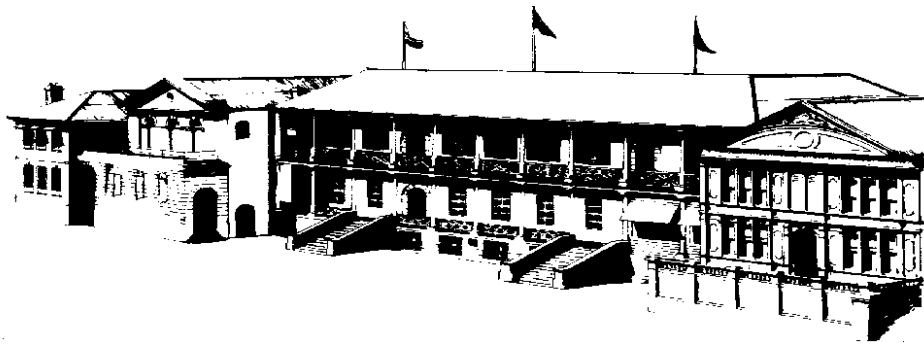




NEW SOUTH WALES



Legislative Assembly

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

**FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT
THIRD SESSION**

OFFICIAL HANSARD

Thursday, 17 September 1998

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday, 17 September 1998

Mr Speaker (The Hon. John Henry Murray) took the chair at 10.00 a.m.

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

WATER SUPPLY AUTHORITIES AMENDMENT (CENTRAL COAST WATER AND SEWERAGE) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 15 May 1997.

Mr HARTCHER (Gosford) [10.00 a.m.]: I last spoke to this bill in May—that is how long it takes for private members' legislation to be debated in this House. At that time I referred to a mass meeting held by the Municipal Employees Union at the Gosford football ground, which was attended by 1,300 people. The MEU was supported by many citizens from the Gosford and central coast areas. The meeting was not attended by the honourable member for Peats, the honourable member for Wyong or the honourable member for The Entrance. I will be interested to hear their contributions to the debate. This bill has the support of Gosford City Council, Wyong Shire Council and the overwhelming majority of residents of the central coast. On 16 April 1997 the honourable member for The Entrance told the House that services to the central coast were cost-effective and efficient. He said also:

Furthermore, the 1994 KPMG management consultancy report commissioned by the two councils, and regular Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal reviews, confirmed that the councils were operating efficiently and found no reason for radical change . . .

History relating to power distribution on the central coast supports this view. When the [then] local power distributor, Shortland County Council, merged with Sydney County Council, the level of local service greatly reduced . . .

I totally support the community's view that any change to the existing system will result in a decrease in services to ratepayers, an issue of particular concern to aged residents and young families on the central coast. The community is also concerned about the impact of job losses on its social fabric and quality of life. A change to the system will, without question, lead to a loss of jobs.

I invite the honourable member for The Entrance to stand behind those words and have the courage to

join members of the Opposition in supporting the bill. If he does not do that he will be revealed as a man of straw—a man who is prepared to say all the right things in a private member's statement, but when the time comes is not prepared to back up his words with action. I look forward to his contribution to the debate and to his support for this bill when it comes to a vote. The honourable member for The Entrance continued:

Currently, the water supply and sewerage system directly employs 300 people. Any change to the existing system threatens that level of employment. The central coast cannot afford to lose one job in the current job climate. Local jobs for local residents is the most important social issue confronting the central coast today.

Those sterling words are just what one would expect of a central coast Labor member! Three cheers for the honourable member for The Entrance! Honourable members, the central coast media and the people of The Entrance will await his contribution to the debate and his vote in support of this private member's bill, which was designed to secure the very object that he was addressing on 16 April 1997. In a survey conducted by Gosford City Council and Wyong Shire Council, a massive 88 per cent of Wyong residents told their councils they wanted them to continue to manage local and water sewerage services rather than any State government agency. The 88 per cent endorsement was the result of a poll conducted in March 1997 by AGB McNair on behalf of the councils. The same survey showed that 93 per cent of customers were satisfied with the reliability of their water service and 82 per cent were satisfied with the quality of their water. On the central coast we can actually drink our water!

The boys and girls in the public gallery whose mums and dads have to boil their water before they can drink it would envy people on the central coast because we do not have to boil our water. The Labor Party has not yet wrecked our water; we have kept it under our control. We intend to keep our water and sewerage under local control and not let the Labor Party destroy it as it destroyed the water service and the quality of water available to the people of Sydney. The survey showed also that 85 per cent of customers were satisfied or very satisfied with their sewerage service. The obvious question to

ask the Government is why it wants to interfere with local water and sewerage services when the public overwhelmingly believes that Gosford and Wyong councils are doing a good job. A message from the mayors of the two councils states:

Any decision that takes control of local water and sewerage services out of the hands of Gosford and Wyong Councils will disadvantage residents. It will mean higher water rates, job losses and lower environmental standards.

The message was signed by Tony Sansom, the Mayor of Gosford, and Doug Eaton, the Mayor of Wyong. Tony Sansom is an active member of the Australian Labor Party. He stood against me in 1988 and was unsuccessful. He stood against me again in 1995, and was again unsuccessful. I commend him for telling the Government to keep its hands off our water and sewerage, and for standing up for the people of the central coast. I urge all members of this House, in particular the three members from central coast electorates, to learn from his example and stand up for the people they claim to represent.

The councils drew effective comparisons between the Gosford-Wyong system and the Hunter Water and Sydney Water systems. On an efficiency level, which is the average operating cost per property, the Gosford-Wyong system was \$286, the Hunter Water system \$331 and the Sydney Water system \$429. People on the central coast pay, on an efficiency ratio, virtually 60 per cent of what Sydney people pay. They compared a number of other issues, which I will not refer to now—

Mr Fraser: Why not?

Mr HARTCHER: Members of this House are mortal; I cannot be expected to stand here all day and detail the magnificent services that are available to the people of the central coast. I will not do that; I will not go into every detail, although I am tempted when I read the sterling words of the honourable member for The Entrance. I would like to meet any person who would back the central coast water and sewerage system, like the honourable member for The Entrance did, but would not vote for the bill. All will be revealed when the division bells ring.

The councils in their analysis said that the central coast undertook a review in conjunction with that ordered by the Treasurer. The review proved that local control means local accountability, which provides for better economic and environmental outcomes than those provided by centralised control. They stated:

Central Coast residents share the benefit and convenience of having one authority provide their water, sewerage and other local government services.

The economy of scope provided by this arrangement allows Councils to most efficiently use their resources in providing these services. The residents receive this benefit in lower charges.

With all their business being conducted in one location residents receive the benefit of a "one stop shop". Provision of similar services has led Sydney Water to co-locate branch offices in Council administration buildings.

Effectively, the people benefit from the control of their own system. They get a better environmental standard, a better financial arrangement and accountability. They can decide whether Gosford City Council is administering the water and sewerage systems effectively. The people of Sydney have no say as to whether Sydney Water is administering their water system effectively. The proof of the pudding is in the eating: the people of the central coast can drink their water, the people of Sydney cannot. The people of the central coast have an accountable council which has to tell them what is going on with their water system, send them bills and can be voted out of office. The people of Sydney have no such rights. This Government, however, wants to force Gosford and Wyong into the Sydney Water system. What a total disaster and, as recent events have shown, what a tragedy that would be for the people of the central coast. A Municipal Employees Union document states:

Big Brother is after your Water and Sewerage services!

