring that there is proper use of the title "paramedic". Given the important role paramedics play in our communities, clarity is vital as to who can use the title "paramedic" so that people in our communities can have faith that those tending to them in times of emergency have the requisite qualifications and experience. However, I urge the Government to go further to support paramedics and the communities they support by ensuring that they are adequately resourced to meet the communities' health needs.

As was recently reported in the *Sun Herald* and the *Newcastle Herald*, a family in my electorate, living at Bob's Farm, was forced to wait 43 minutes for an ambulance to arrive whilst their two-year-old son suffered seizures. It was a terrifying experience that no parents should have to endure and it was almost four times the acceptable wait time. I am pleased to report that young Cooper Harrison survived

his ordeal. But his parents, like many others in my community, are concerned about potential outcomes. What if ambulance response times are not improved? What if they get worse? This is not an isolated story.

I have also heard from a medical practice in Tea Gardens where an elderly gentleman presented at 11.00 a.m. The doctor then determined that he required treatment at hospital and needed intravenous [IV] fluids immediately. The medical practice called for an ambulance and was told that no service would be available for at least one hour. At 2.50 that afternoon an ambulance arrived to take the gentleman to hospital to receive the immediate treatment determined by the doctor. What will it take for NSW Health to adequately resource the Ambulance Service?

Many people know that Port Stephens is a beautiful place to live. Consequently many people come to Port Stephens in their retirement and that means it has an ageing population living on a peninsula. It is a high-density area with a significant number of aged-care facilities which amounts to a community that has significant health needs. Perhaps one could even say that the health needs are somewhat greater than in other areas and, yet, the local Tomaree Hospital has no X-ray capacity. Quite frankly it is unbelievable that Tomaree Hospital has no on-site X-ray capacity. Instead, patients requiring an X-ray are transported to Nelson Bay town centre to the Hunter Imaging Group, but with a couple of catches.

Hunter Imaging is only open during business hours Monday to Friday. Hunter Imaging Group has come to an arrangement whereby Tomaree Hospital can utilise their services on a Saturday in the window between 2.00 p.m. and 3.00 p.m. On a Sunday there are no X-ray facilities at all. This is an area that not only has a high level of healthcare needs but also hosts football tournaments, triathlons, water sports, scuba diving—you name it, we have it. But the real catch is transport. How do patients travel from the hospital to where the only X-ray facilities are available at the Hunter Imaging Group? Patient transport is one answer. Let us explore how that system works.

When hospital staff identify someone who needs X-ray facilities they call someone in Sydney to arrange a patient transport service that operates out of Newcastle to attend Tomaree Hospital, over one hour away. They eventually arrive and transport a patient a few blocks to gain access to X-ray facilities. But it gets better still: on a Saturday, when the hospital only has the 2.00 p.m. to 3.00 p.m. window to access X-ray facilities, patient transport cannot guarantee that it will be able to meet that timing. On Sunday no transport is needed because no X-ray facilities are available. So, when this broken, wasteful system fails—when patient transport is not available or when it does not arrive in time—who picks up the pieces? It is the Ambulance Service.

Ambulances are regularly called on to transport people who cannot access the health services they need locally to Newcastle hospitals. They are often called on to transfer people from hospitals to their homes or even to access X-ray facilities that are not available in the local hospital. When local health services are not capable of meeting the health needs of people in my community, ambulances are required to deliver people to the John Hunter Hospital or the Calvary Mater hospital in Newcastle. When patients arrive at those hospitals ambulance officers have to wait for hours, attending to their patient until their patient can gain access to the emergency department.

Mr Lee Evans: Point of order: My point of order is Standing Order 76 that requires the member's contribution to be relevant to the bill.

The SPEAKER: Order! That point of order was raised as an issue with Acting-Speaker Marshall yesterday quite appropriately in relation to this bill. However, he also emphasised that Speakers have traditionally allowed a fair bit of latitude to all members who are participating in a debate. I have been listening to the member for Port Stephens, whose contribution so far has been relevant. I remind the member for Port Stephens that at some stage she should relate her comments to the bill. I draw her attention to Standing Order 76 on relevance.

Ms KATE WASHINGTON: When ambulances arrive at the John Hunter or Calvary Mater hospitals, their patients cannot enter the emergency department because they face what we know as trolley block or bed block, which means that instead of the paramedics being on deck in Port Stephens they are in Newcastle hospitals. They spend hours out of our area because of inadequately resourced hospitals. But it gets better still, because the closest vehicle response policy means that when our ambulance operators then try to return to outlying areas, like Port Stephens, they are often caught in built-up areas due to the higher demand on services. They get caught in a void, trying to assist with the demand for their services in Newcastle. Meanwhile, Port Stephens is left with inadequate emergency response capability. There is just no fat in the system. The worst example of the difficulties and the broken system that is faced in Port Stephens was reported on 4 August 2013 by Alison Branley in the *Newcastle Herald* relating to the tragic death of 19-month old Molly Mackander. The article states:

When Melissa Brittain and David Mackander think about their daughter Molly's death they will always wonder if it could have been prevented had Tomaree Hospital been better equipped.

The 19-month-old, from Nelson Bay, died on Easter Monday this year after a series of catastrophic events meant the community hospital was the twin girl's only hope ...

Molly only had minor symptoms normally associated with teething and it wasn't until Ms Brittain got her out of bed at 8am on Easter Monday that Molly started vomiting a mix of blood and sputum.

Her parents asked for an ambulance to go to Tomaree Hospital but, sadly, it went to their house. The Careflight helicopter was stranded in Coffs Harbour. A John Hunter Hospital team of doctors tried to get to their home but due to holiday traffic it was prevented from arriving in a timely way. The article continues:

Her parents learned Tomaree Hospital lacked x-ray and ultrasound equipment. No on-site pathology testing meant doctors had no way to properly diagnose Molly. Staff gave Molly steroids to help her breathing, something Molly's parents would later learn may have progressed her demise.

Ms Brittain doesn't blame doctors at the scene, who she said did everything they could.

"If they had have got x-ray or ultrasound they would have been able to see what was going on with Molly and treatment might have been different," she said.

That sad state of affairs still remains in Port Stephens. Paramedics no doubt appreciate the clarity that this bill offers them and their profession. However, what they would really like to see is some relief—relief from their constant concern that the system is not going to be adequate for them to be able to carry out their job, and relief from the constant thought that the system, due to inadequate resourcing, will cost someone their lives on their watch as it did with Molly Mackander.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members that all occupants of the chair allow latitude during debate, but members should relate their comments in some way to the bill before the House. I understand that during this debate members wish to place on record serious issues as outlined by the member for Port Stephens. I remind all members that at some stage during their 10-minute address they must relate their comments to the legislation before the House.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.27 a.m.]: An advanced first aid officer should not necessarily be called a paramedic. Many employees of private entities working in New South Wales at events, festivals and entertainment venues who have crowd responsibilities should not be called paramedics. It is not currently illegal in New South Wales to wear a flashy jumpsuit with

"Paramedic" emblazoned on it. Unfortunately this does happen currently in an inappropriate way. There are those who might fantasise that they are real-life heroes, motivated by potential personal prestige. There are also those who might gain extra credibility or employment opportunity by appearing as a paramedic motivated by financial profit. Just because someone calls themselves a paramedic does not necessarily mean that they should be regarded as one.

Similarly, just because some Labor speakers yesterday in this debate tried to trash our health system in New South Wales and mislead people about State health funding, does not negate the fact that we have one of the best health systems in the world. Nevertheless, our health system can always be better—and this bill aims to make it better. Paramedics perform life-saving procedures under time pressure in a variety of often remote and difficult locations on patients with complicated and frequently unique medical problems. Currently, anyone who wants to call themselves a paramedic may do so regardless of their training and qualifications. That remains a risk to patients and potential patients in New South Wales.

The Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015 amends the Health Services Act 1987 to require any person who claims to be a paramedic to hold the necessary qualifications and experience or risk committing an offence under the Act as revised. It is paramount that the people of New South Wales have confidence in their paramedics. By establishing parameters under which people may identify themselves as paramedics the public will be more confident about their experience and qualifications. Further, there should be better health outcomes as a result of increased professionalism in the area. Australian research published in the *Journal of Emergency Primary Health Care* indicates that paramedics want to be recognised as professionals. I know that is also the view of my sister Camille, who, in addition to being a wonderful person, is a fine paramedic in our system.

While it is not part of the bill, I ask: How might our society do even more to value paramedics in New South Wales while being mindful of the increased professionalism and status that we will afford them by passing this legislation? As always, the first option is to enhance remuneration. That is always a challenge. Public servants do an excellent job but there are limited financial resources. However, perhaps the increased recognition of them as professionals might lend greater weight to the case for enhancing their financial benefits in the future. Secondly, members of the public should not treat paramedics and ambulances as a glorified taxi service. Some people—a disproportionate number of who have an entitlement to use an ambulance and thereby have access to paramedics—abuse the system and use ambulances and paramedics in situations that are far from being life threatening or emergencies. That is a sensitive matter to deal with. While we do not want to remove people's rights to use ambulances and access paramedics, there are some members of the public who should wake up to themselves and stop abusing a valuable resource in our community.

The third option goes to a point that the member for Port Stephens touched on. There is scope to better utilise the expertise of paramedics and the ambulances they staff as a valuable resource by encouraging New South Wales institutions to use alternative transport where reasonably possible. I know the Minister for Health is looking at that issue, and it may well be that matters will be brought before this House shortly to help address it. Fourthly, one of the ways that we can better recognise increased professionalism is to require increased accountability of paramedics, including the ongoing educational requirements and professional standards that go hand in hand with an increasingly professionalised vocation. The education of paramedics has increasingly shifted from in-service and vocational education and training [VET] courses conducted by the Ambulance Service to the university sector.

Paramedics now more commonly hold undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Recognition of those extended levels of training is appropriate. Recognising paramedics as healthcare specialists with unique experience and qualifications will enable them to advertise their careers with pride within New South Wales and beyond as their valuable status and contribution is better recognised. Three main factors will determine someone's ability to be called a paramedic in New South Wales: education, training and experience. Many higher education institutions currently offer paramedical courses, some of which

the previous Government speaker mentioned. They require three years of study as well as on-the-job training before students graduate as paramedics. That is now becoming the norm and the qualifications are clearer.

The other factors are in-house training and experience. Many people who have been working as paramedics for numerous years without holding tertiary qualifications will not be overlooked. The bill contains grandfathering arrangements to allow the health secretary to authorise who will be able to call themselves a paramedic based on an employee's experience, training and years of service. By introducing these amendments the New South Wales Government is protecting the critical role that paramedics play in the health system. Paramedics are often the first point of contact for those who require urgent medical assistance.

Their professionalism and quick thinking often determine a patient's long-term health outcomes and their future quality of life. The New South Wales Government wants the people of New South Wales to know that all people who call themselves paramedics are fully qualified to provide vital emergency treatment under difficult circumstances to the highest level of expertise and proficiency. The Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015 should provide confidence and assurance to patients and families when paramedics respond to their out-of-hospital emergency health needs. I commend the bill to the House.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order! I welcome to the public gallery parents of students from Wiley Park Public School, who are guests of the member for Lakemba.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland) [10.36 a.m.]: I support the Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015, which will make it an offence for a person to use the title "paramedic" if they do not hold the required qualifications. It is essential for anyone who calls themselves a paramedic to be a trained, qualified paramedic. Our paramedics need the support of our legislation and Government. They also need our gratitude for the important work they do. But, ultimately, this amendment is symbolic. Although the bill supports paramedics by respecting their training and qualifications by making it illegal to pretend to be one, I find myself longing for another amendment that would make it illegal for someone to pretend to be a Minister for Health without actually delivering any services. I believe anyone who calls themselves the Minister for Health should show commitment and keep promises about building desperately needed hospitals and ambulance stations.

Mr Gareth Ward: Point of order: Attacks on members must be done by way of substantive motion. The member for Maitland is impugning the motives of the Minister for Health by suggesting that she has not delivered on her promises, which is not true. I ask you to draw her back to the leave of the bill.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order! I remind members that if they wish to attack any Minister or member of this place they should do so by way of substantive motion and not in the course of debating legislation.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: The Government has stripped so many resources from paramedics that many people believe it is now faster for them to make their own way to hospital. Worse still, people who make their own way to hospital often find a lack of beds when they get there. On 7 March 2013 at 5.30 a.m. Michael Johnson of Rutherford called an ambulance for his wife, Paula, who was in her sixties. She had awoken with severe dizziness and vomiting. They were unable to get an ambulance to come to them and so Mr Johnson, who had a broken foot, was forced to drive his wife to the hospital, where she was rushed to the emergency department and underwent five hours of tests and treatment. How dangerous was it for an injured man in his sixties to drive his wife, who had symptoms that could have been indicative of stroke, to the hospital? It is disgraceful.

Why would someone be forced to do that? The answer is clear: There are not enough

paramedics—not even in name only—and when people get to hospital there are not enough beds. Across New South Wales health resources are stretched beyond belief. In response to public need, paramedics are working on their days off to fill gaps in rosters and doing long hours of overtime. Maitland Hospital was declared code red over the most recent Christmas period yet in 4½ years the Government has not added one bed to that hospital. When Mr Johnson arrived at the hospital early on that morning in 2013 he was told there was only one ambulance crew working in Maitland—from Rutherford—that night. At the time there were no plans to increase staffing levels. A survey then undertaken by the *Maitland Mercury* indicated that approximately 93 per cent of people in my electorate believe ambulance services in and around Maitland are inadequate for our population.

The Government said at the time that it did not intend to increase the capacity of our Ambulance Service to employ more paramedics. However, it has since bowed to community pressure and finally agreed to look at building a second local ambulance station. During the recent election campaign the Government committed to build this station and provided the costings. But we cannot find a line item in the budget papers that aligns with that commitment or meets that need. I have requested a briefing from the Minister's office on this and other health issues in my electorate but I have received no response. A new hospital and a new ambulance station are needed desperately in my electorate. They have been promised but not delivered. All we get are the Minister's media releases, lip-service and promises of planning but no action. She takes no action; she is Minister in name only.

Maitland has been promised this new hospital for five years. I remind those opposite that during those same five years the electorate was represented by a member of the Liberal Party. In Labor's last term of office a \$10 million upgrade to the Maitland Hospital emergency department was undertaken and that funding delivered 13 new treatment spaces, 12 new beds and 300 jobs during the construction phase. So far this Government has promised us an incredible shrinking hospital. It has ranged in size from being a John Hunter Hospital of 630 beds to a tertiary hospital of 550 beds, including a teaching function.

It was to be an additional resource to Maitland Hospital's existing 188 beds. The best-case scenario was that potential bed numbers in my community would increase to 820. That is a great idea for a community that grows by an extra five people every day. Unfortunately, it has remained just that: an idea. During community consultations in early 2014 the Government promised everything: a blank cheque and whatever services people wanted. Then we received the sad news during the November consultations—I note that these were held after the former member for Maitland advised that she would no longer—

Mr Michael Johnsen: Point of order: If the member for Maitland knows her standing orders she will also know that her comments are completely irrelevant to the bill before the House.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order! Is the member for Upper Hunter drawing my attention to Standing Order 76?

Mr Michael Johnsen: I ask that you draw the member for Maitland back to the leave of the bill.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order! The member for Maitland will resume her seat. Yesterday I was in the chair when the House was considering this bill and I reminded members of Standing Order 76 and previous rulings by Speakers Kelly and Rozzoli in relation to members confining their remarks to the leave of the bill and its potential implications. They can be found in and are derived from the short title of the bill. The bill is very specific: It is about paramedics and their title. Previous occupants of the chair have granted latitude to members during debate, but the general proviso is that members relate their remarks to the bill. I remind members of that practice. Members should not exceed the latitude that has been extended by me and by other occupants of the chair.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I point out the inability to apply the definitions in a way that produces

outcomes in the community. We must recognise that paramedics are highly qualified, and we should treat them as such. That is the point of the bill. We should ensure that promises about health deliver good outcomes for our community. The bed block at Maitland Hospital impacts on our ambulance services. The hospital will now be half the size of John Hunter Hospital, with 315 beds. The existing hospital is closed, which removes another 188 beds. If we include Morisset Hospital, which has 80 beds, it means that Maitland will be left with 47 more beds than it started with. We can call paramedics whatever we like; it does not matter if we do not have the beds for them to put people in.

This Government must be clear on what it is trying to achieve with this bill. It should be about patient outcomes and ensuring that those in our community who need the services of a paramedic—not people who are looking for a taxi, as the member for Davidson mentioned—receive them. The Government must take this matter seriously; I am sick of Government members saying one thing and meaning something else. I am concerned that by giving a statutory value to the title of paramedic the Government could change the definition of first responders. Firemen and other emergency services workers could then take on work that was previously performed by the Ambulance Service, perhaps giving the Government the opportunity to defund that service even more. I simply do not trust this Government on health and its attempts to Americanise our system.

Ambulance officers and paramedics play a very specific role in our health system. Funding pressure on them flows to other emergency services, which must take up the so-called "slack". There is no slack. There are not enough resources in this area and the Government is failing to provide more. You can give them whatever title you like—you can call them a paramedic or you can call them Ronald McDonald—but if you do not fund them to do their job they cannot do it properly. That is the reality. I am sick of the smoke and mirrors from this Government. We should talk about health outcomes, not just names.

Mr LEE EVANS (Heathcote) [10.46 a.m.]: It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to express my admiration and support for paramedics in New South Wales. As members are no doubt aware, paramedics are the most respected and trusted professionals not just in New South Wales but in the whole of Australia. According to more than 1,200 Australians surveyed recently by the *Reader's Digest*, paramedics top the list of professions that the Australian community has most faith in. This level of public recognition is well deserved given paramedics perform their duties with the utmost professionalism and compassion without expecting recognition in return. I was not aware until the introduction of this bill that there were no restrictions on the title of paramedic. These men and women need to be assured that the important work they perform on a daily basis as paramedics is uniquely theirs.

The bill will once and for all delineate use of the term "paramedic" to apply only to those who are trained in that field. This will ensure the public has confidence in knowing that in the event of an emergency a paramedic who attends to them is fully qualified. The bill will make it an offence for any person to use the title of paramedic if they do not hold the required qualifications, which will be set out in regulations under the legislation. Paramedics perform their duties with the utmost professionalism and compassion, often under very stressful conditions for both them and their patients. Patients must be assured that they are in the best of hands and that the person assisting will do everything possible to ensure that they receive the best treatment at this critical time.

Over the past day or so I have listened to the diatribe from Opposition members about inadequate health funding. I will read into the *Hansard* some highlights from the 2015-16 budget for health funding. Top of the list is a \$1.5 million commitment from the New South Wales Government to employ an extra 35 specialist paramedics over the next four years. There will also be \$325 million for increased hospital activity, including 90,000 extra emergency department attendances and 40,000 extra admissions, as well as 3,100 extra elective surgeries. There will be \$1.4 billion in capital works funding to continue the unprecedented program of building and rebuilding our hospitals following Labor's 16 years of neglect. There is \$1.7 billion for mental health services. There is \$9.3 million to fund 90 new specialist nursing, midwifery and support staff. There is \$3.5 million to support further growth in the medical, dental and

allied health workforce.

Ms Jodi McKay: Point of order: My point of order goes to relevance under Standing Order 76. This point has been raised several times and the Acting-Speaker has ruled on it. I ask that the member for Heathcote be brought back to the leave of the bill.

Mr Gareth Ward: To the point of order: It is not good enough for a member to take a point of order and not reflect on what part of another member's speech is irrelevant. The member for Strathfield should provide evidence in that respect in order to draw the member for Heathcote back to the leave of the bill. Perhaps she could outline where the member is going off topic. I have been listening intently to his contribution, and it is an excellent speech. I would like to hear more of it. I wish the member for "Strathcastle" would stop interrupting.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order! I will rule on the point of order. The member for Heathcote is responding to or refuting remarks that were made by a number of Opposition members. I noted in an earlier ruling that a degree of latitude is extended in debate. That latitude was extended to Opposition members, who accused the Government of underfunding paramedics and the health system. My reading of the contribution by the member for Heathcote is that he is now seeking to refute those assertions, which is within the latitude that has been granted to all members.

Mr LEE EVANS: In the budget there is an extra \$4.8 for the Medical Devices Fund and commercialisation initiatives to help more locally developed medical devices reach the market. There is \$49.9 million for the National Partnership Agreement on Adult Public Dental Services. There is \$159 million over four years for medical research. There is a \$10 million grant towards construction of stage one of the Royal Far West Centre for Child Health and Learning at Manly. There is \$4 million for programs to reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. There is \$3.3 million to enhance the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme, which is relevant to what we have heard from Opposition members. There is almost \$3.5 million to enhance access to specialist palliative care services and pain management services in rural and regional areas—which is exactly what the Opposition members have accused the Government of not spending money on.

There is \$5 million to further increase eHealth network capacity in rural local health districts, as mentioned by Opposition members. Some \$1 million is allocated this year and \$4 million is allocated over the next four years to roll out an extra 100 telehealth sites, in addition to the 1,000 sites already in operation across rural and regional areas. Opposition members claimed the Government was not doing that. The Health Care Complaints Commission will receive an extra \$691,000 to support improved complaints handling. There will be five additional paediatric general surgeons to undertake more routine surgery in local hospitals, which refutes the Opposition's claim that the Government is not doing enough. We will also see the removal of the co-payment for section 100 highly specialised drugs. So the diatribe we have been forced to listen to over the past day or so from the Opposition is absolute bunkum.

Prior to the election the Minister for Health spoke highly of paramedics and the role they play within the community and the health system. It is essential that we acknowledge the life-saving role paramedics play in providing out-of-hospital medical care. Approximately 80 per cent to 90 per cent of all New South Wales paramedics are employed in the Ambulance Service of NSW. This represents about 3,400 paramedics. The role of the paramedic is well regulated and is subject to the NSW Health Code of Conduct. This code of conduct sets out a number of standards to ensure the safety of the public. The education and training of paramedics is similar across Australia and will be set out in the regulations. The bill recognises those men and women who have trained as paramedics in other parts of Australia. Tasmania and South Australia have already taken the step to protect the title of paramedic. In passing this bill New South Wales recognises the important role that these men and women undertake each and every day. The Liberal Party and The Nationals have a proud record of achievement when it comes to health—

Ms Jodi McKay: Even you are laughing. Do you really believe that?

Mr LEE EVANS: I am just laughing at your face. The Liberal Party and The Nationals have a proud record of achievement when it comes to health, and this is just one more example of good decision-making. It is pleasing to note that private paramedic providers, relevant industrial organisations and the Ambulance Service of NSW support this initiative and offered their ongoing assistance to ensure the successful drafting of the regulations under this bill. The bill will deliver on our election commitment to make it an offence for any person to use the title of paramedic if they do not hold the required qualifications. The required qualifications will be set out in regulations under the legislation.

In conclusion, the bill will provide the necessary clarification regarding qualified paramedics and other personnel such as first aid or non-emergency patient transfer officers. The bill will make it an offence for any other person to use the title "paramedic" without the required qualifications. Paramedics are educated and trained over many years to provide complex interventions and administer drugs of addiction. Their training also gives them vital skills to carry out their tasks in difficult or challenging circumstances so that the patient receives optimal treatment. The community has the right to expect that the paramedic attending to their needs has the appropriate qualifications, training and experience to meet the demands of the situation. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms JODI McKAY (Strathfield) [10.56 a.m.]: As indicated by previous speakers from the Opposition, the Opposition will not oppose the Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015. The bill will align New South Wales with Tasmania and South Australia in regulating the use of the term "paramedic". At present there is no restriction on the use of this term, which causes obvious issues with people being able to call themselves a paramedic without needing to complete sufficient training. In a profession that deals daily with life and death, it is in the interests of our community to ensure that all paramedics are trained and qualified to the standards that we would expect.

The bill amends the Health Services Act 1997 to "prevent a person who does not have recognised qualifications, training or experience from holding himself or herself out to be a paramedic". Practically speaking, upon assent of the bill it will be an offence for a person to hold themselves out to be a paramedic unless they meet strict criteria. A paramedic will mean: first, a person who holds qualifications, or who has received training, or who has experience, prescribed by the regulations; secondly, a person who is authorised under the legislation of another Australian jurisdiction to hold himself or herself out to be a paramedic; or, thirdly, a member of staff of the Ambulance Service of NSW or other person who is authorised by the health secretary to hold himself or herself out to be a paramedic. This is a small and symbolic but nonetheless important change that will ensure the public has every confidence in our Ambulance Service. I am pleased to support it, as I am all sensible legislation in this area.

In March this year I was elected as the member for Strathfield, and almost immediately after announcing my candidacy I was inundated with concerns about local health services from members of the public—in particular, concerns about the impact of significant growth and development in my local area on health infrastructure and health services delivery. Hardly a day goes by without my office getting a call about local health services. That issue is raised regularly with me when I go doorknocking or hold public meetings. The concerns raised are varied, ranging from accessing mental health services to waiting lists at my local hospital, Concord Hospital, and, yes, the availability and response time of ambulances. Our ambos do a wonderful job, and they deserve a government that gives them the resources and support they need. I fear they are not getting that support.

The facts do not lie. Every day around 3,300 calls are made to 000—one every 26 seconds. The average number of ambulance responses increased by 1.3 per cent from 2012-13 to 2013-14. Each year ambulances respond to more than 1.2 million call-outs across New South Wales. Sydney has the unenviable distinction of having the longest response time for ambulances of any capital city, and with surges of population growth, as in my area, this is sure to get worse. Response times are also

increasing—in 2005-06 it was 9.5 minutes, and in 2013-14 it was 10.8 minutes. This means more people are being put at risk. Not only do we need to change the definition of a paramedic, as this legislation does, but also we need more of them.

Last year Unions NSW launched a campaign calling for an extra 250 paramedics to be recruited in New South Wales. This would go a long way towards ameliorating the delays in ambulances attending medical emergencies. I put on record my support for this campaign and implore the Government to listen to ambos who are desperately seeking more resources. But the need for health resources does not stop there. Members will all be familiar with the term "trolley blocking"—namely, where ambulances are tied up at emergency departments waiting with patients to be admitted. An ambulance cannot be redeployed on the road until that happens. It is not only our ambulance service that is suffering; our emergency wards and local hospitals are also suffering. That is little wonder in view of this Government's \$3 billion cut to health and hospitals in its last term in office—

Mr Kevin Conolly: Point of order: The member is flouting the Acting-Speaker's ruling. She is continuing to exceed the generous leave that has been allowed in debate of this bill. The member is now talking about other issues relating to hospitals that are not remotely connected to the term "paramedic", which is the focus of this bill. I ask that the member for Strathfield be directed to return to the leave of the bill.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order! I remind all members that I have ruled that their remarks should be confined to the leave of the bill. However, latitude has been granted both in this and in other debates by previous occupants of the chair. I will continue to listen closely to the remarks of the member for Strathfield. Up to this point the member has been generally relevant to the bill and not outside the latitude that has been granted to previous speakers.

Ms JODI McKAY: Thank you. In my local area this problem is intensifying. Concord Hospital is my local hospital. The staff members at that hospital do a wonderful job; they are caring, skilled and professional. I take this opportunity to acknowledge those hardworking staff and thank them for the high standards they maintain in looking after our community. Labor recognised that this hospital was stretched and when I visited the hospital recently I spoke to some paramedics who were waiting in the ambulance bays at the emergency department. In the lead-up to the last election Labor committed \$323 million to redevelop the hospital, including a commitment to provide world-class cancer care at the hospital. This was a responsible and future-proofing commitment because the electorates of Strathfield and Drummoyne have the fastest growing populations in this State.

The Government is planning to build approximately 60,000 new dwellings along Parramatta Road, and 43 per cent of those will be in my electorate. This will mean the addition of 130,000 people to the current council local environmental plan. One of the criticisms of this proposal is that the Government has not committed to the necessary health infrastructure to accompany this significant population growth. I have spoken to the Minister for Planning and he has agreed that the issues around appropriate health infrastructure will be looked at. I am very appreciative of that, but my constituents have raised this with me as a matter of concern time and again. Unfortunately, the Government has only committed \$150 million to upgrade Concord Hospital. My constituents want the Concord Hospital to be able to cater for the increased population growth in our area but, disappointingly, that was not forthcoming in the last State budget.

I have said in this place before, as well as making my views known to my community and in the local media, that with the predicted population growth in my electorate it is imperative that we have appropriate health infrastructure. I implore the Government to consider how it proposes to respond to that significant growth. This will also require a considerable funding commitment to Concord Hospital. As I said earlier, the Opposition will support this bill but it wants more to be done in Health, particularly in funding. For instance, we need more ambos, more emergency doctors, more beds, more resources for mental health and more health resources for victims of domestic violence. Health is always one of the top

issues raised by my constituents with me, because not enough is being done by this Government. This bill is a good initiative but I will continue to fight for more resources for my electorate and for the people of New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr JAMIE PARKER (Balmain) [11.05 a.m.]: On behalf of The Greens I speak in debate on the Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015. The bill amends the Health Services Act 1987 to restrict the use of the title "paramedic" and to make it an offence for any person to use that title if he or she does not hold the required qualifications. Other members have spoken at length but I will cut to the chase and speak about two issues of particular concern to me. For many years the State headquarters of the Ambulance Service of NSW has been located on the site of the former Callan Park institution in my electorate. We need to look at how we treat and define the role of paramedics.

The Greens support the elements of this legislation that indicate the required qualifications that need to be set out for this role. We also encourage the Government to seriously consider the position it intends to take on the location of the State headquarters of the Ambulance Service of NSW. The Greens are concerned that the Government's decision to move it was either in response to the News Limited campaign or was a thought bubble—a bit like moving the Powerhouse Museum to Parramatta. I note that there is a lot of expense concerning the potential moving of the Ambulance Service of NSW. Some members have complained about the Ambulance Service of NSW and issues around its provision but its State headquarters is the heart of so many elements when it comes to paramedics in this State.

I would encourage the Minister to address that issue and to update the House on whether or not the Ambulance Service of NSW will be moving to Parramatta and, if so, when? The Minister for Planning, and the Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, and Assistant Minister for Planning have been constructively following through on the commitments of the former Coalition leader and the good strong tradition of the Liberal Party to defend and protect Callan Park from overdevelopment. We hope that will be taken to conclusion during this term of government. It is very important that the health facilities on the Callan Park site, particularly the Ambulance Service of NSW, be positively managed.

I also have a question of clarification. Will this definition issue have any effect on insurance? For example, a lot of sporting clubs use different types of people such as first aid officers, paramedics and others to assist at sporting events. Has the Government turned its mind to any potential unintended consequences relating to the framing of the term "paramedic" in this legislation? Are there any implications for insurance or are there any other matters that this House should be aware of? It has not been mentioned in the briefing note but I think it would be worthwhile for the Minister to share that information with this House.

Finally, I thank those staff who have been involved in the development of this legislation. The NSW Ministry of Health has consulted with a broad range of agencies and there is a lot of support for this legislation. The Greens will not be opposing the bill. We want to make sure that paramedics, as one of the most respected professions in this State, are protected, managed and regulated in a way that promotes the health of the residents of New South Wales but also supports the professionalism, ethical nature and sheer determination of so many paramedics who care for the people of New South Wales.

Qualifications and training are important. We need to clearly identify the difference between highly trained and skilled paramedics and other important first aid and first responder roles. The Greens welcome the fact that these elements will be grandfathered. It is important to recognise that people who have been working for many years and who do not have the qualifications, training or experience are allowed to continue to call themselves paramedics. I acknowledge the important decisions that this House makes. While this one might seem small and symbolic, it makes a significant difference. I again request that the Minister for Health outline to the House how paramedics will be dealt with outside the Ambulance Service of NSW and whether there are any implications for insurance and other areas from this legislative change.

Mr GUY ZANGARI (Fairfield) [11.10 a.m.]: I note that the object of the Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015 is:

... to amend the *Health Services Act 1997* to prevent a person who does not have recognised qualifications, training or experience from holding himself or herself out to be a paramedic.

A **paramedic** means:

- (a) a person who holds qualifications, or who has received training, or who has experience, prescribed by the regulations, or
- (b) a person who is authorised under the legislation of another Australian jurisdiction to hold himself or herself out to be a paramedic, or
- (c) a member of staff of the Ambulance Service of NSW, or other person, who is authorised by the Health Secretary to hold himself or herself out to be a paramedic.

From the outset, I place on record that the New South Wales Labor Opposition does not oppose the bill. It is important that a distinction be made between highly trained paramedics and other healthcare workers who may not be extensively trained in extreme trauma and highly technical emergency procedures. The Opposition is as committed as the Government to ensuring that emergency patients across New South Wales receive the best possible care from healthcare professionals whom they trust and believe to hold the correct title of paramedic.

Of equal importance is the recognition of the many hours of intensive training paramedics must complete to gain qualification, which should entitle them to be set apart from fellow healthcare workers as highly skilled healthcare professionals. However, it must be noted that merely to define the term "paramedic", as this bill does, is not enough. The Government should not only clarify the meaning of "paramedic" but identify the different ways in which it can provide support to New South Wales paramedics, who face considerable difficulties in the day-to-day performance of their duties.

As of March 2014, there were 3,435 paramedics operating in New South Wales. They attend to more than a million cases a year. A call for ambulance assistance is made every 26 seconds in New South Wales, and 26 per cent of all patients presenting to hospital arrive by ambulance. This makes for a high-stress environment for our paramedics as they struggle to cope with the volume of calls for assistance. As if this were not enough, they are faced with frustration when they accompany a patient to hospital, as they are forced to wait with the patient in the ambulance, outside the emergency department, if there are no beds available.

I have been a patient at Fairfield Hospital and experienced the wonderful care provided by paramedics in our district. When I was in emergency, two years ago, it was an hour before the paramedics could leave my side. Part of that time was spent near the entry doors of the emergency department. Then there was a wonderful upgrade to the hallway, with the paramedics still waiting by my side. I thought that their time could have been better spent on the road. Unfortunately, as a result of what has happened to Fairfield Hospital and the trolley block in the emergency department, the paramedics had to stay. The primary cause was bed pressures in the emergency department at Fairfield Hospital. The Government's neglect of that hospital is now in its fifth year. There is still no hope on the horizon for Fairfield Hospital.

Paramedics have expressed frustration at the waste of time spent waiting for beds for patients—time that could be spent attending to the numerous other calls they receive from people whom they are powerless to help. An increase in the number of beds available in our hospitals would not only alleviate some of the stresses placed on our highly trained paramedics but also enable them to get back on the road so that they may respond to incoming emergency calls for help. Overall ambulance response

times are growing. The median ambulance response time in New South Wales increased from 9.5 minutes in 2005-06 to 10.8 minutes in 2013-14. That is two minutes longer than in Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia. Due to staffing shortages and cuts to NSW Health, ill patients—

Mr Gareth Ward: Point of order: Whilst it would be inappropriate for me to correct the misstatement that there have been cuts to the Ambulance Service, I note that, looking at clauses 1 to 3 of the bill and citing Standing Order 76, comments about budgetary arrangements for the Ambulance Service are not relevant. What is relevant is not operational arrangements but the change to the recognition of ambulance officers. I ask that the member be called back to the leave of the bill.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order! The Parliamentary Secretary is correct that in the short title of the bill there is no mention of other issues beyond the definition of a paramedic. However, a degree of latitude has been extended in this debate. Previous speakers, from both Opposition and Government, have spoken extensively and expressed various views about infrastructure funding. I am listening attentively. I remind members not to exceed the latitude that has been extended. I call the member for Fairfield back to the leave of the bill.

Mr GUY ZANGARI: When the member for Kiama raised the point of order I was going to say that, with staff shortages and cuts to Health, ill patients are far too often forced to wait too long for an ambulance. I invite the member for Kiama to come to Fairfield, to Western Sydney, should his TomTom or Garmin work, to look at what is happening in the emergency department at Fairfield Hospital. I spoke of my personal experience two years ago, when I fell outside my electorate office. The paramedics did great job in delivering me to the hospital, but they were there for an hour. The wait was in two parts: near the entry to the emergency department, followed by an upgrade to the hallway. Not to receive any care from doctors or nurses is unsatisfactory. I am reasonably fit and healthy; however, I fear for my elderly constituents.

They and their children will go to the emergency department at Fairfield Hospital and find that the paramedics have to wait with them for an extensive period when those paramedics could be out on the road attending to other patients within the district. I do not accept the point of order taken by the member for Kiama because I am addressing the issue of our paramedics' time being taken up in emergency departments which are not coping. I am giving the classic example of a hospital which services the electorates of Fairfield, Cabramatta, Prospect and Mulgoa—four electorates whose constituents use the emergency department of Fairfield Hospital. I will not listen to the spurious point of order by the member for Kiama because—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order! You do not have to; I have ruled on the point of order.