Why is the State Government planning this takeover under the guise of providing more efficient service?

The Answer: MONEY—under a State-controlled system a dividend (tax) can be drained from ratepayers to boost the State Treasury.

That document encapsulates the whole issue. Under the system in place in Gosford and Wyong the State Government cannot take any money; the system belongs to the local people. If the water system were merged with Sydney Water then the State Government would be able to take money from it, in the same way it took \$279 million in dividends from Sydney Water last year. The Government would be able to increase its dividend by taking money from the people of the central coast. The State Government controls Hunter and Sydney water. Last year property owners in the Hunter region, for example, paid an average \$95 dividend from their water rates to the State Government.

From revenue of approximately \$1.6 billion in Sydney, a dividend of \$279 million went to the State Government. The Government takes approximately

one-fifth. About \$60 of a \$300 annual water bill goes to the State Government. Those in Sydney and the Hunter pay a large amount of goods and services tax—yes, let us use those words—on their water bills to the Premier of New South Wales. People on the central coast do not pay any tax on their water bills to the State Government. The State Government is trying to make those people pay a tax. It is trying to rip the money away from them, as it has ripped it away from the people of Sydney and the people of the Hunter, and in return give nothing but water that one cannot drink without boiling.

This bill is all about allowing the people of the central coast to make a decision affecting their own water and sewerage systems. It provides that if the water and sewerage systems are to be merged with Sydney or Newcastle the people must first give their consent by way of referendum. The bill does not prevent such a merger; it simply means that at any time in the future the people would have to be consulted before a merger took place. The bill is democratic in principle, it is fair in effect and it is designed to ensure that local people have a say in the provision of local services. The local people pay for those services—only half of the cost was contributed by the State; the other half was contributed by the Gosford and Wyong councils through their rating base.

I acknowledge the support I have received in this legislation from the Hon. M. J. Gallacher in another place, who will introduce the same bill in the Legislative Council. I acknowledge the assistance I have received from my research assistant, Ms Emma Burlington, who has prepared comprehensive notes and has put a great amount of high-quality research into this and other work she undertakes on my behalf. I acknowledge also the assistance provided by the Parliamentary Counsel, who, as always, has been diligent, helpful and co-operative in drafting this bill. I commend the bill to the House and I look forward confidently to the support of the other three members from the central coast when the division bells ring.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Rogan.

PERIODIC DETENTION OF PRISONERS AMENDMENT (ENFORCEMENT) BILL

**Debate called on and postponed on motion
by Mr Fraser, on behalf of Mr Cochran.**

GEORGES RIVER NATIONAL PARK (PICNIC POINT ADDITIONS) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr ROGAN (East Hills) [10.18 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill seeks to add land at Picnic Point to the Georges River National Park in accordance with the National Parks and Wildlife Act. The Georges River National Park was gazetted in 1992. Prior to that it was a State recreation area. In both incarnations the Georges River National Park has provided scenic, natural and recreational opportunities for the people of south Sydney. Georges River National Park represents an important piece of remnant bushland, and as Sydney's urban areas expand every opportunity to protect remnant bushland areas must be taken.

Those lands represent further additions to lands protected by this Government in the greater metropolitan region during the past three years. Their addition to the Georges River National Park continues the Government's commitment in both its nature conservation strategy and its policy for the greening of Sydney to extending existing parks serving urban populations. It is expected that in time the Georges River National Park will be extended further through the addition of Commonwealth lands in its vicinity such as Mill Creek on the southern side of Georges River. The land that the bill seeks to have added to the park was originally a road reserve intended for the rerouting of Henry Lawson Drive and forms a 7.5 hectare corridor through the northern end of the national park.

The plan to reroute Henry Lawson Drive was abandoned in 1992 and I have been informed that the Roads and Traffic Authority has no further need for this land. The land is currently managed by the Department of Land and Water Conservation. This bill will effect its transfer to the National Parks and Wildlife Service and will join together two disjointed portions of the existing park. Such a connection will create a large contiguous area of land and hence improve management of the park as a whole for conservation purposes. It will improve recreational opportunities such as walking, jogging and nature watching.

This transfer of land will also assist the National Parks and Wildlife Service in managing the existing park for fire risk. It will become a permanent buffer zone for the park and will allow the existing fire trail running along public boundaries to be upgraded to meet the very high National Parks and Wildlife Service standards for fire control and prevention. Certain management issues need to be addressed in the area to be added into the park, but the precinct planning for Georges River and a review of the current plans of management can be assisted only by the gazettal of that addition.

Many local residents are willing to assist in the management of the park. The Friends of Yeramabah Lagoon, for example, will undoubtedly play an active role in the management of this addition. Sydney is unique in that it has many national parks close to the city. Indeed, I think of them as green jewels that surround Sydney. It is important for us to appreciate that no other centre in the world can boast national parks such as the Royal National Park, Sydney Harbour National Park, Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, Blue Mountains National Park, Marramarra National Park, Brisbane Water National Park, Yengo National Park, Wollemi National Park and Dharug National Park.

No urban area in the world can boast immediate access to such wonderful national treasures. No city in the world can match such an array of protected areas so close to its city. Those national parks are within 100 kilometres of the central business district and provide enormous opportunities for city people to appreciate their value. National parks are important because they provide recreational and educational opportunities, which enable people to appreciate them as important storehouses of our biodiversity.

A second tier of parks that are as important as those to which I have referred include Lane Cove River National Park, Garigal National Park, Cattai National Park, Illawarra Escarpment State Recreation Area and Georges River National Park, which is an important recreational open space for my constituents and those in surrounding electorates. People who live and work in an urban environment are able to understand and enjoy activities such as fishing, bushwalking, swimming, picnicking, waterskiing, cycling and jogging in a natural setting close to their homes.

Residents of East Hills, Menai, Blakehurst, Hurstville and Kogarah benefit enormously by living so close to the Georges River National Park. Travelling time from those suburbs to the national park is, at most, 15 minutes. That is not the case in London, Paris, New York, Tokyo or indeed any other city in the world. The most important benefit is that schoolchildren are able to visit national parks close to where they live and attend school. I commend the teachers and schools in my electorate for fostering an appreciation of the biodiversity of our national parks by taking students to the Georges River National Park to see first-hand the unique flora and fauna. They also have an opportunity to attend a Department of School Education field study centre at the nearby Royal National Park. A similar facility could be created in the Georges River National Park because of its proximity to public

schools in Hurstville, Rockdale, Kogarah, East Hills and Bankstown.

Environmental education is of growing importance in the school curriculum and this bill will enhance those study opportunities. The National Parks and Wildlife Act has been amended to include regional parks as a new category of land to be reserved for public recreation and enjoyment. Regional parks are areas that have been substantially modified since European occupation and are capable of providing urban space and recreational opportunities for major regional population centres.

Another excellent initiative of the Carr Labor Government is the creation of regional parks throughout Sydney. The Government has launched a regional parks policy statement outlining the system of reservation and management of regional parks, including an implementation strategy. Initially eight areas of land have been identified and assessed as meeting the criteria for regional parks. The development of a comprehensive regional parks system further demonstrates the Government's commitment to protecting urban bushland and regional open space. There is a substantial initiative to improve the lifestyle and recreational opportunities of people living within the greater Sydney area.

The western Sydney regional park, when fully established, will occupy 1,000 hectares and will include land originally set aside at Abbotsbury North for housing and a golf course development. It will provide residents and visitors with picnic areas, shelters, children's playgrounds, pedestrian and cycle tracks, extended tracks for long-distance walkers, horse-riding trails and ponds. However, the establishment of such a varied range of facilities will need to be staged over a number of years. The park is already accessible to the public by roads and walking tracks. A total of 580 hectares of Crown land has been transferred to the Minister for the Environment for development of the first stage of the park, which is expected to take four years. Work has already commenced on roads and tracks and the construction of picnic facilities.

Revegetation activities are in progress and to date approximately 100,000 trees have been planted on the site in association with the Olympic Co-ordination Authority and the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning. Stage one construction work worth \$800,000, including picnic facilities and access roads and paths, was opened by the Minister for the Environment on 3 October 1997. A plan of management is currently being prepared for areas of the park to ensure that the community is involved in

guiding the future direction and management of the site.

Consultants have been engaged to prepare a master plan for the entire site. The Minister for the Environment and the Minister for the Olympics have entered into a joint funding agreement of \$1.25 million each for the development of recreational facilities and landscaping in concert with the proposed Olympic equestrian cross-country track on the eastern side of the park. Development works on the site commenced in February and have now been completed. A further \$1.8 million has been committed for additional development in the 1998-99 financial year. Stage one of the Rouse Hill regional park occupies 41 hectares of land surrounding historic Rouse Hill House, and stage two will consist of an additional 110 hectares of land yet to be acquired by the Government.

Rouse Hill regional park and the adjacent Rouse Hill House, which was built between 1813 and 1818, will provide an invaluable scenic and recreational zone for north-western Sydney. The park will ensure that residents and visitors can enjoy large open spaces of peace and beauty. Public access to the area is now possible. Contracts worth \$732,000 were let for year one, stage one of the construction work, including additional landscaping and entrance gate. That work was completed in June 1997. Design and construction for year two, stage one development works commenced on 27 April 1998. A contract worth \$788,000 has been let for the construction of pedestrian and cycle path systems, toilets and extensive tree planting. Public consultation began in early November as part of the preparation of a plan of management. The draft plan of management is completed and will be placed on exhibition shortly.

Pursuant to sessional orders debate interrupted.

PARLIAMENTARY ELECTORATES AND ELECTIONS AMENDMENT (VOTER IDENTIFICATION) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 30 April.

Mr CRITTENDEN (Wyang) [10.31 a.m.]: Honourable members may recall that I was interrupted by a joint sitting on 30 April when I was speaking to this bill introduced by the honourable member for Coffs Harbour. On that occasion I referred to the gross hypocrisy of the National Party in particular, and the coalition in general, in bringing

this matter before the House. I said that although the Federal Deputy Leader of the National Party and member for Gwydir, Mr Ralph Hunt, flip-flopped and initially supported the Australia card proposition, in the end the Reith forces managed to subvert that proposition put forward by the Hawke Government.

Mr Fraser: This has got nothing to do with the Australia card.

Mr CRITTENDEN: It has everything to do with it, because if the Australia card had been put in place this ridiculous legislation would not be before the House today. New South Wales taxpayers will be put to unnecessary expense if this legislation is enacted. There will be a bloated bureaucracy to administer the electoral system because the National Party wants to cover up the obvious rorts that it carries out in remote parts of New South Wales.

[Interruption]

It is so good to see the honourable member for Lane Cove trying to develop a rapport with the National Party. I am sure it will last only until she becomes leader of the Liberal Party. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour promulgated this ridiculous bill before he attained his current position, in a bid to get onto the Opposition front bench. He managed to stab the honourable member for Oxley in the shoulder blades and became what is laughingly called the National Party Whip. Honourable members are left with this bill as a result of his failed bid for promotion.

It is also interesting to note that this bill continues a tradition of conservative forces in Australian politics to ensure that people who are not as well educated as some others or who do not take a great deal of interest in National Party politics do not get a vote. Members of the Opposition want a system of voluntary voting in place, which is the course followed by the Prime Minister of this country in relation to the republican debate. Even worse than that, they have subverted what that former champion of the democratic process, Frank Walker, did when he was the Federal member for Robertson, which was to put in place legislation which effectively meant that habitation reviews had to be carried out within 18 months of a Federal election.

I checked with the Australian Electoral Commission and ascertained that that legislation has been repealed and habitation reviews are no longer mandatory. So much for the claims of the honourable member for Coffs Harbour and other members of the so-called conservative element of

Australian politics that they are interested in the democratic process! Opposition members are seeking to ensure that the system is subverted and confused so that people will be unable to exercise their democratic right to vote. It is just as bad when it comes to a redistribution. Honourable members may recall that prior to the 1991 State election there was a redistribution. Shortly after the election there was a challenge to the result in the electorate of The Entrance.

Mr O'Farrell: And Maitland.

Mr CRITTENDEN: Maitland came later. Despite all the legal talk and eloquence of the lawyers, Justice Slattery decided to order a fresh election because a number of constituents from the Gosford and Wyong electorates were permitted to vote in The Entrance electorate; similarly constituents from The Entrance electorate voted in the Gosford and Wyong electorates. The democratic process had to be adhered to. That is exactly the sort of confusion and subversion of the system that the National Party and its partner, the Liberal Party, want to put in place in New South Wales.

Mr Fraser: Support the legislation.

Mr CRITTENDEN: Support the Australia card? I am all for an Australia card that ensures that governments get a grip on legal immigration, and on who is paying tax and who is receiving social security. It is regrettable that the conservative element in Australian politics made sure that the Australia card was torpedoed when it was championed by the former member for Calare, David Simmons. I am sure it is a good idea to revisit this matter but it should be done at the Federal level to ensure consistency across Australia. This issue is absolutely critical to the democratic process. I was not a member of this House at the time, but I have heard the stories about the ticks and crosses rot when honourable members opposite, who will stay on that side of the House, were in government.

They schemed to ensure that they stayed in office and introduced an absolute rot so that the votes of those who placed a tick or a cross in a box in the system of optional preferential voting did not count. Fortunately, that caused an uproar and the problem has been addressed. The coalition Government schemed, connived and abused the parliamentary process to get an electoral advantage to ensure it remained in the Treasury. There is nothing worse than a political party that abuses a system to ensure it retains government. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour is doing

precisely that with this bill because he knows deep in his heart that this bill will cause a rot, that the system will become unworkable and that people will be denied their democratic right to vote.

Mr SOURIS (Upper Hunter—Deputy Leader of the National Party) [10.39 a.m.]: I am pleased to have the opportunity to support the bill proposed by the honourable member for Coffs Harbour. I am also pleased that a number of Liverpool school students are in the gallery. They are on an excursion to Parliament House to study parliamentary democracy and our democratic system. It is appropriate that today we are debating the methodology of voting for parliamentary representation. Perhaps later, after they receive a copy of the debate, they will be able to reflect on some of the points that have been made by honourable members in relation to the method of voting in this State. This bill is designed to ensure that we have a strong democracy, that when a vote is cast it is beyond reproach and without corruption, that there is no opportunity for interference, and that our system of voting is secure.