Mr GUY ZANGARI: At the end of the day we put on the record that we will go back to the electorate and tell them that the member for Kiama is a nice bloke but he has no idea what is happening in Western Sydney. He has no idea because he is in Kiama, drinking a soy latte, having a scone, looking at the Blow Hole and thinking, "How good is this in Kiama?"

Mr Gareth Ward: Point of order: The member for Fairfield was off topic before but he is nowhere near the realm of relevance now. As entertaining as he is, I ask you to call him back to the leave of the bill. And I will take him up on his offer of a soy latte in his electorate.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order! I uphold the point of order. As entertaining as the contribution of the member for Fairfield is, he will return to the leave of the bill.

Mr GUY ZANGARI: I will return to the leave of the bill. The New South Wales Labor Opposition does not oppose the bill. However, as we say, more needs to be done to make the jobs of our

paramedics easier and more needs to be done to decrease ambulance response times in New South Wales.

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [11.20 a.m.]: I make a contribution on behalf of the New South Wales Labor Opposition to debate on the Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015. One of the main purposes of this bill is to make it an offence for anybody to use the title "paramedic" if they do not have the required qualifications, training and experience. Currently there is no restriction on the use of the title "paramedic". This bill will make a clear distinction between qualified paramedics and other healthcare workers who provide other types of care. The role of a paramedic is a very important one. In fact, the role itself is physically and emotionally stressful as it involves long and gruelling hours.

Every day, paramedics are confronted with risks in attending to a host of critical health emergencies. They are constantly on the front line and, given the demands of the job, it can take an emotional toll on them. That is why it is vital to distinguish a highly qualified paramedic from someone else who is employed within the healthcare sector. Along with the Opposition, I am deeply concerned about the safety and wellbeing of our paramedics as they find themselves in the midst of a growing ambulance crisis. The lack of beds in our hospitals is placing significant pressure on how paramedics treat their patients in critical situations. Paramedics have to wait hours on end outside emergency departments waiting to place patients in hospital beds and so are unable to attend to other calls. Most times these other calls are a matter of life and death.

One of the nearest hospitals to my electorate of Cabramatta is Liverpool, which has the busiest emergency department in Sydney. Last year 44 per cent of patients waited more than four hours to receive treatment at Liverpool Hospital's emergency department. This translates to 33,000 patients in that year having to wait a considerable and unacceptable amount of time to be treated. This figure is deeply concerning and, given the escalating trolley block crisis, it will get even worse. Delays are putting patient safety at risk and bed shortages account for growing queues, while at the same time paramedics are enduring a lot of stress, treating and caring for their patients.

Mr Gareth Ward: Point of order: I cite Standing Order 76. Whilst I am loath to interrupt my friend the member for Cabramatta, this debate is about paramedics. What the member is referring to now, as relevant as it may be in another debate about waiting times, is not what this bill is about. I respect your ruling in relation to latitude but there is obtuseness and then there is just out of orbit, which is exactly where the member is at the moment. I ask you to bring the member back to the leave of the bill which concerns paramedics and not waiting times, which are not relevant even though they are important to the health debate. Supporting our paramedics is important and I think we need to have the debate the member is referring to at a different time, not during debate on this bill.

Mr NICK LALICH: To the point of order: How can paramedics and hospital beds not correlate with one another when the paramedics' job is totally tied to the time it takes to get the patient to the emergency department and into a bed? Trolley block is causing the problem.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order! Strictly speaking, Standing Order 76 requires members to confine their remarks to the leave of the bill, which is derived from the short title, and any impacts that that legislation may have in the community. In this debate members have spoken about health infrastructure, health spending, waiting times, hospital beds and all sorts of things when they were able to demonstrate a tangible link between those issues and the leave of the bill. I am not ordering the member for Cabramatta to remain seated; I am giving him the call, but I remind him that he must show in his contribution that what he is speaking about is germane to the bill we are debating.

Mr NICK LALICH: The job of paramedics is made more difficult by the trolley blocks we have in hospitals. I understand that the member for Kiama is pedantic on many of these issues—he is a smart member and I have a lot of time for him—but I know that sometimes he takes points of order to erode our speaking time.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order! And you are entertaining him. The member for Cabramatta will continue with his contribution.

Mr NICK LALICH: The Liberal Government speaks much about things being "fit for the future"—it seems to be a catchcry of the Government on just about every issue that arises. It is quite obvious that hospitals and the Ambulance Service of NSW are far from fit for the future. As a result of job cuts to NSW Health, patients who require immediate treatment have to wait for long periods to be attended to. To help the member for Kiama, the New South Wales Labor Opposition does not oppose the bill.

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong) [11.26 a.m.]: I am keen to make a contribution to debate on the Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015 because the paramedics in my electorate and area do a fantastic job and they are not at all happy with the Government. So I will take my lead from paramedics to determine how they are faring.

Mr Gareth Ward: You are talking to the union, not the paramedics.

Ms NOREEN HAY: Do not tell me who I am talking to. You would not have a clue.

Mr Gareth Ward: I know; I'm watching you.

Ms NOREEN HAY: You do not know what day it is.

Mr Gareth Ward: I'm watching you; I keep an eye on you.

Ms NOREEN HAY: Mr Acting-Speaker, he is not entitled to keep his eye on me.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order! The member for Wollongong will direct her remarks through the Chair and she will not entertain the interjections of the Parliamentary Secretary, who is deliberately trying to steal her time and take her off course, as I am right now. The member for Wollongong will return to the leave of the bill.

Ms NOREEN HAY: Mr Acting-Speaker, you and the member for Kiama are both trying to steal my time. I know that people reading *Hansard* will see what you two are up to.

Mr Gareth Ward: What are you up to? What did you do last summer?

Ms NOREEN HAY: If the member for Kiama remains quiet he would learn something. Just listen for a change. Whilst this bill speaks about making it an offence for a person to use the title of paramedic—as it rightly should be—it does not alter the fact that paramedics, certainly at Wollongong Hospital, can be tied up for 30 minutes to two hours or more while they line up with patients on stretchers in hospital corridors.

Mr Gareth Ward: That's not true.

Ms NOREEN HAY: It is true and it was reported as such in the *Illawarra Mercury*—a bastion of news—on 21 July—

Mr Gareth Ward: Why weren't you at the rally?

Ms NOREEN HAY: Because I was not in the country, dope.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order!

Ms NOREEN HAY: I withdraw that.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Adam Marshall): Order! Is the member withdrawing that remark?

Ms NOREEN HAY: I withdraw calling the member for Kiama a dope. Through the Chair, he is a dope. On 21 July 2015 the *Illawarra Mercury* states:

HSU Illawarra sub-branch president David McCormack agreed that bed block – which occurs when a hospital has no available beds – was worsening at Wollongong, Shellharbour and Shoalhaven hospitals.

Mr Gareth Ward: Listening to the union.

Ms NOREEN HAY: Why does the member for Kiama hate unions? They do a great job lifting people's standard of living. Why does he hate unions? And he hates patients and children—and leave my dogs alone.

Mr Gareth Ward: I would not be talking about the great danes if I were you.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! The member for Wollongong will direct her remarks through the Chair and not respond to interjections from the member for Kiama. The member for Kiama will cease interjecting.

Ms NOREEN HAY: Mr McCormack said:

A few years ago bed block got really bad; it got better for a little while—

Under the Labor Government—

but now it's starting to ramp up again—particularly in the past month ...

Mr Gareth Ward: Is he from the union?

Ms NOREEN HAY: As I said, I am very proud to talk to unions that represent workers, in particular, those in the health service. Ambulances are impacted upon in their ability to respond to other incidents, which results in longer response times. That can be life threatening if paramedics are tied up for one or two hours in a trolley block. The article continues:

Ambulance Release Teams (ART) are used by the NSW Ambulance Service to relieve paramedics struck in bed block at hospitals.

Previously off-duty ART teams were called in for this purpose, but an internal NSW Ambulance Service directive seen by the *Mercury* shows the service is now allowing managers to direct on-duty paramedics to do so.

There needs to be a thorough examination of the way that health and hospitals are being resourced by this Government. As I said at the outset, paramedics do a fantastic job under very trying circumstances—which now are worsening. That happens when \$3 billion is cut from the health service.

Mr Gareth Ward: Point of order: Whilst I will not reflect on the fact that that statement is erroneous, inaccurate and wrong, my point of order relates to Standing Order 76. This bill, as noted in the title and its objects, relates to paramedics. The member for Wollongong is now addressing an issue that was raised in the appropriations legislation. She is not addressing the bill before the House. I ask that the member for Wollongong be directed to confine her remarks to the bill—which would be a first time for her.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! The member for Wollongong will confine her comments to the bill before the House, which relates to paramedics.

Ms NOREEN HAY: It is on behalf of paramedics that I make my comments.

Mr Gareth Ward: Paramedics and the union.

Ms NOREEN HAY: Paramedics who are members of the union are paramedics nonetheless. The member for Kiama may not like that but it is a fact.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! The member for Wollongong will address her comments through the Chair.

Ms NOREEN HAY: The member for Kiama may not like it but paramedics who are members of a union are still paramedics and, contrary to his comments, they do a fine job. Obviously Labor does not oppose this bill, but it cannot be dealt with in isolation. The paramedics that this bill relates to are being impacted by the cut of \$3 billion from the health service.

Mr Gareth Ward: Point of order—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! Under what standing order does the member take his point of order?

Mr Gareth Ward: Again Standing Order 76. Also, the member for Wollongong is canvassing your ruling. Mr Acting-Speaker, you ruled on my previous point of order relating to budgetary matters and appropriation issues. The member for Wollongong is now flagrantly flouting your ruling. We all support paramedics. She supports the union; that is all she supports. She is listening to the union leadership and not to real paramedics. She has never even met one.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! The member for Wollongong will return to the leave of the bill.

Ms NOREEN HAY: I should not be restricted in my comments on paramedics because the member for Kiama does not like the fact that paramedics are being impacted by the \$3 billion cuts to the health service. That is all I said.

Ms Pru Goward: What \$3 billion cut? There is no \$3 billion cut.

Mr Gareth Ward: Point of order—

Ms NOREEN HAY: The member cannot keep taking the same point of order.

Ms Pru Goward: There is no \$3 billion cut and you know it.

Mr Gareth Ward: There is no \$3 billion cut and, Mr Acting-Speaker, the member for Wollongong is flouting your ruling. It is a lie, lie, lie. The member for Wollongong is telling big whoppers.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! The member for Kiama is debating the point. The member for Wollongong will return to the leave of the bill, which relates to paramedics. Does the member want me to read the object of the bill?

Ms NOREEN HAY: No, I have it in front of me. If paramedics could stand here today and address the House, they would say that they cannot be talked about without referring to what they act upon or the

cuts to their service. How can we talk about paramedics and ignore the fact that billions of dollars have been cut from the health service?

Ms Pru Goward: But they have not. We have increased the funding by more than 5 per cent every year.

Mr Gareth Ward: Point of order—

Ms NOREEN HAY: It is harassment to have them all shouting at me.

Mr Gareth Ward: With all due respect, if the member for Wollongong wants to debate other issues concerning paramedics, she can bring on that debate.

Ms NOREEN HAY: You can't handle the truth.

Mr Gareth Ward: The bill before the House is clear in its intent. The member for Wollongong should speak to the bill. We all know that she has a loose and casual relationship with the truth. She can have her own views, but she cannot make up her own facts.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lee Evans): Order! The member for Wollongong will return to the leave of the bill or I will direct her to sit down.

Ms NOREEN HAY: It is a shame the member for Kiama will not sit down. It is a disgrace that he has done nothing but burn up my time so that I am unable say what I need to say on behalf of the hospitals, paramedics, ambulance drivers and health service workers in my electorate. The member for Kiama is determined to ensure that I am unable to represent the people of my community in this Chamber today. He continually shouts across the Chamber and takes the same point of order and then debates the point. If anyone should be directed to sit down it should be him. He should be quiet.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang) [11.36 a.m.]: The Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015 proposes to amend the Health Services Act 1997 to restrict the use of the title "paramedic" and to make it an offence for any person to use the title of "paramedic" if they do not hold the required qualifications. I note that the required qualifications will be set out in regulations to the legislation. Currently, there is no restriction on the use of the title "paramedic". The legislation will make a distinction between trained qualified paramedics and those providing other types of care. The bill states that a "paramedic" is someone who is authorised under the legislation of an Australian jurisdiction to be a paramedic and is employed in New South Wales as a paramedic.

The work of a paramedic often involves caring for the most disadvantaged members of the community, and paramedics often witness horrific trauma. Our paramedics have a genuine passion for and commitment to the maintenance of high standards of care for the community. I pay tribute to those strengths and express my sincere thanks to the frontline staff who continue to maintain those high levels of service. As the shadow Minister for the Central Coast, on behalf of a very grateful community I acknowledge the hardworking paramedics who operate in our growing region. When reading the job criteria of a paramedic, one must have admiration and respect for the important community role they play as first responders. Paramedics provide frontline, out-of-hospital care and medical retrieval and health-related transport for sick and injured people in emergency and non-emergency settings. They accurately assess and document a patient's health and medical needs to determine and implement appropriate paramedical care in line with ambulance policies and procedures.

Paramedics are first-contact health workers providing advanced, out-of-hospital, emergency and non-emergency care and related transport services to the community. Paramedics work collaboratively with their team, the broader ambulance service and other healthcare and emergency services to provide quality, patient-centred care to the public. Our paramedics work as part of the response to emergency

and non-emergency calls, making significant clinical decisions in varied and often complex environments to provide clinical treatment, life-saving stabilisation and transport of ill or injured people to hospital.

It goes without saying that paramedics are highly skilled individuals. Also, the role of paramedics is changing. As the population ages and with the rise in mental illnesses affecting the community, paramedics are increasingly at the forefront of dealing with social and mental health problems. Due to the unique nature of their work, paramedics are in the best position to provide medical advice, education and health promotion to the community, but there is one area in which we can do better for our paramedics and other frontline responders. That is post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD. Earlier this year I attended a special conference on PTSD at Doyalson RSL, which was hosted by an impressive organisation called Behind the Seen. It was organised by Ross Beckley and Veronique Moseley, who live in my electorate of Wyong. At the conference I learnt much about the plight of first responders. As the conference website states:

Let's face it—emergency services see what others don't ... but are often expected to just "deal with it". Maybe some can, but a lot of young minds—those starting out—and even the ones that have been at it for years—need practical guidance in dealing with some of the horrors they come across.

These memories, if left unchecked, can develop into a variety of post traumatic issues—or in worse cases cause severe emotional breakdowns that are not only debilitating for our front line heroes, but everyone around them—their mates and their families.

An alarming number of emergency services personnel suffer from depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other behavioural health issues. These issues can affect work, family and a capacity to live a happy and healthy life.

Research has shown that early intervention and informed support networks will not only assist with a more effective recovery process, but may also reduce the severity of stress symptoms.

Figures reveal that one police officer, paramedic or firefighter takes their life every six weeks. Experts warn that frontline emergency workers are not getting the treatment they need. The Intentional Self-Harm Fact Sheet is based on coronial cases around Australia and shows that 110 police officers, paramedics and firefighters died by suicide between July 2000 and December 2012. On 30 June 2015 on Newcastle ABC 1233 radio, Newcastle-based clinical psychologist Matthew Stanton said that emergency workers are particularly susceptible to PTSD because of the nature of their work. He said:

For example, if a person is at a motor vehicle accident, they might need to pick up body parts; they need to somehow disassociate from that, so they're able to look at things and record them in an accurate way without being emotionally engulfed and upset.

They learn to detach from that, and sometimes they might use humour as a coping mechanism, and try not to recognise how those [body] parts may relate to a human being ... because it would greatly affect them to know that.

A person tends to cope with those incidents by suppressing or disassociating from the actual experience—looking at it factually, and putting the emotions away.

He went on to say:

I think what actually happens is, people don't look at the emotional load that has come from lots of different incidents, because the process of coping has separated them from actually understanding that impact, and having the awareness of that impact.

Matthew Stanton said that there needs to be increased awareness that professions such as emergency services can present psychologically damaging experiences for workers. He also said:

I think people in senior positions can certainly help build a help-seeking culture ...

I don't think there is any silver-bullet approach to preventing PTSD.

What I understand is that some people are a little bit more vulnerable to it—whether it's related to the traumatic event, their personality, or their time in service. The most important thing is people are regularly asked the questions if the personnel are coping from a family perspective as well, so we're getting a whole picture of how that person is mentally functioning.

These experiences change people; they change the way the person's brain operates, and they need long-term psychological intervention.

The bill has limited practical implications and it is largely symbolic. I hope that the Government can do more to support our paramedics through real initiatives, particularly by supporting them and their families when they are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Ms JO HAYLEN (Summer Hill) [11.44 a.m.]: I speak in support of the Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015. Labor supports the bill, and I acknowledge the important step the Government is taking to legislate to make a critical distinction between trained, qualified paramedics and those providing other types of care. The bill rightly makes it an offence for a person to use the title "paramedic" if they do not have the required qualifications. Paramedics are the most trusted professionals. They have earned that trust for a reason. They work in situations of emergency, trauma, stress and fear. They are frontline responders. They are the first responders. They bring timely and professional medical expertise and, with that, often much-needed calm and comfort.

When I see traffic and pedestrians stop to make way for an ambulance I often think that it is a great reflection of our community. It is an important symbol of a civilised society and of our global city functioning as a safe place to live and work. I also reflect on the critical role that government plays in keeping those services working to meet the expectations and needs of our society. I take this opportunity to thank our paramedics for the critical work they do. I acknowledge that their job requires shift work performed under high pressure and specialised training.

I know that many people in my electorate of Summer Hill have incredibly positive stories to tell about the times they needed assistance from our paramedics, particularly those who service the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Camperdown, known as RPA. The hospital has an emergency department that services a very large area. It has a combined adult and paediatric emergency department that receives around 70,000 presentations each year, 15 per cent of whom are children. My little boy has been one of those children. On a dark, cold night when an accident happens at home there is nothing more comforting than the assistance of the quick-responding medical professionals at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. Around 30 per cent of emergency patients are admitted to RPA. Through their work to save lives, paramedics deserve the recognition and status that this legislation will bring.

We must give paramedics the necessary support to allow them to do their job. However, recent Commonwealth budget cuts undermine the certainty of the essential service. The recent Baird budget has done little to address those cuts, which amount to nearly \$2 billion. We need to be relieving pressure on our paramedics by giving them the resources to respond in time and treat patients. We must also give our emergency services the space to cope. I note that current Health funding in the Baird budget is \$300 million less than the Australian Medical Association says is needed just to maintain existing services in order to keep up with demand. We want to reduce waiting times at our hospitals across the State and we need to make sure our medical professionals have the support they need.

The RPA currently is above the State average for emergency room waiting times. That is an unsettling number given the increasing density across the inner west and inner city. We want to make sure we reduce those waiting times and give paramedics the support they need. Paramedics and our medical professionals must have the tools they need to do their jobs and save lives. That is the mark of a civilised, functioning and safe society and that must be our common goal.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Minister for Health) [11.48 a.m.], in reply: I thank all members who made contributions to debate on the Health Services Amendment (Paramedics) Bill 2015. Even though I have not been in the Chamber for the entire debate, I have been following the comments made by many members. As I always do, I again put on record my admiration for our paramedics and acknowledge the fantastic work they do. I was helped by paramedics on one occasion and members of my family have also been assisted by them. When I see paramedics in the street, in the hospitals or at functions, I always go out of my way to thank them.

In the debate, many members made comments that were frankly outside the leave of the bill, but I understand the sentiments that were expressed. I will clarify a couple of things. There has been no budget cut in New South Wales. Although that is part of a mantra that Labor has been carrying on with for years, there has been no budget cut. In fact, the budget has gone up. Since I have been the Minister for Health the ambulance budget has gone up by 26 per cent. We have employed extra paramedics and we are building new ambulance stations. The member for Balmain raised the issue of insurance. The code of conduct for unregistered health practitioners, which includes paramedics, provides for appropriate insurance arrangements. This bill does not change any of that.

The bill is very simple; it is about the protection of the title "paramedic". It amends the Health Services Act to protect the title. The bill provides that it will be an offence for a person who is not a paramedic to describe themselves as such. A "paramedic" will be defined as a person who holds the qualification; who has the training or experience prescribed by the regulations; who is authorised to call themselves a paramedic under the law of other jurisdictions, such as other States; and who is authorised by the Health Secretary to call himself or herself a paramedic. I make it clear that paramedics and first-aiders both provide valuable services to our community. I do not by any means diminish the important role of those who provide first aid through organisations such as St John Ambulance. However, paramedics should be distinguished from first-aiders.

Paramedics are highly skilled professionals who provide emergency health services to the sick and injured in our community. Paramedics provide complex health services and procedures such as emergency medical assessment, life-saving resuscitation and defibrillation, the management of complex burns and spinal injuries and the administration of drugs of addiction, such as morphine. Paramedics treat a wide variety of patients in emergency situations, which often can be challenging and dangerous. Increasingly, paramedics have been given the skills and training to enable them to be much more a part of an integrated healthcare system. For many patients in life-threatening situations, their treatment starts while they are in the hands of the paramedics. We have seen profound changes in the outcomes of patients through the involvement of these highly skilled paramedics.

A range of regulation is in place with respect to paramedics. Most paramedics work within the Ambulance Service of NSW and, therefore, are subject to the NSW Health code of conduct. The use of drugs of addiction is regulated via the New South Wales Poisons and Therapeutics Goods Act and regulation. In addition, paramedics, as unregistered health practitioners, are subject to the code of conduct for unregistered health practitioners. This code sets out the ethical standards expected of all unregistered health practitioners, and the NSW Health Care Complaints Commission can investigate alleged breaches of the code.

While there are various regulations in respect of paramedics, there is no legislation protecting the title "paramedic". That is the intent of this bill. The legislation has been discussed with paramedics over a number of months and at a national level there has been discussion about the use of the title "paramedic"

through the health Ministers councils. The bill is in line with the type of protection that is provided in other States, such as South Australia and Tasmania, and I believe other States will be following this example. The protection will allow members of the community to feel confident when they are attended by a qualified paramedic that they are in the hands of highly skilled professionals. They will know that the paramedics have the level of training and experience that is necessary for them to deliver a high level of care. I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now read a second time—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Motion by Mrs Jillian Skinner agreed to:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Bill read a third time and transmitted to the Legislative Council with a message seeking its concurrence in the bill.

RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES AND HOUSING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (PUBLIC HOUSING—ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOUR) BILL 2015

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Brad Hazzard, read a first time and printed.

Second Reading

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst—Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister for Social Housing) [11.55 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to bring before the Legislative Assembly the Residential Tenancies and Housing Legislation Amendment (Public Housing—Antisocial Behaviour) Bill 2015, a bill that seeks to address antisocial, illegal and fraudulent behaviour in social housing. The management of antisocial and criminal behaviour is a challenge for the social housing system. The Public Accounts Committee recent report on tenancy management identified the need for better management of antisocial behaviour in and around public housing.

The primary goal of this bill is to improve the behaviour of a minority, and I stress "a minority", of tenants engaging in antisocial behaviour and to create better, safer communities for the large majority of law-abiding tenants, including those who are ageing and vulnerable. Many of these tenants have had what might be termed a pretty rough trot in life. Often they find their way in public housing after facing great challenges. The consistent message I keep hearing from many of these wonderful tenants in social housing is that they want the Government to know, first of all, we need more social housing but we also need it to be safe.

Social housing providers across New South Wales manage 140,000 tenancies. Most social housing tenants are good tenants; they are law-abiding people who treat their properties and neighbours with respect. However, there are a minority of tenants who choose to engage in antisocial behaviour. This behaviour can range from ongoing nuisance and annoyance to outright physical violence or the manufacture and dealing of illegal drugs, amongst a range of other activities. This behaviour adversely

impacts neighbours and the broader community. It has impacts on the vulnerable. This behaviour diverts scarce resources away from those waiting for social housing assistance. It is only fair that current tenants comply with the terms of their tenancy agreement, including respect for their property and the property of others and respect for their neighbours.

As the Minister for Social Housing, I have heard firsthand from social housing tenants about the impact of antisocial and illegal behaviour on their lives. During the Government's recent consultation process on the social housing discussion paper, the issue of better management of antisocial behaviour was one of the most common and high-priority issues raised by tenants and people living in social housing. Many people expressed their frustration at a system that they believe allows those who perpetrate antisocial behaviour to remain in social housing even when serious criminal behaviour is occurring. Many tenants report noisy or disruptive neighbours and some identified a problematic level of drug and alcohol use in some social housing communities. This bill demonstrates that the Government has heard our tenants and our communities. It demonstrates this Government's commitment to improving the quality of life for people living in social housing.

A recent survey of 780 tenants indicated that 78 per cent think antisocial behaviour in public housing is a problem and 72 per cent think eviction is an appropriate response for people who commit criminal acts in public housing. It also found 51 per cent of tenants have experienced antisocial behaviour in public housing and one-third have experienced or witnessed serious crime. This is obviously extremely concerning to the broader community and the New South Wales Government. At present, social housing landlords have limited tools to manage antisocial, illegal and fraudulent behaviour before such behaviour escalates to a level that requires eviction or other action in the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal, which I will refer to from hereon in as the tribunal. A simpler, more transparent approach is needed that provides a clear and strong message to problematic tenants and potentially problematic tenants about the consequences of their behaviour. This bill will help protect vulnerable tenants by removing those engaged in serious breaches of their tenancy agreement from their social housing property.

The provisions within the bill will allow social housing landlords to intervene more effectively to better deal with people who engage in antisocial, illegal and fraudulent behaviour. This new approach will ensure it is balanced with the need to protect the rights of people who experience a range of vulnerabilities, including mental illness, and/or are subject to domestic and family violence. This bill introduces a one-strike policy to apply where tenants or occupants have been involved in the most severe criminal behaviour. In the event that a tenant is involved in those serious crimes, termination of the tenancy will be automatic. Those crimes include being charged with storing illegal firearms or the show cause offences under the Bail Act 2013, in particular violence that constitutes grievous bodily harm and the manufacture, cultivation or supply of illegal drugs.

There has been a number of cases where the tribunal has accepted that significant drug cultivation or dealing is occurring from a public housing property and has not issued a termination order. For example, a public housing tenant was found with more than 12 kilograms of cannabis in her home and more than 20 kilograms in her car. Police seized nearly two kilograms of cannabis leaf bud with a street value of \$15,000, which had been dried in a kitchen cupboard. Charges were laid, and a two-year suspended sentence with a good behaviour bond was handed down by the courts. Even though there was clear evidence that this serious crime was committed on Government property, the tribunal declined to terminate the tenancy. These provisions in this bill will ensure that, in these very serious cases, the tenancy is not continued. Our priority here must be to protect the people who live near these criminals—it must be to protect the majority of tenants in social housing who do the right thing; and in particular to acknowledge that many of these tenants are vulnerable and afraid.

The tribunal will, however, maintain some level of discretion in exceptional circumstances for other serious behaviour. Should the tribunal not terminate a tenancy in such cases, it will be required to document its reasons for that decision. We are not talking about minor offences here. We are talking about serious crime that has a terrible impact on individuals in our social housing community and the

broader community. If a tenancy is at risk through the one-strike process because of the behaviour of other household members, the Department of Family and Community Services will still have to prove, as now, that the tenant intentionally or recklessly caused or permitted the behaviour.

Take for example a scenario where a mother and son are living together in social housing with the mother holding the lease and the son found to be dealing drugs. While the mother is the tenant and is liable for the breach, if she is unaware of the drug dealing it is unlikely she will be evicted. However, if it is shown that she is aware then she is liable for the breach and will be evicted. Further, we will not apply these measures to people who get into difficulty through no fault of their own. Family and Community Services currently has tenancies where a serious crime such as drug dealing is carried out by a violent partner against the tenant's wishes. In these cases, if the partner cannot be forced to leave, Family and Community Services will rehouse the innocent tenant.

In a recent case in Redfern, a vulnerable tenant with an intellectual disability was preyed upon by drug dealers who used his flat as a location from which to distribute drugs. The tenancy had to be terminated to get rid of the drug dealers, but the tenant was rehoused. This is an example of how Family and Community Services will continue to respond to cases where people with a vulnerability, such as those who experience mental illness or disability, get caught up in situations for which they are not responsible. I now turn to the three-strike policy. This bill will introduce a three-strike policy. This aspect of the bill will act as a warning system for social housing tenants with the aim of modifying the behaviour of people who engage in ongoing antisocial behaviour and helping them to sustain their tenancy.

The use of the three-strike policy will be for breaches of a tenancy agreement that are not considered serious enough to warrant an immediate eviction. If a tenant acquires three strikes within a 12-month period, action can proceed to the tribunal to terminate the tenancy. Natural justice and procedural fairness are important to the process. It is important to note that when a first or second strike is issued against a tenant, the tenant will have a right to appeal the decision through an independent review panel. For a third strike the tenant will have the opportunity to put their case before the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Where a tenant experiences mental illness and is involved in behaviour that may constitute a breach or strike, Family and Community Services does everything in its power to avoid evicting that person.

For example, Family and Community Services is currently involved in a case where a tenant is hoarding goods, and where there is severe tension with neighbours and allegations of extreme verbal and some physical abuse. Family and Community Services is working with an organisation called Partners in Recovery, which helps people who experience mental illness. It is agreed that the tension between the neighbours and the hoarding by the tenant has reached a point where the tenancy cannot continue without affecting the mental health and wellbeing of everyone involved. But the intention of Family and Community Services is not to make this vulnerable person homeless. Family and Community Services is arranging a new tenancy and Partners in Recovery are working with the tenant to help him limit the amount of goods he moves into the new property. I hope, and I am sure all members hope, they succeed.

But this is an example of how Family and Community Services, under the direction of this Government, approaches vulnerable tenants. Evicting tenants is a last resort, but it has to be done in some cases because the obligation of Family and Community Services to neighbours, many of whom are small children, the elderly or those who have other vulnerabilities, including mental illness, cannot be ignored. Family and Community Services weighs the risks to the tenant against the risks to others in the community. However, the tenant would be provided with access to private rental products, including bond loans, advanced rent and assistance with locating properties through real estate agents. Family and Community Services would continue to make referrals to health services in the event the tenant had not yet engaged with them.

The bill also introduces neighbourhood impact statements for consideration by the tribunal once a breach has been proven. Neighbours will be able to have a confidential discussion about what is

happening, with a Family and Community Services officer, and will be able to table a statement outlining the impact of the antisocial or illegal behaviour on the local community. The statement may draw on information from more than one source and will only include information the officer assesses to be accurate. The source of the information will not be identified. The tribunal will have to take this statement into account when making its decisions. The weighting of this evidence is still a matter for the tribunal to determine. At the moment the only way the tribunal can hear of the impacts of antisocial behaviour on neighbours is where Family and Community Services can find a witness willing to appear at the tribunal. This is very difficult, as many tenants fear retribution.

Tenants may give evidence about illegal behaviour at the tribunal, only to find that their neighbour is not evicted and they have to continue living alongside them. For this reason most tenants do not have confidence that they will be properly protected if they give evidence. In one case a tenant who was twice proven to have been using his public housing property to deal in drugs was allowed to remain by the tribunal, which refused to terminate his tenancy. There was no evidence from neighbours of the negative effect he was having on them, yet the neighbours are over 70 years of age and their front doors are metres from the drug dealer's front door. They could not be expected to give evidence, especially when there is no guarantee that the day after the tribunal hearing they will bump into the person allegedly involved in drug dealing again. After 15 months the decision to allow the tenant to remain was finally overturned on appeal, but elderly neighbours had to put up with a drug dealer and his customers making their lives a misery for more than a year longer.

These statements will enable the tribunal to take into consideration the wider effects of antisocial or criminal behaviour on communities while ensuring that neighbours are protected from recriminations. Other aspects of this bill will help Family and Community Services tackle subsidy fraud. The rent that public housing tenants pay is linked to their household income. Most tenants pay 25 per cent of their income in rent. If a tenant does not declare their income correctly and is found out, Family and Community Services will calculate the rent that he or she should have paid and charge the tenant that amount. This will result in a debt, which can amount to many thousands of dollars. The tenant is able to make arrangements with Family and Community Services to pay off that debt in small manageable payments over an agreed period of time. This bill will allow any debt arising from a proven subsidy fraud to be classified as rent arrears and therefore managed by the department as such.

This was the case for many years until a tribunal judgement in 2014 determined that the debt arising from fraudulently claiming a subsidy was a civil debt and not rent arrears. This is important because it is much easier to get repayment of the money owed if the debt is classified as rent arrears rather than a civil debt. The only way to have civil debt repaid is through costly and often very lengthy proceedings in civil courts. This bill will also provide Family and Community Services with the power to obtain information, documents and evidence from third parties such as employers, to help investigate fraudulent activity. These powers are similar to those that a number of other State agencies have. Furthermore, this bill changes the prosecution for tenant fraud from six months from the date of a false declaration being made by a tenant to 12 months from the date the fraud is detected by Family and Community Services. It is very common for Family and Community Services to become aware of offences sometime after the false initial income or assets declaration is made.

When a tenancy has been terminated for rent arrears or antisocial behaviour, the tenancy should be terminated within a reasonable period of time. This is so that rent arrears do not continue to accumulate or so that neighbours do not have to tolerate antisocial behaviour for longer than necessary. Tenants should not generally need more than 28 days to make alternative arrangements for themselves—for example, finding a property in the private market, especially as they will be given assistance to do this. If there are exceptional circumstances then the tribunal will be able to delay the vacation of the property for a longer period.

Family and Community Services conducts 400,000 maintenance jobs per year and has binding contracts for maintenance in place. The prices within these contracts are determined by competitive

procurement processes and maintenance providers generally offer discounts because of the volume of work commissioned. These contracts provide Family and Community Services with a detailed and agreed schedule of costs for all maintenance work. As these properties are a public asset, an appropriate standard of workmanship is required. Need I add, simply to make sure that social housing tenants have a good standard of living an appropriate standard of workmanship is required.

Under the contracts, Family and Community Services is able to establish and monitor the standard of work provided by its contractors. It is important that tribunal members accept Family and Community Services' schedule of costs, so that tenants pay the actual cost of repair and tax payers are not left to foot the bill for someone else's irresponsible behaviour. This legislation proposes that when assessing the cost of malicious damage to a property the tribunal will be obliged to accept Family and Community Services' actual costs of repairs—I stress actual costs of repairs. Tenants will still be able to dispute whether the repair is necessary and whether they were responsible for the damage.

The management of antisocial and criminal behaviour is a challenge for the social housing system, but it is critical that it be addressed so that the vast majority of tenants who live in our social housing system feel safe and protected. In my few months as Minister, and also from my many years as a member of Parliament, I have heard from social housing tenants of their wish to ensure that our social housing communities are safer and more pleasant environments for all who live in them. I am also sure that many members in this place are well aware of the high level of concern amongst social housing tenants for the need to ensure that their homes are safe and that they can feel totally confident when they walk out their front doors to engage with the rest of the community. I assure the House that this Government is committed to ensuring not only that more social housing is provided over the next few years but that it is safe for tenants. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Ms Sonia Horner and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

IMPOUNDING AMENDMENT (UNATTENDED BOAT TRAILERS) BILL 2015

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

Second Reading

Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst—Minister for Local Government) [12.21 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce the Impounding Amendment (Unattended Boat Trailers) Bill 2015. The object of the bill is to introduce a number of measures to improve the management of boat trailer parking. Increasing numbers of families across New South Wales are enjoying the pleasures and enjoyment that come from a day on the water. One of the great treasures that New South Wales has to offer is its vast and diverse recreational waterways—whether that is the beauty and majesty of Sydney Harbour or the simple pleasures of boating on Lake Oberon, in my electorate. However, as more families are taking up this pastime there is increasing pressure on storage of boats, especially in higher density areas. Increasingly, boat owners are using on-street parking as a long-term parking solution for their boats. This has led to legitimate concerns about loss of amenity and increased road safety risk.

Currently, there are 204,000 boat trailers in New South Wales registered with Roads and Maritime Services. This number is forecast to increase by around 2.9 per cent per annum over the next decade. Consequently, the concerns of residents are likely to be exacerbated if the problem remains unchecked. The Impounding Act 1993 confers powers on enforcement officers to impound a vehicle or a trailer where the enforcement officer believes on reasonable grounds that the vehicle or trailer has been abandoned or left unattended. While these powers allow enforcement officers to impound clearly

abandoned or unattended boat trailers, the officers cannot direct that legally parked boat trailers be moved by their owners, however long they have been parked. Enforcement authorities, in particular local councils, the NSW Police Force and Roads and Maritime Services, are finding that the exercise of current powers is proving insufficient to effectively respond to residents' concerns about the negative impacts of boat trailer parking.