What could possibly be wrong with a bill designed to ensure that the person casting the vote on polling day is indeed the person ruled off the roll as having voted? What could be wrong with ensuring that no other person is able to assume that elector's name, and that the name is not ruled off at more than one polling booth? If honourable members opposite were sincere about democracy and the security of our voting system, they would vote in favour of this bill. It is a source of amazement to me that when a vote is finally taken in respect of this bill, honourable members opposite will vote against the identification of voters at the point of voting—a system that would prevent the many rorts and scams that occur one after the other under the present system.

I would like to see the system strengthened even more. Perhaps at a later time consideration could be given to the proposition that the Electoral Districts Commission provide every person eligible to vote with an identification card to be surrendered at the point of voting. Such a system would not only deal with identification but also ensure that electors do not cast a vote at more than one polling booth in their own or any other electorate.

Mr Iemma: Give us some example of multiple voting. Do you have the figures?

Mr SOURIS: I have been asked by experts in voter fraud to give a few more examples. I am not able to quote as many examples as those opposite can quote. The honourable member for Hurstville

will have an opportunity to make his contribution shortly. I suggest that he should give the House the full list, that he should read out the catalogue of voter fraud that he is obviously so well acquainted with. The honourable member for Hurstville is opposed to this bill because it will curtail the way that the party of which he is a member operates the voting system. That is what he is on about.

It will not take much longer to ensure that each voter is identified at the point of voting. Clause 4 of the bill provides a list of the various ways in which identification can be proved at the point of voting, and there are undoubtedly other ways. However, ample means of identification are provided in the legislation. Voters would be able to prove their identity at the point of voting in several ways and the process would not require a vast bureaucracy or involve vast cost. People routinely carry some of these forms of identification and it would not be an imposition on voters to have to prove their identity in order to have their names ruled off the roll. I do not understand why there should be any objection to strengthening our voting system.

The Opposition is tired of the multiple voting that occurs when the Labor Party organises things. We are tired of busloads of voters who enjoy having a multiple vote every now and again being transported all over the State. Does it give them some kind of thrill? We are sick and tired of the behaviour of people like Mr Joe Moran in the Port Stephens by-election—a nice organiser, a nice little earner and a nice little voter. The Labor Party knows how many votes that creature was able to cast for Labor. If the honourable member for Hurstville votes against this bill he ought to be ashamed of himself.

Mr Iemma: You don't want itinerant workers to vote. That's what this is about.

Mr SOURIS: It is not about itinerant workers. Is there something different about itinerant workers? Would they not have a driving licence in their pockets?

Mr Iemma: You do not want coalminers to vote either.

Mr SOURIS: I am very proud—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Hurstville will be given the call when the Deputy Leader of the National Party has completed his contribution. The Deputy Leader of

the National Party will refrain from responding to interjections and direct his remarks through the Chair.

Mr SOURIS: Honourable members would have seen the Australian Labor Party in action during the Federal election campaign. ALP computer hackers have been interfering with a home page on the Internet. How can we trust members of the Labor Party to devise a voting system that is secure? How can we trust them when they are opposed to voter identification at the point of voting, when their staffers—presumably with full knowledge of their masters—have committed electronic fraud during the current election campaign? I do not know what those very same people might have been planning with regard to multiple voting in marginal electorates, but I will bet they have been up to something. If they are prepared to tamper with the Internet and risk being found out, goodness knows what else they have in the pipeline.

I am sure that one day we will have a system of mechanical or electronic voting in this country, similar to the system that operates in the United States of America, which will provide security. There was a suggestion that the TAB, which has numerous terminals throughout New South Wales, would be able to conduct an electronic system. I am not sure, however, that there are enough agencies for it to be effective. An electronic system of voting will eliminate multiple voting. Once a serial number is used in conjunction with a PIN number, that serial number cannot be used again elsewhere in the electronic system. That will put a stop to all the nonsense that the Labor Party is engaging in.

[Interruption]

The bill has nothing to do with the Australia Card. One could not possibly imagine a more pathetic defence than to raise the issue of the Australia Card. No-one has proposed an Australia Card and the bill has nothing to do with the Australia Card. The Opposition believes we should at least take the opportunity to introduce one of the many available methods of voter identification to ensure that our system is not infected by multiple voting. Honourable members opposite believe that even the dead can vote! Of course members on this side of the House are in favour of a more secure voting system.

Members of the Opposition are not rorting the system; Government members are rorting the system. It is little wonder that they are so sensitive to suggestions of voter fraud. Members of the

Opposition have nothing whatsoever to lose and nothing to hide. We are in favour of a better democracy, and we are in favour of democracy. This Parliament would be a far better place if it were devoid of the urchins opposite, who have found their way into this place thanks to multiple voting, votes of deceased persons, and the fraud that people such as the honourable member for Hurstville have been able to perpetrate.

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI (Lane Cove) [10.50 a.m]: I am absolutely amazed that we have spent so much time debating this issue. One would imagine that this issue would have bipartisan support. I know that you are a fair man, Mr Speaker. You support democracy in this State, and, unlike honourable members opposite—the ones who are screaming and shouting and trying to interject to stop the debate from proceeding—you understand that democracy requires a fair electoral system. Democracy requires a system under which votes are counted in a fair manner and those elected to Parliament are elected because they have the confidence of the majority of the constituents in their electorates. We do not want a system under which candidates representing electorates with very small margins are elected to this House because the Labor Party has defrauded the vote.

The Labor Party has manipulated the vote to put people into this House who are not entitled to be here. People have been elected to this House on forged votes; votes of people not entitled to vote, votes of people who are no longer living—the old Labor Party trick of the dead vote—or, more often than not, on the votes of people who do not reside in the electorate. Members of the Opposition are keen and conscientious. When we receive the names of newly enrolled voters from the Electoral Districts Commission we send a letter welcoming them to the electorate, advising them of the sorts of services that local members are able to provide and offering assistance. What happens with those letters?

Mr Iemma: Some of them come back marked "Not known at this address".

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: Not only some, as the honourable member for Hurstville interjected, but many; and it is of concern that a substantial number of those letters are returned just after an election. Those letters come back because they were addressed to people who were never properly enrolled, people whose names were added to the roll so that the Labor Party could rot the election. The Labor Party knew that those extra couple of hundred votes would enable it to get over the line and win marginal seats, and therefore cheat its way into

government. If that is not true why is the Government so concerned about this bill? If that is not true why is the Government not supporting voter identification to make sure that cheating cannot occur?

If that is not true members of the Government should say that they will do absolutely everything they possibly can to make sure that democracy is fair, above board and honest, but they have not done so. The honourable member for Wyong gave a somewhat ineloquent speech, a somewhat impassioned speech—but not as impassioned as the speech by the Deputy Leader of the National Party—and he said that this bill would destroy democracy. He spoke about the creation of a new bureaucracy to administer this system. He must not have read the bill, because the relevant forms of identification are clearly set out in the bill. They are the sorts of documents that most adults would have: a driver's licence, a passport, a credit card.

Mr Crittenden: I do not have a passport. Not many people do.

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: The honourable member for Wyong does not have a passport? The bill outlines the forms of identification that would be acceptable, but members opposite scream that not everyone has a passport. The voter identification is the sort of identification that is required to open a bank account, which most people have. Voter identification could be a Australian Taxation Office return or a rate notice, documents which are not difficult to acquire. Most people would have those sorts of documents.

Mr Crittenden: George Wallace would be proud of you.

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: The honourable member for Wyong interjects and suggests that we are going to create a whole new bureaucracy to administer this system. That is the biggest furphy, an absolute lie, and he knows it. In fact, as the honourable member for Georges River pointed out, the sort of identification one needs for voter identification is about as difficult to produce as that necessary to gain membership of a local video hire shop. To suggest that voter identification will be a problem is an absolute nonsense. The honourable member for Wyong said that people would be denied their vote. How?

The coalition understands that the ability to vote and the right to vote are an important part of the democratic process. The intention of the Opposition is not to deny people the right to vote,

but to deny the vote to those who abuse that right. The Opposition will not permit abuse of the right to vote, because we believe that the New South Wales Parliament's credibility depends on the fair election of its members. Earlier the honourable member for Hurstville made the outrageous statement that this new process would take up too much time. He said that people would have to line up to vote. The Opposition disagrees for two reasons; firstly, the Australian community respects the right to vote and regards voting as a privilege. In exercising that right to vote people will go through whatever process is required.

Voters have to queue at the moment so there would be little difference in the time involved. If people were required to take an extra five or 10 minutes to vote they would appreciate, as people in other parts of the world have appreciated, that sometimes it takes a little while to go through the voting process. For example, honourable members will recall the first South African election when people happily queued for days because they were excited about having the privilege to exercise their vote. It is absolutely spurious to suggest that there will be a problem about the time needed to vote. I wonder why there is so much angst about this in the Labor ranks. Is it because of a guilty conscience? Is it because Labor knows that it has been rorting the system? Labor has been rorting the system for so long that it knows that if a voter identification system is introduced the rorting might be stopped.

Mr Fraser: What did Dr Amy McGrath say about this?

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: The honourable member for Coffs Harbour referred to Dr Amy McGrath. I have a copy of her interesting book about the history of rorting in Australia starting in the late 1890s. She wrote at great length about the way in which the Australian Labor Party has rorted the vote for at least the past 75 years. The Labor Party has had a lot of experience; and practise makes perfect. If I had more time I would go through this book at length. Instead I will refer to a couple of parts of it. In his contribution to the debate, the honourable member for Coffs Harbour referred to Frank Hardy, who was a long-time member of the Victorian Communist Party; a well-known author; and a particularly honest gentleman. He talked, at some length, about the fact that the Labor Party had been involved in rorting the vote for a number of years. He gave an interview to Alan Jones in 1988 in which he claimed that the 1987 Federal election had been manipulated. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I would like to refer to comments made in the book by Professor Cooray, who was commenting on the interview. He said:

Marginal seats are generally unpredictable. But what was curious about the 1987 election was the consistency with which all the marginals defied the national swing. The recent NSW elections demonstrated a wide swing in many areas. The ALP however did very well by comparison in marginal seats. There appears to be an unreal consistency in the marginal seats where the ALP holds its ground, or the swing against is less than elsewhere. The allegation is made by Brian Wilshire that the result of the 1987 election was manipulated. Frank Hardy, a distinguished Australian on the left wing of politics, made a similar allegation in a radio interview with Alan Jones.

Wilshire argues that talk back radio provides a unique opportunity to assess people's beliefs and voting patterns. At every election prior to 1987, he, and other talk back persons, were able to predict the results. In 1987 there was a marked divergence between what the talk back radio personalities thought were to be the result and the actual result. Was the 1987 election result manipulated?

Mr E. T. Page: So what? What God-given right do they have to pick elections?

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: Settle! Settle! Stop barking.

Mr E. T. Page: Are you suggesting that we scrub elections and have surveys on talkback radio?

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: Can we throw the Minister for Local Government a bone? It might quieten him down. The quote continues:

The natural response of most Australians would be "inconceivable". Manipulated elections do not take place at the national level in democratic countries. Australia, however, more than any other democratic country, has experience with manipulated union elections.

I place great emphasis on the next few words:

The movement from manipulating union elections to national and state elections is possible given sufficient determination and the will.

And we know how much the Labor Party likes to win elections. Professor Cooray is obviously a man of great insight, because he went on to say:

The public affairs media and the press galleries had been silent on the allegations: but, if made against the Liberal or National Parties, they would have been big news.

I suspect that was probably true at the time. Dr Amy McGrath's book also refers to a number of disputed returns results, some of which have already been referred to in this debate. However, I would like to draw to the attention of the House one which, unfortunately, did not go to conclusion because of

costs: *Webster v Deahm* in the Macquarie electorate. High Court Justice Mary Gaudron struck out a number of the allegations in the petition.

Mr Gibson: You didn't even preselect.

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: The honourable member for Londonderry is on very shaky ground talking about preselection. How is the honourable member for St Marys looking? Are they good friends? Are they holding hands? Are they sitting holding hands in the Chamber?

Mr Fraser: No, they are kissing in the lifts.

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: They are kissing in the lifts, says the honourable member for Coffs Harbour. In that petition the parts that Justice Mary Gaudron allowed to stand included:

That raises a matter which, if made out, is capable of affecting the election result, either alone (depending on the numbers of votes involved) or, perhaps, in combination with other matters raised in the Petition.

She then went on to the ninth and tenth allegations, which she said would stand:

Persons voted, who were not entitled to vote, including particulars which indicate that the votes involved are those which were cast in the names of persons who were on the Electoral Roll but did not, in fact, exist.

Included in those allegations were categories of persons nominated in the petition:

People who had died up to, and more than, two years prior to the date of the election; or were listed in non-existent residences or on vacant blocks of land; "or who did not exist at all".

Mr Lynch: And then the High Court threw it out. Tell the whole story!

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: The honourable member for Liverpool arrives late, and in typical rorting fashion—

Mr Lynch: Tell us about the branch stacking.

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: I had already indicated to the House—

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Gaudry): Order! The honourable member for Lane Cove will refrain from responding to interjections and address her remarks through the Chair.

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: I would be delighted to do so, if you would ask the honourable member

for Liverpool to restrain himself, and also ask him if, the next time he comes into the House halfway through a debate, he will check to see what was said beforehand. I had already indicated to the House that the matter did not proceed to finality in the High Court. If he wants to interject in debates like this he should at least know what he is talking about. The purpose of the legislation is not, as members on the other side keep screeching out, to somehow make the voting system so difficult that people will be put off, and not be able to go to their polling booth and vote. The intention of the bill is to ensure that those who seek to vote are entitled to vote, so that anyone who walks into a polling booth on election day claiming to be an enrolled voter can show to the returning officer that he or she is indeed the person named on the electoral roll.

What is so difficult or so wrong with that concept? Why is the Labor Party so scared of it? What does it have to hide? The Labor Party is so adamant, excited, arrogant and emotional because it perceives that this legislation will stop practices that party has been involved in for the past 100 years. The Labor Party perceives that it cannot be elected to office in the way the vast and overwhelming majority of Australians believe their representatives should be elected to Parliament, and that is fairly. The Labor Party is frightened that this legislation will infringe and impact on the party's ability to rot elections and sway marginal seats fraudulently and dishonestly.