This bill seeks to amend the Impounding Act 1993 by conferring on enforcement officers enhanced powers specifically relating to the parking of boat trailers. It proposes to do this in the following ways: making parked boat trailers, whether parked legally or otherwise, subject to impounding by an enforcement officer if unremoved for a period of three months; allowing the three-month period to be altered by regulation; and providing that, once a boat trailer becomes subject to impounding because the three-month period has elapsed, the owner must be given a minimum of 15 days' notice before impounding occurs. These measures will provide council and other enforcement officers with a clear power to direct that boat trailers, although legally parked, be moved on or impounded after being parked in the same place for three months after a further 15 days' notice has been given to the owner.

The further 15-day notice period is provided as a matter of fairness to boat trailer owners, having regard to the length of time the trailer has been parked and the fact that in most cases trailers are registered and legally parked. These measures are designed to balance the rights of boat owners to legally park their trailers on the street and the interests and amenity of residents and the broader community in the use and sharing of an increasingly scarce resource—namely, on-street parking. It is also important to note that this bill is part of a broader package of legislative and complementary policy measures that seeks to increase long-term and on-water boat storage capacity.

The amendments will not affect the power enforcement officers currently have under the Act to immediately impound, without notice, a boat trailer that is obstructing traffic or that is likely to be a danger to the public. Nor will the amendments affect the general power that enforcement officers currently have to impound a boat trailer where they believe, on reasonable grounds, that the trailer has been abandoned or left unattended. Further, the offences that currently apply under the Impounding Act where a vehicle is abandoned or left unattended will not apply to owners of boat trailers that are parked for more than the prescribed period. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the Hon. Duncan Gay, Minister for Roads, Maritime and Freight, on this important bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Paul Lynch and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

CRIMES (SENTENCING PROCEDURE) AMENDMENT (FIREARMS OFFENCES) BILL 2015

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 2 June 2015.

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool) [12.27 p.m.]: I lead for the Opposition on the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Firearms Offences) Bill 2015. The Opposition does not oppose the bill. The object of this bill is to provide amendments to the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act in two respects. One is to establish non-parole periods for several firearms offences against the Crimes Act. The second is to increase the standard non-parole period for offences relating to the unauthorised possession or use of firearms and prohibited weapons under the Firearms Act and the Weapons Prohibition Act. The standard non-parole period [SNPP] scheme was introduced in 2002 by the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Standard Minimum Sentencing) Bill. The SNPP represents the non-parole period for an offence that falls into the middle of the range of seriousness for that offence.

Sentencing courts retain the discretion to depart from imposing the SNPP in any given case. At the time of its introduction the scheme was subject to two conflicting criticisms. The then Opposition, now

Government, said it did not go far enough and should have been replaced by mandatory sentencing. Indeed, they divided on it. On the other hand, others, including the Bar Association and legal professionals, for example, said it went too far and was a restraint on judicial discretion. This traditional common law criticism continues to be made today, often in conjunction with the understandable concern that the process of sentencing has perhaps become overly complex.

My own view is that the SNPP scheme retains judicial discretion and is dramatically superior to, and more preferable than, mandatory sentencing. The SNPP scheme has since been considered in *Muldrock v The Queen* [2011] HCA 49; 244 CLR 120. This Parliament subsequently responded with the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Standard Non-parole Periods) Act 2013, which essentially conformed to Muldrock. The scheme periods are a significant guidepost in the instinctive synthesis that is the sentencing process.

The provisions that are in this bill are taken from recommendations in a report dated December 2013 by the NSW Sentencing Council entitled "Standard Non-parole Periods". The provisions in the bill are identical to several of the Sentencing Council's recommendations. That is important because it deals with what has traditionally been one of the major criticisms of SNPPs—that the assigned periods often seem arbitrary and the ratios of SNPPs to maximum sentences seem to vary widely. That, for example, was clearly the case for section 66A (1) of the Crimes Act—a point made in the recent debate on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Child Sex Offences) Bill. An additional criticism is that the basis for the inclusion of some offences and the exclusion of others has also not been clear.

The recommendations in the Sentencing Council report follow a careful consideration of which offences should be included in the scheme and what the SNPPs should be. That gives an intellectually much more satisfying outcome and I believe a much more just result. The development of a Sentencing Council report, which includes consultation, avoids the criticism of lack of transparency made in relation to the original scheme. Chapter 2 of the Sentencing Council report has a useful discussion of the basis upon which offences should be included in the scheme.

The Sentencing Council provides an analysis of the case for including each of the offences included in the bill. Section 33A of the Crimes Act should be included because the offence has a very high maximum penalty, is indictable only and is similar to offences already included. Several subsections of section 93GA are also included in the scheme. Reasons for inclusion include that they have maximum penalties of 14 years or more, they are indictable only, they have a risk of innocent community members being harmed, and the commission of offences causes apprehension in the community.

The Sentencing Council notes very small numbers of convictions for section 93GA. From April 2006 to March 2013 only 25 sentences were imposed for offences under section 93GA (1) as the principal offence. As at 11 December 2013, no convictions at all had been imposed for offences under section 93GA (1A) or section 93GA (1B). The number of reported incidents is greater, but SNPPs are only relevant if someone is apprehended, sentenced and convicted. The Sentencing Council also recommends increases in the SNPP for offences of unauthorised possession or use of a pistol or prohibited firearm or prohibited weapon. Both offences have SNPPs of three years. The offence relating to pistols and prohibited firearms has a recommendation that the SNPP be increased to four years. It is proposed that the SNPP for the prohibited weapon offence be increased to five years. At paragraph 4.58, the Sentencing Council report states:

The increased term for prohibited weapons is justified because prohibited weapons include military-style weapons such as bombs (including improvised explosive devices), grenades, rockets, missiles, mines and tear gas canisters, as well as other articles such as detachable firearm magazines. The use or possession of these items can give rise to exceptional harm and potentially large numbers of victims and, accordingly, give rise to a special need for deterrence.

As well as justifying the inclusion of the offences in the scheme, these comments highlight that despite

this bill's title and the Government's rhetoric around it, the bill is about more than guns. If the SNPP scheme is to sensibly provide guidance to the sentencing process it needs to be on a rational and transparent basis. As the Sentencing Council notes, the 2002 legislation does not suggest an entirely coherent approach. The Sentencing Council posits a starting point for SNPPs of 37.5 per cent of the maximum penalty for those offences included in the scheme. This comes from a non-parole period of 75 per cent of the head sentence, the head sentence of a mid-range offence being set at 50 per cent of the maximum penalty. SNPPs can be varied upwards or downwards from that point.

This approach can be seen in the provisions of this bill, which, as I have said, are a precise reflection of the Sentencing Council recommendations. The SNPP ratio-to-head sentences for the offences in the bill, in the order in which the offences appear in the bill, are as follows: 36 per cent, 36 per cent, 36 per cent, 38 per cent, 38 per cent, 28.75 per cent and 35.71 per cent. This is a much more rational and transparent approach than was previously seen in the SNPP scheme. For that reason in particular the bill should be supported. In that context I note some of the inaccurate rhetoric by the Government around this bill. Various senior Government Ministers have talked this bill up as part of a crackdown on gun crime and as sending a message to gun criminals. Government members have said they have had a gutful of these incidents. This, of course, is hypocritical Government cant.

This bill results from a Sentencing Council report. The Government requested the report in September 2013 and did not mention gun crime. The Government sensibly requested a review of the SNPP scheme in far more general terms than has been reflected in the rhetoric around it since then. Insofar as the Government's request highlighted particular offences, the request referred to child sexual assault offences—it was not about gun crimes. Indeed, this very bill now before the House deals with more than gun crime. The Government received the report in December 2013 and 18 months later it finally legislates. As a sensible reform to the SNPP scheme this bill is welcomed. As to sending a message on gun crime, it is a bit late. Including crimes not associated with guns is entirely sensible but it makes a mockery of some of the Government's rhetoric.

As to how effective this bill might be, the Government has overegged the pudding. As I noted earlier, the Sentencing Council said several of the offences in this bill have never been used—no-one has ever been charged. It is a pretty bizarre case of putting the cart before the horse to say that introducing SNPPs for offences which are never used will frighten gun criminals into desisting from their behaviour. It is the Jim Hacker *Yes Minister* approach to gun crime: changing sentences for offences for which no-one has ever been charged. The Sentencing Council report refers to offences up until 2013.

The Parliamentary Library has provided me with updated figures. For the 2½ years between January 2012 and September 2014 there were 10 convictions under section 33A (1) and 16 under section 93GA (1). There continues to have been zero offences charged under section 93GA (1A) or (1B). For offences under indictment there were nine offences under section 7 (1) of the Weapon Prohibitions Act between January 2012 and September 2014. There were admittedly more for section 7 of the Firearms Act. There were also quite a number of matters dealt with summarily, but they would not be included in the SNPP in any event. Therefore, the reality of some of this does not match the Government's rhetoric.

There has also been an assertion that these changes will increase the length of sentencing. Leaving aside the point I have just made about how few people actually get convicted of some of these offences in a way that involves the SNPP, the evidence about sentences increasing under SNPPs is not that clear. That is particularly because, as the Sentencing Council notes, there is no real assessment of sentencing trends available post Muldrock. Some work was done and recorded by the Judicial Commission in 2010 on pre-Muldrock sentencing patterns, but that was on quite limited data. Sentences seem to be increasing in any event, as the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research reminded us in March, regardless of whether SNPPs are involved or not. So I think the rhetorical claim is probably best regarded at this stage as unproven.

As I have indicated, to present this bill as a decisive response to gun crime is a bit of a stretch.

The emphasis on spin over substance is regrettable, albeit predictable. There is a fundamental difference between the two sides of this House on this issue. For this side of the House these issues have very real and immediate concerns. Disproportionately, drive-by shootings occur in Western Sydney and they are particularly relevant for Labor members in this House. I live in a great part of Sydney and I enjoy living there very much. In the past few years my street has had two drive-by shootings, a fire bombing and a machete attack. My street also saw the commencement of events leading to a siege in Roland Avenue in February of this year. Around the corner is a house marked with bullet holes. Two blocks away there was a drive-by shooting in Mainsbridge Avenue.

These are real and immediate concerns for electorates such as mine. We do not need to have perfectly sensible bills such as this dressed up as something they are not. Neither I nor my electorate have any time for a government with such disingenuous rhetoric and which opportunistically treats a matter that is literally one of life and death. The Government's silly rhetoric over the bill does nothing to calm the fears in areas such as mine. Despite that, the bill is quite sensible and the Opposition does not oppose it.

Mr DAMIEN TUDEHOPE (Epping) [12.40 p.m.]: I support the Government's introduction of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Firearms Offences) Bill 2015. As the Attorney General said in her second reading speech, this bill implements an election commitment to bring sentences for gun-related crime into line with community expectations, better reflecting the objective seriousness of firearm and weapon crimes as well as improving confidence in the justice system. The issue has been one which has tormented governments as far back as 2004 when the Sentencing Council, then chaired by Alan Abadee, QC, issued a report entitled "Firearm Offences and the Standard Non-Parole Sentencing Scheme". Historically the same issues which bedevilled the Government in 2004 remained in existence in 2013.

Both governments were bedevilled by drive-by shootings and gun-related street offences. In 2013 the Sentencing Council issued a further report on the use of standard non-parole periods in respect of a variety of serious offences, including firearm offences. The starting point in the consideration of this legislation is to get a clear understanding of the use of standard non-parole periods in the sentencing process. In introducing the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Standard Non-parole Periods) Bill 2013, the purpose of which was to clarify the operation of the standard non-parole period scheme in accordance with the decision of the High Court in *Muldrock v The Queen*, the then Attorney General said:

Part 4, Division 1A of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 sets out a scheme of standard non-parole periods for a number of specified, serious offences.

Standard non-parole periods provide clear guidance on the seriousness with which the Legislature views certain offences. In particular, they indicate to courts what Parliament considers should be the non-parole period for an offence which falls in the middle of the range of seriousness, for the types of offence to which they apply.

The explanatory notes to that bill provide:

The object of this Bill is to amend the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 with respect to the setting of standard non-parole periods for offences.

The amendments made by the Bill clarify the following aspects of the role of the standard non-parole period in sentencing, as a consequence of the High Court decision in *Muldrock v The Queen* 120111 HCA 39:

- (a) a standard non-parole period represents the non-parole period not for the actual offence for which an offender is to be sentenced but for an offence of the same kind that is in the middle of the range of seriousness taking into account only objective factors that affect its

relative seriousness,

- (b) the standard non-parole period for an offence is to be taken into account in determining the appropriate sentence for an offender,
- (c) in taking a standard non-parole period into account, a court is not required to make an assessment of the extent to which the seriousness of the offence for which the non-parole period is set differs from that of an offence to which the standard non-parole period is referable.

Not all offences are of such a nature that they need a legislative direction in respect of the setting of a standard non-parole period [SNPP]. The factors that can be considered in deciding whether an offence should be a SNPP offence include whether the offence has a significant maximum penalty, is triable on indictment only, involves elements of aggravation, involves a vulnerable victim, involves special risk of serious consequences to the victim and the community, is prevalent, is subject to a pattern of inadequate sentencing and is subject to a pattern of inconsistent sentences.

The fact that an offence potentially encompasses a wide range of offending behaviour is a factor that can be considered in deciding whether to exclude an offence from the SNPP scheme. The factors need to be applied flexibly and with careful judgement. It is not necessary for all of the factors to be present. A combination of some but not all of the factors will usually need to be taken into account. In its 2013 report the Sentencing Council set out a methodology for determining the manner in which the Legislature ought to approach the setting of standard non parole periods:

The process for specifying a SNPP for a SNPP offence would assume as a starting point a non-parole period that is 37.5% of the maximum penalty for the offence. The resulting figure can then be reduced or increased (to no more than 50% of the maximum penalty for the offence) as is appropriate, having regard to the following matters:

- (a) the special need for deterrence,
- (b) the need to recognise the exceptional harm which the offence may cause,
- (c) the potential vulnerability of those who may be victims,
- (d) the extent to which the offence may involve a breach of trust or abuse of authority, and
- (e) sentencing statistics and practice, including relevant appellate guidance as to appropriate levels of sentencing for the offence.

Using this rationale and methodology the bill before the House amends the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 to introduce five new SNPPs for the following firearms offences in the Crimes Act 1900:

Discharging a firearm with intent to cause grievous bodily harm section 33A(1) of the Crimes Act 1900—SNPP of 9 years;

Discharging a firearm with intent to resist arrest or detention section 33A(2) of the Crimes Act 1900—SNPP of 9 years;

Fire a firearm at a dwelling/house or other building with reckless disregard for the safety of any person section 93GA(1) of the Crimes Act 1900—SNPP of 5 years;

Fire a firearm, during a public disorder, at a dwelling/house or other building with reckless

disregard for the safety of any person section 93GA(1A) of the Crimes Act 1900—SNPP of 6 years;

Fire a firearm, in the course of an organised criminal activity, at a dwelling/house or other building with reckless disregard for the safety of any person 593GA(1B) of the Crimes Act 1900— SNPP of 6 years.

Each of the offences represents a standard non-parole period of 37.5 per cent of the maximum penalty. In making this recommendation the Sentencing Council said:

In our view the SNPP for the offences under s 33A of the Crimes Act 1900 (NSW) should be 9 years imprisonment. This is the same SNPP we have recommended for the related offence of wounding or causing grievous bodily harm with intent to resist arrest or prevent lawful arrest or detention under s 33 (2). We have recommended the same SNPP for the offences under both s 33A (1) and (2) because we consider the discharge of a firearm with the specific intent to cause grievous bodily harm is as serious as that of wounding or discharging a firearm with intent to resist arrest or prevent lawful arrest or detention. In each case, the proposed SNPP involves an appropriate gradation of the SNPPs for the associated offences related to the unauthorised possession or use of pistols or prohibited firearms currently included in the scheme (item 20) which do not require proof of any specific intent concerning their possession or use.

We consider that the SNPP for firing at a building with reckless disregard for safety (basic and aggravated offences under s 93GA)—should be set at around 37.5% of the maximum penalty for each offence. While deterring such behaviour is an important consideration, particularly serious outcomes involving injury or death, particularly where that is specifically intended, will be covered by other offences with appropriate penalties (some of which are already included in the SNPP scheme).

The bill also amends the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 to increase the SNPPs for the following firearms offences: unauthorised possession or use of firearms under section 7 of the Firearms Act 1996—SNPP from three years to five years; and unauthorised possession or use of a prohibited weapon under section 7 of the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998—SNPP from three years to five years. In recommending those increases the Sentencing Council observed:

For each of the offences of unauthorised possession or use of a pistol or prohibited firearm, s 21, or a prohibited weapon, s 22, the current SNPP is set at 3 years or 21.4% of the maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment.

In our view these NPPs are disproportionately low for offences involving the unauthorised possession or use of a pistol or prohibited firearm or of a prohibited weapon. Again the potentially serious consequences for the community arising from these offences and the need for strongly deterrent sentences justify an increase in the SNPPs. We recommend that the SNPP for unauthorised possession or use of a pistol or prohibited firearm be increased to 4 years (resulting in a 28.6% ratio to the maximum penalty), and that the SNPP for unauthorised possession or use of a prohibited weapon be increased to 5 years (resulting in a 35.7% ratio to the maximum penalty).

The increased term for prohibited weapons is justified because prohibited weapons include military-style weapons such as bombs (including improvised explosive devices), grenades, rockets, missiles, mines and tear gas canisters, as well as other articles such as detachable firearm magazines. The use or possession of these items can give rise to exceptional harm to potentially large numbers of victims and, accordingly, give rise to a special need for deterrence.

[Extension of time agreed to.]

The people of New South Wales believe that the use of firearms is a risk to the safety of us all. Australia leads the world in restricting their use and of this we ought rightly be proud. How the United States envies the legislation that the Howard Government introduced to limit the amount and use of firearms. I commend the bill to the House.

Dr HUGH McDERMOTT (Prospect) [12.49 p.m.]: I support the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Firearms Offences) Bill 2015. The purpose of the bill is to establish and increase standard non-parole periods for a number of firearm offences. As members know, the Standard Non-Parole Periods [SNPP] scheme was introduced by legislation in 2002 as an alternative to mandatory sentencing. The SNPP scheme represents the non-parole period for an offence in the middle range of objective seriousness. Critics argue that the scheme restricts judicial discretion and makes sentence more complex. In fact, judicial discretion is retained and it is preferable to mandatory sentencing. I agree with that.

The Government has presented the proposals in the bill as a significant toughening of the laws when, in fact, they result from a careful consideration of the standard non-parole periods in a Sentencing Council report. That being the case, the bill is not the Government crackdown that has been sold to the public. The Sentencing Council was asked to review the SNPP scheme rather than to crack down on gun crime. The recommendations included a range of criminal offences and were not limited to gun crime. The Sentencing Council report was dated December 2013. Legislation was only introduced 18 months later. In any event, there is limited evidence that increased penalties deter offending. Likelihood of apprehension is a much more effective deterrent.

As the member for Prospect living in Western Sydney, I am aware that over the past few weeks shots have been fired in my electorate. It is a general occurrence in the area. We hear news reports almost weekly of gun crime all over Western Sydney. Gun crime has decreased over the past months, which is a credit to the police force. It is also a credit to the proactive policing taking place in Blacktown, Holroyd and Fairfield that is helping to cut down on the number of shootings. It is notable that many raids have been carried out and restrictive actions have been taken against bikie gangs within the Prospect electorate at Wetherill Park and other places. That has also occurred in Horsley Park and Mulgoa in neighbouring electorates, which must also have helped to reduce gun crime. However, there is much more we can do to reduce gun crime and other types of crime in the Prospect electorate and throughout Western Sydney.

Almost every month in the past four years there have been serious incidents involving gun crime in the Fairfield, Blacktown and Holroyd local area commands, all of which are within my electorate. More than 350 shootings have taken place in Western Sydney since 2011. I come to the solution from two angles. The first is as a barrister and former senior lecturer at the School of Policing, who has worked closely with law enforcement in New South Wales and overseas. The second is as a father with a young family of two daughters. The safety and security of families in Western Sydney is a matter close to my heart.

We need tougher laws on guns and ammunition sales and ownership. We must strengthen the criminal justice system so that penalties reflect the menace of gun crime and its impact in Western Sydney and New South Wales. We need a focus on high-visibility policing to deter criminal activity. We need a strong response from police when there is a critical incident. When a shooting incident happens the scene must go into lockdown and must have the best detectives and forensic investigators on the scene. We need to target the criminals from all angles—seizing their weapons and the profits of their illegal activities including their houses, cars, bank accounts and any other toy they obtained from illicit proceeds. Police need to work closely with the local community to gain its trust and build strategies together to target these criminals.

As a result of the State Government budget cuts the Fairfield, Blacktown, Holroyd and local area

commands are currently short of their allocated authorised strength. We need more police on the beat, not less. When crime in Western Sydney is rising we should be asking: Why is the Baird Government cutting the police budget? Why do we not have enough police officers in local area commands? What is the Minister for Western Sydney doing about it? And what have we been doing to fight to keep local police officers in our communities?

The first thing we can do is reverse the Coalition Government's slashing of police officer numbers in our community and give the police the resources and community support they need to fight crime. The spiralling rise in shooting crimes in Sydney's western suburbs requires strong and sustained political, community and police action to keep the suburbs safe for families. I happen to live in a suburb that has been ringed by shooting incidents. One recently took place just around the corner from my home. Although we have not had any shooting in Greystanes police have twice raided homes at which weapons were being manufactured. In fact, an area commander joked to me that they are not going to shoot in the area because it is where they manufacture the weapons.

Like many of my neighbours, I can see that the State Government is seeking but not offering new strategies or solutions to fight the gun crime that is plaguing Western Sydney. It is not just well-organised bikie gangs that are to blame; it is a range of criminals and business rivals who all have access to guns. They are escalating rather than settling all manners of disputes by carrying out targeted shootings. As a result of "normalisation" it is only a matter of time before handguns become more widely used in disputes among traditionally law-abiding members of the public and shootings follow the United States trend and occur in places such as Australian high schools.

We are not talking about rifles but concealed weapons—namely, pistols. We need new and tighter controls on pistols and ammunition, which perhaps should include a new buyback scheme for pistols. A previous speaker mentioned the Howard Government's buyback scheme, which was a credit to that Coalition Government. It worked effectively and perhaps we need a modernised version of that scheme. It would certainly have my support. The new controls should also include a national register and perhaps a strengthening of border control strategies because the majority of handguns come from overseas suppliers.

There also needs to be a greater high-profile police presence in the suburbs that are most affected by shootings and the police response to shooting incidents needs to be immediate and unrelenting. The community will support strong and hard action by police against criminals. Criminals are reacting to a lack of enforcement, a lack of police in key target suburbs and what appears to be a lack of political will by the State Government to really take on the problems of gun crime and criminal gang activity. An example of the Government's lack of will was its announcement almost two years ago in response to a batch of up to five shootings in one day. The Government changed the law so that most outlaw motorcycle gang members would be unable to wear their colours in nightclubs in Kings Cross. Police and criminals alike met that announcement with howls of laughter. How does changing a dress code stop gun crime? In addition, Kings Cross is in the eastern suburbs—nowhere near where the shootings were occurring in the western suburbs.

During the 1990s Victoria faced a similar dilemma with smaller organised crime groups that had resorted to shootings and bombings to settle disputes. The police response was slow at that time because the view of most Victorian police officers was that as long as the criminals were shooting other criminals it should not matter too much and it really was not a concern for the general public. That view drastically changed when Jason Moran was shot at a children's sporting event in a mini-van as children sat terrified in the back seat. It has now become clear that if the Baird Government will not take on the people who use guns to settle disputes or give the police the support and direction they need it is time for our local community organisations to take up the challenge. The most enduring fix will come from the combined effect of public community groups exerting pressure on the government and police to break the culture of gang and criminal activity that sponsors gun use as an acceptable recourse for dispute resolution.

Communities in Western Sydney must start taking action to organise and reclaim street safety in their suburbs. If the State Government cannot fix the escalating problem, the community must stand up and demand an end to gun violence in Western Sydney. It was that type of community action that helped fight the devastating impact of Vietnamese crime gangs that controlled the heroin trade in Cabramatta. We need to send a clear message to this Government and the gun-wielding criminals that we will support whatever action is needed to make our streets safe again. For me the big question is what it will take for the Government to act to solve the gun crime problem. Will it take a Port Arthur style massacre in Western Sydney?

Mr JOHN SIDOTI (Drummoyne—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.59 p.m.]: I support the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Firearms Offences) Bill 2015. For too long the New South Wales community has been under threat from lacklustre laws that allow ridiculously lenient sentences for criminals caught with loaded semi-automatic pistols and lethal machine-guns. All that is about to change under the provisions in this legislation. The Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Firearms Offences) Bill 2015 delivers on the Government's election commitment to improve sentencing for gun-related crime. There is a long-held view amongst the public that criminals have been getting off too lightly for owning firearms or for firearms offences. Currently the average jail term for weapons offences in the New South Wales District Court is less than two years, despite carrying a maximum penalty of 14 years. This has been commonplace despite judicial sentencing guidelines that recommend a minimum non-parole period of three years for gun possession.

Unbelievably, the average term given in the Local Court is even lower, at just six months. The maximum sentence of 14 years is rarely given. In one case Oliver Merza, a member of one of Sydney's most vicious street gangs, received a minimum sentence of two years after he was caught with nine weapons that were to be used in a street war. At the time, Merza pleaded guilty to possession of three of the weapons. Another known criminal Steven Hallaby was arrested with a loaded pistol in February this year. The pistol was concealed in a bum bag. He was sentenced to three years jail but will have to serve a non-parole period of only 14 months. Police were outraged at the sentence, with one senior officer observing:

So in just over a year, a well-known criminal carrying a handgun while walking around Sydney will be back on the streets. It is not sending any message at all to these guys.

In another instance, a senior member of a bikie gang spent only eight months behind bars after a loaded Uzi machine-gun and 40 rounds of ammunition were found in his possession. According to New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research figures, the average sentence in the District Court for any gun crime is just 23.9 months. In the Local Court it is 6.9 months. Clearly, it is time to revisit sentencing, and the time has come with this bill. At present there is absolutely no deterrent to carrying a gun. Many criminals are getting off lightly by pleading guilty. As the Chief Executive of the Victims of Crime Assistance League, Howard Brown, said:

There is something seriously wrong if you buy a machinegun and get a six month good behaviour bond.

Consider the case of Chad Jon Blazejko. He was given a six-month good behaviour bond in April last year for buying and possessing an Austen machine-gun. This has got to stop. Criminals who fire guns to evade arrest and gangsters who carry out drive-by shootings will now face much tougher penalties. Put simply, firearms offences will be added to the standard non-parole period scheme. This guides judges when deciding the minimum jail terms that criminals must serve. The bill ensures that sentences for firearms and weapons offences are better aligned with community needs and reflect the seriousness of the crime.

The bill sets standard non-parole periods for five very serious firearms offences that are not

currently included in the scheme. In 2013 the New South Wales Government sought advice from the NSW Sentencing Council in a review of the operation of the standard non-parole period scheme. The council undertook community consultation and made recommendations on what offences should be included in the scheme. As a result, the five serious firearms offences were added because of the serious criminality involved. Another consideration was the risk that certain individuals posed to the community and law enforcement officials. The proposed standard non-parole periods are set at a level identified by the NSW Sentencing Council taking into account the seriousness of the offences and their relationship to other offences within the scheme.

The bill also makes provision that, on the council's recommendation, existing non-parole periods relating to prohibited firearms and weapons be increased. Under the bill the standard non-parole period for unauthorised possession or use of a prohibited firearm or pistol will increase from three years to four years. The standard non-parole period for unauthorised possession or use of a prohibited weapon will increase from three years to five years. These provisions have not only been recommended by the council but also reflect community concern about the leniency of sentences for criminals in possession of firearms. They also reflect the concern expressed by members of the NSW Police Force who for some time have said that light sentencing sends the wrong message to criminals.

In September 2009 Nigel Manifold was sentenced to two years and three months for firearm possession. He spent only one year and 28 days in jail before being released. At the time, one police source observed that organised crime figures were more worried about being jailed for driving without a licence than being caught carrying a handgun. Schedule 1 to the bill amends the Crime (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999, adding five new weapons offences to the standard non-parole period scheme.

Those offences and their corresponding standard non-parole periods are: discharging a firearm with intent to cause grievous bodily harm under section 33A of the Crimes Act 1900, with a standard non-parole period of nine years; discharging a firearm with intent to resist arrest under section 33A of the Crimes Act 1900, with a standard non-parole period of nine years; discharging a firearm at a dwelling or other building with reckless disregard for the safety of any person under section 93GA (1A) of the Crimes Act 1900, with a standard non-parole period of six years; discharging a firearm in the course of organised crime activity at a dwelling or other building with reckless disregard for the safety of any person under section 93GA (1B) of the Crimes Act 1900, with a standard non-parole period of six years.

Item [3] of schedule 1 changes the standard non-parole period for the offence of unauthorised possession or use of a prohibited firearm or pistol from three to four years. The standard non-parole period for the offence of unauthorised possession or use of a prohibited firearm increases from three to five years. These changes to the law have been sought by the community and enforcement agencies for some time. I congratulate the Attorney General and the NSW Sentencing Council on bringing this legislation before the House in such a timely manner. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [1.06 p.m.]: I take great pride in supporting what I consider to be an ongoing process that is continuing in the Crime (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Firearms Offences) Bill 2015. The bill amends the Crime (Sentencing Procedure) Act of 1999 to introduce standard non-parole periods [SNPPs] for five firearms offences already contained in the Crimes Act 1900. It increases the existing standard non-parole periods for the two offences relating to the unauthorised possession or use of firearms and prohibited weapons. The bill implements the Government's election commitment to bring sentences for gun-related crimes into line with community expectations and better reflect the objective seriousness of firearms and weapon crimes, as well as improving confidence in the judicial system. The reforms in the bill adopt the recommendations of the NSW Sentencing Council in its 2013 report on standard non-parole periods.

The SNPPs aim to promote greater transparency and consistency in sentencing, and to act as a sentencing guidepost for the judiciary. I note that the former Minister for Police is in the Chamber. I was his Parliamentary Secretary when firearms prohibition orders were introduced that allowed police to

search vehicles, premises and people who were subject to a prohibition order. At the time I thought it was fairly significant legislation. But it was not until I represented the Minister that I had the opportunity to speak at length to frontline police. In Liverpool in the south-west region I attended a function with the member for Holsworthy at which police officers received awards, and I spoke to many officers.

I acknowledge the work of Assistant Commissioner Frank Minnelli. He does a fabulous job. Unfortunately, in his area there is a high incidence of drive-by shootings and firearms offences. The police applauded the Government for taking a hard line on firearms offences. They gave me many examples of how firearms prohibition orders—one of the best measures this Government has introduced to catch criminals and prevent crime—had assisted with searching cars, premises and individuals to discover large caches of firearms. I think that demonstrates clearly the Government's commitment to stamping out this practice and keeping our community safe. The Government is doing its bit in this area. Importantly, it is talking to the key stakeholders: police on the front line.

As I have said previously in this House, I have had several opportunities to ride with police in a general duties car or to accompany them on tactical assault group operations. I have witnessed the hard work of the men and women of the NSW Police Force and seen what it is like for them working at 3.00 a.m. or 4.00 a.m. It behoves all members in this place to give police the tools they need to do their job. We cannot ask the men and women of the NSW Police Force to continue to go out into the community with one hand—or in some cases both hands—tied behind their backs. The Government amended the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act at section 99 (3) to make arrest powers simpler for police. I know there is to be a further review so I hope that the police will have access to even greater tools.

The Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Firearms Offences) Bill 2015 implements the Government's commitments and shows that it is serious about tackling gun-related crime. The amendments are consistent with recommendations made by the NSW Sentencing Council following its review of the standard non-parole period scheme. The council thought a number of gun-related offences were so serious that they should be included in the standard non-parole period scheme. The council also thought the existing standard non-parole periods for unauthorised weapon possession needed to be increased because the potentially serious consequences of those offences created a special need for deterrence. The council's recommendations have informed the Government's actions in this area and provided a strong policy basis for the amendments in the bill.

Since 2011 the Government has introduced a suite of reforms to target directly those who misuse illegal firearms. The Government has introduced new laws that create a new aggravated offence of shooting at a dwelling in the context of organised criminal activity—punishable by up to 16 years imprisonment. The new laws give police the power to enter and search premises or vehicles occupied by persons subject to a firearms prohibition order without warrant to determine whether the person is complying with the order. On that point, in my great electorate of Tweed there has been a particular focus on the so-called bikie laws in Queensland and the potential for bikies to move into New South Wales. I know of four occasions when the police have used firearms prohibition orders successfully to make arrests and to confiscate a significant amount of firearms, illicit drugs and cash. It is a big deterrent to those criminals. I pay tribute to Jeff Loy, the Northern Region commander. He does an excellent job and is thoroughly supported by Stuart Wilkins, the current detective superintendent, and all the other hardworking local police.

The new laws also prohibit people who are subject to a firearms prohibition order from acquiring or possessing ammunition and firearms parts, residing in premises where firearms are kept and attending premises such as shooting ranges. They also increase the penalties for breaching a firearms prohibition order. Police have put these powers to good use and issued more than 550 firearms prohibition orders since the new laws came into effect. At this point it is appropriate to indicate my support for the Federal Government and the enormous steps it has taken to increase border security and customs controls. Unfortunately, the previous Federal Government allowed those agencies to be starved of funds and

manpower. What did we see? An enormous number of illicit firearms entered the country. So I say well done to the current Federal Government for its ever-increasing vigilance regarding our borders. Of the 550 firearms prohibition orders I just mentioned, 200 have been served on members of outlaw motorcycle gangs. More firearms prohibition orders have been approved and are waiting to be served.

In the last financial year the police took more than 10,000 guns off the streets—including more than 700 handguns—in New South Wales. That is significant and obviously reflects the hard work of the men and women in our Police Force. Local police are supported by specialist police whose purpose is to drive down gun and gang crime via Operation Talon and Strike Force Raptor. I have awarded commendations to many police officers for their great work during those operations. Between them, Raptor and Talon have arrested more than 4,000 people; laid more than 8,000 charges; and seized nearly 900 firearms, \$4.4 million in cash and assets, and more than \$15 million in drugs. This is a great bill that reflects the Government's ongoing desire to keep the streets of New South Wales safe. I commend the bill to the House.

Pursuant to sessional order business interrupted and set down as an order of the day for a later hour.

Pursuant to sessional order community recognition statements proceeded with.

COMMUNITY RECOGNITION STATEMENTS

UPHIRE PTY LIMITED

Mr STUART AYRES (Penrith—Minister for Trade, Tourism and Major Events, and Minister for Sport) [1.16 p.m.]: I congratulate Uphire Penrith on being named the Hire and Rental Industry Association's Rental Company of the Year for 2015 in the under \$5 million category. Uphire is locally owned and since its inception in 2011 has gone from strength to strength, now providing close to 250 pieces of equipment for hire. It caters to the construction, manufacturing, infrastructure, events and retail sectors.

Owners Nigel and Renae McKinley and their dedicated team should be commended not only for winning this award but also for backing the Penrith community by employing locals and sponsoring local sporting groups and charity events. Finalists for this award in 2014, the Uphire team took on board the constructive feedback and this year took out the prestigious national title. I congratulate all members of the Uphire team on this remarkable achievement and on their continued support of the Penrith community.

CANTERBURY STATE EMERGENCY SERVICE

Mr JIHAD DIB (Lakemba) [1.17 p.m.]: I recognise and thank members of the Canterbury unit of the State Emergency Service [SES] for their valued work in my electorate during the month of Ramadan, especially at the Lakemba Mosque. SES volunteers gave up their time to direct both foot traffic and vehicles in and around Wangee Road, directing parking at Parry Park across the road and providing first aid when needed. They were there every weekend during Ramadan, and volunteered for three to four hours each night. On the holiest night, Laylat-ul-Qadr, SES members volunteered until sunrise the following day, only to be back again for the Eid celebration a few days later.

A lot of work and preparation occurs behind the scenes to enable community events to succeed. This is sometimes taken for granted, especially the work of volunteers. I take this opportunity to recognise the work of the SES on behalf of my constituents and the tens of thousands who visited Lakemba during the Islamic holy month. They noticed the presence of the SES, under the leadership of Lenore and Chris, and relayed to me how grateful they were for that extra bit of assistance. It is truly a credit to the SES and

to the volunteers who donated their time during this important cultural and religious occasion. It is volunteering that makes our community better, and I am rightly proud of my local branch of the SES. In the presence of the Minister for Emergency Services, who is in the Chamber, I say to them: Well done.