Mr Knowles: How many votes have you got?

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: Sit down! That is why Government members are screeching and interrupting the debate. Labor is losing control of this debate as it sees its opportunity to rot the system slipping away. If honourable members believe in democracy and a fair voting system in which the people of this State can have confidence, they should support the bill.

Mr WINDSOR (Tamworth) [11.10 a.m.]: I speak briefly in debate on the Parliamentary Electorates and Elections Amendment (Voter Identification) Bill and congratulate the honourable member for Coffs Harbour on introducing a bill that demands honesty in our electoral system. I happen to be one of those people who have been wronged by the current electoral system. Coming from a marginal seat I am aware of the rorting in the system. In 1991, because of my location, I was not permitted to vote for myself—assuming that I would have voted for myself. However, I had to make a decision as to who should become the member for Upper Hunter.

Mr Scully: Not Souris, surely?

Mr WINDSOR: I will not divulge my voting preferences. However, I cannot remember who the Labor candidate was at that time. On that occasion I was unable to vote for myself because of certain rules applying to the location of persons standing for election. Because of an error on a map the Surveyor General had to make a determination concerning which side of a road I resided on—a road which was designated as an electoral boundary. My electorate includes land in the Tamworth and Upper Hunter electorates. When the previous Government was in office I used to say to the honourable member for Upper Hunter that when I was angry with his Government I would go onto his side of my tennis court, which is neatly divided between two electorates.

The point I am making is that on the occasion to which I am referring I had to prove where I resided before I was given the right to vote. The bill introduced by the honourable member for Coffs Harbour seeks to extend our voting rights. Members of the public and those standing for election should have to prove their identity. This bill, which is not seeking to achieve any more than that, contains a number of provisions to ensure that people are able to prove their identity. Some of the debate that ensued today reminded me of my grandmother.

There has been a lot of discussion about dead bodies and cemeteries. If my grandmother were alive today she would be 100. I fondly remember my grandmother. Often when we were on holidays we would travel through various electorates, and as we went past a cemetery my grandmother would turn to us and say, "I could not be buried there." When we asked her why she would say, "Because I am not dead yet." I agree with the objects of this legislation. However, I am a little surprised at the level of angst in relation to this bill as all it is attempting to do is increase the degree of honesty and integrity in our democratic system. I support the bill.

Ms FICARRA (Georges River) [11.15 a.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Coffs Harbour on introducing the Parliamentary Electorates and Elections Amendment (Voter Identification) Bill. It is a fine bill. If members of the community were polled and asked whether they valued their vote, whether they wanted their vote to count and whether they wanted their identification to be proven—and this is something that members of the Australian Labor Party could never support—overwhelmingly people not only in New South Wales but throughout Australia would say,

"Yes, because we want the outcome to be true, honest and fair for anyone elected in our fine, democratic Westminster system." I was the only member of my family born in Australia. The honourable member for Cabramatta would know, because she was involved in a conversation in a lift in this place, about the origin of my family. The honourable member for Cabramatta referred to my family in a derogatory fashion, but that is something that she has to live with.

Migrants come to this country because of our democratic system, our freedom of speech and our freedom to vote. Members of the Labor Party never treat ethnic communities as they should be treated. They abuse them with election rorting and branch stacking—something that has occurred in the Labor Party for years. Members of the Labor Party manipulate the electoral system. For years they have rorted the voting system in State, Federal and union elections. Earlier the honourable member for Lane Cove made reference to a book written by Dr Amy McGrath. For 75 years members of the Labor Party have perfected electoral system rorting as an art form. Yet members of the Labor Party speak down to ethnic communities, mistreat them, take them for granted, and involve them in election stacking and in branch preselections. It is disgusting! Migrants are shipped into Labor electorates by the busload. That is why members of the Labor Party are defensive about a bill which has a simple objective.

The object of this bill is to require every person who votes in a New South Wales election to first establish his or her identity. That is all that this legislation is about. There will be no big administrative problems and any suggestion that there will be problems is a furphy. Electoral officers will be required to ask each elector whether he or she can provide one of a number of pieces of identification. We all have to provide some form of identification if we want to open an account at a video store. I am sure that the majority of honourable members opposite would have gone through that process and those who have not should try to do that this weekend. When they try to open an account they will be asked for a driver's licence, a Medicare card or a passport. That is all that this bill will require electors to do. So whether electors apply for a vote on the day, whether they apply for a postal vote, or whether they apply for a prepoll vote they will have to establish their identity.

People seeking to vote will be asked to provide one of a number of things. Everyone has a Medicare card but if that cannot be produced a driver's licence, which has a picture of the driver, a passport or a number of other things can be

provided. Members of the Labor Party have said that that process would cost too much and that it would take too much time. The Government should ask members of the public what they would like. I am sure that they would say that they like the proposals contained in this legislation. Australia is not a Third World country but a lot of Third World countries have provisions similar to the ones proposed in this legislation.

Mr Scully: Name them.

Ms FICARRA: I will get to that. I have a list of those countries in front of me. The documentation that can be produced includes birth certificates, citizenship certificates, passports, even passports that have expired within a two-year period—some Government members might not have renewed their passports but I know that many of them go on overseas trips so they probably have up-to-date passports—marriage certificates and even divorce decrees. Honourable members opposite would fit into that category. They have been born, most have been married and some have been divorced.

Mr Gibson: Have you ever been married?

Ms FICARRA: I am still searching. How is the honourable member's preselection going? Schedule 1 also included a deed poll and a pensioner health benefits card, and the list goes on. A *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial of 7 November 1995 stated:

The NSW Electoral Commissioner, Mr Ian Dickson, has reported that 1,433 invalid plural votes were cast in the last NSW election.

That is a lot of votes, especially when related to marginal seats.

Mr Scully: What are you on about? It was a good election outcome.

Ms FICARRA: The next election outcome will be even better. The editorial continued:

In 1,419 instances, the invalid votes were dual votes—two votes cast under the same name. The rest were multiple votes. The commissioner asserts—surprisingly—that he does not believe that plural and multiple voting have ever affected the outcome of an election.

The community and other experts do not agree. The editorial further stated:

The fact is that the voting system is so open to rorting that no-one involved in the political process can be sure that results in some electorates have not been effectively contaminated by invalid voting. Former MPs—with the benefit of hindsight—

have called the present system a disgrace. The claim has been made, for instance, that on occasions there have been more dead people still on the roll than the majority by which a seat was one.

Even if the implications of this statement are disregarded, it is accepted that multiple voting takes place. And sometimes this multiple voting is outrageous. Mr Dickson, for instance, notes that in the 1991 NSW election, 19 votes were cast under the same name. In the last NSW election, also, four votes were cast under one name in the Blue Mountains. The Blue Mountains result, as it happened, was one of the closest in the NSW election, with Labor winning with a 2.6 per cent majority.

But if political gossip is right, the chances of electoral outcomes being contaminated are even wider than is generally accepted. The fact is that the present system has too few checks against people voting for someone else whose name is on the electoral roll. Sometimes, for instance, people move out of an area and the checking system fails to pick up the move.

All honourable members should check their electoral rolls and bring any discrepancies to the attention of Mr Ian Dickson. The editorial also stated:

Occasionally, too, the death of a voter is not registered. Someone with a detailed knowledge of mistakes on the electoral roll is in a position to exploit these mistakes.

I wonder who those people with a detailed knowledge would be. With all their experience in union rorting, I reckon that most Government members would have a detailed knowledge of it. At the moment the honourable member for Hurstville is very interested in checking the credibility of some of his branch members, and I acknowledge that occurs on this side of the House too. We must stop any rorting that occurs at any level of any party and clean up the system. Otherwise, as Government members know, the system holds no credibility for branch members. When they attend branch meetings, they see a host of people filing into the room to vote at a preselection who are not seen again until the next preselection. Any malpractice on either side of the House must be cleaned up. If it is not, members could not look themselves in the mirror and say that they are doing an honest job.

Mr Scully: Can you?

Ms FICARRA: The Minister for Transport asked can I look at myself in the mirror. I can, at any time, because I value my integrity. The very interesting editorial continued:

The commissioner suggests that the best way to eliminate multiple voting is to institute a computerised system,

Also, a system of checks could be instituted to prove the identity of voters. In 1995 a computerised system would have cost approximately \$15 million.

That is a small price to pay. Otherwise, more returning officers and electoral assistants would be required to sit at their desks and check names and identities. The cost would now be less than a \$20 million increase on the present cost of conducting the electoral poll. Most Australians would see the value in that money being spent. The editorial continued:

The computer would reveal immediately, he says, if a person's name had been crossed off as having voted already.

That would eliminate the rort of Joe Bloggs voting at all the booths. "Vote often, vote early" is a great Australian Labor Party saying. The editorial further stated:

This system would prevent multiple voting. But it would not prevent "the cemetery vote". The only real safeguard against voting rorts, in fact, is to bring in a system whereby each voter produces an identification of who she or he is. If people have to show identification to hire a video, why shouldn't they do the same when they vote?

Is voting more important than hiring a video? Perhaps not to some Government members because they have different pastimes. There have been interesting comments. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Allan Viney, convenor, Scrutineers for Honest Elections, of Frenchs Forest, wrote an interesting letter to the editor which appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 17 November 1995.

Mr O'Farrell: A good bloke.

Ms FICARRA: As the honourable member for Northcott said, he is a good bloke. The letter stated:

The commission not only cannot guarantee that all deceased persons' names have been removed from the roll, it even permits reincarnation. A headline, "Dozen dead children make the voter list" in *The Sunday Age* (October 29) introduces the story of a Melbourne man who used the names of dead children to make false enrolments to defraud the Department of Social Security. The addresses he used in every case were those of Melbourne newsagents. The Electoral Commission only knew about the bogus enrolments when told by the Federal Police who were investigating Social Security fraud.

In endeavouring to defend the indefensible, Mr Wilson makes the mistake of believing his own propaganda. He knows full well that the Electoral Commission is unable to guarantee that the number of persons illegally on the roll in a marginal electorate is not greater than the margin by which the seat was won. The Divisional Returning Officer (DRO) for one Queensland electorate, through his own *unofficial* methods, detected 200 non-citizens attempting to enrol in a nine-month period. The DRO in question has stopped using his unofficial checks because he feared he could be in breach of the Privacy Act . . .

Democracy is all about free and fair elections, but unless the electoral rolls are beyond suspicion, fair elections *must* be in doubt.

All the Opposition is talking about is fair elections. Government members do not want to hear it, but the general community is very supportive of this bill. The *Sydney Morning Herald* is very fair in the way that it portrays community opinions. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour was congratulated by the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 29 November 1995 for his efforts in bringing some fairness, equity and justice into the electoral system.

The Minister for Police, the Hon. Paul Whelan, was outspoken in his criticism of the bill. He said that it would entail enormous administrative and cost problems. It was said that it seemed rather like a Sir Humphrey recipe for killing off reforms that had administrative merit to them and that the debate in State Parliament during the second reading of the bill did not give any indication whether the State Government—

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA

Dr MACDONALD (Manly) [11.30 a.m.]: I move:

- (1) That this House, in recognising that the issues surrounding voluntary euthanasia are complex, controversial and of such significance that they should be voted on by all citizens at a referendum, appoints a joint select committee.
- (2) That the committee inquire into and report upon the legislative and administrative issues involved in a referendum on voluntary euthanasia in New South Wales with the following terms of reference:
 - (a) consider legislative and administrative frameworks that have been proposed, are current or have recently been in practice;
 - (b) prepare the question to be put to the public for referendum in 1999; and
 - (c) prepare the affirmative and negative cases to be circulated prior to this referendum.
- (3) That such committee consist of eight members of the Legislative Assembly and four members of the Legislative Council and that, notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders of either House, at any meeting of the committee, any six members shall constitute a quorum provided that the committee shall meet as a joint committee at all times.
- (4) That the committee have leave to sit during the sittings or any adjournment of either or both Houses; to adjourn from

place to place; to make visits of inspection within the State of New South Wales, other States and Territories and overseas.

- (5) That should either House stand adjourned and the committee agree to any report before the Houses resume sitting:
- (a) the committee have leave to send any such report, minutes and evidence taken before it to the Clerk of the House;
 - (b) the documents shall be printed and published and the Clerk shall forthwith take such action necessary to give effect to the order of the House; and
 - (c) the documents shall be laid upon the Table of the House at the next sitting.

I gave notice of this motion 15 October 1996, and it has taken almost two years for the debate to be called on. The motion refers to a referendum on voluntary euthanasia and the establishment of a committee to inquire into and report upon the legislative and administrative issues involved in such a referendum. The committee would also be required to look at legislative and administrative frameworks that have been proposed, are current or have recently been in practice. The motion also relates to preparation of the referendum question and the affirmative and negative cases. That is what the motion is about; it is about not introducing legislation to allow voluntary euthanasia. That is not the strategy.

Euthanasia legislation has been introduced in other Houses. It was introduced successfully in the Northern Territory and subsequently overturned by the Federal Government. It was introduced in South Australia and in the Australian Capital Territory—unsuccessfully. The motion does not go that far; it is about the development of a referendum question. It is not about members of Parliament going out on a limb on a controversial issue. Many members of Parliament are anxious about the issue of euthanasia. I shall relate some of the comments from honourable members I have spoken to without naming the members involved.

One honourable member was very nervous about any vote on euthanasia because he would lose his seat if he voted for it, even though in his heart he supported it. Another comment was that in marginal seats candidates supporting euthanasia would lose votes rather than gain them. That is one reason that members of Parliament are nervous about moving on the issue. One honourable member was particularly guarded. He recognised the political risk involved. Another was worried about a conscience vote. He said that he would lose his seat

because of the powerful Catholic lobby. Those are the sorts of sentiments expressed by honourable members. I would like the matter to be dealt with on a conscience vote: members should vote not according to party lines but according to their conscience as to whether there should be a referendum on voluntary euthanasia. It is about supporting a process of moving gradually towards legislation. It is about Parliament taking the first step. Time is running out: the election is in March 1999 and I want a referendum question at that election.

This month is a milestone in the history of the euthanasia debate. It is the second anniversary of the death of Bob Dent in the Northern Territory. He died on 22 September 1996. The day before, on 21 September, he made a public statement using language we could all understand. He talked about his suffering, the grotesque demise of his body and the effects of medication. He argued that the promotion of a speedy death is more humane than prolonging the agony of dying. He made his own end-of-life decision—not the doctors. He rejected authoritarianism.