TRIBUTE TO AL GERSBACH

Mr ANDREW GEE (Orange—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.18 p.m.]: Today I inform the House that Al Gersbach of Parkes recently played his 200th game for the mighty Parkes Boars. Al is 57 years old. Al is the Benjamin Button of rugby—the older he gets, the better he plays. On that day, which was the Can Assist Charity Day, the Parkes Boars comfortably beat the Forbes Platypi 26-10. I was present that day. I congratulate the club on raising money for the Can Assist charity. I also note that Al, besides being the Benjamin Button of Central West Rugby, is also a noted Elvis tribute artist. When *Sunrise* visited Parkes last week he was featured in his Elvis gear. Indeed, we travelled to Parkes for the Elvis Festival on the *Elvis Express* earlier this year. I offer my congratulations to Al. I have with me for the benefit of members a photograph of Al featured in the Parkes *Champion-Post*. As members can see, he is a picture of rugby.

BLUE MOUNTAINS BUSHFIRES

Ms TRISH DOYLE (Blue Mountains) [1.19 p.m.]: Last Friday a fire broke out in the Jamison Valley at Wentworth Falls, off Tableland Road. Wildfire behaviour was provoked by strong winds. This is quite extraordinary for this time of year and only two weeks after a huge snowfall in the Blue Mountains. A section 44 state of emergency was declared on the morning of Sunday 2 August. I pay tribute to the NSW Rural Fire Service remote area firefighting crew, Fire and Rescue NSW, local police officers, National Parks and Wildlife Service personnel, State Emergency Service and ambulance crews. In particular, I thank Superintendent David Jones of the NSW Rural Fire Service for his calm leadership of hundreds of volunteer firefighters and support personnel throughout the weekend. Efforts continue into this week.

I offer my thanks to Rural Fire Service brigades from the Blue Mountains, Cumberland, Macarthur, Wollondilly and Sutherland districts, and local group captains Mick Metcalfe, Greg Corrigan and Greg Frullani. I also thank the councillors and staff of the Blue Mountains City Council, especially our fabulous mayor, Mark Greenhill. I take this opportunity to acknowledge our new NSW Rural Fire Service members, including my 15-year-old son, Tom, who completed their bushfire training earlier this year and proudly participated in efforts to protect and safeguard our community.

CASTLE HILL RSL SUB-BRANCH ANNUAL LUNCHEON

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills—Minister for Corrections, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Veterans Affairs) [1.20 p.m.]: It was my privilege once again to attend the annual luncheon for life and veteran members of the Castle Hill RSL sub-branch, which was held at the Lyceum on 12 July 2015. This luncheon provides the opportunity to recognise the contribution of life and veteran members of the Castle Hill RSL Club. It was ably arranged by Mr and Mrs Ron Smith and Mr and Mrs Dave Wood, and the master of ceremonies was club vice-president Mick Cummings. The roots of the Castle Hill RSL can be traced back to 1932, when the Hills District Returned Sailors and Soldiers Club was formed to assist World War I veterans and their families. The club's record of service since then has been exemplary. The luncheon maintains the club's high position. Indeed, I hope to reflect the model of service of its life and veteran members in my Veterans' Affairs portfolio.

WESTCONNEX

Ms JO HAYLEN (Summer Hill) [1.21 p.m.]: Today I recognise the hard work of community groups and local campaigners fighting to stop the Baird Government's WestConnex project. Save Ashfield Park is a grassroots group of concerned residents using limited resources to loudly oppose the project. The group has succeeded in making sure that WestConnex does not take away from the precious open green space of our heritage Ashfield Park. It has been organising rallies and bringing concerned parents, home

owners and tenants together to be part of the movement against this toll road.

I have had the pleasure of joining Save Ashfield Park at its meetings at Ashfield Bowling Club and I am regularly struck by the level of passion, investment and knowledge of community needs. In particular I note the work of Jo Alley, Chris Elenor and John Hyde, who are standing up for their local community. I applaud them on the work so far and ask that they do not give up the fight. I also acknowledge the hard work of the WestConnex Action Group, local school parents and citizens associations and many concerned residents who are joining together to save their suburbs in the face of this Government's short-sighted community vandalism.

ARMIDALE UNITED HOSPITAL AUXILIARY

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [1.22 p.m.]: Today I recognise the hardworking longstanding members of the Armidale United Hospital Auxiliary. I pay tribute to President Maureen O'Grady, Treasurer Judith Maguire and Secretary Robyn Clutterbuck, present and previous members over the past 50 years who have been raising important funds for services and facilities at the Armidale Rural Referral Hospital. Since its inception in 1965, the auxiliary has raised more than \$1.5 million through its work at the hospital kiosk. The auxiliary workers have kept the staff, family and friends of those in hospital fed and watered with the wonderful and scrumptious delights at the kiosk—a pie, a sandwich or something sweet. I can attest to the wonderful work that the auxiliary does. I thank all the members for their service to the community and for supporting our local health facilities.

TRIBUTE TO ALAN PLAYFORD

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend) [1.23 p.m.]: Today we recognise a great local bloke who has saved countless lives in the Hunter region. Alan Playford retired in June 2015, after serving for more than 40 years as a paramedic and 35 years as a firefighter. Alan held the position of captain at NSW Fire and Rescue New Lambton for 18 years. He was inspired to join the Ambulance Service of NSW by his paternal grandfather, who served in the 5th Australian Field Ambulance during World War I. Alan has selflessly served his community for his whole working life. This commitment, bravery and generosity are worthy of the highest honour. We thank Alan for his life-changing work and wish him all the best in the future.

TRIBUTE TO TONY DENHAM

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater—Minister for Planning) [1.24 p.m.]: Today I recognise the contribution of Mr Tony Denham to my community of Pittwater for more than 26 years. Tony has given countless hours of time and energy to volunteer and make a difference in the local Pittwater community. Tony was involved in Apex Australia for eight years. After that he joined the vibrant and energetic group of volunteers at the Pittwater Lions who are focused on serving our community and providing a real example of the benefits, both personal and corporate, that voluntary service can bring.

Tony has been involved with the Pittwater Lions since 1989, which gives him 26 years of service so far. In addition, he was in charge of Cash a Can for about 10 years and was treasurer for eight years. He has also overseen several outlets selling Lions mints. At Christmas time Tony was a valuable help in the sale of Lions Christmas cakes and puddings. He was the audience favourite in playing Santa at the seniors Christmas party. Formerly of North Narrabeen, Tony has now moved across the water to Umina Beach. The Pittwater Lions Club will miss him and I join them in wishing him well. I hope he continues his Lions service when he finds a suitable club closer to his new home.

LLANDILO PUBLIC SCHOOL

Ms PRUE CAR (Londonderry) [1.25 p.m.]: Today I acknowledge Llandilo Public School, which this year will celebrate its 150th anniversary. Llandilo Public School has been at the centre of the Llandilo

community for many years and is a testament to the rich history of the area. Recently I visited Llandilo Public School and met principal Deborah Getley, who gave me a tour of an original classroom that the school hopes to turn into a museum to celebrate Llandilo's rich early Australian history. I congratulate Llandilo Public School on reaching this fantastic milestone and commend the school not only for its longstanding commitment to celebrating the history of the Llandilo area but also for providing fantastic education in our region for many years. I wish Llandilo Public School all the best for the next 150 years and look forward to celebrating with the school community.

GRAFTON UNITED HOSPITAL AUXILIARIES OF NSW

Mr CHRISTOPHER GULAPTIS (Clarence—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.26 p.m.]: Today I congratulate the Grafton branch of the United Hospital Auxiliaries of NSW, which recently held its annual general meeting. I offer my congratulations to President Alba Linklater, the executive and members for raising an outstanding total of \$92,000 last year. This allowed the auxiliary to purchase a state-of-the-art ultrasound machine for Grafton Base Hospital at a cost of \$69,000. The hospital is very grateful for this machine. I wish the auxiliary continued success in the future.

EASTERN CREEK FIRE

Dr HUGH McDERMOTT (Prospect) [1.27 p.m.]: Today I congratulate the volunteers and professional firefighters on the amazing work they did in my electorate last week when a major fire ripped through a disused factory on Peter Brock Drive at Eastern Creek. The fire was only metres from the M4 and spread to nearby bushland. Up to 120 firefighters from the NSW Fire Service and 80 firefighters from the Rural Fire Service battled this blaze. It was declared a HAZMAT incident and large amounts of hazardous material were on site. In particular I offer my thanks to the Rural Fire Service volunteers from brigades at Horsley Park, Regentville, Schofields, Orchard Hills, Erskine Park, Plumpton, Eastern Creek and Wallacia. I also thank volunteers from Cumberland Support, Cumberland Group 2, group officers and fire control. They all did an amazing job. I also note that many of those volunteers helped in the Blue Mountains fire outbreak the following day and next weekend.

RADIO 2AC TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley) [1.28 p.m.]: One of the great strengths of Australia's culturally diverse society is its multicultural media. Across print, radio and television there is a treasure trove of information and opportunities to look inside any community. Importantly, it also has a role in allowing anyone to maintain or improve their knowledge of a language, culture and the arts. More significantly, the multicultural media plays a growing role in marketing and is a key tool in the process of what is called multicultural marketing. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the twentieth anniversary of radio 2AC. Last Friday night I attended the celebrations of radio 2AC. It does a great job in the Chinese community of broadcasting in Cantonese and Mandarin across Australia. I acknowledge Janey Tham and the entire team for their commitment to multicultural media over the years. On behalf of everyone in this Chamber I congratulate radio 2AC on everything it has achieved in the past 20 years.

BYRON YOUTH SERVICE

Ms TAMARA SMITH (Ballina) [1.29 p.m.]: I inform the House of the fantastic work of the Byron Youth Service, in particular Deb Pearse, Stephanie Sims, Jonathan Edwards and Rosalie Bryant. I know how important the service is to my community. I have seen scores of young people at risk of not finishing their education make it through with the support programs offered by Byron Youth Service. It is disappointing that cuts by the State and Federal governments have seen Byron Youth Service lose around 70 per cent of its funding. I have seen how the service's work makes a real difference to the lives of vulnerable young people. It deserves the support of this Parliament.

Community recognition statements, by leave, taken forthwith for an additional 10 minutes.

ANITA PRYKE, WANDA SURF LIFE SAVING CLUB

Mr MARK SPEAKMAN (Cronulla—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, and Assistant Minister for Planning) [1.30 p.m.]: I acknowledge the achievements of the immediate past president of Wanda Surf Life Saving Club, Anita Pryke. Through her eight years as president, Anita was a driving force behind the club, steering it to financial and competitive success. Wanda Surf Life Saving Club is an outstanding facility that members of the community can enjoy. Recently it participated in the Sutherland 2 Surf race. It delivers on its commitment to the surf lifesaving movement and is one of the most competitive clubs in Australia. It is through Anita's leadership that the club is well equipped for the future. It is in a strong financial position, has a hardworking and active membership and has the facilities for a competitive club. I congratulate Anita on her outstanding achievements and wish her future successes. I look forward to working with new president Mark Sargeant and seeing Wanda progress in the years ahead.

RACHEL RATIVO, YOUTH AMBASSADOR

Mr EDMOND ATALLA (Mount Druitt) [1.31 p.m.]: I congratulate Rooty Hill High School student Rachel Rativo for being selected as Blacktown City Council 2015 Youth Ambassador. Blacktown City Council has been promoting the youth ambassador program since 1982. The selection criteria involved a written application in which Rachel explained why she wanted to be a youth ambassador, as well as an interview by members of the council. Rachel then completed a written quiz and delivered a five-minute speech on how the youth of Blacktown are influenced by technology and ways in which council can use technology to enhance the sister cities program. Rachel, who is in year 11 at Rooty Hill High School, is an inspiration to her peers and is to be applauded on her appointment.

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION WEEK

Mr DAVID MEHAN (The Entrance) [1.32 p.m.]: To mark Homelessness Prevention Week, I recognise two Central Coast services that do a great job to help homeless people on the Central Coast. The first is Coast Shelter. The executive director, Laurie Maher, shows great leadership that has resulted in Coast Shelter now being responsible for the delivery of all homelessness services on the Central Coast. I congratulate them on their ongoing work. I also acknowledge the work of the Central Coast Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service, superbly managed by Sidonie Gnauck and staffed by Glenda Morris, Lisa Ashby and Evelyn Johnston. Tenants Advice works with Coast Shelter to help those on the Central Coast who are at risk of homelessness, to make sure that they do not fall into homelessness. The services are working well together and doing a great job, and I recognise them here today.

WOMEN IN POLICING 100TH ANNIVERSARY

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Castle Hill—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.33 p.m.]: This year marks one hundred years of women in the NSW Police Force. One hundred years on, women make up approximately 35 per cent of the force. To mark this significant event, a baton relay is currently travelling across New South Wales. I had the pleasure of joining with Inspector Jim Szabo and the women from our local area command at Rouse Hill town centre as the baton was handed on to some of our 23 fine policewomen. To mark the occasion, Constable Samantha Wilson, Loretta McGrath, Rebecca Nethercote, Melissa Haller, Christie Desira, Senior Constable Rachel Berrick, Sergeant Julia Brown and Sergeant Kaylene Wade, as well as Lyn Sale, Tracey Aquilina and Rose Matijevic, ran from Rouse Hill to Castle Hill on one of the wettest and coldest days this winter. It is fantastic to see the women out in force and joining with their male counterparts to do a magnificent job in protecting our community. Well done, ladies, and congratulations on your first century.

CENTRAL COAST MEN'S SHEDS

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal) [1.34 p.m.]: One of the most inspiring projects I have seen to date is the men's shed project, now successfully established on the Central Coast, which provides a wonderful place for local retired men. Last week I visited the Terrigal Men's Shed, where more than 25 retired seniors from our local community meet each week to refine their skills in woodwork, welding and artistry. I commend president Geoff Yates, secretary Roy Henry, treasurer Dave Menere and my good friend Jacques Minassian for their community spirit in organising this successful project. Some of the most beautiful woodwork is created at the Terrigal Men's Shed, much of it donated to charitable organisations. Passing on skills to ensure that they are not lost is so important in this technological age. I am proud to support the Central Coast Men's Shed projects where possible.

KOKODA TRACK CHALLENGE

Mr ANDREW GEE (Orange—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.35 p.m.]: Recently 20 men from Parkes, as well as five from other locations, completed the gruelling Kokoda Track walk. The group included Don Johnson, Tony Byrne, Bryan Creith, Lachie Bennie, Richard Rice, Jeff McClurg, Wayne Osborne, Anthony Barrott, Brad Byrnes, Anthony Ruzgas, Steve Scally, Riley Byrne, Steve Hayward, Brendan Davis, Daryn Tanswell, Duncan Abbey and Ian Westcott. They were pictured recently on the front page of that great publication the Parkes *Champion-Post*. The group did extensive training. The extensive feature in the Parkes *Champion-Post* noted how poignant the journey was for all the men and outlined their training regimen in preparation for the trek. I congratulate the Parkes men on undertaking the journey and hope that there are many more in the future.

TRIBUTE TO KIM HUYNH

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [1.36 p.m.]: I take this opportunity to acknowledge Kim Huynh, who recently retired from Bankstown Women's Health Centre after 25 years of service to both that centre and the Bankstown community. Kim Huynh is well known in my community as a tireless local advocate who has worked to support the Vietnamese community, and Vietnamese women in particular, in Bankstown. She assisted them to access a range of health services through the health centre. The Bankstown Women's Health Centre recently held a special ceremony, which I was able to attend, to provide Mrs Huynh with a certificate of appreciation and to thank her, on behalf of the community of Bankstown, for her tireless efforts in providing services to women. I congratulate her and wish her a wonderful, prosperous retirement.

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY CHINESE COMMUNITY DINNER

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills—Minister for Corrections, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister for Veterans Affairs) [1.37 p.m.]: I was delighted to be invited to the University of Western Sydney Chinese community dinner at the Parramatta campus on 31 July by Vice-Chancellor and University President Professor Barney Glover. As an alumnus myself, I fully understand the inestimable support given to the University of Western Sydney by its multicultural communities. The spectacular dinner strengthened the already strong link between the University of Western Sydney and the Australian Chinese community. I was glad the event provided fellow Western Sydney community members with an opportunity to meet key people from the university, to find out what it has to offer and to see why the University of Western Sydney is the university of choice.

NON-RESIDENT NEPALI ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIA

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley) [1.38 p.m.]: It was a great pleasure to attend the opening of the national conference of the Non-Resident Nepali Association of Australia in Hurstville last weekend. As one of the fastest-growing populations in Sydney, the Nepalese community has worked hard to help Nepalese migrants settle in Australia, maintain their culture and traditions and help rebuild Nepal after the devastating earthquake of 25 April 2015. With hundreds of thousands of people left homeless by the disaster, the Non-Resident Nepali Association has been at the forefront of efforts to rebuild homes,

schools and institutions across the country. Many people in Australia, especially in New South Wales, are working hard to assist the recovery efforts.

My electorate of Oatley and the broader St George area—and I acknowledge the presence in the Chamber of the member for Rockdale—are home to one of the largest Nepalese populations in Sydney. Many people in my area have friends and family who remain homeless in Nepal. At times of crisis, we draw together in the spirit of harmony to give each other a helping hand. Over the years, the Nepalese community has proven itself to be strong and resilient. On behalf of all members of this Chamber, I acknowledge everything that the Non-Resident Nepali Association of Australia has achieved and I look forward to supporting it in the future.

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Mr TIM CRAKANTHROP (Newcastle) [1.39 p.m.]: I congratulate the University of Newcastle on its fiftieth anniversary. The university was originally part of the University of New South Wales. The Governor of New South Wales came to the University of Newcastle this week for the wonderful ceremony marking its significant milestone. The university is a world leader in the education of engineers and doctors in particular. With the new campus for 5,000 students in the central business district, the university is growing stronger and better. It is a wonderful asset for Newcastle and the Hunter.

[The Speaker left the chair at 1.40 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I welcome 24 school leaders and their teachers from the beautiful Mulgoa electorate, guests of the Parliamentary Secretary for Youth Affairs and Homelessness and member for Mulgoa. I also acknowledge 60 students and their teachers from St Andrews Cathedral School in Sydney, guests of the member for Sydney. I also acknowledge 15 students from the Macquarie Liberal Club, guests of the Minister for Finance, Services and Property and member for Hawkesbury.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Routine of Business

[During the placing or disposal of business.]

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Kiama to order for the first time. I call the member for Kiama to order for the second time. I will wait for quiet again. Arguing across the table will cease. I call the Minister for Family and Community Services to order for the first time. I have asked the House to come to order. Members who do not want to listen will be placed on calls to order.

QUESTION TIME

[Question time commenced at 2.23 p.m.]

LEARNING MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS REFORM PROGRAM

Mr LUKE FOLEY: My question is directed to the Minister for Education. What is the total expenditure to date on the Learning Management and Business Reform [LMBR] program?

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Family and Community Services will come to order. Again I remind the House that interjections are disorderly at all times from either side of the Chamber.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The Learning Management and Business Reform [LMBR] Program was

established in 2006 under the previous Labor Government to modernise the way that public education manages and delivers its services to schools and TAFE in New South Wales. The objective of the program is to support educational reform in New South Wales and deliver better services to school communities. The last major upgrade of IT systems for schools was in 1991. The previous Labor Government neglected schools and TAFE when it came to the IT system needed to support teachers and students. It was a DOS-based system, totally inadequate for twenty-first century teaching and learning.

Finance systems were based on cash accounting, something business, industry and government moved away from decades ago. Technology partners advised they could no longer provide support to maintain the old legacy payroll platform. This meant that without an entirely new payroll system teachers across New South Wales could not be guaranteed they would be paid. LMBR, to put it in its context, is delivering seven major IT solutions and is one of the largest reform programs with a major technology component in Australia's history.

Mr Chris Minns: How much is it going to cost?

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: I will get to that.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Kogarah will come to order.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: We have already delivered a new SAP-based finance system into corporate offices and TAFE institutes across New South Wales; a new HR payroll system and student management administration solution for TAFE NSW; a significant upgrade to the finance system for TAFE and corporate offices; an initial rollout to 229 pilot schools for a SAP-based schools finance solution; a new student administration and learning management solution; and a student wellbeing solution.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Canterbury will cease her loud interjections and will come to order.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: For schools the LMBR program started with a rollout to 229 pilot schools. These were to test the system and for learning to be gained for the full rollout. It is no secret that the deployment of the finance and student management releases proved to be challenging both in the use of the new solutions but also in new practices like accrual accounting. In term one of 2014, the LMBR taskforce was formed to provide additional support for the 229 schools. This included providing additional school administration managers and school administration officers to support school staff to continue using the new tools delivered by the LMBR program. Throughout 2014 updates to the system were made to correct defects and provide schools with new tools and reports to better support school operations.

In term one of 2015, improvements to finance reports were completed. In term two, the 229 schools also received an enhancement to make budgeting and planning simpler and easier. During 2015 the support team has provided additional functional support via the helpdesk and refresher workshop sessions. The LMBR pilot deployment to the 229 schools has provided a range of learning opportunities to help inform the deployment strategy for the nearly 2,000 remaining New South Wales public schools and support the future success for the deployment of the LMBR solutions.

Mr Chris Minns: Point of order: The Minister was asked a specific question.

The SPEAKER: Order! What is the standing order that has been breached?

Mr Chris Minns: He has not answered it. He needs to spend less time on the Amalfi Coast and a little more time fixing problems in his department.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Kogarah should read the standing orders before he takes a point of order. There is no point of order. The member for Kogarah did not cite a standing order

that had been breached and he must learn to do that.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The rollout to the remaining 2,000 schools will commence in the first half of 2016. The Auditor-General, in the December 2014 report, detailed the capital cost of the program at \$403 million. This figure is within Treasury capital limits for the LMBR program. Additional unbudgeted costs detailed in the report relate to operational expenditure such as staff training, interim maintenance and support of the system, changed management activities, supplementation of existing resources—

Mr Michael Daley: Point of order: Standing Order 129. The Minister is clearly rattled. It is unlike him to read an answer, even if it is as ill-prepared as this one is. There were two limbs to the question: What was the total expenditure to date?

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Maroubra has cited the point of order; thank you very much for your assistance.

Mr Michael Daley: The Minister is going absolutely nowhere near the question. He is reading a dissertation.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister remains entirely relevant to the question and that is all that is required.

Mr Michael Daley: No, he is not.

The SPEAKER: Order! I advise the member for Maroubra not to argue with me. If he does I will place him on a call to order.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The Auditor-General put capital and operation costs at \$573 million as at June 2015, \$403 million— *[Time expired.]*

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Canterbury will come to order. She will be called to order if she continues to interject.

MEDICINAL CANNABIS

ASYLUM SEEKERS

Mr KEVIN ANDERSON: My question is addressed to the Premier. How is the Government showing care and compassion to the people in our society who need it most?

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order or they will find themselves called to order. The Premier will be heard in silence. I call the member for Canterbury to order for the first time.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: Despite the response from those opposite I welcome all those schools from Mulgoa, which is represented by a fantastic local member. It is great to have them here. I pay particular tribute to the member for Tamworth. I think all members who come to this place soon realise what an incredible privilege it is to meet people from across our community and have the capacity to make a difference to those who need it most. It is one thing to talk about economic success. Yes, it is undoubtedly an objective of this Government to drive the economy forward. That is to give us more fiscal capacity so that we can not only build infrastructure and improve services but also—as we have constantly argued—look after those who need it most.

The member for Tamworth came to see me to talk about a young man in his community who was

in incredible need—a need that none of us could ever understand unless we were in the same position. That young man was suffering from a terminal illness and fighting for his life. On the back of a story that he heard about Dan Haslam, and Alyce and Lucy Haslam, the member for Tamworth said to me, "We have to do something about this." It was that local member's action that brought this Government to a position where it had an opportunity to make a difference to people in that situation. I will never forget Dan Haslam's eyes. I will never forget the sense of desperation that he had. He knew that there was something that made a difference by taking away the pain, reducing the nausea and improving his quality of life. The question was could we do it in way that helped not only him but also others across the State and the country.

That is why I was proud to join with the Minister over the break to announce the first trial of medicinal cannabis, under the leadership of Associate Professor Meera Agar. I thank her and her team at Calvary Mater Newcastle hospital, the University of New South Wales and all of those who have brought together the first medicinal cannabis trial for terminally ill adults. Thirty people will be involved and we expect to start to receive results at the end of next year, and obviously there will be processes to run beyond that. The announcement was a moment of sheer excitement because we realised that people who are in that situation and playing pharmacist are in the fight of their lives. We want them to be able to spend their time with their family and let the best minds in this State and country come together to see if we can understand the impacts, the quantities and the way this can be distributed to make a difference to terminally ill people. That is what this is about.

We are incredibly proud of not only the trial but also the establishment of the Centre for Medicinal Cannabis Research and Innovation, which is a first. We have linked up with other States and Territories and I congratulate the other Premiers who want to participate in the trial. That includes Premier Palaszczuk and Premier Andrews down in Victoria. As the trial expands we expect those States to participate with patients. I encourage the Federal Government to continue to look at ways that we can continue to grow this across the nation. I congratulate the Prime Minister on his support. He is very supportive of it, as he outlined as part of the leadership retreat. There is a lot to do but my strong sense is that we have taken an incredible step forward and there is a great enthusiasm. The University of Sydney has received an incredible donation from the Lamberts. That will go alongside the work we are doing. It is an exciting time in this space.

Over the break the Government also announced significant transport concessions for asylum seekers. We are proud to do that. Asylum seekers are fleeing circumstances that, again, none of us can understand. If we have the capacity to help then that is exactly what we should do. We were proud to announce that we are taking away the burden of their transport costs by making those costs effectively the cheapest in the country. It will give the non-government organisations that support asylum seekers greater opportunities to provide food, counselling and housing because they will no longer have to find the money to pay the transport concession. It is a small thing that we have done but it is very important. We want to be clear that as a Government we are here to support those who need help, who are vulnerable and who are in disadvantaged positions. Getting the economy moving and providing the capacity to do that—

Pursuant to standing order additional information provided.

Mr MIKE BAIRD: I will not be much longer, but it is important to finish this answer. In this House we hear lots of debates about lots of things. My hope is that on these sorts of issues we can come together. I think we have done that in many respects. The overriding argument is that unless we get the economy going and have sustainable finances we will have a much smaller capacity to look after those who need it most. That is what drives members on this side of the House. We are proud of the action and reforms that we have taken. Most importantly, we are proud of the difference we are making across this State to those who need it most. There are many ways we can do that. I have spoken of just two examples. We will certainly continue to look for opportunities, whether they be in medical cannabis or support for asylum seekers or others who are most disadvantaged in our communities. That is what

drives us to get the economy moving and it is incredibly important that we do so.

LEARNING MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS REFORM PROGRAM

Mr DAVID HARRIS: My question is directed to the Minister for Education. By what date will the Learning Management and Business Reform program be operational in all New South Wales public schools?

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: As I was saying earlier, when I touched on the rollout to the remaining 2,000 schools, it will begin in 2016. The Auditor-General's report put capital costs at \$403 million, which is within Treasury capital limits, plus \$170 million in operational costs.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Maroubra will come to order.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The reason we see the difference between the \$403 million in the Auditor-General's report and the reported figure of \$573 million is that in its business case for the Learning Management and Business Reform program Labor factored in only the capital costs of the IT system.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order and cease interjecting.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: You build an IT system and then you have to implement it. This is one of the many landmines that the previous Labor Government left the new Government. Additional unbudgeted costs detailed in the report relate to operational expenditure such as staff training, interim maintenance and support of the system, change management activities and supplementation of existing resources to ensure "business as usual" activities.

Ms Linda Burney: Point of order: My point of order is under Standing Order 129. I know the Minister is jet-lagged but—

The SPEAKER: Order! He is also being relevant.

Ms Linda Burney: —we want to know the date.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Minister is being relevant to the question that has been asked twice this afternoon on this issue. The member for Maitland will come to order.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The Auditor-General put capital and operational costs at the end of June 2015 at \$573 million and the Department of Education advises me that its estimate of expenditure at the end of June this year is \$579 million. The Auditor-General estimated \$573 million in expenditure and Department of Education estimates that it has spent \$579 million.

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

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: Let me make it clear again: When the Labor Government signed up to this almost 10 years ago it budgeted the capital costs of developing the IT system.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Londonderry and the member for Port Stephens will cease interjecting. Members will cease interjecting.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: It never budgeted the operational or implementation costs of the new IT system. That is why we see the difference. In terms of the original capital budget, the Department of Education is within the Treasury capital limits. In terms of what the Auditor-General expected as expenditure by the end of June this year, the department estimates it will have spent \$579 million. It is a

large amount of money but to put it into some context—

Mr David Harris: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister is being relevant. Does the member have another point of order?

Mr David Harris: My point of order is taken under Standing Order 129. The question was about the time. We know the Central Coast rollout was cancelled and there is no end in sight.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wyong is having a second bite of the cherry. The Minister remains relevant to the question that he was asked.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: As I have said in the Chamber before, this IT rollout is extremely complex—particularly for schools. What I have said is that it will not be rolled out further until we are 100 per cent confident that it is working in schools. That is exactly what we are doing. The Department of Education is doing a very good job across a very complex information technology reform. In 2011 we inherited an absolute basket case, with significant costs unbudgeted. The Department of Education is doing a very good job of rolling out this program to schools in accordance with the reforms that have been introduced over the 4½ years we have been in government.

POLICE FIREARMS PROTOCOL

Mr STEPHEN BROMHEAD: My question is addressed to the Deputy Premier, Minister for Justice and Police, Minister for the Arts, and Minister for Racing. What is the Government doing to help police officers better protect themselves and the communities they serve?

Mr TROY GRANT: I thank the member for Myall Lakes, a former police officer, for his question. The member was once dedicated to serving the community as a police officer and is now dedicated to serving his electorate as a member, and he is doing an outstanding job. As the member well knows, and I am sure the Opposition would agree, our police protect our communities on the front line.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order.

Mr TROY GRANT: I cannot believe the disrespect that is being shown by those opposite.

The SPEAKER: Order! There are too many audible conversations in the Chamber. The member for Maroubra will cease interjecting.

[Interruption]

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

Mr TROY GRANT: Our police, as a result of the wonderful service they give to our communities, have unfortunately become targets themselves. In September 2104, Australia's national terrorism public alert level was raised to high because the threat of terrorism at home and abroad had increased. Separately, in January Federal authorities declared that a terrorist attack targeting officers of the law, our own police, was likely and the specific terrorism threat level applying to police was raised from medium to high. As well as the Melbourne assault in September, two police in Paris were killed as part of a terrorist attack and two soldiers were killed in separate attacks in Canada in October. Recent events in France, Canada and Melbourne are a sobering reminder to us all of the risks associated with policing. In Sydney we have experienced the Martin Place siege and a number of terrorism-related arrests.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will remain silent when the Deputy Premier is

speaking.

Mr TROY GRANT: In the eight months to April 2015, 22 people had been arrested as a result of seven counterterrorism operations. This equates to almost one-third of all the terrorism-related arrests since 2001. In recognition of this environment, our police face unprecedented times. I am pleased to announce that now, under the new protocol, police will be able to wear their guns in court complexes and while giving evidence in court. This is sadly necessary due to the challenges facing our police in our communities both here and abroad. Prior to this change, police were required to seek special permission from each court jurisdiction to bring their guns into court; otherwise, they were not permitted to do so.

Police have been directed to increase their vigilance; as a consequence, they will retain carriage of their firearms at all times. The protocol is a result of extensive, detailed negotiations and has been developed in consultation with the heads of the jurisdictions in the Supreme Court, District Court and Local Court. I acknowledge and thank the chief justices of each jurisdiction for their considered effort and support of this measure, led by the Attorney General. Yesterday this protocol was signed off by the Sheriff of New South Wales and the NSW Police Commissioner. I genuinely thank everyone involved for their support of our police.

The Sheriff of New South Wales will still be responsible for enforcing court security. The protocols will take effect next week and will remain in place while Australia's terrorism alert remains at high. I am pleased that this new protocol will offer heightened protection for police while ensuring courts continue to operate effectively and independently. This is a common sense approach that comes at a time when our nation faces a high terror alert and when police overseas have become terror targets—a situation that we want to avoid at all costs. Equipping our police is vital to ensure the best response systems are in place and available.

The Government is investing \$100 million into the Policing for Tomorrow Fund. This fund is for the trial and implementation of new initiatives and new technology in crime fighting which will keep police a step ahead of the criminals and all that confronts them. We also are investing \$3.65 million in the continued rollout of body-worn video cameras for our frontline police officers. Together these measures will ensure that the NSW Police—of whom we all can be rightly proud—can continue to protect themselves and our community and the new firearms protocol will equip them to protect those in and around court jurisdictions.

DUST DISEASES BOARD

Mr CLAYTON BARR: My question is directed to the Minister for Finance Services and Property. Given that in 2013 and 2014 the Dust Diseases Board achieved an overall satisfaction rating of 93 per cent, will the Minister guarantee that any Government reforms will not disadvantage current or future victims of dust-borne diseases?

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Canterbury will cease interjecting.

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: I begin by saying that the behaviour today of the Labor Party and the unions is nothing short of disgraceful.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will be heard in silence. Members will refrain from interjecting.

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: Their behaviour is nothing short of disgraceful. They have gone out and caused distress and concern to some of the most vulnerable people in our community—

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

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: —who are suffering from dust diseases and families who have lost a member through dust diseases.

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

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: It shows the state of the union movement today when they will use victims for their own political purposes.

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

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: The reality is they have got it wrong. We are not abolishing the Dust Diseases Board. The Dust Diseases Board will become the Dust Diseases Authority.

Ms Linda Burney: It is the same thing as abolishing.

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: They talk about workers' compensation, they talk about dust diseases, but they do not even understand the scheme. It is clear from statements of the member for Cessnock in radio interviews today that he does not understand the scheme.

The SPEAKER: Order! The interjections of Opposition members are inappropriate. If members do not cease interjecting they will be removed from the Chamber.

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: The only change that we are making is that the board that oversees the Dust Diseases Board will become an advisory committee to Insurance and Care NSW.

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

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: Why are we making that change?

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

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: Under the current regime those who are making a claim have to wait—

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

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: —up to 30 days for their claims to be processed because the board of the Dust Diseases Board meets only on a monthly basis. We want to ensure that those—

Mr Greg Warren: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Keira will sit still and be quiet, as he is often told to do. He has been very good today.

Mr Greg Warren: My point of order relates to Standing Order 128. This is not a debate; it is not a time for making imputations. The question was very clear. The Dust Diseases Board has achieved a satisfaction rating of 93 per cent. Will that not be reduced as an outcome of this Government's policy? It is a very simple question.

The SPEAKER: Order! I uphold the point of order. The Minister is tending to be argumentative in his answer. I draw the Minister back to the leave of the question.

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: This change is about simplifying the process so that claims can be heard and dealt with in a more expeditious manner. Importantly, we are bringing onto the board and the new committee groups that represent victims who have suffered asbestos-related diseases.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister does not need the assistance of Government members.

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: Let us hear from the experts. What does the Bernie Banton Foundation say about the changes we have made? It says:

Bernie Banton Foundation supports any initiative that will streamline the application process for an eligible sufferer of asbestos related disease, or indeed any "dust" disease, without lessening any of the benefits or services currently in place.

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

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET: The foundation continues:

The fact the proposed Advisory Committee will for the first time give victims support organisations a direct input on how victims are helped can only be seen as a positive move. The Government is to be applauded for this initiative.

What the member for Cessnock has shown today is that he does not understand the scheme. He said today, "At the moment the board, because they are experts, are able to process claims within about 30 days." That is the problem; we want claims to be processed much faster than that. How can the member for Cessnock say that 30 days is good enough for someone who may have only months to live? This is a good reform from a good government.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order.

HEALTH BUDGET

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY: My question is addressed to the Minister for Health. How will the financial performance of NSW Health assist in delivering better health services?

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: I thank the member for Riverstone for his question and for his great interest in the performance of the New South Wales health system. He made some accurate and perceptive comments about the budget in the House last night when debating a piece of legislation. NSW Health's end-of-year financial hospital performance is on budget for another year, just as it has been every year since the Liberal-Nationals Government was elected in 2011.

In fact, every year the budget increase has been 5.2 per cent. Over that period, in fact since Labor's last budget in 2010, there has been an increase of 27 per cent. The member for Cessnock is saying that is right. He is correct; it is right. There has been an increase in the Health budget of 27 per cent since we came to office. That is a \$4 billion increase in the Health budget. We can contrast that with the spurious claims made by those opposite that there has been a \$3 billion cut in the Health budget. That is absolute rubbish.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Cessnock will cease arguing.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: The Health budget has gone up by \$4 billion, not down by \$3 billion. In fact, in the 2015-16 budget, recurrent spending in health is \$19.6 billion, up \$976 million from last year, which is another 5.2 per cent increase. Furthermore, we have come in on budget. We have not had to go back to the Treasury on any occasion to seek supplementation. By contrast, during the many years when Labor was in office—and I was shadow health Minister and watched it very closely; I still have all of the

spreadsheets on my computer—Labor went back to Treasury for supplementation almost every time.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wollongong will come to order.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: Their performance was going down the gurgler. Morale was shocking. The media coverage of health was disastrous. It was legendary. Our achievements at the end of the financial year show record budgets—

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will come to order. I am finding it hard to hear the Minister because there are too many conversations among Government members.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: In terms of the budget, we are on track. The important thing is what the budget is doing for our patients. In the budget this year the Government provided \$325 million for increased hospital activity, including 90,000 extra emergency department attendances and 40,000 extra admissions, including 3,100 extra elective surgeries. We have employed extra staff. We now have an additional 4,000 nurses working in our hospital system—that is since I have been the Minister for Health. We had 205 extra paramedics recruited in the last term, with a commitment to further increase that number this term. We have increased the number of doctors by a substantial amount, nearly 1,900 doctors.

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

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: We have improved the impact of services so the flow through hospitals is much smoother. Elective patients are being attended to in record times. They are all within the timeframes, whether they are urgent, semi-urgent or non-urgent cases. In fact, we have the best figures in Australia, and that is reported at a national level. Members do not have to take it from me. These are figures from the national level. A most telling indication in relation to the performance of an emergency department is whether patients are seen within four hours and sent home, sent to another facility or admitted to hospital for further treatment. When I became Minister 59 per cent of patients were seen within that time; the rate is now 74 per cent. That is an indicator of improved performance through efficient management of the budget. The Premier has talked about the importance of getting the budget right and getting the fiscal strategy right.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wollongong will come to order.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: We can invest in extra services for patient care only because we have got the budget right. Through our devolved structure we have now engaged our clinicians. I give credit to every doctor, nurse, paramedic and health worker employed in our health system.

Mr Michael Daley: They all love you.

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: They do. I have thousands of letters from staff who say they love me. I thank the member for Maroubra for drawing that to the attention of the House.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order.

LEARNING MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS REFORM PROGRAM

Mr LUKE FOLEY: My question is directed to the Minister for Education. In light of the Minister's earlier answer that the cost of rolling out the Learning Management and Business Reform [LMBR] program to date to one in 10 schools is \$579 million, how much will it cost the State to deliver the program to all schools?

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: If this were a classroom and I were the teacher, I would say "You need to

listen a bit more carefully." It has not cost that much money to roll out the program to 229 schools. I listed what has been done in terms of this reform. It is a significant reform delivering seven major solutions—a new SAP-based finance system to corporate offices and TAFE institutes across New South Wales; a new human resources payroll system and student management administration solution for TAFE New South Wales; a significant upgrade to the finance system for TAFE and corporate offices; and an initial rollout to 229 pilot schools of a SAP-based school finance solution, a new student administration and learning management solution and a student wellbeing solution. This is 10 years in the making. Those opposite started it and budgeted for some of it but not for all of it. We inherited a dog's breakfast. The department has done a very good job of making this work. As I said, the commitment I make to schools is that this Government believes in doing things right, as opposed to those opposite—

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber. The member for Port Stephens will come to order.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: During the 16 years that Labor was in government it did not spend a cent on information technology [IT] reform. That is why schools were using DOS systems. The member for Northern Tablelands is probably too young to know about DOS systems. Those opposite did not invest. This is a huge reform.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Blacktown will come to order.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The Auditor-General in a report noted that the department has implemented all the recommendations—

Ms Linda Burney: Point of order: As tedious as this is, my point of order relates to Standing Order 129. The question was about the cost of the rollout for all schools. The Minister knows very well that there has been a school that has lost its power because of this program.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister's answer remains relevant to the question.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The question was wrong. The department has implemented all the recommendations of the Auditor-General's report except one, which will be implemented in the coming months. We thank the Auditor-General for his recommendations.

OPAL ELECTRONIC TICKETING SYSTEM

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA: My question is addressed to the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure. How is the Government moving public transport into the twenty-first century with the Opal card?

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order. Members will be removed from the Chamber if they do not cease interjecting.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I thank the member for Davidson for his tremendous question about the tremendous Opal card. The Opal card is one of the best initiatives that will ever be seen by a State government and is it not pleasing that it was this Liberal-Nationals Coalition, under Minister Berejiklian's leadership, that delivered it? With more than 3.3 million commuters across the State now having an Opal card and 350 million trips—with more than 86 million of those free under Opal—it is time to make the transition to a single electronic ticketing system. That is why yesterday I announced the phasing out of some 57 paper-based ticketing products.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Lakemba will come to order.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I make this point in answer to the interjection by the member for

Balmain—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Balmain rarely interjects; it was the member for Lakemba. I recognise the voice of the member for Balmain, and it definitely was not the member for Balmain.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: I offer my sincere apologies to the member for Balmain. Over the past 12 months we have seen an enormous decrease in the number of paper ticket products. The Government will retain single and return paper-based tickets after 1 January, but it is important to reflect on why we are phasing out these tickets. In the past 12 months the sale of MyBus TravelTen tickets has decreased by 76 per cent; MyMulti Weekly, by 89 per cent; MyFerry TravelTen, by 94 per cent; the Light Rail Weekly, in the order of 72 per cent; and the Pensioner Excursion Ticket, by 45 per cent. These are large decreases in the sale of paper-based tickets. It is time for commuters to tap onto this twenty-first century electronic ticketing operation.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bankstown will come to order.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: Over the next five months, in the lead-up to 1 January, the Government will continue its focus on encouraging seniors to take advantage of the enormous benefits of the gold Opal card. Some 370,000 seniors have already applied for a gold Opal card. The Government will continue to urge the remainder of the seniors' community who utilise public transport to apply for a gold Opal card. There is no increase in fares or cost associated with applying for the gold Opal card. The Government will continue to work with seniors groups across New South Wales, in shopping centres and the like, to inform them of the benefits of having a gold Opal card. I note that overnight the shadow Minister basically implied that seniors were incapable of applying for a gold Opal card. When one considers that one million seniors in this State have applied for a NSW Seniors Card—

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

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: —it will be a very easy step for those seniors to apply for a gold Opal card. We can then verify that they are entitled to the \$2.50 fare and they too can enjoy the enormous advantage of this tap-on, tap-off system. Those opposite are hardly in a position to offer advice to us about the Opal card. I had a close look at the history of the infamous Tcard, for which the member for Keira was responsible when he was running the Department of Transport under Labor. We were left with an enormous bill. The Tcard was announced on 18 November 1997. Those opposite had 4,878 days to deliver the Tcard.

Pursuant to standing order additional information provided.

The SPEAKER: Order! Opposition members will come to order. The member for Cessnock will come to order. I call the member for Cessnock to order for the first time.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: Those opposite had 4,878 days after that announcement to deliver.

Ms Kate Washington: Point of order: My point of order is relevance, under Standing Order 129. The Minister is now being irrelevant to the question he was asked.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Minister is being entirely relevant to the question he was asked. The Minister has the call.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: Those opposite wasted \$100 million of taxpayers' money. The Minister for Transport at the time, Gladys Berejiklian, had to deal with the court case and mop up the mess. For \$100 million Labor delivered only one Tcard mount, and it was delivered by the member for Keira. Labor spent \$100 million on an electronic system that did not work. The Opal card is now being

delivered across this State and is being used by 3.3 million commuters. The Government is now phasing out the old ticketing system in order to deliver the enormous benefits of this electronic ticketing system, including free travel after eight trips, daily and weekly caps across the network, and for the seniors' community the enormous benefits associated with the gold Opal card. This has been a tremendous outcome from the roll-out of this tremendous Opal product. I urge all those who are yet to get an Opal card to do so, because as of 1 January the Opal card will be operating across the network as the sole ticketing system— *[Time expired.]*

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order.

MILLERS POINT PUBLIC HOUSING

Mr ALEX GREENWICH: I direct my question to the Minister for Social Housing. Following the Minister's meeting and site visit with Millers Point residents, will he now agree to the proposal to exclude some purpose-built, low-value properties from the sales program so that tenants who are aged, frail and have complex needs can stay?

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I thank the member for Sydney for his question and his ongoing interest in this challenging issue for all of us. I also thank the member for Sydney and Clover Moore for facilitating a further meeting. In my first 12 weeks or so of being the responsible Minister I have visited Millers Point on a number of occasions. I very much appreciated the opportunity of meeting with the member for Sydney, Clover Moore, Flo—I will not say her surname—Barney, John and a few of the others for scones and a bit of a chat. But I turn now to what the Premier was saying earlier. This Government, contrary to the rump on the other side, genuinely cares and has compassion for and is interested in the community. Those opposite can carry, on but they really did not do very much in 16 years for people in need of support. Those opposite talked the talk, they talked the politics but they did not deliver.

The SPEAKER: Order! There are far too many interjections and private conversations in the Chamber. Members will be removed from the Chamber if they continue with their disorderly behaviour.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Social housing is a huge issue. A few of the rump of the former Labor Government are still here. Labor allowed public housing to eat itself over the 16 years it was in office. Every year roughly 1,000 homes were lost from social housing. We have not discussed this, but I remind the member for Sydney that between 2008 and 2011—before the member came into this place—that Labor acknowledged it had a problem: A backlog of 60,000 people were on the waiting list. What did it do? Labor actually started what we have continued. This is not a new concept. We hear howling and yowling from those opposite—I suggest they look that up in the dictionary if they do not know what it means.

From 2008 to 2011 Labor sold 28 leaseholds and raised about \$38 million. It did not use the money very effectively, but it actually did it. Since coming to government we have sold 23 properties and raised \$50 million. The reasonable ambition—and it is certainly possible—is to raise \$500 million and build around 1,500 new social houses. It is tough on some of the tenants. Flo, whom I mentioned earlier, has been there for more than 70 years. She and her husband, Teddy, were married for 61 years. She gave me the history of her involvement in the area. As the Minister responsible, I understand that it is a challenge. It is a huge task—

[Interruption]

Will the member for Bankstown keep quiet and listen? The member for Bankstown does not know the first thing about it. She did even not even get a mention—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Bankstown will cease arguing with the Minister. I call the member for Bankstown to order for the first time. I call the member for Bankstown to order for the second

time.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: In a 1½-hour social forum the Leader of the Opposition spent 33.33 seconds on social housing. The member for Bankstown did not even get a mention. She was not even there. The member for Bankstown should listen to what is being said.

Ms Jenny Aitchison: Madam Speaker—

Mr Guy Zangari: Madam Speaker—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Maitland stood up and sought the call before the member for Fairfield.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The Opposition is a boring lot. For 16 years it did not do much for the community.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will resume his seat.

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will resume his seat. Government members will remain silent; I need to hear the point of order.

Ms Jenny Aitchison: Point of order: It is astounding and offensive for the Minister to shout at other members across the Chamber, and I ask that he refrain from doing so.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Coming from the melodious member for Maitland, that is classic.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister's comment is over the top.

Mr Alex Greenwich: Point of order: Given the level of interruption, I ask that the clock be reset for the Minister's answer.

The SPEAKER: Order! Is the member asking that the clock be reset for the entire five minutes?

Mr Alex Greenwich: Yes.

The SPEAKER: Order! I deny the member's request. However, the Minister may have another two minutes in which to complete his answer.

Pursuant to standing order additional information provided.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Family and Community Services, and Minister for Social Housing will address his comments through the Chair.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: I thank the member for Sydney for his request. I find it objectionable that the Speaker will not allow me another five minutes.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Prospect is being disrespectful to the member for Sydney. I call the member for Prospect to order for the second time.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The short answer is that the Government is trying to strike the right balance. Last week I was at Lurnea. Members would know that much of the money has gone into places like Casula, Lurnea, Warilla, Chester Hill and Yagoona.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The Government anticipates that it will be able to build about 1,500 houses. I met with tenants. I understand that many of them have been there for a long while, but the bottom line is that we must achieve economic outcomes. If we sell each of the properties, we will achieve five new and very good properties for people who have been on the public housing waiting list for years. The Government is committed to trying to build thousands more new homes—not what Labor did. As Minister for Social Housing I am listening and I am meeting with tenants. I understand the issues for many of those people and I understand the proposal that has been put. The community in Millers Point is saying, "Why not sell the heritage houses? We will move out of them and some of us may be able to move into houses that do not have the same high heritage value." I am looking at all of that. The Premier has made the point that care and compassion are hallmarks of this Government, but economic good sense has to prevail. The Opposition should not say a thing, because it did absolutely nothing while it was in government.

QUALITY TEACHING, SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS INITIATIVE

Mr JOHN SIDOTI: My question is addressed to the Minister for Education. How will students benefit from the additional staffing resource allocation under the Quality Teaching, Successful Students initiative?

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The Liberals and Nationals in this Chamber ask great questions about education. This Government knows what makes a difference to students in the classroom. That is why we have introduced such a wide-ranging suite of reforms over the past 4½ years. The most obvious and most significant is that New South Wales was the first State to sign up to the Gonski agreement, delivering significant additional resources to public, independent and Catholic schools. Through Gonski funding, the Government is able to introduce a number of reforms that have been sought by schools for many years.

Until recently the member for Wyong was the principal of Point Clare Public School, a great primary school on the Central Coast. Primary school teachers and principals have been asking for years to have what high schools have had for many years, which is additional release time. The member for Lakemba and former principal of Punchbowl Boys High School obviously knows this. High schools were given additional release time for teachers. That resource was not given to primary schools at the same time. I was proud, as a member of the Liberal-Nationals Government, to announce that that is precisely what we will do for primary schools.

The \$224 million announcement provides additional release time for the most experienced teachers in schools to mentor, support and team teach younger and more inexperienced teachers. Every parent knows that there are teachers with varying degrees of experience in a school. There are great teachers who have been teaching for many years. We are giving them release time to share their knowledge and expertise with other teachers. We want to make sure that it does not matter which teacher your child has in a public school because they will be the best teacher that they can possibly be and will share in the experience of the best teachers in the school. The \$224 million rolls out over three years as the Gonski funding expands. The Government has announced the first 1,141 schools that will receive additional resources. Point Clare is probably one of them. This is something that primary schools have been asking for for a long time.

I was in the electorate of Lane Cove a few weeks ago, at Ryde East Public School. The principal spoke with great excitement about the potential this new resourcing will have for her school. It will allow her to embed systemic support for her teachers. This initiative uses the knowledge and experience of the best teachers in the school, taking them out of the classroom for a short period to spend time with less experienced teachers to work on their teaching practice. We know from best-practice examples around

the world that what makes the biggest difference is what happens in the classroom, and we want to share that expertise.

I was in Five Dock today with the member for Drummoyne where we met a number of teachers at Five Dock Public School. We met Rhoie Garay, who is in her first year as a permanent teacher. She was the recipient of a four-year teacher education scholarship offered by the Department of Education, which was worth \$5,000 a year and guaranteed a permanent position. She obtained a permanent position at Five Dock. She is a beneficiary of additional release time. We will support first-year teachers by ensuring that more experienced teachers get release time to spend with them. We are able to do this because we have been a good Government. We have introduced major reforms across New South Wales and the Gonski agreement has allowed us to fund measures like this.

Question time concluded at 3.19 p.m.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I welcome to the gallery the Hon. Kayee Griffin, a former member of the Legislative Council.

UNPROCLAIMED LEGISLATION

The SPEAKER: Pursuant to Standing Order 117, I table a list detailing all legislation unproclaimed 90 calendar days after assent as at 5 August 2015.

PETITIONS

The Clerk announced that the following petitions signed by fewer than 500 persons were lodged for presentation:

Sydney Electorate Public High School

Petition requesting the establishment of a public high school in the Sydney electorate, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Inner-city Social Housing

Petition requesting the retention and proper maintenance of inner-city public housing stock, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Same-sex Marriage

Petition supporting same-sex marriage, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Pet Shops

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

Slaughterhouse Monitoring

Petition requesting mandatory closed-circuit television for all New South Wales slaughterhouses, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Pig-dog Hunting Ban

Petition requesting the banning of pig-dog hunting in New South Wales, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Plastic Bags Ban

Petition calling on the Government to introduce legislation to ban single-use lightweight plastic bags at retail points of sale in New South Wales to reduce waste and environmental degradation, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

Container Deposit Levy

Petition requesting the Government introduce a container deposit levy to reduce litter and increase recycling rates of drink containers, received from **Mr Alex Greenwich**.

The Clerk announced that the following petitions signed by more than 500 persons were lodged for presentation:

Murrumbateman Primary School

Petition calling on the Government to establish a primary school in Murrumbateman, received from **Ms Pru Goward**.

Renewable Energy

Petition requesting the Government to set a renewable electricity target for 2020 and to increase the renewable electricity target for 2015 and 2030, received from **Mr Jamie Parker**.

Blue Mountains Planning Framework

Petition requesting that the current key provisions of the Blue Mountains planning framework be included in the new local environmental plan, received from **Ms Trish Doyle**.

Council Amalgamations

Petition opposing the forced amalgamation of Cabonne Council with Orange Council, received from **Mr Andrew Gee**.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Order of Business

Motion by Mr ANTHONY ROBERTS agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended at this sitting to provide for the following routine of business after the conclusion of the motion accorded priority:

- (1) Government business.
- (2) Private members' statements.
- (3) Matter of public importance.
- (4) The House to adjourn without motion at the conclusion of the matter of public importance.

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY

Rural and Regional Infrastructure and Investment

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [3.21 p.m.]: For people like me from country New South Wales the reasons this motion should be accorded priority are relatively self-evident. This motion is about celebrating the genuine powerhouse of New South Wales—the bush and its people—which provides the resources and the produce that keep the lights on and put food in the fridges of people right across this great State. After 16 years of being shunned and paid lip service to by those opposite, people in rural and regional New South Wales are finally seeing investment again in their local communities by a State government in the form of crucial and long-needed infrastructure and vital economic initiatives to ensure that our country communities continue to realise their vision of being the very best places to live, to work, to do business and to invest.

This motion deserves to be accorded priority if for no other reason than to bring this record investment by the Baird-Grant Government in country New South Wales into sharp focus for the benefit of those opposite, who, up to this point in the Fifty-sixth New South Wales Parliament have shown little or no interest in what is happening in the bush. I guess they should be given some points for consistency because they showed absolutely zero interest in the Fifty-fifth Parliament also. Across rural and regional New South Wales there is a boom in construction activity and economic growth, with new schools, hospitals, roads and bridges complementing the thousands of new jobs being created by the private sector, underpinned by strategic and well-targeted investment and incentives from this Government.

The Government's investment includes \$217 million for the Resources for the Regions program to assist mining-affected communities, \$25 million recently rolled out to fix mobile blackspots in country areas, \$336 million to improve water security for our regional communities to ensure that they are drought-proof, \$110 million for regional tourism infrastructure, \$83 million for jobs and payroll tax incentives—the list goes on. For every \$1 that has been invested by this Government in country New South Wales we have been able to leverage \$40 of private sector investment. The success story of country New South Wales deserves to be told and it warrants urgent discussion in this House today. That is why this motion should be accorded priority.

Education

Ms LINDA BURNEY (Canterbury) [3.24 p.m.]: This motion deserves priority because it goes to the heart of several looming disasters in the Department of Education and Communities on this Minister's watch. Now that the Minister for Education is well rested, he owes it to the House to explain how he intends to fix this mess. The Learning Management and Business Reform program is being rolled out in only one in 10 schools, \$500 million over budget and there is no end in sight. The Auditor-General found that the program is a disaster. In 2011 the Minister said he would take steps "to make sure this important project gets back on track so that it will benefit schools, staff and students". We are still waiting.

The project is \$90 million in the red, with no end in sight. Two new schools could have been built with that much money. What is the Minister going to do and how can he justify the \$1.7 billion ripped out of the education system by this Government without a second thought? The Local Schools, Local Decisions reform has resulted in children with disabilities getting no support in schools. On the North Shore, school classrooms are overflowing, particularly Willoughby Girls High School, for which there is no plan in sight to provide enough classrooms to cater for that overflow. Walgett is a prime example of the collective disaster of the Connected Communities program.

This motion is vital because the Minister also needs to respond to Christopher Pyne's comments on the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN]. What is the Minister going to do about the stagnation of NAPLAN results in New South Wales? While the Minister was away the acting Ministers for Education—first the Deputy Premier and then the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs—had

absolutely nothing to say in relation to the threat of extremism in our schools. I make the point that the Minister was away during Education Week. The Premier had to step up—and where was his jumping-around Deputy Premier?

The Department of Education and Communities' policy states that students who wish to take a vacation during school terms are required to provide to school principals justification of their trip's benefit. There was no such requirement of the Minister, who missed yesterday's sitting of Parliament. It is reasonable for people to have a holiday but it is up to the Premier's office to make sure that holidays are taken appropriately. Clearly the Premier's office missed the point of the Minister not being in Parliament yesterday. The education system has looming disasters and the Minister for Education is aware of it. How on earth is he going to fill in the two years of Gonski that are not funded? That is the biggest disaster the Minister has coming, and he knows it. [*Time expired.*]

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I remind the member for Canterbury that she is already on a call to order. I place her on three calls to order.

Question—That the motion of the member for Northern Tablelands be accorded priority—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 48

Mr Anderson	Ms Goward	Mr Provest
Mr Ayres	Mr Grant	Mr Roberts
Mr Baird	Mr Gulaptis	Mr Sidoti
Mr Barilaro	Mr Hazzard	Mrs Skinner
Ms Berejiklian	Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Speakman
Mr Brookes	Mr Humphries	Mr Stokes
Mr Conolly	Mr Johnsen	Mr Toole
Mr Constance	Mr Kean	Mr Tudehope
Mr Coure	Dr Lee	Ms Upton
Mr Crouch	Mr Maguire	Mr Ward
Mrs Davies	Mr Marshall	Mr Williams
Mr Dominello	Mr Notley-Smith	Mrs Williams
Mr Elliott	Mr O'Dea	
Mr Evans	Mrs Pavey	
Mr Fraser	Mr Perrottet	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gee	Ms Petinos	Mr Bromhead
Ms Gibbons	Mr Piccoli	Mr Patterson

Noes, 38

Ms Aitchison	Mr Greenwich	Mr Minns
Mr Atalla	Mr Harris	Mr Park
Mr Barr	Ms Harrison	Mr Parker
Ms Burney	Ms Hay	Mr Piper
Ms Car	Ms Haylen	Mr Robertson
Ms Catley	Ms Hornery	Ms K. Smith
Mr Chanthivong	Mr Kamper	Ms T. F. Smith
Mr Crakanthorp	Ms Leong	Ms Washington

Mr Daley
Mr Dib
Ms Doyle
Ms Finn
Mr Foley

Mr Lynch
Dr McDermott
Ms McKay
Mr Mehan
Ms Mihailuk

Ms Watson
Mr Zangari
Tellers,
Mr Lulich
Mr Warren

Question resolved in the affirmative.

VISITORS

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): I welcome into the public gallery Declan O'Conner, who is a St George supporter. He is probably wearing a South Sydney jersey underneath but he should not take that jersey off!

RURAL AND REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND INVESTMENT

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [3.36 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) Supports the Government's record investment in infrastructure and economic support for regional New South Wales.
- (2) Notes that since coming to office, the current Government has facilitated more than \$4 billion of investment into job creation initiatives across regional New South Wales.
- (3) Condemns the Opposition's lack of interest in issues facing regional economies.

Government members understand that a strong New South Wales requires a diverse, productive and thriving rural and regional economy. The Government very proudly supports initiatives that create jobs, drive economic growth and deliver the services that unleash or help to unleash the economic potential of rural and regional New South Wales. The economic potential of rural and regional New South Wales is massive. Despite being home to only 30 per cent of the people who live in this great State, we provide the resources and produce that feeds, clothes and keeps the lights on for everywhere else in New South Wales, regardless of where people live. It is an important part of the State.

I am proud to be on this side of the House as we are doing everything we can to support people in rural and regional New South Wales to achieve that economic potential. We are doing everything we can to attract more people to move out, to invest, to do business, to work and to enjoy what is, I think, quite parochially, the very best part of this country. Since coming to government we have facilitated more than \$4 billion worth of investment into job creation initiatives across country New South Wales. In the past 12 months the number of people employed in regional New South Wales has increased by 12,500 people, now gainfully employed. We have invested more than \$100 million in assisting businesses across regional New South Wales—assisting them to grow and assisting them with payroll tax rebates and other incentivising programs.

This Government is delivering on its commitment of providing more than \$13 billion to revitalise rural and regional New South Wales infrastructure, which is required because of the neglect by those opposite when they were sitting on the Government benches. As part of delivering that record infrastructure package, the Government has prioritised regional infrastructure under Restart NSW. A total of 30 per cent of the capital fund has been earmarked for country areas, including \$2 billion for the Pacific Highway upgrade. In addition, \$217 million has been allocated for mining-affected communities, including for infrastructure projects to alleviate the impacts and to equip communities with the capacity to value-add

to maximise the benefits of those mining developments through the Resources for the Regions Program.

Some \$336 million has been allocated for the Water Security for the Regions. That is an absolutely vital program for communities in my electorate and those further west to drought proof their communities, to sink the bores, to create extra water storages and to ensure that when we experience the big dry again we have potable water supply storages so that people in our communities can continue to go about their lives. The Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund is another great fund. A large portion of that \$110 million is earmarked for regional airport infrastructure upgrades to make it easier for people to get in and out of country New South Wales, whether they are doing business, delivering services or looking to relocate.

Most exciting is the legislation that passed through Parliament early in the life of this Government offering a potential \$6 billion in infrastructure to regional New South Wales under the Rebuilding NSW plan. It will ensure that we are able to continue our program of building the new schools, roads, bridges and hospitals that country New South Wales deserves. At the end of this term and after eight years in government we will have commenced or completed 70 rural and regional hospital upgrades or complete redevelopments. That is in stark contrast to the fewer than five that were completed in 16 years in the same areas of the State under the stewardship of members opposite. This Government has contributed to the creation of more than 40,000 new jobs in the past four and bit years across country New South Wales. Country New South Wales is undergoing a massive transformation for the good. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms YASMIN CATLEY (Swansea) [3.41 p.m.]: I start by saying that I agree with the member for Northern Tablelands on one thing: Regional New South Wales is the powerhouse of New South Wales. The Hunter, where I am from, is a fine example of that. The member noted that since coming to office the Liberal-Nationals Government has facilitated more than \$4 billion worth of investment in job creation across New South Wales. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is an absolute joke. In the face of regional unemployment rates that have grown significantly worse on this Government's watch, the Government has gone missing.

While the Premier likes to claim credit for economic indicators in Sydney, he continues to brazenly ignore and shy away from the fact that the unemployment rate is higher than 9 per cent in regions such as the Hunter and the Central Coast. That is a fact. That compares with a statewide unemployment rate of 6 per cent. The Hunter has lost 6,800 jobs over the past 12 months alone. The Central Coast has lost 5,200 jobs. Unemployment rates in regional New South Wales continue to be unacceptably high and the latest jobs data provides more troubling evidence of the two-speed economy in this State. The Government might like to talk up its economic prowess, but the persistently high jobless rate in regional New South Wales is the elephant in the room that it refuses to acknowledge.

On this Government's watch unemployment is topping 9 per cent to 10 per cent, and too many of those without a job are in regional communities. Families are doing it tough. They are facing mounting job insecurity and many are struggling to retrain through TAFE as a result of this Government's cuts. Families in the Hunter must be starting to think things are beginning to sound pretty Sydney-centric, which means that the Government is out of touch. The Government abolished ministerial positions for the regions and Labor members are not the only people who think that was wrong. The member for Barwon—which is a rural electorate—Kevin Humphries, blamed Mike Baird and Deputy Premier Troy Grant and backed our argument against removing the regions' influence from the Cabinet table. Of course, we agree with him. It is outrageous that the Government abolished those ministerial positions, particularly when the regions have double-digit unemployment rates.

Members opposite need to take into consideration that at the March election swings in excess of 20 per cent were recorded against the Government in regional New South Wales. They wonder why. The facts are on the table. The member for Northern Tablelands needs to take a good, hard look at himself. How dare he lecture me and other Labor members about a lack of interest in regional New South Wales.

His side could not even find someone who was willing to be a Minister for the Hunter or the Central Coast. I also remind the member of what the so-called Smart and Skilled reforms have done to regional New South Wales. They have resulted in a staggering 30,000 fewer students enrolled in TAFE this year compared with last year. What a slap in the face to kids in regional New South Wales and those who want to retrain. On top of that, the Government has abolished water catchment management authorities and ripped millions of dollars and hundreds of jobs out of the regions.

Government members have removed considerable funding for mental health services, in particular rural and remote mental health services for farmers. They have cut back on support for teachers in regional schools. They have removed drought funding programs in regional New South Wales. What a disgrace. Government members are closing Fair Trading and Roads and Maritime Services [RMS] offices. I would like to know when they are going to close the Belmont RMS—pretty soon I bet. They have also closed other government department offices across New South Wales. They are refusing manufacturing contracts to rail providers in Bathurst and my region in the Hunter. They are smashing young men with young families who have dreams and aspirations. Are they proud of that?

What benefits can people in our local communities expect on the back of this so-called infrastructure budget? Despite a reported surplus of \$2.5 billion, I do not need to remind members of what the Swansea electorate got for infrastructure—\$0.00. But that is what we expect from members opposite. On the streets of the Central Coast people are calling it the "lay-by budget"—the Government put down 10 per cent but will not be coming back to pick it up. Is that support for regional New South Wales? I think not.

Mrs MELINDA PAVEY (Oxley) [3.46 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to support my colleague the member for Northern Tablelands in this important motion. When I listen to the member for Swansea it is like I am living in a parallel universe.

Ms Yasmin Catley: Yes, you are.

Mrs MELINDA PAVEY: I gave the member for Swansea the courtesy of not interjecting although I could have because she cited some slanted statistics and information in her contribution. I am proud to say that at this moment there are at least six cranes in the electorate of Oxley—two at Kempsey hospital, two at the Macksville bridge construction on the Pacific Highway and another two across the Hastings River. If I cast my mind back about 15 years I recall that when travelling on the Pacific Highway for school sports or excursions or any number of family events we used to have to pass through Swansea. God, I hated it. That is not to say it is not a beautiful place; it is a beautiful place. But this was before the highway was duplicated.

The section of the highway in the electorate of the member for Swansea was duplicated about 15 years ago. We are now seeing the benefit of having The Nationals' representation at a State and a Federal level. We have been able to cooperate and coordinate with the Federal Government, which is now contributing 80 per cent of Pacific Highway duplication funding. That will ensure that in 18 months and at an approximate cost of \$3.2 billion the Pacific Highway through the Oxley electorate will be duplicated—which has already happened in the Swansea electorate. That is important for tourists, industry, residents and the New South Wales economy. It has happened because we have had cooperation at a State and a Federal level. I will congratulate one element of the Labor Party. I have had the privilege of serving as the Parliamentary Secretary for Rural and Regional Health.

During my eight years in the other place I traversed New South Wales and visited places such as Cooma, which did not have dialysis services, and broken-down hospitals in electorates all over the State, such as Wagga Wagga, Tamworth and Mr Deputy-Speaker's electorate of Lismore. Those clapped-out hospitals needed money spent on them. The Labor Party spent some money on Orange and Bathurst, but theatres were constructed the wrong way around and had to be rebuilt. That was Labor's capacity. However, under the Federal Labor Government led by Kevin Rudd we signed up to transform hospitals

from Port Macquarie, Lismore, Tamworth, Dubbo, Parkes, Forbes, Wagga Wagga to Bega. Across New South Wales health services and facilities are being transformed and jobs are being created. We are talking up country and regional New South Wales; those opposite continue to talk it down. [*Time expired.*]

Mr DAVID MEHAN (The Entrance) [3.49 p.m.]: The motion calls on the House to compare the records of the major parties with regard to regional New South Wales. That gives me the opportunity to talk about the Central Coast region, which is situated between the Hunter and the Sydney metropolitan area. In opposing this motion I advance the proposition that the only time the Liberal-Nationals care about the Central Coast region is at election time. That was most apparent during the recent election campaign. Both major parties promised close to \$1 billion in investment for the Central Coast region. Promises are one thing but the proof is in the pudding. The budget just delivered reveals the false promises of the Liberal-Nationals Government. The Government's record on the Central Coast is shabby.

The Government promised \$200 million to redevelop Wyong Hospital, but the budget allocates nothing to that project. The Government promised \$368 million for the redevelopment of Gosford Hospital. But the budget delivered less than 10 per cent of that figure—just \$30 million. During the election campaign \$100 million was promised for stage three of the Pacific Highway in my electorate but only \$10 million is allocated in the budget. As the member for Swansea said, there is 10 per cent delivery on the Central Coast. At this rate it will be 10 years before the Government delivers on the promises it made to the Central Coast regarding the next four years. But what about the past four years? The result was even worse. Consider this: No new roadworks were started on the Central Coast from 2011 to 2015 under the Liberal-Nationals Government. The best it could do was finish work started under Labor's 2009 regional infrastructure roads and development plan. The only thing those opposite did in the past four years was run a money-laundering operation. Wall to wall, representatives of the Liberal Party and The Nationals on the Central Coast laundered money for the New South Wales division of the Liberal Party. That is all they did. What about jobs?

Mr Paul Lynch: It was a full-time job.

Mr DAVID MEHAN: It was a full-time job. I note that a government service centre has been established at Gosford on the Central Coast. I welcome any new jobs on the Central Coast, but at what cost? The cost in this instance is the closure of the Woy Woy motor registry. What will be next? Will it be the Swansea motor registry? Will it be the small motor registry at The Entrance that our elderly residents rely on to do their business locally? The number of government jobs on the coast has decreased under the Coalition—jobs in Corrective Services, national parks, WorkCover and TAFE are all gone. Labor's record stands apart from this. We delivered the WorkCover office to the Central Coast. We delivered the police call centre to the Central Coast. Our record completely surpasses that of this Government. I encourage the House to reject this ridiculous motion. [*Time expired.*]

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [3.52 p.m.], in reply: I thank my colleague the member for Oxley: Her contribution to the debate and the revelation that she hated driving through Swansea will be forever etched on my mind. I am sure she meant no offence to the member for Swansea. I also thank the member for Swansea and the member for The Entrance. It is good to see new members getting involved in robust debate. That is good for democracy and good for everyone. I think those opposite have misconstrued the debate a little. To clarify for the member for The Entrance, when a hospital project is announced the entire sum is not allocated in the next budget. If it is a \$100 million project, \$100 million is not allocated in one single budgetary period. Because we are rebuilding and redeveloping so many hospitals around the State—something members opposite are unaccustomed to seeing—health infrastructure prioritises that expenditure and those projects.

There are projects such as that in my electorate of Armidale, including a \$60 million redevelopment. We did not receive all that money in the budget; it will be allocated in future budgets. The work cannot be completed in a single financial year. It takes time to call tenders and get contractors on site. Ultimately, the project will take years to complete. Obviously the bigger the project the longer it will

take. I would not stress about it; if money is allocated in the budget more will be rolled out over time. It is a similar situation with the hospital development in Mr Deputy-Speaker's electorate of Lismore. The first part of that \$160 million investment was allocated in this year's budget.

As at June 2015, 327,100 people were employed in the northern inland region of rural New South Wales. That is an extra 22,700 people employed over the past year, or an increase of 7.5 per cent. I note the comments of members opposite and take them at face value. But in inland country New South Wales we are seeing a growth in employment. We are seeing a growth in businesses—whether it be Thomas Foods International in Tamworth; Express Coach Builders in Macksville in the electorate of the member for Oxley; the Costa Group's Tomato Exchange in Guyra, which will create 171 full-time jobs in the next few months; Bindaree Beef in Inverell, which will create 118 new jobs in the next six months; or the Stone and Wood Brewing Company at Murwillumbah in the electorate of the member for Lismore, which will put on an extra 30 workers. All those businesses have been supported by this Government through various incentive schemes. Regional and rural areas are growing. Let us talk up country New South Wales, not talk it down. I commend the motion to the House.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Pursuant to resolution Government business proceeded with.

WORKERS COMPENSATION AMENDMENT BILL 2015

STATE INSURANCE AND CARE GOVERNANCE BILL 2015

Bills introduced on motion by Mr Dominic Perrottet, read a first time and printed.

Second Reading

Mr DOMINIC PERROTTET (Hawkesbury—Minister for Finance, Services and Property) [3.58 p.m.]: I move:

That these bills be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce the Workers Compensation Amendment Bill 2015 and the cognate State Insurance and Care Governance Bill 2015. These bills honour the commitment made on 15 March 2015 that a re-elected Baird Government would immediately review the financial position of the workers compensation scheme following the election, and out of that one-off review of every dollar above the minimum surplus in order to keep the scheme sustainable two-thirds would be invested in supporting injured workers to get them back to work, with the balance being returned to businesses as lower premiums. The Government will enhance benefits for injured workers, provide a performance discount for employers with good safety and return-to-work records, and introduce three new organisations to operate and regulate the State's insurance schemes and regulate workplace safety.