My motion provides a framework to determine various issues relating to a referendum. There is substantial community support for voluntary euthanasia. The figure is consistently around 75 per cent. I welcome in the public gallery Judy Wedderburn, a member of the committee of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society in New South Wales. Parliament's fundamental goal is to translate community views into public policy and not to shy away from these issues. That is why I call upon members to consider this matter seriously and to support a conscience vote. John Ellard was the psychiatrist who certified that Bob Dent, the world's first patient to die legally by euthanasia, was not suffering from severe depression. I have a very high regard for John Ellard, one of Sydney's leading psychiatrists. In the month following Bob Dent's death John Ellard wrote eloquently about his involvement with Bob Dent. In an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 4 October 1996 he stated:

Each of us is marching inexorably towards his or her own death. Fortunately, for most of our lives we do not know when or how it will happen. If we are particularly fortunate it will come suddenly, painlessly and unheralded; there are less happy alternatives. Doctors do not save lives; when it is within our skill we postpone death and diminish suffering. We can do no more.

He went on to state:

As doctors we must do our best to make that individual's life as good as it can be made by treating the disease, easing the

pain, relieving the depression. There can come a time when all our efforts do not do enough. The pain, breathlessness, nausea, incontinence, smell, anxiety and a thousand other afflictions combine to make continuing what little life is left grotesque.

Palliative care can work wonders, but not miracles: there are some whose distress of body and mind cannot be relieved.

Such a man was Bob Dent.

He was a good man; much of his life has been devoted to relieving the suffering of others. Over the years he had wrestled with the eternal questions and reached his own answers. When his time came they stood him in good stead. As his cancer slowly killed him and his agony of body and spirit increased, he knew what was best for him. I was able to play a small part in giving him what he wanted and needed and in delivering him from his suffering. If I had not done what I did, I would have been ashamed for the rest of my life.

John Ellard also said:

I have been associated with clinical medicine for the best part of half a century. Those who believe that euthanasia has not happened until now have been walking around with their eyes closed. The human condition is infinitely complex. It would be comforting if we could devise laws regulating all possible events to everyone's satisfaction. Let us try, but let us not shrink from the possibility that it cannot be done.

So spoke John Ellard, the man who played a role under the Northern Territory legislation: he certified that Bob Dent was competent, coherent, willing and at the terminal stage of his life and that he was not suffering from severe depression. Public opinion has consistently been in favour of parliamentarians picking up on the community mood and moving towards dealing with the issue of euthanasia and putting it in some form of legislative framework. It is difficult to draft appropriate legislation but there have been many efforts. There are models that prevail and it is possible to come up with good and safe legislation that builds in proper safeguards. In October the Letters Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* spoke about the enormous number of letters the paper had received, particularly from senior citizens. The editor then quoted one of the correspondents, who said, among other things:

The Government should listen to the wishes of senior citizens who are vitally concerned with the outcome of this issue rather than the 'do-gooders' more concerned with their own public image than our welfare.

The Letters Editor also said:

On another level, a serious concern has emerged that the principle of the separation of Church and State is under threat with the Andrews bill.

The Andrews bill was one of the consequences of the Northern Territory legislation where there was clearly a lack of separation between church and

state. I met with representatives of the Uniting Church on 16 October 1996 and I appreciate the support and counselling I have received from the church in its attempts to further the debate on euthanasia, in relation to which they are at odds with other churches. My view is that euthanasia is the ultimate act of compassion for a patient who is willing, competent and coherent at the final stage of a terminal illness. I seek the support of this House for this motion to establish a committee to develop the process for a referendum, the actual question to be asked and the yes and no cases.

Mr O'FARRELL (Northcott) [11.40 a.m.]: I speak briefly in the debate on the motion moved by the honourable member for Manly. I indicate at the outset that the position of the coalition will be set out by the honourable member for the North Shore at a later time. I am one of those who strongly oppose euthanasia, and nothing I have read or heard since the debate in this place last year has changed my view. However, it is also my view that the honourable member for Manly is well intentioned; he is exhibiting the sort of approach that ought to be taken if this issue is to be considered in detail. At one level I welcome an inquiry. I do not support this inquiry, but I welcome the concept of an inquiry because each inquiry that has been conducted overseas has come down against legislation in relation to euthanasia. That has certainly been the case in the United Kingdom and Europe.

So in a sense, as an opponent of euthanasia, I do not fear an inquiry. I believe an inquiry would be some benefit in the sense that it would educate people like my friend the honourable member for Manly about what I believe is their wrong perception of the issue. In a sense the euthanasia debate in this place last year came about the wrong way around. The debate was led by public opinion rather than by informed fact. I suppose it is that point that the honourable member for Manly is trying to address. As someone who was brought up in the Northern Territory, I simply do not believe this issue should be governed by State or Territory parliaments. Voluntary euthanasia is an issue of national significance.

The honourable member for Manly and others argue in favour of a State-based approach, that is, having six, seven or eight separate laws relating to the one issue. But if the issue is to be addressed it should be addressed at national level. The Northern Territory, where I grew up, has fewer residents than the local government area in which I live. I would not take advice from Hornsby council on this important issue, and I do not believe the Northern Territory should have led or attempted to lead

Australia last year and the year before in relation to this issue. I reiterate that I am an opponent of voluntary euthanasia, but if the issue is to be addressed seriously at all, it ought to be addressed at a national or supra-State level.

In respect of the request by the honourable member for Manly for a referendum I simply say that we are elected to Parliament to lead. We are not elected to Parliament so that we can behave like Pontius Pilate and return the responsibility for making decisions about issues such back to them. At present across Australia there is a concern that people in places such as this House are not displaying the leadership expected of them by the electorate. I believe referenda on these sorts of issues is a wimp's way out. Parliament—and preferably the national Parliament in my view—ought to make a decision, adhere to that decision and bear the consequences of it.

Mr WINDSOR (Tamworth) [11.44]: I support the motion of the honourable member for Manly to set up a committee to consider a referendum on voluntary euthanasia. Contrary to what the honourable member for Northcott has said, I believe the community should be consulted on critical major social changes such as euthanasia and capital punishment, an issue in relation to which I tried to get a bill through Parliament some time ago. In the past the community has been consulted on less significant issues than euthanasia. Earlier today the honourable member for Georges River said, in relation to electoral fairness, that if the members of the community were asked for their opinion, they would say that people should be able to prove their identity before voting.

The arguments are a little hypocritical, but in relation to major social change there should be a vehicle by which the community can be consulted. Contrary to some suggestions, I believe that playing politics with these matters in this Chamber may lead to the issue not being addressed in the way it should be addressed. Issues such as this should be put to the community. I oppose voluntary euthanasia, but it is an issue in relation to which the community should have the right to have some input.

Debate adjourned on motion by Dr Refshauge.

MULTICULTURALISM

Mr STEWART (Lakemba) [11.47 a.m.]: I move:

That this House reaffirms its strong commitment to multiculturalism.

I am proud to have moved this motion. The debate over multiculturalism has continued for too long because the Prime Minister, John Howard, did not deal with the causes of the debate in the early stages and has since ignored all the symptoms. As a result—as the former Prime Minister, Paul