In 2012 the scheme was in crisis, with a \$4.1 billion deficit, and businesses were facing premium rises of up to 28 per cent, with 12,000 jobs at risk. Thanks to reforms introduced by this Government, the scheme now has assets exceeding its target funding ratio; the New South Wales return-to-work rate is higher; premiums have been reduced by an average of 17 per cent; and injured workers with the highest needs are receiving more benefits than before. The Government is now in a position to return some of these funds to further support injured workers, to get them back to work and to reward employers with an above average safety record with lower premiums.

The Government has considered the submissions to and recommendations of numerous recent

parliamentary inquiries, held discussions with injured workers, and conducted surveys of businesses and injured workers. It has also spoken to other stakeholders in the workers compensation system to understand their issues, experiences and suggestions for change. While it is never possible to give everybody everything they may be looking for, the Baird Government has worked to be as well informed as possible in identifying priorities for improving the system over coming months.

If someone is injured, we need to provide them with the assistance they need to get back to work—or, for those with more serious long-term injuries, provide the support they need to live their lives with dignity. Injured workers, employers, health professionals and other stakeholders currently have to deal with multiple parties with disparate goals and purposes, with the government paperwork and regulation to go along with it. The system needs to have customers and their needs and goals at the centre of decisions—not at the end. It needs to be fair, sustainable and customer-centric. That is what the New South Wales workers compensation system should look like; and that is exactly what the New South Wales Government will strive to achieve.

The benefit enhancements being introduced by the Government are focused on three simple objectives: supporting injured workers to recover and return to work, providing proper assistance to workers with the highest needs, and making sure that any changes to benefits will not compromise the financial sustainability of the scheme. These benefit changes are anticipated to benefit thousands of future and existing injured workers. The Workers Compensation Amendment Bill 2015 will amend the Workers Compensation Act 1987 to deliver a range of improved benefits for injured workers and their families, and the employers of New South Wales. Every workplace death is a tragedy. Even one death is one too many and impacts not only the family of the worker but also many others.

Schedule 1 to the bill provides for a large increase in the amount paid to dependants of a worker who has died—from \$524,000 to \$750,000. This is the most generous lump sum support package in Australia for families of workers who have died at work. This will apply to any fatality that occurs from today onwards. Funeral expenses are also increased—from an amount of \$9,000 to \$15,000—to reflect current market costs. This recognises the need to support families and makes the New South Wales system one of the most generous in Australia. Again, this provision will apply from today.

Schedule 2 to the bill introduces a minimum safety net weekly payment for the most seriously injured workers. The bill will ensure the workers with the highest needs will receive a minimum amount of \$788 each week, which will comprise the benefit paid for by their insurer and any post-injury earnings of the worker. This will assist those workers with over 30 per cent permanent impairment who were on very low pre-injury average weekly earnings and who may receive weekly payments for many years.

The bill introduces new terminology for seriously injured workers who have more than 30 per cent whole-person impairment. Injured workers with a permanent impairment of over 30 per cent will now be known as workers with highest needs. Workers who have more than 20 per cent whole-person impairment will be referred to as workers with high needs. Schedule 2 to the bill also provides for a fairer system for review of work capacity decisions. This allows injured workers to continue to receive weekly payments while their work capacity decision is under review by their insurer or WorkCover.

Currently, legal practitioners are unable to charge injured workers or insurers in connection with a review of a work capacity decision. Schedule 2 paves the way for the payment of legal costs for legal advice on review of a work capacity decision to be permissible as prescribed by regulation. The new section 44BF will require a regulation in order to be operative. As the amount and point at which legal costs should be payable are important details, I want input from stakeholders on this amendment, which will allow for appropriate consultation to occur. My intention is that the new State Insurance Regulatory Authority, in its role as the workers compensation regulator, will commence a process of consultation with stakeholders and the community about the content of a proposed regulation.

Schedule 2 also amends section 52 of the Workers Compensation Act to allow workers injured

before retiring age to receive weekly payments for up to 12 months after reaching retiring age and allows for regulations to provide for variation of the calculation of pre-injury average weekly earnings in order to reduce the complexity in some cases. Schedule 3 to the bill amends the Workers Compensation Act to provide for a much more generous scheme for payment of medical and related expenses for injured workers to assist in their recovery and return to work. Benefit changes for the injured workers with high needs—those with greater than 20 per cent whole person impairment—include the payment of medical expenses for life.

All workers, regardless of their level of permanent impairment and whether they are in receipt of weekly payments, will receive reasonably necessary medical expenses for a minimum of two years from the date the claim was made. For workers with a permanent impairment of 11 per cent or more, this is extended to up to five years. For workers in receipt of weekly payments, medical benefits will be available while those weekly payments are payable and for an additional two or five years, depending on their level of permanent impairment, after weekly payments are no longer payable to the worker. Compensation for certain kinds of medical or related treatment, including artificial aids such as hearing aids and artificial members, will not have a time limit.

The ability to claim for secondary surgery is also clarified in the bill. The term "secondary surgery" can refer to multiple subsequent surgeries. Secondary surgery is directly consequential to an earlier surgery and affects part of the body that was affected by the earlier surgery. The surgery must be approved within two years of the earlier surgery or be approved following a dispute that arose within two years of the earlier surgery. A replacement section 59A (4) will make clear the circumstances in which weekly payments are "payable" to a worker. As a result of different arbitral interpretations placed upon the 2012 amendments to section 59A, there was some uncertainty about whether there could be a theoretical, rather than an actual, entitlement to weekly payments that would extend the duration of a worker's entitlement to compensation for medical and related expenses.

It was always the intention of the 2012 amendments that a worker's entitlement to compensation for medical and related expenses would be linked with the worker's actual, and not theoretical, entitlement to weekly payments. The decision of the Workers Compensation Commission in *Flying Solo Properties trading as Artee Signs v Matthew Collet* [2015] gave effect to section 59A in accordance with the legislative intention. New section 59A (4) in this bill is intended to put the intended meaning beyond any doubt by clarifying that, for the purposes of section 59A, weekly payments of compensation are payable to a worker only while the worker actually satisfies the requirements to be entitled to weekly payments.

Schedule 4 to the bill provides for two new initiatives to help injured workers return to work—an important objective of the New South Wales workers compensation scheme that benefits both employers and workers. Return-to-work changes include assistance of up to \$1,000 for an injured worker returning to a new employer, as well as re-education and re-training assistance of up to \$8,000 for high-need workers who have received weekly payments for 1½ years and have a permanent impairment greater than 20 per cent. These incentives are aimed at encouraging and supporting injured workers return to work, particularly if they are not able to return to their previous employment as a result of their significant injuries.

Schedule 5 to the bill provides for a more generous scheme for payment of indexed lump sum compensation for permanent impairment, similar to that used in Victoria. Injured workers with permanent impairment between 50 per cent and 75 per cent will be eligible for higher maximum lump sum amounts in recognition of the greater impact of their injury. This will apply to injuries that occur from today. Lastly, schedule 6 to the bill provides for savings and transitional arrangements. Benefit changes to enhance equity, such as payment of medical expenses, include extending the same benefits to people who have claimed from 1 October 2012 as those received by people who claimed prior to this date. Workers who were excluded from the operation of the Workers Compensation Legislation Amendment Act 2012, such as police officers, paramedics, firefighters and some others, will not be affected by the changes in the bill.

The Government is also delivering on its commitment to use one-third of annual surpluses in the workers compensation scheme to reduce premiums for employers. Businesses will benefit, with approximately \$170 million to \$200 million being returned to above average performing employers via a premium performance discount. We are also making the insurance structures in New South Wales easier to understand. The reforms contained in the cognate State Insurance and Care Governance Bill 2015 are an overhaul of the governance of State insurance and care schemes and the way in which those schemes are serviced in New South Wales. We are proposing to establish three new organisations to operate and regulate the State's insurance schemes and to regulate workplace safety. The structural separation of these insurance functions addresses the findings of the statutory review of workers compensation in New South Wales by the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Law and Justice. It also responds to the calls of stakeholders in the system.

WorkCover has already recognised its conflicts of interest and has implemented an operational separation of its regulatory and insurance activities. However, the Government has resolved to take stronger steps to address industry concerns and the recommendations of the recent reviews. The structural separation to be implemented by this bill will give effect to that intention. The new structure will be far more transparent and accountable and, most importantly, lead to better outcomes for injured workers. The new organisations will be more customer-centric, streamlined and efficient, building economies of scale and focusing on clear objectives. The three new entities to be created are: Insurance and Care NSW, which will be a single provider of services for New South Wales insurance and care schemes; the State Insurance Regulatory Authority [SIRA], which will be a new, independent regulator of New South Wales government insurance schemes; and SafeWork NSW, which will be an independent work health and safety regulator.

The bill will create a clear statutory and operational separation between the functions of providing government insurance services and the regulation of those services. I turn now to the detail of the bill. Part 2 of the bill establishes the new consolidated service provider, Insurance and Care NSW, which will be an independent statutory corporation with a board and chief executive. The board of Insurance and Care NSW will consist of up to nine directors, including the chief executive. Pursuant to new section 11, Insurance and Care NSW will have the primary function of providing services for the Workers Compensation Nominal Insurer, the Lifetime Care and Support Authority and the NSW Self-Insurance Corporation. Insurance and Care NSW will also provide services to the new Dust Diseases Authority, which is to replace the existing Workers Compensation Dust Diseases Board, and the Sporting Injuries Compensation Authority, which will take over administration of the Sporting Injuries Insurance Scheme.

Combined, these schemes represent insurance liabilities of more than \$26 billion—larger than any other general insurer in the country. I assure the House that the services the Dust Diseases Board currently provides to workers with dust diseases and their families will not change under these new arrangements. They will continue to receive the same high level of customer service and have relationships with the same staff. The same Dust Diseases Compensation Fund will be available, and the entitlements and services will continue to play an important role in supporting people with a work-related dust disease. This support will actually be enhanced under the new arrangements through Insurance and Care NSW. Under the current system an asbestos victim often has to wait for up to one month to have his or her claim approved by the board members, after the expert medical authority has already determined that he or she has a compensable dust disease. For people with a malignant dust disease, with an average lifespan of 12 to 18 months at reporting stage, this wait time makes an enormous difference.

Under the new structural reforms the expertise currently provided by Dust Diseases Board members will be available to the Dust Diseases Authority through an expert advisory committee. It will comprise a diverse range of organisations with expertise in dust diseases, including employer groups, employee groups, research groups and victim support bodies. Some of these stakeholders will have a voice on this important table for the very first time. The committee will advise on the delivery of services to workers and their families, and how services can better meet their needs. It will also provide strategic advice on the Dust Diseases Authority's research funding strategy, including advice on where research

dollars can achieve the best outcomes for victims of dust diseases and community education activities relating to the risks from dust exposure.

Insurance and Care NSW will be a centre of excellence for long-term care needs, combining claim cohorts with similar care needs to focus on return to work and quality of life outcomes. Insurance and Care NSW will deliver workers compensation that is less adversarial. There will be fewer forms and less bureaucracy, and injured workers will have more say in their treatment and return-to-work pathway. Given its role in servicing the Dust Diseases Scheme, the legislation will require that, on its inception, Insurance and Care NSW establish an expert committee on dust diseases. This committee will ensure that Insurance and Care NSW receives appropriate expert advice on the science, impacts and special considerations associated with dust diseases.

Part 3 of the bill establishes the new State Insurance Regulatory Authority, which will also be a statutory corporation with a board and a chief executive. The SIRA board will have up to five members, including the chief executive. SIRA will independently assume the regulatory functions of WorkCover in relation to workers compensation insurance and related activities, the Motor Accidents Authority in relation to compulsory third party [CTP] insurance, and NSW Fair Trading in relation to home building insurance. SIRA will focus on ensuring that key public policy outcomes are being achieved in relation to service delivery to injured people, affordability, and the effective management and sustainability of the insurance schemes. Consolidating regulatory responsibility for State insurance into one regulator will enable a consistent and robust approach to the monitoring and enforcement of insurance and compensation legislation in this State.

Finally, the role of WorkCover in enforcing work health and safety legislation will be transferred to a separate statutory regulator, which will be called SafeWork NSW. The relevant provisions establishing SafeWork NSW are contained in schedule 13 to the bill, by way of amendments to the Work Health and Safety Act 2011. SafeWork NSW will focus on harm prevention and improving the safety culture in New South Wales workplaces. It will also include the establishment of a centre of excellence for work, health and safety in New South Wales. The new structure will be more transparent and accountable and, most importantly, lead to better outcomes for injured workers. There will be no job loss as a result of these improvements.

The head office of WorkCover in Gosford and other regional offices will not be relocated as part of these changes. Staff moving to SafeWork NSW and SIRA will remain in the public service under the Government Sector Employment Act 2013 and in the Department of Finance, Services and Innovation. Their existing entitlements will be maintained. Insurance and Care NSW staff will continue to be employed under a replicated award which mirrors the same entitlements that currently exist for public servants. Insurance and Care NSW will report directly to me.

The Government has heard loud and clear the recommendations of the recent parliamentary inquiries and statutory reviews into workers compensation and has acted. It has heard the views of the industry stakeholders that took the time to tell us about their experiences in the workers compensation system and acted. This bill will make it easier for participants in the system. The Government is committed to a workers compensation system that is fair, financially sound and focused on earlier recovery and return to work for those injured workers who have the capacity to do so. A system that is fair, sustainable and customer-centric will provide the best protection for workers, employers, the community and our economy. I commend the bills to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Clayton Barr and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

CRIMES (SENTENCING PROCEDURE) AMENDMENT (FIREARMS OFFENCES) BILL 2015

Second Reading

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley) [4.19 p.m.]: I speak in support of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Firearms Offences) Bill 2015. The bill implements the Government's election commitment to bring sentences for gun-related crimes into line with community expectations, better reflecting the objective seriousness of firearms and weapon crimes as well as improving confidence in the justice system. The bill amends the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 to introduce standard non-parole periods [SNPPs] for five firearms offences already contained within the Crimes Act 1900 and increases the existing standard non-parole period for two offences relating to the unauthorised possession or use of firearms and prohibited weapons.

The reforms in the bill adopt the recommendations of the NSW Sentencing Council in its 2013 report on standard non-parole periods. The SNPPs aim to promote greater transparency and consistency in sentencing and act as a sentencing guidepost for the judiciary—something the community has wanted for many years. The New South Wales Government takes firearm-related crime very seriously. The standard non-parole period scheme applies to a small number of serious offences and provides further guidance for the sentencing discretion of a court. In March the Government announced a commitment to introduce standard non-parole periods for five additional firearms offences. The Government also committed to increasing the existing standard non-parole period for two weapons possession offences. This bill, which I understand is supported by the Opposition, implements the Government's commitments and shows that the Government is serious about tackling gun-related crime.

The amendments contained in the bill are consistent with recommendations made by the New South Wales Sentencing Council following its review of the standard non-parole period scheme. The council considered that a number of gun-related offences were so serious that they should be included in the standard non-parole period scheme. The Sentencing Council also considered that the existing standard non-parole periods for unauthorised weapon possession needed to be increased because the potentially serious consequences of these offences create a special need for deterrence. The council's recommendations have informed the Government's actions in this area and have provided a strong policy basis for the amendments contained in the bill.

The bill amends the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 to introduce five new SNPPs for the firearms offences in the Crimes Act 1900. They include discharging a firearm with intent to cause grievous bodily harm, attracting an SNPP of nine years; discharging a firearm with intent to resist arrest or detention; firing a firearm at a dwelling, house or other building with reckless disregard for the safety of any person; and firing a firearm during a public disorder. The bill also amends the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 to increase the standard non-parole periods for the following firearms offences: unauthorised possession or use of firearms under section 7 of the Firearms Act 1996—an increase from three to four years; and unauthorised possession or use of a prohibited weapon under section 7 of the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998—an increase from three to five years.

These amendments are necessary and something for which the community has cried out for many years. This bill demonstrates the Government's ongoing commitment and determination to tackle gun crime. The bill is not aimed at the majority of licensed gun owners who comply with the strict regulatory framework for licensed firearms in New South Wales. Rather, it is aimed at criminals who intentionally go out and wreak havoc in the community. Since 2011 the Government has introduced a number of important reforms to directly target those who misuse illegal firearms. The Government has introduced new laws—for example, providing police with the power to enter and search premises or vehicles occupied by persons who are subject to a firearm prohibition order without a warrant in order to determine whether the person is complying with the order, and increasing penalties for breaching a firearm prohibition order.

Police have been putting these powers to good use and have issued over 550 firearm prohibition

orders since the new laws came into effect. Of those, 200 have been served on members of outlaw motorcycle gangs, and more firearm prohibition orders have been approved and are waiting to be served. In the last financial year police took over 10,000 guns off the streets, including more than 700 handguns, which is a huge number. These results will be complemented by strong penalties for those who engage in gun crime. This bill means that the judiciary now will be required to consider the standard non-parole period for additional firearms offences when handing down sentences.

Local police are supported by specialist police whose purpose is to drive down gun and gang crime. A number of operations and strike forces have been established over the years. Strike Force Raptor and other operations have led to the arrest of more than 4,000 people, the laying of more than 8,000 charges and the seizure of nearly 900 firearms, \$4.4 million in cash and assets and \$15 million in drugs. Such operations go a long way towards tackling all sources of crime. This bill introduces common-sense amendments and gives the judicial system the necessary powers to tackle firearms offences. I support the bill.

Mr GLENN BROOKES (East Hills) [4.28 p.m.]: The Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Firearms Offences) Bill 2015 is important for the people of my electorate, who tell me that law and order are among their most important issues. This bill aims to introduce standard non-parole periods for five firearms offences already contained within the Crimes Act 1900. The bill also increases the existing standard non-parole period for two offences related to unauthorised possession or use of a firearm or prohibited weapons.

The five new standard non-parole periods [SNPPs] for firearms offences in the Crimes Act 1900 are: discharging a firearm with intent to cause grievous bodily harm, SNPP of nine years; discharging a firearm with intent to resist arrest or detention, SNPP of nine years; firing a firearm at a house or other building with reckless disregard for the safety of any person, SNPP of five years; firing a firearm during a public disorder at a house or other building with reckless disregard for the safety of any person, SNPP of six years; and firing a firearm in the course of an organised criminal activity at a house or other building with reckless disregard for the safety of any person, SNPP of six years.

This bill also amends the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 to increase the SNPPs for the following firearms offences: unauthorised possession or use of firearms under section 7 of the Firearms Act 1996, SNPP from three years to four years; and unauthorised possession or use of a prohibited weapon under section 7 of the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998, SNPP from three years to five years. How can anyone oppose this bill when it meets community expectations and does the right thing by the decent law-abiding people of this State? This bill arises from recommendations made by the NSW Sentencing Council in its 2013 report on standard non-parole periods. The changes will keep convicted criminals behind bars for at least the amount of time of the SNPPs.

As a member whose electorate has suffered drive-by shootings, I can say that this bill will come as welcome news to my community. Tougher penalties are what the people in my electorate want, and this Government is listening to them and keeping people safe. Too often we hear about our hardworking police men and women doing their job and putting these criminals behind bars only to be disappointed by a judge's decision that lets them off on a soft sentence. Standard non-parole periods will do away with out-of-touch court decisions and will send a clear message to would-be criminals.

This approach to law enforcement is fantastic as it gets rid of the softly, softly approach that the community suffered under the Labor Government. No longer will the work of the NSW Police Force be in vain. The community has made its expectations clear on this and the Baird Government is delivering. I want to make it perfectly clear that this bill does not target law-abiding licensed gun owners but it proves that this Government is taking gun crime very seriously. Since 2011 the Government has introduced many reforms that target those who use illegal firearms. The Government has introduced new laws that give police greater powers to search and arrest criminals suspected of having illegal firearms.

Proof that these new laws are working is the alarming fact that in the last financial year alone police took more than 10,000 guns off the streets, including over 700 handguns. The police are doing great work, especially in my area which comes under the Bankstown Local Area Command. These hardworking officers are doing their job and putting those who threaten the safety of our community behind bars, and now the Baird Government is doing its job and ensuring that these criminals stay behind bars even longer. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr ALISTER HENSKENS (Ku-ring-gai) [4.34 p.m.]: I speak in support of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Firearms Offences) Bill 2015. The process by which criminals are sentenced by our courts remains a mystery to most members of the public. Indeed, it could be accurately described as Delphic. The High Court of Australia recognised as much in the leading sentencing decision of *Markarian v The Queen*, reported at [2005] HCA 25 and also (2006) 228 CLR 357. In that decision the justices of the High Court described the proper exercise of a sentencing discretion as a process of "instinctive synthesis". That is, judges exercise a very broad sentencing discretion based upon all the circumstances of the case.

The proper fulfilment of judicial discretion in the sentencing of criminals must take into account many factors. Those factors are determined by a combination of statute law and common law. Included within the considerations are the objective circumstances of the offence having regard to the maximum penalty prescribed by Parliament and the subjective factors of the offender. Sentencing should also take into account the impact of the criminal acts upon the victims of the criminal enterprise and should include a consideration of the deterrence of future offending by anyone in the community as well as future offending by the particular offender. By doing so, the court will meet community expectations as to the operation of our legal system.

It is to this last consideration that the bill is directed. By their training, judges are skilled in logical thought, but the qualities and lifestyle that assist a successful career in the law do not necessarily equip judicial officers with a grassroots understanding of the community and its expectations of the law. For example, probably not many judges live in parts of our community where there is a high incidence of firearms offences. It is therefore highly desirable for the community, through its Parliament, where the members of its Houses are frequently in contact with the grassroots of our community, to communicate to the judiciary through bills such as this, the standard non-parole period that should apply to certain crimes. Parliament has been doing this through the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act since it was first enacted in 1999.

Standard non-parole periods are a strong indication by the community, through this Parliament, to both sentencing judges and the appeal courts how the broad sentencing discretion should be exercised by our judges with regard to certain offences. The table to part 4, division 1A of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act does not specify a standard non-parole period for all offences. The offences specified in that table are the more serious offences, as seen by the community through this Parliament. Under this bill, five new discharge of firearm offences are added to the table and in respect of two offences relating to the possession of firearms which are currently in the table the standard non-parole periods are increased.

This Government recognises that in a civilised society there is no place for the possession and discharge of firearms in urban areas. Prior to the State election, the Government made an election commitment that it would tighten up the sentencing laws with regard to certain firearms offences. This bill makes good that election commitment. The amendments within this bill are not the product of any kneejerk reaction but are consistent with the NSW Sentencing Council's review of the standard non-parole period scheme. The bill is not directed at the majority of licensed gun owners who comply with the strict regulations applying to licensed firearms in New South Wales. Rather, the bill is aimed at criminals who intentionally go out to wreak havoc in the community.

The bill builds on the existing regulatory framework underpinned by the Firearms Act 1996 and its

regulations, the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998 and the 1996 National Firearms Agreement, which was one of the great achievements of the Howard Federal Government. Through this bill the Government will provide clear guidance to the courts on how seriously these offences are viewed by the community and will require courts to take into account a secondary guidepost, being the standard non-parole period, as a consideration in addition to the maximum sentence when judges exercise their very broad discretion to sentence convicted criminals.

I emphasise three important aspects of the bill. First, the bill implements an election commitment of the Government announced in March 2015 that it would introduce a standard non-parole period for five additional firearms offences. This bill implements the Government's commitment and shows that it is serious about tackling gun-related crime. Secondly, the bill demonstrates the Government's ongoing commitment and determination to tackle gun crime. It is part of a broader suite of measures to deter gun crime in our community. Finally, by amending the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 this bill builds on the existing regulatory framework in the provisions that I have already specified. This bill is an appropriate and considered legislative provision, and I urge all members to support it.

Mr GREG PIPER (Lake Macquarie) [4.44 p.m.]: I will make a brief contribution to the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Firearms Offences) Bill 2015 and state my support for the bill. In any reference to firearms in this instance, I am not referring to firearms used for law enforcement, sports or legitimate hunting and rural purposes, but to firearms used as weapons of fear, intimidation and violence. Those who seek to possess and use them for those purposes should receive harsh and unambiguous treatment from our courts. These illegitimate firearms have no place in our communities, and it is an unfortunate fact that there are too many of them within our communities.

This legislation establishes standard non-parole periods for five firearm offences and increases existing standard non-parole periods for two offences relating to the unauthorised possession or use of firearms and prohibited weapons. This is sensible reform that will help guide the courts in bringing down sentences that are appropriate and in line with community expectations. Members may know my view on mandatory sentencing: I am not in favour of it, and I have spoken against it on a number of occasions in this place. Standard non-parole periods offer the court a much better way of determining sentences that reflect adequate penalties for serious crimes but also respecting the need for separation of powers between the judiciary and the Legislature.

The bill introduces standard non-parole periods for five offences. It proposes a period of nine years for discharging a firearm with intent to cause grievous bodily harm or for discharging a firearm with intent to resist arrest or detention. It introduces standard non-parole periods for three categories of crime relating to the discharge of a firearm with reckless disregard for the safety of any other person. It also extends the standard non-parole periods from three to four years for the offence of unauthorised possession or use of a prohibited firearm or pistol under section 7 of the Firearms Act 1996, and from three years to five years for the offence of unauthorised possession or use of a prohibited firearm under section 7 of the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998.

Strong sentences are needed to deter people from unauthorised ownership and use of firearms. It is unfortunate, but that is the case. It is not enough for offenders to claim, after an offence has been committed, that they had no intention of hurting anyone. If someone produces a firearm, the potential for harm is immediate and real. If someone has an unauthorised firearm in his or her possession, a threat exists. This legislation tells unauthorised owners of weapons and would-be offenders that abuse of firearms will not be tolerated, regardless of whether harm is caused or intent to harm can be demonstrated.

The legislation reflects the recommendations of the NSW Sentencing Council, made in its 2013 report on standard non-parole periods. The council took into account the opinions of stakeholders, community views and legal precedent in forming its advice. It also devised and applied consistent methodology to arrive at the recommended sentence periods. In making its recommendations, the

Sentencing Council noted in its report that offences of discharging a firearm with reckless disregard carry a special risk, through their nature and the irresponsible circumstances of their commission, of causing harm to innocent members of the community who may become unintended victims of such shootings. Unfortunately there are cases on record of that having occurred.

Firearms offences cause apprehension in the communities in which they are committed and commonly occur in the context of organised crime-related activity. The Sentencing Council noted also that the rate of conviction for these offences is low and disproportionate to their reported frequency in the community. The measures outlined in this legislation will better protect innocent people in the community from indiscriminate use of firearms. They also send a clear message that any unauthorised ownership or use of firearms will be dealt with unequivocally by our courts. I am certain that the residents of Lake Macquarie and our communities more broadly will welcome this legislation. I congratulate the Government on introducing this legislation and commend the bill to the House.

Ms GABRIELLE UPTON (Vaucluse—Attorney General) [4.54 p.m.], in reply: I thank Government members representing the electorates of Epping, Drummoyne, Tweed, Ku-ring-gai, East Hills and Oatley, and also the shadow Attorney General and member for Liverpool, the member for Prospect and the member for Lake Macquarie for their contributions to this debate. The purpose of this bill is to make good the Government's commitment to take steps to deliver stronger sentences for gun-related crimes. As I noted in my second reading speech, for too long the community has felt that violent, serious criminals are getting off too lightly for offences such as owning and using a prohibited firearm or weapon, or committing drive-by shootings.

The changes set out in this bill will ensure that criminals are better and more appropriately punished for their actions when they engage in illegal activities, including with firearms and other weapons. Despite the claim made by the Labor Party and the shadow Attorney General in this Chamber today that the Government is doing little to combat gun-related crime, the fact is that this Government is taking action to address illegal firearms and weapons, which have the potential to cause great harm to a large number of victims who are just decent members of our communities from the electorates we represent. Since 2011 the Government has introduced a suite of reforms to directly target those who possess and misuse illegal firearms.

The Government has already introduced a number of laws, such as creating a new aggravated offence of shooting at a dwelling in the context of organised criminal activity, which is punishable by up to 16 years imprisonment; providing police with power to enter and search premises or vehicles occupied by persons subject to a Firearm Prohibition Order without warrant to determine whether the person is complying with that order; prohibiting people subject to a Firearm Prohibition Order from acquiring or possessing ammunition and firearm parts residing in premises where firearms are kept, and from attending premises such as shooting ranges; and increasing penalties for breaching a firearm prohibition order. They are four examples of the ways in which this Government has demonstrated and implemented a strong regime around illegal gun-related activity in our community.

In the 2013-14 financial year alone, the NSW Police Force seized, took as an exhibit, or had surrendered to it more than 10,000 firearms, including more than 700 handguns. Local police commands are also supported by specialist police whose purpose is to drive down gun and gang crime through Operation Talon and Strike Force Raptor. As some Government speakers noted, between them Raptor and Talon led to the arrests of more than 4,000 people, laid more than 8,000 charges, and seized nearly 900 firearms. They are significant achievements in addressing gun-related crime in our community.

Members opposite were too quick to comment that the Government is doing little to address gun crime and that police numbers are in decline. That is not the case. Police numbers across New South Wales are at record highs. The authorised strength of the force is currently 16,665 and just this month an additional 100 positions were added to the NSW Police Force. Further, the Baird Government has committed to boost the authorised strength of the NSW Police Force to 16,795 over this term of

government. The outstanding work of our police force will be complemented by changes to penalties that are set out in the bill.

I note that the changes were recommended by the NSW Sentencing Council in 2013 as part of a review of the operation of the standard non-parole period scheme. The bill sets new standard non-parole periods for five serious firearms offences that are not currently included in the standard non-parole period scheme. The offences are: discharging a firearm with intent to cause grievous bodily harm; discharging a firearm with intent to resist arrest or detention; discharging a firearm at a dwelling house or other building with reckless disregard for safety; discharging a firearm during a public disorder at a dwelling house or other building with reckless disregard for safety; and discharging a firearm in the course of an organised criminal activity at a dwelling house or other building with reckless disregard for safety.

The bill also takes up the Sentencing Council's recommendations to increase existing standard non-parole periods for two offences: unauthorised possession or use of a prohibited firearm or pistol where the standard non-parole period will increase from three years to four years; and unauthorised possession or use of a prohibited weapon where the standard non-parole period will increase from three years to five years. The amendments set out in the bill will help to ensure that sentences handed down for firearm offences better align with community expectations. That is because the standard non-parole period scheme acts as a sentencing guidepost for courts, with standard non-parole periods representing the non-parole period for a hypothetical offence in the middle of the range of objective seriousness.

The bill will not only help to ensure that sentences for firearms and weapons offences better align with community expectations but also will send a clear signal to criminals that if they want to own or—worse yet—use an illegal gun or weapon they will face the real prospect of serving more time behind bars. The people of New South Wales deserve to feel safe and secure in their homes and communities. They should be able to get on with everyday life without the fear of gun- or weapon-related crime. This bill is just one example of how the Baird Government is taking steps to build a safer community. I assure the House that the Government will continue to work hard beyond the scope of this bill to keep the community safe and ensure that people have full confidence in our justice system. I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now read a second time—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Motion by Ms Gabrielle Upton agreed to:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Bill read a third time and transmitted to the Legislative Council with a message seeking its concurrence in the bill.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Sixth Day's Debate

Debate resumed from 24 June 2015.

Ms MELANIE GIBBONS (Holsworthy) [4.53 p.m.]: When I was interrupted on the last occasion I was speaking about the investment that the Government has made in schools in my electorate and New South Wales as a whole. The Governor spoke about the thousand new and upgraded classrooms across

the State. I note Amity College in Prestons, which is a school that is new to me and one that I am enjoying getting to know. With the help of a New South Wales Government grant of \$700,000, some Federal Government funds and an incredible fundraising effort by the college to more than match our \$700,000 it has opened six new general learning areas and a fantastic wood tech workshop. Amity College is a school that is on the up and up. There is a fabulous video taken by a drone flying over the school that shows not only how far the school has come but also how it is going to go through the expansion that will take place. *[Extension of time agreed to.]*

I also note St Christopher's School in Holsworthy, which has updated its playground through a \$30,000 Community Building Partnership grant. The school now has a fabulous new playground where kids of all abilities can join in. I enjoyed looking at the plans with Minister John Ajaka. I cannot wait to see how the playground grows and perhaps return to join in with the students as they have fun there. The Governor mentioned that the Fifty-fifth Parliament of New South Wales has increased the Health budget by 20 per cent. I saw evidence of that last week when I opened a third new endoscopy suite at Liverpool Hospital.

I opened the first two suites and was thrilled to open the third and see the new SpyGlass equipment that will make such a difference to people in the early stages of cancer and others who require diagnoses. The Governor also mentioned that there are now more healthcare workers than ever. That is evident at Liverpool Hospital as we meet with all of the new doctors and nurses at the start of their careers. I am thrilled to say that a new super ambulance station is being built on the old council site at the corner of Hoxton Park Road at Liverpool, which will house 30 to 40 new ambulances and be a super hub.

Mr Andrew Gee: That's big.

Ms MELANIE GIBBONS: It is the biggest in the country and the largest of the five priority sites. I am very excited to have that super ambulance station in Liverpool as part of a \$150 million strategy to ensure that New South Wales ambulance facilities are fit for the future. The Governor also spoke about how commuters will benefit from a once-in-a-lifetime investment in roads and rail. We know that the New South Wales Government is already delivering 10,500 extra public transport services each and every week, and things will get even better very soon. On 8 February this year services began on the South West Rail Link to the new stations at Leppington and Edmondson Park.

Those 11.4 kilometres of new rail line are already making a difference and we are looking forward to there being more than one train every half hour. It will make a huge difference when the train connects properly to the line once we know how people want to use it and where they want to go. It will be much easier to gather that information through the Opal card technology, which will provide us with information on people's destinations and when they want to travel. We are thrilled that the line was opened to customers more than a year ahead of schedule and \$300 million under budget. It was such an achievement.

We are currently building an additional 400 car spaces at Holsworthy station car park. Construction of the first 200 spaces began last week and I am expecting them to be opened in early 2016. I thank the members of my community for their patience while we are building. Obviously, a lot of construction is taking place and they cannot use many of the spaces at the moment. It is difficult and disruptive for them. I am looking forward to the first 200 being opened while we work on the next 200.

Mr Andrew Gee: It will be worth it.

Ms MELANIE GIBBONS: It will definitely be worth it, as the people of Sutherland have seen since we opened their new car park last month. That long-awaited multilevel car park comprising 340 new spaces was part of a major upgrade to the bus interchange that was completed last year. We now have a seamless bus and train interchange with car parking for those who need it. It is very exciting for that community. It is not just rail. The Governor also mentioned roads. I was excited to see that this

Government invested funds into planning for the F6 motorway through the Sutherland shire to help make that a reality. That will ease traffic not only through Sutherland but also through Heathcote Road, going to the other side of my electorate, and help people get to the city and beyond. Other pinch points in the electorate—Hoxton Park Road, Hill Road and the Camden Valley Way—will be upgraded as part of the \$300 million strategy to tackle Sydney's congestion problems. They are roads that need attention. I was excited to be able to go out during the election campaign and state that that would be where the money would be spent. It will make a real difference.

The Heathcote Road duplication project between Infantry Parade and The Avenue is about to commence. A total of \$4 million has been committed to make it shovel ready. That duplication will widen part of Heathcote Road from two to four lanes, including widening the notorious traffic bottlenecks at the Harris Street Bridge, the bridge over Williams Creek and the railway bridge. Three bridges is not an easy undertaking, but it will make a big difference. It will be much safer, particularly for residents getting in and out of Voyager Point, and it will stop the bottleneck on the way to the train station as well. The M5 West widening has made a huge difference to traffic flow already. It has given us a quicker trip into the central business district—sometimes half an hour, but often 15 or 20 minutes, less travel time. That extra lane has been a real godsend. A total of \$400 million has been allocated for that project. I know that the residents appreciate the sound barriers that have come with that project.

The new King Georges Road interchange of the M5 for WestConnex has commenced, 18 months ahead of schedule. That will cut travel times at that intersection by up to half. That is a notorious spot where commuters sit and then crawl to their designation. The announcement of the Sydney metro line extending to Bankstown will be great. I know the mayor, Ned Mannoun, at Liverpool City Council would like to see that extend further into Liverpool. That is something I am interested to have a look at as well. That will improve services to and from the city to the south-west and give people another option to travel into the central business district. The Governor mentioned Service NSW and its rollout. The Liverpool office is the busiest Service NSW office in the State. People may undertake any of 800 transactions there. It is a service run by the fabulous centre manager, Arun Kumar.

I was pleased to launch a new translation service with the Hon. John Ajaka, the Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Multiculturalism. That is something that was really needed at Liverpool where 150 different languages are spoken. It is a benefit for them to have that facility. The police station at Liverpool is next door to the upgraded Liverpool Court in the place of the former station. The site is set to receive a \$22.9 million rebuild. Work is progressing 24 hours a day to get that ready for the police to have a purpose-built facility. I hope that that will be completed by the end of this year. I know Superintendent Peter Gillam is looking forward to that, as are the 210 personnel it will accommodate. I thank the Governor for his Speech and interest in New South Wales.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [5.03 p.m.]: I am delighted to reply to the Governor's Speech. I am honoured to have been re-elected as the member for Bankstown. Since being elected to this place in 2011 I have fought hard to ensure that the Bankstown community receives a fair share of resources from the State Government. On repeated occasions I have called on this Government to upgrade local infrastructure. I am proud of some of the results, through my advocacy in this place, including a major upgrade of Bankstown railway station and significant upgrades of the Hume Highway to ease traffic congestion. I have been campaigning for upgrades to our local schools, such as a new high-security fence for Bankstown South Infants School.

More than \$1.3 million has been distributed to our local schools and community groups through the Community Building Partnership program to upgrade community infrastructure. However, I sadly report that on this occasion that partnership program has been cut by 25 per cent. I have had the pleasure of meeting hundreds of local residents at more than 100 mobile offices that I have held on weekends in local town centres throughout the Bankstown electorate. I have always made it my priority to advocate for the best interests of all our community. In the next four years I will continue to stand up and fight for better services in health, in particular the Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital; better resources for our

TAFEs and local schools; upgrades to our roads; and reinstating the Liverpool via Regents Park train line, the inner west train line, express services at Yagoona station, and accessible upgrades for all our train stations.

It is vital that Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital is not privatised and remains in public hands. Premier Baird already has runs on the board when it comes to prioritising profit over public health. As Treasurer he oversaw a \$3 billion cut to hospitals across the State, putting more pressure on doctors, nurses and health professionals. Our community opposes any privatisation of Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital and further cuts to public health services. Free quality health care is vital for our community and that is why my priority will be that Bankstown-Lidcombe Hospital remains in public hands and is well resourced.

Another issue causing a great deal of distress to my community is the train timetable. The changes that took place in October 2013 to the Sydney Trains timetable removed the entire inner west train line, more commonly known as the Liverpool via Regents Park train line. It removed also the express services from Yagoona station. This botched train timetable has more than doubled travel times for commuters from Villawood, Chester Hill and Sefton, who are forced to change trains at Birrong and again at Lidcombe, where their next train terminates. What was formerly a single journey to the inner west and city now takes some residents three train changes.

Prior to the last election the New South Wales Opposition made a strong commitment to restore this service, a commitment that Liberal candidates in Auburn, Bankstown, Fairfield and Cabramatta were unwilling to match. For almost two years I have been writing to the current and former Minister for Transport and Infrastructure showcasing a number of examples from students, workers, mothers with prams and the elderly, who have brought to my attention their significantly increased journey times under this new train timetable. Sadly, on each occasion I have received only a stock standard response. I call on this Government to support better public transport services in my electorate of Bankstown. It is not just about servicing one part of Sydney.

The Minister for Transport and Infrastructure must conduct an immediate review of the Sydney Trains timetable and reinstate the Liverpool via Regents Park train service. I will continue to demand that this Government install an easy access lift at Yagoona, Chester Hill, Birrong and Villawood stations. The Baird Government needs to stop paying lip service to the commuters from my electorate and start providing them with viable access to the public transport service that they rely upon each day. Sadly, I noted in the recent statistics provided that patronage of public transport services in my area is down significantly from five years ago. That is not what good government is about. It is about encouraging people to use public transport and providing those services.

An issue I will always be passionate about is supporting our local public schools. Our local schools are truly the lifeblood of our community, which is why I am so proud of the hardworking teachers and staff at our schools. They are doing an amazing job at empowering local youth through education. Government has an important role to play in supporting our schools and teachers through appropriate resourcing and funding. It is imperative that the New South Wales Government stands up to its Federal Coalition colleagues and ensures that New South Wales schools receive the funding they deserve.

The Baird Government's TAFE fee increases and course cuts have put vocational education out of reach for many people in my community. Some \$1.7 billion has been cut from education and training, 100 TAFE teachers and support staff have been sacked in my region, and TAFE courses have been cut—and, worst of all, student fees have been drastically increased by up to thousands of dollars, including 40 per cent of students in 2015 being slugged an extra \$500 to \$1,500 for courses.

Earlier this year I met with student Colin Burgin from Yagoona. He will be paying an estimated \$5,000 to complete a certificate III course to become a licensed electrician that last year would have cost him only \$1,200. For many people seeking a technical or vocational qualification, or those looking to

reskill or retrain, TAFE is the key to getting a better job and a better quality of life. Labor has committed to reverse the Baird Government's dismantling of TAFE and to invest in TAFE so that everybody has access to a fair and affordable TAFE system to develop skills and enhance long-term career opportunities.

Another important issue which many members of the Bankstown community have brought to my attention is the privatisation of the State's electricity network. It was recently railroaded through this Parliament to avoid public scrutiny and debate. Many constituents have conveyed their concerns about rising electricity prices, including the fact that electricity costs have risen by approximately 42 per cent over a three-year period. I will continue to support measures that would ease the cost-of-living pressures for my constituents, including via lower electricity bills.

Recently the Australian Energy Regulator determined that the price of electricity should fall. This price determination would have had the effect of delivering Bankstown families with savings of up to \$300 and Bankstown small businesses with savings of up to \$500 on their bills per annum. Time and again throughout the election campaign and in this place the Premier told the people of New South Wales that he is about lowering electricity prices. But, disgracefully, the Liberal and Nationals members opposite did not back the Australian Energy Regulator's determination. Instead this Government intends to appeal the reduction in the cost of electricity.

The fire sale of our electricity network will result in billions of dollars of future profits being lost—which the State relies upon to fund critical services in my electorate such as nurses at Bankstown Hospital, teachers at local schools and hardworking local police. I express my utter disappointment at the fact that the budget delivered by the Baird Government in the last two months again ignored the needs of Bankstown residents. It did not provide any additional funding to support essential services in my community, and nor did it provide any upgrades to health, transport or school infrastructure in Bankstown.

Sadly, this Government has yet again ignored the most pressing public transport needs of our community by refusing to reinstate the Liverpool via Regents Park train line. Last night I met with residents of Potts Hill, a new development in my electorate. The general theme from discussions with those residents was that they were very disappointed by the fact that that train line was removed and they are struggling to access their local train stations due to the lack of easy access lifts at Chester Hill, Birrong, Yagoona, Villawood and Punchbowl stations.

However, I am particularly encouraged by the vision offered by the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Auburn, in his budget reply speech. The Leader of the Opposition outlined a vision for the future of Bankstown Airport and its eventual conversion into a business park to rival Macquarie Park or Norwest Business Park, creating thousands of high-wage jobs in the process for my community of Bankstown. When the planned western Sydney airport at Badgerys Creek comes into full operation, there will be a need to re-evaluate Bankstown Airport due to airspace requirements. It is important that that evaluation starts now and not in a decade.

All members have seen the benefits of employment centres like Macquarie Park, and Bankstown should be next. Creating an employment zone and career opportunities will boost not only the local economy but also the whole south-west Sydney region. With Bankstown's strategic location connecting the southern and western suburbs of Sydney, a major business and commercial park will undoubtedly invigorate the entire region and make Bankstown the epicentre of Sydney.

I am proud that Labor has also offered a positive framework to address the issue of affordable housing. As the Leader of the Opposition has advocated, there is an opportunity to allow the community housing sector to unlock millions of dollars of Commonwealth grants to invest into new social housing stock by transferring 20,000 homes owned by the New South Wales Government to the community sector. This plan could enable the building of 2,000 new homes for essential public sector workers, thereby giving our nurses and police, for instance, the opportunity to live and work in their communities.

The 2015-16 budget collected record stamp duty revenue of over \$7.29 billion, but just 4.7 per cent of this figure will be spent on social housing—clearly not enough to tackle the growing housing affordability crisis we are dealing with in this State and in particular in Sydney. With the median house price in Sydney having recently reached \$1 million, the great Australian dream of owning the family home is slowly falling out of the grasp of ordinary working people. We know that 70 per cent of young people under the age of 35 are struggling to enter the housing market at all. Recent statistics from Anglicare are particularly concerning, with less than 1 per cent of rental accommodation being considered affordable for those individuals who receive welfare income assistance, and a mere 16 per cent of rentals being considered affordable for families with two adults earning the minimum wage.

The New South Wales Government has lost its direction in the past four years when it comes to looking after the basic housing needs of our community. Sadly, New South Wales has experienced a significant increase in the number of homeless people in recent years, and there are more people experiencing homelessness in New South Wales than in any other State or Territory. According to Homelessness NSW, there were approximately 28,191 homeless persons in our State, and the number of people without stable housing has increased 32 per cent in the past two years. Young people are particularly at risk of entering the cycle of homelessness due to cost-of-living pressures and a lack of affordable housing. The harsh reality is that New South Wales has more young people experiencing homelessness than any other State due to a growing crisis with youth unemployment. Approximately 24.6 per cent of those homeless are young people between the ages of 12 and 24.

In 2011 there were 187,000 people unemployed in New South Wales. Under the leadership of the current Liberal-Nationals Government, this number has ballooned to approximately 225,000 people today. One in eight young people looking for work cannot find a job. Across regional areas it is one in six, and in many areas it is higher still. This is a Government that in four years has thrived in an environment of cuts to front-line services and cut 15,000 public service jobs; delivered wage cuts for our nurses, teachers, police and firefighters; and significantly cut our workers compensation scheme.

This Government's TAFE fee increases and course cuts have put vocational training out of reach for many people in our community at a time when the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics employment statistics reveal a growing rate of youth unemployment, reaching as high as 16.8 per cent in parts of Western Sydney. This Government's dismantling of TAFE demonstrates that it is willing to continue to deny thousands of young people, and generations to come, the opportunities they rightfully deserve.

Ms YASMIN CATLEY (Swansea) [5.17 p.m.]: I begin my speech in reply to the address from the Governor by thanking the Governor for his Speech on behalf of the Government. I congratulate all members, both newly elected members and re-elected members, in both Houses on taking their seats to represent the people of New South Wales in this Parliament—the first, oldest and finest Parliament in Australia. The Government, led by Mike Baird, deserves to be congratulated on its election win in March. I look forward to the contest of ideas in this place over the next four years. I assure all members that I will strive to be a thorn in the side of the Government and will be dedicated in holding the Government to account for its decisions.

I congratulate the Leader of the Labor Party, Luke Foley. Despite the time constraints and pressures placed upon him, newly elected to bring our party back from the brink, he led a revitalised and resurgent Labor to an election result of which he can be proud. I am proud to be part of his team. The Labor class of 2015 is impassioned. It knows too well about the pitfalls that come with complacency. We are a decent bunch. We will work with distinction, always putting the people of our electorates first. I look forward to serving alongside them all for many years to come.

As the Governor remarked, we now have the authority and the opportunity to implement lasting and meaningful change, which is a responsibility that should not be taken lightly. As a woman elected to the Legislative Assembly I know the great responsibility that has been placed on my shoulders. The Australian State and Commonwealth parliaments were amongst the first in the world to give women the

right to vote, although actual representation by women in parliament took much longer and is still less than 20 per cent nationally. Within Australia, the New South Wales Parliament ranked in the middle and was the second Parliament to appoint a woman member. Sadly, since 1918, when women were first allowed to run for a seat in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, only 70 have been elected. This needs to change and we must encourage many more women into a life of public service. I assure the House that I and members on this side of the Chamber will take that challenge seriously.

The Baird Government claims to have a mandate for privatisation. The New South Wales electricity network has been privatised and our poles and wires will be gone. The asset raises more than \$1 billion annually for the people of New South Wales but it will be flogged off for an unknown amount, which is likely to be much less than the \$20 billion that was promised. The Liberal Government rammed the privatisation of our electricity network through this Parliament, which is bad news for electricity prices, bad news for electricity reliability, bad news for regulation and bad news for local jobs. Since the Coalition Government came to office, the average household electricity bill has increased by more than 40 per cent, to \$629 per year.

Mike Baird has advised that the Coalition Government expects to receive anywhere between \$15 billion and \$20 billion from the privatisation of poles and wires. Unfortunately, little of that money will reach my local community. Only 30 per cent of the proceeds have been earmarked for rural and regional New South Wales, much of which will be used to appease The Nationals whose members slammed their Coalition partners for privatising the poles and wires. In fact, the Deputy Leader of The Nationals, the Minister for Education, said as late as June last year that people in his electorate had "made it very clear they do not want their local electricity poles and wires to be sold." I agree with him. Yet he and his Nationals colleagues voted for privatisation because Mike Baird promised to bolster their electorates with an uneven and unfair cash splash, all the while sparing the rural electricity providers from privatisation. It was a great deal for them but it comes at the expense of the rest of us.

It was the same story with the privatisation of the Port of Newcastle. Our region was promised a large portion of the \$1.75 billion raised from the fire sale of the Port of Newcastle. However, the budget reveals that \$400 million of the proceeds has been shifted from the urban renewal of Newcastle to fund new trains in Sydney. Again, that is great for Sydney but it is a poor deal for us. This Government believes strengthening the economy is a key priority of the 2015-16 budget, which is crafted on the back of record stamp duty returns that are unsustainable. The budget is not about building our future; it is about record taxes, record fees and record spin. Mike Baird is now the highest-taxing Premier in the history of Australia. There are no allocations in the budget to ensure that quality schools and hospitals will be built and sustained in the years ahead. This is a short-term, lazy budget that suffers from its reliance on the rivers of stamp duty gold.

Mr Matt Kean: I didn't know you were a fiscal conservative.

Ms YASMIN CATLEY: You do not know me. The budget does not prepare us for a sustainable future when stamp duties begin to reduce. The people of New South Wales will do well to look at what this Government has delivered in contrast to what it has promised. In his first budget Mike Baird promised to spend \$62.5 billion on infrastructure projects over four years. Over the past four years he has managed to spend only \$55.7 billion on infrastructure, which means that \$6 billion was not spent on vital projects and on creating thousands of jobs. Since this Government came to office it has underspent on Health and Education but is raking in \$7 billion more in tax. Its priorities are wrong.

The Government claims that we have entered an era of unprecedented investment in infrastructure. But Swansea received 0.00 per cent of the allocation in this budget for investment in new transport infrastructure. It is a crying shame, a disgrace and an insult to the people of Swansea. The Government claims that record spending on new transport infrastructure will allow the people of New South Wales to spend less time in their cars on the road and more time with their families. The people of Swansea also deserve that right. I have major concerns about this budget. I am passionate about the

TAFE sector. Swansea has often been characterised as a tradies' electorate, and I am proud that we have a huge population of tradespeople. Unfortunately, the budget papers paint a bleak picture for TAFE. I am concerned about what this means for the next generation of tradies.

There has been a shocking decline in TAFE enrolments, which are down more than 43,000 this year alone since the introduction of Smart and Skilled. Approximately 80,000 fewer students are enrolled in TAFE than in 2012 and more than 2,600 full-time equivalent staff have been sacked since 2012-13. Alarming, many people in my community have presented to me with their fears that TAFE campuses in and around my electorate may face closure as a result of the budget. It is not the fault of Hunter TAFE because it has delivered quality education services to our region for decades. The highly skilled and experienced staff pass on their knowledge to students who are eager to achieve the skills they need to apply for jobs. The blame for this debacle lies squarely at the feet of this Government. The recent TAFE reforms have been a disaster from the outset, and staff and students at Belmont TAFE—which I hold dear—are worried.

Staff are worried they will have no jobs and therefore will not be able to pass on their knowledge to the next generation of local kids, and students are worried because their course costs have gone through the roof. I have spoken with many students who have had to make the demoralising decision to pull out of their courses altogether. It is terribly unfair. A recent Newcastle poll asked: Do you support the State Government's TAFE reforms? Some 87.83 per cent of respondents said no. I am pleased that the people of the Hunter are with me on this topic. There is no doubt that the people of the Hunter see the so-called reforms for what they are: a blatant ideological attack on TAFE, with privatisation as the Government's endgame. The Treasurer said that building infrastructure is the main goal of the 2015-16 budget, but I have growing concerns about how this Government plans to build infrastructure for the future.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! If Government members stop interjecting the debate may not deafen us all.

Ms YASMIN CATLEY: I can get much louder if you need me to.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): No, we do not need that. If members stop interjecting the member for Swansea may keep the tone down.

Ms YASMIN CATLEY: I will respond accordingly, Mr Assistant-Speaker. I will recap because I am sure Government members did not hear what I said. I have growing concerns about how this Government plans to build infrastructure for the future. How can the next generation get ahead if our skilled labour comes from elsewhere and our kids cannot get a start because no jobs are left for them? If the Government truly is an infrastructure government it should address the jobs crisis that is currently crippling the Hunter and Central Coast. But this budget gives me no confidence that the Government has a plan to get our region back on track and back to work.

During the winter recess, instead of addressing the jobs crisis with urgency, the Government announced that it would again delay committing to building our new inner-city train fleet in the Hunter. I am alarmed that the Baird Government again has not only delayed the procurement of the new fleet but also it appears that this important manufacturing project may be built offshore. What a kick in the guts that is for our region. The unemployment rate in many of our towns and suburbs has reached double digits, and the manufacturing sector in the Hunter is at the front line of the jobs crisis. Since the election of the Liberal Government in 2011 our train-building industry has shed hundreds of jobs. Indeed, recently the iconic Forgacs was pushed to the wall by the Abbott Liberal Government failing to announce a coherent industry policy, and the best the State Minister for Transport and Infrastructure can do is announce that two local manufacturers "might be in with a chance" to build our trains in the Hunter.

Unfortunately, our environment is also a real loser. I welcome the \$1.7 billion earmarked by the

Treasurer for national parks and heritage. Why would I not? But it was the Wran Government that set the bar high in protecting our precious environment. The Wran Government accomplished more than any other State Government by ensuring that one-third of our coast is permanently protected and managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. I am very proud that his Government created 20 new national parks during its term in office. But the real story—and everyone is talking about it—is that New South Wales is lagging behind in renewable energy. While the Government is bogging itself down with concerns about litter, the big picture on meeting the renewable energy target of 20 per cent by 2020 is missing from this budget.

The Government needs to take renewables seriously by committing to a New South Wales renewable energy target. A strong renewable energy target framework will support the thousands of jobs and millions of dollars of investment created in that industry. The New South Wales Minister for the Environment should be held accountable for the environmentally hostile decisions of his Federal Liberal colleagues. With Tony Abbott dramatically weakening the renewable energy target framework and the Federal budget confirming the axing of the Clean Energy Finance Corporation, the Minister for the Environment must stand up to protect the New South Wales environment and defend the millions of dollars being invested in green jobs. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Most importantly, the Minister for the Environment should call on Tony Abbott to make combatting the disastrous effects of climate change easier not harder by allowing the States to establish their own renewable energy target frameworks. In conclusion, I quote Labor leader Luke Foley in his reply to the 2015 budget. He said:

There is a better way for NSW.

Labor understands that Government should defend the public interest against vested interests.

Labor understands that health and education are not potential budget savings but essential public services.

Labor has new ideas for the delivery of public services.

Labor has a plan to spread prosperity beyond Sydney's CBD to the regions, towns and suburbs of this state.

Labor is excited by the opportunities of the sharing economy and engaged with this Asian century.

Labor is focused on the future; focused on a sustainable economy delivering opportunity for all.

Ultimately, we are here to speak for our communities; their interests must come first. Respect for each other and the people whose voices we represent should underpin our undertakings in this place. I will dedicate myself to upholding that principle and I hope those on the other side of the House will join me. Thank you.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON (Maitland) [5.34 p.m.]: I commence my contribution by congratulating the Premier and all members who were elected to serve in this Parliament at the recent election. I share the hope expressed by the member for Swansea that members will use this opportunity to improve the lot of our constituents and that when we leave New South Wales will be a better place in which to live. Months have passed since the Governor gave his opening address so earlier today I read his Speech again. At the conclusion of his Speech the Governor summarised the aspirations that politicians should have for this State. He said:

The Government went to its people with a fully funded plan to ... future-proof the State.

New South Wales has clearly signalled its support for that plan and the Government has made a firm commitment to New South Wales that it will deliver on the commitments so emphatically supported at the election.

The Government will deliver improved infrastructure and better services, protection for our environment and communities and restore accountability across government ...

They are important words. I note that Mr Scot MacDonald, the Parliamentary Secretary for the Hunter and Central Coast, is over his post-election blues—namely, shortly after the election he said that the Hunter had spoken but it should have been a bit quieter because it would get nothing from this Government. The Government is obviously trying to work on its commitment but we would prefer it to work at a better than glacial pace. The Governor said further:

I encourage you to learn from and support each other ... remember you are here to speak for your community and it is their interests that come first.

Respect for each other and the people whose voice you represent is what should underpin every debate ... and it is that which will lead to good policy and good outcomes for the communities you represent.

I take those laudable aims very seriously in the way in which I represent my community in this place. But it is important also for the Government to listen and meet its election commitments. Earlier today, as I often do in this place, I talked about Maitland Hospital. For a promise to remain undelivered for five years is beyond belief. The original hospital promised to us was to have 630 beds. Then it was going to be a teaching hospital, with 550 beds, and was to act as an additional resource to the existing Maitland Hospital, which had 188 beds. So we were potentially looking at having 820 beds, and a community that is growing by five people per day clearly needs a hospital to grow with it into the future.

In early 2014 community discussions were held. The Government offered a blank cheque. It talked about the services, including cancer and lymphedema services, that would be delivered in this amazing new hospital. But by November 2014 the Government had changed its mind. Indeed, we saw a change of direction after the former member for Maitland advised that she would not be standing at the 2015 election. The Government then announced the existing hospital would be closed and that the new hospital would be a second tier rural referral hospital—not a tertiary hospital. The new hospital was to have a helipad, which sounded great until we realised that it was to be used to take the hard cases elsewhere. With 315 beds, the new hospital will be half the size of John Hunter and, after deducting the existing 188 beds at Maitland Hospital, there will be a total of 127 new beds. There was then some talk about 80 beds at Morisset Hospital being rolled into that figure. So after five years we are left with 47 extra beds. What a disgrace.

Earlier this year other electoral candidates and I spoke with the Maitland Hospital Medical Council about historical funding issues. During those discussions doctors raised various issues, including lack of investment in the existing hospital for five years. The Labor Government spent \$10 million on extending the emergency department and creating new beds but since the last election the Liberal-Nationals Government has spent nothing on our local hospital, despite the fact that every day an additional five people come to live in this area. About 7,000 to 8,000 additional people are now using this hospital but there is no extra capacity. Doctors were not able to provide the necessary services to treat this oversupply of patients and they could not wait for a new hospital to overcome pressures and issues relating to trolley block.

In December last year a code red emergency was declared at Maitland Hospital because literally no beds were available. When I met with the doctors they told me that they supported the closure of the existing Maitland Hospital. I was surprised on one level but I realised that, like all workers, they want the

newest technology. Some of their discussions about the collocation of services seemed to make sense but they all seemed to think that the hospital would be located on a larger site. However, this Government is not talking about a massive new hospital; it is talking about a small hospital. I tried to give them feedback from the November consultations but they would not believe it; they trusted this Government but it lied to them.

I often wonder what the doctor who was present at those consultations and who came to the pre-poll in the week before the election thought about all this. He asked me why we were campaigning to save the existing Maitland Hospital when the Government was going to build an \$800 million hospital. I again said that that was not the case, that he should heed what had been said during public consultations and that I would send him the notes. The next day the Government announced that it had made a commitment to spend only \$400 million on the new Maitland Hospital. Recently the Minister for Health said that the Government was consulting widely on this issue. However, either her department missed the doctors or the doctors missed the memorandum that informed them they were no longer getting the large, fantastic, you-beaut hospital they thought they would be getting.

The Premier has to come clean on this funding model but he still refuses to do so. Even last week in Newcastle he could not spit out the words "public-private partnership" when he was referring to the funding model. He is still keeping everyone in suspense. A couple of months ago when he was in my electorate the same thing happened. When the Government goes ahead with its PPP model, as it did in the northern beaches region, we will have two classes of medical care: there will be the haves and the have-nots. There will be those who have high-quality health care and those who do not. Those who have high-quality care will be private patients. The public patients in my electorate will lose their public hospital and have a privately funded hospital which will be a real loss to them.

I am concerned because last week the president of Maitland Medical Council rang and asked me whether I had received a briefing from the Minister for Health; he wanted to know how I knew we were going to have a small hospital. I told him that I had listened to the public consultation. This Government and this health Minister did not tell the president of Maitland Medical Council that council should oppose the closure of the existing hospital because the hospital it would be getting would be only half the size of what it had been promised. When the president of the council spoke to me he was distressed, said that he felt betrayed, that he was angry and that he could not understand why the Government would lie to him. My community needs a new hospital. This will probably be the last major public hospital that is built in my area in my lifetime so I want the Government to come clean on the time frame, the modelling and the funding. More importantly, I want the Government to build this hospital. I am sick of all the talk; we have been talking about it for five years.

Another issue that this Government has been talking about relates to the rail services in my area. Last week Minister Constance visited my electorate but he could not find my phone number to inform me that he was going to make an announcement about rail services in that area. He did not tell me, "I know you are interested in rail services, Jenny, so I would like to tell you what is going on." He visited my electorate, started talking about hubs, et cetera, and released a beautiful new video. Members will remember the Maitland rail story but I would like to put it on the record again. The Liberal-Nationals Coalition went to the election in 2011 saying that it would not cut rail services but it back-flipped in 2012 and in 2014 we had the race to destruction. Consultations began and community members overwhelmingly said, "Keep the rail services and keep the transport corridor active", but the Liberal-Nationals Coalition did not want to do that. We all remember the infamous Cabinet minute that was issued later that said it would cost an additional \$100 million to go outside the corridor, but the Liberal-Nationals Coalition did not worry about that.

Save Our Rail took the Government to court and said, "You need an Act of Parliament to do this." As the Government could not change the law there was a shifty change in ownership and it was hoped that someone else would rip up the rail line. This matter is still under appeal but the Government is proceeding with an unlawful and unwanted ripping-up of our rail line. Minister Constance has been talking

about hubs and no staff so that people would know what is happening on the rail lines, which is what happened before the election. When Minister Berejiklian visited my electorate and informed us that she would be introducing a brand new train service in Maitland people were nonplussed and did not understand. Why would the Minister for Transport introduce a train service in an area in which services had just been cut? The Government took train services off the network but then provided a new service—the train from nowhere.

Every day people visit my electorate office, ring me, write emails or talk to me on Facebook and tell me how unhappy they are with the rail services provided by this Government. It pains me when I hear this Government talking about infrastructure and all the things that it is building and doing as \$340 million from the sale of our port will be used to rip up rail infrastructure, which is ridiculous. The other day I was speaking to a lady who told me that she had broken her foot at Hamilton station after getting off the train and getting onto the bus. People are no longer visiting Newcastle CBD which has impacted on businesses. A university will be opening in the region, there is a theatre, a regional museum and the law courts—all the services that people in Maitland and further up the valley, including the Upper Hunter, would like to access. It is disgraceful that Government members are not standing up for those communities.

This Government has tasked Newcastle council with consulting commuters about the provision of rail services. However, we cannot ensure that people in my electorate, in the Upper Hunter and in other electorates will be able to have a say. The crowning idiocy of this whole debacle is the Government's stated aim of removing rail from Newcastle to clear Stewart Avenue. However, in the video we see that the light rail goes over Stewart Avenue, so what was the point—all this anger and angst for nothing. Light rail will still go over the top of Stewart Avenue. If the Government keeps just one of its promises light rail services will be running every 10 minutes, which will be more disruptive than heavy rail was in that space.

Over the past four years we have been struggling with increasing unemployment under this Government. Forgacs briefed all members of Parliament but I do not know whether it met with the member for Upper Hunter. I am aware that hundreds of jobs will be lost in a number of electorates in addition to job losses at the Austar mine. On the Government's watch unemployment figures have doubled in my electorate. This Government is rolling over the defunct and underutilised payroll tax incentive scheme. Under pressure from the Opposition the Government introduced incentives for smaller employers but there has been little else.

This week members of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union came to this place to advocate for manufacturing contracts for trains which could and should be built in New South Wales. However, because of economies of scale and efficiencies in tender delivery the Government has not applied that to its own procurement policies. When the chairman of Forgacs came to see me he flagged that very shortly a Canadian ship-building company would be coming to New South Wales to renew its fleet over 30 years and that it would be providing jobs in our electorate. This Government has no vision. Government members talk about efficiencies for workers and for companies but what about procurement efficiencies? If we had a strategic, planned, rolling replacement of trains people could work in the train manufacturing industry for 30 years, but this Government has no vision and young workers and their families are now left without jobs.

What about the cuts to TAFE? Workers cannot retrain because 68 teachers have gone and more will go as the Government continues its dumb and dumber approach to TAFE. We need quality teaching, not just the ability to acquire qualifications. How will older workers retrain? How will they afford it? They will not. There is no help for them to get a job because their partners are employed. We cannot leave these people, who want to be productive members of our community and to contribute to our economy, without jobs. But we will have to because they will not be able to afford to retrain—

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! The member's time has expired.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I seek an extension of time.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! I remind the member for Maitland that the normal practice in this House is to ask for an extension of time before her speaking time expires.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I am sorry. I was distracted by interjections.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! The member for Maitland should concentrate. Before I put the question, I welcome Mayor Laurie Bishop and General Manager Glenn Wilcox of Armidale Dumaresq Council. I hope the council is a little more orderly than this House. An extension of the member's speaking time is agreed to.

[Extension of time agreed to.]

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: Please record that I am happy about that. I thank the House for extending my time. I appreciate it.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! I will have Hansard record that you are happy.

Ms JENNY AITCHISON: I also extend a welcome to the members of the Armidale Dumaresq Council. I used to live in Walcha, which is quite close by, so I am very well acquainted with Armidale. Welcome to our Parliament. This week it is appropriate to talk about another matter of concern affecting our community, which is homelessness. In the year that we commemorate the Anzac centenary it is important to talk about heroes. I can think of nothing more heroic than someone who lives on the streets, who lacks access to resources and who continues every day to lead a life of sad experiences.

Being a hero in this century is an everyday event; it is not the end of the battle. It is about taking the first step on the path to defeat every day but hoping that you will win. It is like trying to get a law changed when you are in opposition. It is about standing up to right a wrong. The essential quality of being a hero in this century is a deep belief in fairness, social justice and equal rights for all. That is something I am very concerned about. We need to look at how we are delivering services in our community. In 2013 the then Chief of Army, David Morrison, said in an unflinching video that very quickly went viral that there is no place in the Army for those who seek to exploit and demean their colleagues. He added:

If we are a great national institution—if we care about the legacy left to us by those who have served before us, if we care about the legacy we leave to those who, in turn, will protect and secure Australia—then it is up to us to make a difference.

I think that applies to this place as well. Those words are so powerful to me and a perfect summation of the Anzac spirit. In this year of the Anzac commemoration that is something we should honour in our day-to-day lives as politicians. My work as a politician is devoted to social justice and righting the many wrongs that hard-hearted policies have caused in my community. I am thinking of the rise in homelessness due to domestic violence and other triggers. I think of the more than 400 people who are turned away from homelessness services every night, and the more than 2,800 women fleeing abusive partners who are turned away from support services every year. Homelessness Australia has said that \$33.8 million is needed from the Federal Government to help close the gap in domestic violence service provision and ensure that women fleeing their homes are not left without crisis accommodation. As a State Government, we should also ensure that we meet those obligations.

My son recently visited the Wayside Chapel in Sydney as part of an innovative school excursion. He learnt the hard truths about homelessness—that teenagers who end up on the street are often raped, forced into prostitution, abused, then become drug addicted and eventually die. The heroes of

organisations like the Wayside Chapel day after day provide hope, warmth, food, counselling and a hand up to homeless people in our community. These are the heroes of the twenty-first century—people who do not just talk about something needing to be done but get in and do it. Aside from the infrastructure projects that are important for my community, I believe the work these people do is vital. We have argy-bargy in this Chamber about whether people should smile while they are debating, but it is so important that we advocate for people in need. If nothing else, I want to be part of a Parliament that decreases to zero the number of women who die at the hands of a partner. I will be working to do that. That is the most important job of the Parliament and one that I urge the Government to put at its centre.

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): Order! The mayor and general manager of Armidale Dumaresq Council are guests of the hardworking member for Northern Tablelands.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Adam Marshall and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

Pursuant to resolution private members' statements proceeded with.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

TOONGABBIE BUSINESS CHAMBER

Dr HUGH McDERMOTT (Prospect) [5.56 p.m.]: The Toongabbie Business Chamber has recently been reformed. I had the pleasure on Monday night to meet and talk to the members of that chamber. I was accompanied by Michelle Rowland, the Federal member for Greenway, and the Mayor of Holroyd, Greg Cummings. Toongabbie has a small commercial centre that is built around its train station. It is home to many small businesses owned by hardworking families who go to work before sunrise and come home well after the sun has set every day. Many of those small businesses are owned and run by people who are working hard to give their families a better chance in life. This is a good story. But modern Toongabbie is not all about work; it is also about community.

This is where the Toongabbie Business Chamber comes in. The chamber has a vision to transform Toongabbie from a collection of small shops into a vibrant centre that attracts people from not only Toongabbie but also other parts of Sydney. The chamber wants to reintroduce the Toongabbie fete, a tradition lost decades ago. Members may not know that Toongabbie was the third settlement in Australia. We know about the settlements at Sydney and Parramatta; Toongabbie became the third settlement of the new colony. The Toongabbie Business Chamber also wants to clean up the community by taking action to remove years of graffiti on buildings. The chamber has put together strategic objectives to increase participation by the local population in local business, and to decrease crime, decrease graffiti and increase shopping revenue. Toongabbie is increasingly multicultural—most migrants are from the subcontinent—which is also having an impact on the community and businesses.

The business chamber continues to lobby the three councils in the area—Holroyd, Blacktown and Parramatta—to achieve its objectives. An upgrade of Toongabbie train station is needed. Unfortunately, the State Government has continued to promise an upgrade, including putting in lifts, but once again has failed to deliver in the budget. There are no commitments to upgrade the train station this year. Significant concerns about the safety of the overpass bridge at Toongabbie have been raised with me. The bridge was built in 1946, and its time has well and truly passed. It needs further load testing and upgrading. Once again, this Government has failed to provide funding to allow the department to do the testing. I commend the business chamber for its vision. The renewal of Toongabbie is only a small part of the inevitable continued expansion of Western Sydney, but it is an important part.

I turn to the economy of Western Sydney. Employers tell me that they want a State Government

that supports small business as well as big business. Every day since the last State election, 24 extra people have joined the New South Wales unemployment queue. The State Government has directly cut 15,000 jobs. Federally, the Abbott Liberal Government plans to cut a further 16,500. We need to reinvest in TAFE. TAFE gives our youth in Western Sydney the tools they need to compete in an increasingly global market. Education is the key. We know that, once again, TAFE is being cut by this Government. Not only are TAFE jobs being cut but also fees are being increased. Not only are TAFE jobs being cut but fees are being greatly increased. Wetherill Park TAFE in my area needs more support. It is increasing in size—that is a credit to the Government—but the fee structure has increased so dramatically that many people from the local area can no longer afford to attend TAFE.

Western Sydney is undergoing a period of massive expansion and growth. We need to maximise this growth for the benefit of the residents of Prospect and other parts of Western Sydney. With the massive potential population growth in the next few years, about 190,000 new homes will be necessary in Western Sydney over the next 20 years. If we are to capitalise on Western Sydney's future we must ensure that the State Government is investing in our central services and not cutting them. How will the area become a better place to live if there has been a complete destruction of TAFE, for example, when we cannot get our young people into these important places so they can get important jobs? How will growth in the area fit in the context of the Liberals' cuts to our schools and hospitals? Labor has a plan to reinvest in our important services—our schools, hospitals and TAFE—and to support local businesses. The expansion of Western Sydney must come with an improvement in local services and support for local businesses to support job growth and drive the Western Sydney economy.

EPHING SCOUTS CENTENARY

Mr DAMIEN TUDEHOPE (Epping) [6.01 p.m.]: On 11 July 2015 I had the great pleasure of attending the centenary of Epping Scouts. It is astounding to think that a century ago, one year into the First World War, the scouting organisation planted its roots in Epping. In fact, the scouting movement as a whole was formed not long before, in England in 1908. The scout and guide movements have mentored generations of young people, encouraging them to strive for excellence and to conduct themselves with an awareness of duty and compassion for others. The type of values instilled in young scouts and guides are the kind that help to turn a residential suburb into a thriving community where people care for each other and for the environment around them. And that is what my electorate is—a thriving, successful community, a multicultural success story and, above all, a place where people want to live and raise a family.

So on the anniversary of this centenary, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the valuable contribution that Epping Scouts has made to that success. Today we see a generation of young people glued to screens and electronic devices, seldom leaving the house, otherwise preoccupied with smartphones, iPads, and gaming consoles. Scouts is one outlet that can help parents break that cycle, taking children out of that environment and teaching them to appreciate being outdoors and being active. Let us not forget that some children do not have the good fortune of a happy home life. Organisations such as Scouts can give disadvantaged youths an outlet to learn values, responsibility and leadership, and provide them with activities to occupy their time, which might otherwise have been spent learning the wrong sort of lessons from the wrong sort of role models. Let us consider for a moment the scout law:

A Scout is trustworthy.
A Scout is loyal.
A Scout is helpful.
A Scout is friendly.
A Scout is cheerful.
A Scout is considerate.
A Scout is thrifty.
A Scout is courageous.
A Scout is respectful.

A Scout cares for the environment.

Some stand out to me as more virtuous than others; however, they are all worthwhile. The values espoused by scouts are the sort of old-fashioned values that encourage individual responsibility, selflessness and care for others. One might think that an organisation that has not updated its values in more than a century might lack relevance or be a bit out of date. But the truth is quite the opposite. These values are timeless and could not be more relevant in today's society. It is a sad truth that our society is becoming increasingly materialistic, self-centred and obsessed with rights. So I find it encouraging that the Scouts are still teaching young people about responsibilities as opposed to rights, encouraging them to put others first and to ask, "What can I give back to society?" instead of "What can society do for me?".

It is a stark reminder of the hubris of each generation, and it begs the question that perhaps we are not always the moral superiors to our parents and grandparents before us. Indeed, we have much to learn from the wisdom of past generations. Over its history, Epping Scouts has ranged from between 20 to 200 members at any given time and has seen more than 50 Queen's scouts pass through its ranks. This is particularly thanks to the enduring leadership and support of the governance of Epping Scouts and to the dedication of parents and leaders of the movement. Since my entry into Parliament I have seen firsthand how active the scouting movement has been in my local area. I am proud to say now that I am able to sit on the supporter's council of the Sydney North Region Scouts.

I acknowledge Group Leader Peter Buckley, Joey Leader Carol Hoh, Cub Leader Teresa Pulley, Scout Leader Matthew Lim, Venturer Leader John Williams and Rover Crew Leader Jacqui Osborne. It is because of the enduring and tireless efforts of every one of them that this amazing community organisation still stands strong—even in its 100th year. I also acknowledge the efforts of all the assistant leaders, parents and volunteers who dedicate their spare time to ensuring that the values of the scouting movement are passed on to future generations. To finish I will share with members the oath of a scout:

On my honour
I promise that I will do my best
To do my duty to my God
And to the Queen of Australia
To help other people and
To live by the Scout Law.

In my opinion, these are worthwhile virtues. Any oath that pledges allegiance to God, Queen and country is a fine oath indeed. In fact, the only thing missing is family. I congratulate Epping Scouts on 100 years of service to the community, and I wish them all the best for the future and hope they are still serving in another 100 years.

TRIBUTE TO MR BARRIE LAWN

ABERDEEN HIGHLAND GAMES

Mr MICHAEL JOHNSEN (Upper Hunter) [6.06 p.m.]: I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak about Mr Barrie Lawn of Parkville, a constituent of the Upper Hunter electorate who has tirelessly worked for the Aberdeen Highland Games Committee. After 16 years on the Aberdeen Highland Games Committee, 10 of those as president, Barrie is stepping down. Over the years Barrie has steered this event, along with the dedicated committee members and volunteers, to a spectacle that is renowned throughout the State. Indeed, it is well known throughout Australia and is making its presence felt internationally. People in America bought their tickets online for this year's event.

The Aberdeen Highland Games are held on the first Saturday in July. This year the event attracted more than 5,000 visitors to the community of Aberdeen and surrounding districts—a far cry from the crowd of 500 in its first year, 16 years ago. I note that the population of about 2,500 people in

Aberdeen more than doubles for this event every year. Visitors gather annually in Aberdeen on this winter's day to experience the vibrant essence of Scotland and the Scottish heritage in the Upper Hunter Valley. The games cater for nearly 70 stallholders, campers and caravaners who stay to watch the spectacle. The games begin with a parade of bands, clan representatives and others that leads into the massed band salute and the chieftain's address that officially opens the day.

As someone who has been honoured to fulfil the role of MC of the Aberdeen Highland Games for the past seven years, I can assure members that it is a wonderful feeling when massed bands are coming at you on the stage; you get a real sense of the historical value of the Scottish heritage and the war cry that is the massed bands. Throughout the day there are highland and country dancing, pipe band displays, tartan warrior strongmen, traditional Scottish fare, novelty games and a tug-o-war followed by a fantastic Ceilidh in the evening. As someone with two left feet I am still dragged up by my wife because she loves the dancing. So I simply have to do it. The event caters for young and old.

Mr Adam Crouch: Give us a display.

Mrs Melinda Pavey: Come on, Michael, show us.

Mr MICHAEL JOHNSON: No, it is terrible. Trust me. Remember that I have a good head for radio and no feet for dancing. Barrie not only has overseen the Aberdeen Highland Games, he also has run country and highland dancing classes for 15 years in Scone. Barrie also has been a dancer and caller. Interestingly, some years back Barrie stood against my predecessor as a One Nation candidate. However, he saw the light and he has been a fantastic supporter of The Nationals and its local members for quite some years now.

Throughout Barrie's commitment and his history with the Aberdeen Highland Games, including his 10 years as president, he has been able to achieve some remarkable things, including a number of vice-regal visits to the Aberdeen Highland Games and, for a number of years, organising the Australian Federation Guard—a fantastic team from our Australian Defence Forces—who put on a magnificent display and are always a highlight of the games. Barrie is supported by his wife, Sue. Over the past couple of years, both have not been in the best of health. But that has never stopped them from getting out there and doing the best job they possibly can.

The fact that the crowds have continued to grow in their thousands over a number of years is testament to Barrie's commitment to the games and the presentation and highlighting of the Scottish heritage and culture within the Upper Hunter valley. On behalf of the Upper Hunter electorate, I personally thank Barrie for his dedication, expertise and commitment to the Aberdeen Highland Games. This event undoubtedly has put the small township of Aberdeen on the tourist map as a major annual event. Since it was elected in 2011, the State Government has been a great supporter of this event through Destination NSW. The community appreciates its support. I look forward to seeing everyone come along and enjoy a fantastic day at the Aberdeen Highland Games.

NATIONAL BLOOD DONOR WEEK

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal) [6.11 p.m.]: The last week of July was National Blood Donor Week and Central Coast nurses, students, chefs and tradies were amongst those hailed as extraordinary people by the Australian Red Cross Blood Service. Local blood, plasma and platelet, anti-D and bone marrow donors were applauded during National Blood Donor Week for their generosity. I am about to make my fiftieth plasma and platelet donation this month and I am told by the Red Cross that over the time I have been donating blood my donations will have saved approximately 150 lives, which is incredibly humbling.

Today I am challenging all my parliamentary colleagues and the good people of the Central Coast to donate blood during the month of August. Donating blood takes only one hour and by giving that time

donors make an extraordinary impact on the lives of those who need blood and other lifesaving blood products. As part of my challenge to all the people of the Central Coast to give blood in August, I am asking that they register with my office and send me, together with their details, a selfie taken during their blood donation. They will then go into a draw to win a lunch for two in Parliament House.

Ms Jodi McKay: Is it the needle or the vial? What are we talking about?

Mr ADAM CROUCH: I like to see the actual insertion. Donors will go into the draw to win a lunch for two in Parliament House with the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly and me.

Mr John Sidoti: It's a great incentive.

Mr ADAM CROUCH: It is. The Speaker leapt at the chance to take part in the "Give a Pint" challenge and I encourage all my parliamentary colleagues on both sides of the House to take up my challenge and donate blood this month.

Ms Jodi McKay: The Parliamentary Secretary should be speaking on this.

Mr ADAM CROUCH: So he should. As a guide, the Red Cross has confirmed that every blood donation helps to save three lives. It is therefore incredibly important to take an hour out of our busy schedules to visit a blood donor centre. There is one located nearby in Martin Place and Elizabeth Street. Blood donors give a patient undergoing chemotherapy the extra strength they need to make it through treatment, anti-D donors give pregnant mums an extra chance to have a healthy baby, and bone marrow donors give patients another chance at life. Only last week I visited a close friend, Diane Davies, who is undergoing treatment for acute leukaemia. She is receiving vital platelet donations which protect her compromised immune system during chemotherapy while she waits for a lifesaving bone marrow transplant.

I also recognise in Parliament today and congratulate two Central Coast residents: David Williamson, who has just given his 350th blood donation, and John Gifford, who has just given his 400th blood donation. Based on Red Cross figures, these two wonderful citizens who are dedicated to the Red Cross have saved approximately 2,200 lives, which is quite a sobering feat. I also pay tribute to the fantastic team at the Gosford Red Cross office who provide a friendly and inviting environment for all donors, including me. I acknowledge Jemma Falkenmire, the Red Cross Communications Officer, and Simon McMillan, the Red Cross Community Relations Officer, for their dedication and enthusiasm. The most important part of the Red Cross team are the local volunteers who are ever-present to take care of the donors at the end of every donation. I acknowledge them today.

I ask all members to sign up to Red25 this month and make their donation count towards our Government's tally. Red25 is a movement supported by businesses, schools, community groups and government departments. The more donations received the greater the opportunity for our group to be recognised for its support and lifesaving contribution towards 25 per cent of Australia's blood supply. The final point I make today is that it is sad to think that the Red Cross has to apply overseas for bone marrow donations because Australia has an insufficient supply. That is something we need to think about in our busy lives. The Australian Red Cross Blood Service needs our help. I urge members to take up my challenge, register and send to terrigan@parliament.nsw.gov.au, together with their contact details, a selfie of them giving blood.

Mr JOHN SIDOTI (Drummoyne—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.16 p.m.]: I reiterate the remarks of the member for Terrigan about the Australian Red Cross Blood Service and I commend the member for an outstanding private member's statement. The Red Cross does a remarkable job. We do not know whether in the future our family members, loved ones or acquaintances will have the need for a blood transfusion or bone marrow donation. The Red Cross does an outstanding job in ensuring the availability of supplies. I again commend the member for Terrigan for his contribution.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Anna Watson): I also congratulate the member for Terrigal on bringing this important issue to the House tonight. I know that the member for Strathfield is now very keen to give blood. I hope that every member in this place will take up that challenge. I, for one, will certainly be doing so.

TRIBUTE TO ANTOINE KAZZI

Mr JIHAD DIB (Lakemba) [6.17 p.m.]: I also commend the member for Terrigal and I look forward to the member for Strathfield giving blood. I will be happy to be present to ensure that the Red Cross takes the right amount of blood. Tonight I want to recognise the very impressive Antoine Kazzi, a highly regarded, award-winning journalist and writer who spends an enormous part of his time advocating for peace and harmony. I have known Mr Kazzi for many years; he is acknowledged as one of the most respected figures in the Arabic media. Through his contribution towards building a better society, Mr Kazzi has been a prominent feature in interfaith and intercultural activities. Although my Arabic is nowhere near as strong as his, I have greatly enjoyed listening to his recitation of poetry at these events.

The art of communication has the ability to move people and the poetry that Mr Kazzi recites off the cuff is a highlight of the gatherings I have attended. He writes and speaks in a way that inspires people to do their best and he is highly regarded for his sense of purpose to better the community and strongly motivate others. However, there is a great deal more to Antoine Kazzi. Most recently, in 2014, Mr Kazzi was appointed as an honorary ambassador for social harmony representing the Arabic community, and this year he received a special award from the Bayt Al-Zakat, or House of Charity, for his support and mentoring of students who strive for high academic achievement.

Throughout his long journey in the Australian community media, which began upon his immigration in 1988, Mr Kazzi has focused on reinforcing cooperation between Australia and the Arab world through his writing, his poetry and his ability to bring people together. Since 1996 Antoine has been the editor-in-chief of an Arabic newspaper. His columns are often thought-provoking and insightful. Antoine's social commentary has both Middle Eastern and Australian relevance. His unwavering commitment to the traditional forms of journalism and the importance of freedom of speech ensure he receives widespread recognition from mainstream media outlets as well as responsiveness from his Middle Eastern readers.

Mr Kazzi is often called upon as an Australian correspondent to comment on major Middle Eastern matters. He has been interviewed by a large range of international and national media organisations such as BBC Radio, Al Jazeera television, SBS Radio, ABC Radio, Radio 2Moro, 2GB and 2000FM. To put things into perspective, Mr Kazzi has written more than 3,000 articles, most with a fundamental focus on the necessity to engineer and promote social harmony in Australia. Through his writings and actions, Mr Kazzi encourages the Arabic community to actively involve themselves in mainstream society and promote social harmony while respecting the law in Australia. He actively promotes multicultural Australia and the sense that we can all be proud of the heritage we may have, whilst at the same time sharing that pride in being Australian.

It is very difficult—in fact, near impossible—to try to expand upon the activities within a short period of time. However, it is important to note the fact that Mr Kazzi has been a leader of, organiser of or participant in many conferences that elaborate on roles and contributions of Arabic migrants through many seminars and dialogue between various groups within our multicultural Australia. As a proud Australian of Lebanese heritage, Mr Kazzi published the first encyclopaedia database of high achievers within the Arabic Australian community. The database served as an important first step in developing a way for people to not only connect but also recognise the positive contributions made by those of different cultural and religious backgrounds.

The sense of positivity is very important in times when there may be some who question the role

of multiculturalism or the contribution migrant communities have made to our great nation of Australia. Given my background in education and the value I place on a range of mechanisms that serve an investment in our youth, I have been very impressed by Mr Kazzi's understanding of the importance of recognising talent and understanding the need to mentor young people by establishing the first Lebanese youth parliament in Australia. Mr Kazzi has published 17 books. They range from social commentary through to poetry and philosophy.

However, for me, the book *Brilliant Faces*, which chronicles Arabic migration and achievement, was the highlight. I was not the only one to see the importance of such a book; former New South Wales Premier Kristina Keneally dubbed it one of three significant achievements of the year when it was published. The strength of our nation is found in the various patches we all bring through our heritage and beliefs. These combine to make the most beautiful quilts, as an example to the world. The greatest communicators are those who bring people together. Mr Antoine Kazzi's modus operandi is to take every opportunity to build a better society through positive dialogue and I thank him for his constant efforts at this.

Mr JOHN SIDOTI (Drummoyne—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.22 p.m.]: I compliment the member for Lakemba on his private member's statement and congratulate Mr Antoine Kazzi, a stalwart of the Arab community. I have had the pleasure of meeting Mr Kazzi on numerous occasions. He is an elder in the community and a sensational mentor of young people, and he has written numerous books. I compliment the member for Lakemba on his advocacy on this important issue. I am aware of his experience in this area because one of my special needs school—Lucas Gardens—recently moved into his area temporarily, so I had a chance to catch up with the member during the week. We enjoyed some labneh and some kibbeh, a traditional Arabic meal. Antoine Kazzi and many like him lead the community, and promote peace and harmony. They are a credit to the community.

MOREE AREA HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [6.23 p.m.]: In 2013, the last census found there were 28,191 people in New South Wales who were considered to be homeless—a staggering statistic. A lot of those people are from rural and regional New South Wales. Of the many issues confronting rural and regional New South Wales, homelessness is probably not one that is at the forefront of people's minds. Nevertheless it is an important issue, as homelessness in country areas is not necessarily seen by the community as people sleeping rough, as is sometimes seen in Sydney's central business district or other metropolitan areas. In country areas the homeless are often young people from broken homes who are couch surfing or people who cannot get a rental reference and are going from place to place. They even break into vacant premises sometimes to find shelter from the harsh weather.

It is important that we reflect on homelessness during National Homelessness Week, which is this week. I draw to the attention of the House a magnificent initiative of the Moree Area Homelessness Services organisation called Hike for the Homeless. I had the great pleasure of participating in the first day of this initiative on Sunday. This year it is a 396-kilometre hike that will end on Friday. The trail takes hikers on paths throughout the Moree Plains local government area. Fifteen locals left Jellicoe Park in Moree at about 9.00 a.m. on Sunday and hiked almost 65 kilometres to Croppa Creek, which we reached a bit before 6.00 p.m. It was a great day—refreshments at the Croppa Creek Bowling Club have never tasted so good. It was great to see Superintendent Gelina Talbot from the Barwon Local Area Command setting a cracking pace and leading from the front.

Last year's Hike for the Homeless went right across the New England north-west. This year it is concentrated on the Moree Plains Shire to raise awareness of and much-needed funds for the work of the homelessness services, which not only cover Moree but also cover Boggabilla, Boomi, Mungindi, Garah, North Star and everywhere else in between in the Moree Plains Shire. I pay tribute to a number of people involved in organising this year's event. Jo Williams is the Acting Operations Manager of the Moree Area Homelessness Services. Jared Lidgerwood, Anna Simmons and Giselle Cartridge, with a number of

volunteers, have helped out and are doing the hike as I speak. They are on their way to Mungindi tonight and were on the road when I last checked in with them. Others who have helped are Patricia Waters, Ian Stewart, Cheryl Leader and the indefatigable Frank Crump.

Women's Refuge staff in Moree helped with the barbecues and with food. They are Marlene Howard, Anela Carrol and Pauline Caine. There has also been the involvement of the local police including officers Mark Hamilton, Adam Bartlett, Martin Burke and Kim Finch. The local media have also supported the hike, including Sam Walton at the *Moree Champion*, Greg "The Hat" Henry at 2VM Now FM, and Barbara Rowe and Jessie, who participated in the hike on Sunday. They did very well for people who have never done anything like that before. I make special mention of the State Emergency Service [SES] volunteers from Moree, Inverell and Tenterfield—Ian Stewart from Tenterfield, Cheryl Leader from Inverell, and Dennis Humphries and Elise Harper from Moree. They are working hard by providing vehicles with flashing lights to make sure hikers are safe on the road.

The hike begins every day at 6.00 a.m. and ends at 6.00 p.m. The first night was at Croppa Creek, the next night was at Boggabilla, then Boomii; Mungindi tonight, Garah tomorrow and finishing at Rocket Park in Moree at about 4 o'clock on Friday afternoon with a big barbecue and lots of refreshments, I am sure. It should be a great afternoon. I give a special shout out to Todd and Carolyn Bellman from the Croppa Creek store. When they heard on the radio on Sunday that we were hiking all the way to Croppa Creek they got into their kitchen and whipped up 12 absolutely delicious and world-famous Croppa Creek burgers. They delivered them to us halfway along the route. Thank you, Todd and Carolyn. I congratulate the Moree Area Homelessness Services on raising awareness of and money for a vital cause. I encourage the people of Moree Plains Shire and beyond to think about homelessness this week and to give very generously to those worthy causes.

BOOMERANG BAGS

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater—Minister for Planning) [6.28 p.m.]: My community of Pittwater is situated on the beautiful northern peninsula of Sydney with the Pacific Ocean on one side and Pittwater on the other. It is the unique coastline, beaches, waterways and wildlife that make this area so special. When I hear about the great work being undertaken by members of my local community to protect our natural environment, I beam with pride. Last week I met some of the members of the Boomerang Bags Avalon community group. Hearing about the great work they are doing for my community makes me proud.

Boomerang Bags is a not-for-profit community initiative aimed at reducing the use of plastic bags by encouraging local communities to use a sustainable alternative—shopping bags made out of recycled materials that can be used over and over again. The Surfrider Foundation and Living Ocean have joined forces to bring Boomerang Bags to Avalon in an effort to reduce the distribution of plastic bags. Members of the Boomerang Bags Avalon community group told me that in Australia about 4,000 plastic bags are used every minute. Plastic bags are made out of petrochemicals, which end up in landfill, clog our waterways and can suffocate our marine life. Concerned local residents, surfers and ocean enthusiasts alike are working together with a number of local businesses and community members to support this project by donating second-hand materials, signing up to attend sewing bees and spreading the word that Boomerang Bags are coming to Avalon.

A boomerang bag is a reusable tote bag—preferably homemade out of recycled fabric—that can be used communally over and over again. I have one here. The donated boomerang bags are available in centrally located locations around shopping villages. People can borrow a bag to take home their items and then return it later for others to use. This system provides shoppers with the same convenience as a plastic bag—except the boomerang bag is not harmful to the environment. They can be used over and over again and are often made from recycled materials that would otherwise be thrown out.

I often hear the common statement that it is so convenient to just use a free plastic bag from the

shops. The boomerang bag addresses and counters this, as it is a free bag from the shops that is not plastic and can be reused. There are a number of locations around Australia where projects are being launched. Avalon Beach, Cabarita, Pottsville, Manyana Milton Ulladulla districts and Crescent Head in New South Wales are leading the way. Also in Torquay in Victoria, Burleigh Heads in Queensland, and Margaret River and Perth in Western Australia are also involved. The Avalon Beach project is still in the development stages. It is hoped that the project will launch early in 2016.

At the moment weekly sewing meetings are being held and volunteers are being sought to help sew the bags. The idea is to have approximately eight boxes full of bags placed in different parts of Avalon where customers can pick one up. Shopkeepers will help by storing the boxes in their shops overnight and wheeling them outside again in the mornings. In addition to homemade tote bags, the Avalon project members are looking for old tote bags that organisations or clubs no longer want. I am advised that recently Macquarie University donated about 50 bags. This initiative gets around the tricky laws that would prohibit plastic bags, which raises the concerns of placing costs difficulties or regulatory imposts on small businesses.

The boomerang bags initiative is driven by and for the community. Positive outcomes of this initiative include, but are not limited to: creating awareness, engaging the community's interest in our local environment, and subtly changing behaviours of both shoppers and shop owners. It is also a follow-the-leader model. As more businesses become involved subtle pressure will be placed on others to follow suit and get with the times. I am advised that Pittwater Council is supportive of the project and so is the Avalon Chamber of Commerce. It is great to see the widespread support from business owners. There are opportunities for schools to also get involved in sewing bags. The organisers really want the Avalon community to take ownership of the project and be proud of it; be proud that Avalon is helping to lead the way.

The hope is that other shopping villages in Pittwater and across the northern beaches will adopt the concept after seeing the success in Avalon. This could not be done without the passion and energy of some key movers and shakers. They include local residents like Kirsty Gyles and Laurel Wood, the Surfrider Foundation especially Jess Hansman, the Living Ocean especially the founders Kim and Deon Hubner, and Carol and Robbi Newman, Pittwater Council, Avalon Chamber of Commerce and all the volunteer sewers. Special mention to Annabelle Kristevic, who is one of the most dedicated sewers.

I will write to the Minister for the Environment, the Hon. Mark Speakman, about their great work as I know this will be something he will be interested in. This Government is passionate about our ocean and cleaning up our waterways. The member for Drummoyne told me a couple of minutes ago that four dolphins have just been spotted in the Parramatta River off Cabarita. It is great to see that after decades and decades of treating our waterways as receptacles that the process has been reversed and we are actually restoring our natural environment and making the beautiful waterways of Sydney more accessible, cleaner and better for everyone. This boomerang bags initiative is just one small piece of the puzzle that we all need to be involved in if we are going to get serious about cleaning up our oceans.

BEAUTIFUL MINDS

Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG (Macquarie Fields) [6.33 p.m.]: John Nash won the 1994 Nobel Prize in economics for his work on game theory, differential geometry and partial differential equations. He was a mathematical genius, but he also suffered from paranoid schizophrenia, a mental illness that took control of his life and became part of his daily struggles. His life story was portrayed in the film *A Beautiful Mind*, which showed that mental illness is indiscriminate, affecting Nobel Prize winners as well many others in our community.

I want to speak about Beautiful Minds, a local organisation that helps people with mental illness and provides hope for a better life. Sandra McDonald, who runs Beautiful Minds, has long championed the need to address mental health issues in our community. She is a dedicated volunteer who sacrifices

her time without complaint to help others. She was awarded Campbelltown's Citizen of the Year in 2014, and is a worthy recipient of one of our highest civic honours. In many ways, she brings further prestige to the award and demonstrates how much our community values the work she and her team of volunteers have done at Beautiful Minds for people in our community who have to live with mental health issues.

Mental health problems are becoming more prominent in our society, and we need to develop strategies and facilities to help those and their families who live with mental health issues. One in five Australians will experience mental illness during their lifetime, and tens of thousands in my local community will also suffer from this terrible illness. As Mayor of Campbelltown, I hosted a charity night that raised more than \$20,000 to help Beautiful Minds to build better facilities at Waratah House and Harmony House. Our community came together that evening to show its support—it was the personal stories that touched everyone that night.

Susan shared her story of feeling isolated, lacking self-esteem and experiencing volatile emotional difficulties and their impact; she found it difficult to connect with others and to be productive at work. Glenn, a softly spoken man, said he was on the verge of suicide and had been on medication for years. These were personal stories with powerful messages on how mental illness affects honest and hardworking people. While their life stories contained a journey of struggle, they also inspired a story of hope and demonstrated the importance of local organisations like Beautiful Minds, which helped both Susan and Glenn, and many others in our community, to rebuild their lives.

Beautiful Minds is a volunteer group whose mission is to raise funds to create a society in which people with mental illness are valued and assisted to live fulfilling lives. The dream of Beautiful Minds was to open a mental health recovery centre in south-west Sydney. In 2008 that dream was realised when, with the assistance of the Schizophrenia Fellowship NSW, Beautiful Minds opened Harmony House in Bradbury, Campbelltown. It provides intensive support to people suffering mental illness through the day-to-day living program and now boasts being the centre for mental health recovery in Campbelltown. The clubhouse model of Harmony House is recognised worldwide as the most effective model in helping people with mental illness.

Beautiful Minds receives no ongoing government funding: It relies on the generous support of many people in our community and the dedication and time of volunteers. Through fundraising initiatives such as stalls, grants and events such as Waratah Day—where Beautiful Minds managed to sell 4,000 waratahs across Macarthur—the organisation has managed to raise money for mental health awareness. Annual events, such as high tea at Hurlstone Agricultural High School and the recent Mad Hatters Mayhem Dinner Party, which was a wonderful event hosted by Sandra and her team, have been crucial in gathering funds but also in providing awareness on mental health. On some Saturdays Sandra and her team will run their own Market Street stall at Ingleburn selling items to raise money for mental health.

Beautiful Minds has also campaigned on destigmatising mental health, which is fundamental to a better understanding from the wider community. For all of us who know or knew of those living with mental health issues, the most valuable gift we can give is our own time. Take the time to listen to their stories, to understand their struggles and to show them they are not alone. Mental illness is hard enough to deal with, but for those who are fortunate enough not to experience it, let us make it easier for friends and families of others living with mental illness to show them we understand and we do care.

Mr JOHN SIDOTI (Drummoyne—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.38 p.m.]: I commend the member for Macquarie Fields for raising this important issue and for showing his kindness in bringing this important matter to the attention of the House. Mental illness affects all members of our community and all governments can do more. The member for Macquarie Fields is very fortunate to have an organisation like Beautiful Minds in his electorate. Such organisations would be lost without volunteers in all our electorates. I have also attended a Mad Hatter party, which brings all sorts of joy to people in our community. The member for Macquarie Fields eloquently said that the greatest thing we can give to those with mental health issues is our time. I commend the member for Macquarie Fields.

Private members' statements concluded.

Pursuant to resolution matter of public importance proceeded with.

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION WEEK

Matter of Public Importance

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [6.40 p.m.]: As the shadow Minister for Family and Community Services, the shadow Minister for Social Housing, and the shadow Minister for Mental Health, I am honoured to draw this matter of public importance to the attention of the House. Homelessness Prevention Week is a national initiative of Homelessness Australia, which coordinates an annual themed week in the first week of August to raise awareness of the struggles of individuals who sadly experience homelessness and the issues associated with homelessness. Homelessness NSW is the peak body dealing with homelessness in this State and comprises approximately 170 groups that provide direct services to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness. I acknowledge Katherine McKernan, the Chief Executive Officer of Homelessness NSW and a passionate advocate.

The first Homelessness Prevention Week was officially marked in August 2007, and it has been marked every year since. This initiative emerged from several winter vigils that were organised by various church groups and missions to pay tribute to the homeless individuals and rough sleepers who tragically died on the streets during the coldest part of winter. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, people are considered "homeless" if their current living arrangement is in a dwelling that is inadequate, if they have no tenure or short tenure that cannot be extended, or if their living arrangement does not allow them control of or access to social space.

The Chamberlain and Mackenzie definition of "homelessness" was adopted by the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness in 2001. It states that homelessness can be broken down into three categories: primary homelessness, such as that experienced by individuals living without conventional accommodation, for example, rough sleepers; secondary homelessness, such as that experienced by individuals who unfortunately are forced to move from one form of temporary accommodation to another, for example, between refuges and emergency accommodation; and tertiary homelessness, which is experienced by people who live in accommodation that is below conventional community expectations, such as in boarding houses or caravan parks.

Of course, homelessness still confronts our society today. Many factors can lead to an individual experiencing homelessness, including financial difficulties and poverty, short-term or long-term unemployment, a lack of affordable housing and housing stress, poor mental health, domestic violence and sexual assault, and substance abuse. Sadly, New South Wales has experienced a significant increase in homelessness in recent years. There are more people experiencing homelessness in New South Wales than in any other State or Territory. According to the 2011 census, New South Wales had approximately 28,191 homeless people. That was an increase of almost 6,000 or 27 per cent in the figure reported in the 2006 census. According to Homelessness NSW, approximately 34 per cent of those classified as homeless stay in overcrowded dwellings, 23 per cent stay in boarding houses, 18 per cent stay in supported accommodation, 18 per cent stay with other householders, 7 per cent sleep rough, and 1 per cent stay in temporary accommodation.

The number of people without stable housing has increased by 32 per cent in the past two years. That is a staggering number. Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicates that homelessness is not confined to particular age groups, geographic locations or ethnic backgrounds. It is concerning that Aboriginal Australians are over represented, with 25 per cent of the homeless population identifying as Indigenous. According to Shelter NSW, in 2013-14 Aboriginal persons used homelessness services at nearly 12 times more than their representation in the general population. Homelessness is also a growing

problem for individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Many of these individuals face barriers in accessing emergency and support services.

Young people are particularly at risk of entering the cycle of homelessness due to cost-of-living pressures and a lack of affordable housing. The harsh reality is that New South Wales has more young people experiencing homelessness than any other State due to a growing crisis with youth unemployment. Approximately 24.6 per cent of homeless individuals are youths between the ages of 12 and 24. These are significant statistics and they should be highlighted during Homelessness Prevention Week.

Mr ADAM CROUCH (Terrigal) [6.45 p.m.]: I thank the member for Bankstown for her contribution on this important topic. This week marks National Homelessness Prevention Week, and on any given night approximately one out of 200 people in Australia is homeless. The reasons for homelessness are as varied as the people on whom it has an impact—women fleeing domestic violence; men with substance and alcohol abuse problems; and teenagers with mental health issues. Homelessness does not discriminate; it can happen to any of us. There are approximately 60,000 people on the New South Wales social housing waiting list and every night thousands sleep rough in our streets, on railway stations, in parks or in their cars. That is why the Baird Government has committed to do more to protect the vulnerable members of our community.

The New South Wales Government recognises the challenge faced by people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless and this financial year it has committed \$182 million to deliver specialist homelessness services throughout the State. Since the Liberal-Nationals Government was elected in 2011 it has provided approximately \$563 million statewide. This represents a significant increase in funding over previous years and highlights the Government's ongoing commitment to this issue. The Central Coast will receive \$6.4 million for specialist homelessness services for our outstanding local community groups, including Coast Shelter, Wesley Community Services, Bungeree Aboriginal Association and the Uniting Church.

Last night the Minister for Social Housing, the Hon. Brad Hazzard, visited a Family and Community Services [FACS] pop-up office in Woolloomooloo. This is a new initiative introduced by the Baird Government. FACS staff met with those who were sleeping rough on one of the coldest night this winter and provided some with temporary accommodation. It was a small but significant step in helping our more vulnerable community members. In May Minister Hazzard convened a social housing forum co-chaired by former Premiers Nick Greiner and Morris Iemma. As he put it, "to fix this problem we need a bipartisan approach with all hands on deck". This Government takes this issue very seriously. That forum brought together 200 people from private financial institutions, such as property developers and superannuation organisations, and a large cross-section of government, non-government and community-based organisations. The forum included public housing tenants and discussed the significant challenges we all face in doing something to address the situation. The report from that forum is now available online.

There is a real thirst for change across the government, private and not-for-profit sectors. This is a pivotal time for social housing in New South Wales with the establishment of a \$1 billion fund to facilitate new social and affordable housing. The Baird Government remains committed to helping those who are homeless and those who are at risk of becoming homeless. Last Monday morning I joined Central Coast ambassador Julie Goodwin at the Australian Reptile Park to promote Zoo and Snooze, which raises funds for Coast Shelter. Friday night's event will highlight the issue of homelessness for coast residents. This annual event is held during Homelessness Prevention Week and volunteers raise \$1,000 each to enter the zoo and to sleep overnight on a cold winter's night and among the wildlife. We all know that a safe home is fundamental for our wellbeing. However, thousands of people in New South Wales will be without a safe home tonight. The Government is aware of the situation and it will continue to address it.

Ms YASMIN CATLEY (Swansea) [6.49 p.m.]: I thank shadow Minister Tania Mihailuk for raising Homelessness Prevention Week as a matter of public importance. I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to speak in this discussion. With sadness and regret I note that more than 28,000 people are currently experiencing homelessness in New South Wales. On any given night in Australia one person in every 200 is homeless. Homelessness is often perceived to be a metropolitan problem, but in fact a significant proportion of people experiencing homelessness live in regional and rural areas. Homelessness does not discriminate. People from all walks of life can be affected by homelessness including doctors, teachers, scientists, men, women and, sadly, children. Through no fault of their own many people find themselves in the position where they do not have suitable accommodation. It can happen instantly—one small thing that happens overnight. Alarming, the biggest contributing factor leading to homelessness remains domestic violence and relationship issues including family breakdown, assault and violence.

I know that Premier Mike Baird and the Liberals have good intentions when legislating to address homelessness in New South Wales. I commend the Government for taking this important issue seriously and for committing funding in the recent budget for social housing and homelessness services. However, the Government needs to do more to ensure that those experiencing homelessness in this State are better supported. While I welcome additional funding to address homelessness in New South Wales, I am looking forward to seeing the policy detail to find out how it will fund practical solutions that will tackle homelessness and deliver real outcomes rather than provide window dressing. While adequate and ongoing funding for homelessness services is one of the best ways to address this issue in New South Wales, we know that those services cannot solve the problem alone. We need to start to take housing affordability seriously. Following the budget the Chief Executive of Homelessness NSW said:

This budget does not really address the issue of affordable housing.

There is a huge demand for crisis accommodation and ... without an increase in affordable housing that problem is going to continue.

Labor agrees. With less than 1 per cent of rental accommodation now being affordable for people receiving income assistance, only 16 per cent being affordable for families with two adults earning the minimum wage and almost 60,000 people on the waiting list for social housing relief we are in a crisis. But it is a crisis that can be addressed. Led by my colleague the formidable Tania Mihailuk, shadow Minister for Social Housing, Labor has begun the task of engaging with the industry's key stakeholders and providers. We will work diligently and methodically to ensure that addressing homelessness is a policy priority for Labor. I encourage all members from across the political divide to work towards preventing homelessness in New South Wales.

Ms TANIA MIHAILUK (Bankstown) [6.52 p.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Terrigal and the member for Swansea for their contributions to today's discussion on the matter of public importance. In response to the member for Swansea, it is important for us to ensure that we highlight that homelessness is not a problem confined to the Sydney central business district; it is becoming an increasingly major problem for regional and rural New South Wales. I thank the member for her contribution. I also thank the member for Terrigal for his contribution, but caution him in future to think before boasting about the \$1 billion plan Premier Mike Baird announced earlier this year during the election campaign. We still have not seen that plan and not one dollar of the \$1 billion has been allocated towards homelessness or housing in the budget. That is important to note. We wait for the Premier and the Minister in particular to provide us with some more detail about the \$1 billion plan that they announced during the State election.

I also remind members that only 4.7 per cent of the \$7.29 billion in stamp duty that the Government received was allocated to social housing. It is important to note that the Government is enjoying a \$2.5 billion surplus at a time of a growing housing affordability crisis. That crisis is exacerbating the problems of service providers who are dealing with an increasing number of homeless people who would not ordinarily have found themselves in that position. In July we heard of a woman who

froze to death in Hornsby. Homelessness NSW has taken the opportunity this week to highlight particularly the impacts of homelessness on older women who suddenly become homeless and the difficulty those women have in obtaining services and assistance. I again thank members for their interest in Homelessness Prevention Week and thank both speakers for their contributions. I remind members on both sides of the House that this problem requires an incredible call to action. Our State has the most homeless people in the nation and we need to address this major crisis urgently.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Anna Watson): I thank the member for Bankstown for bringing this important issue to the attention of the House tonight.

Discussion concluded.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to resolution, at 6.55 p.m. until
Thursday 6 August 2015 at 10.00 a.m.**
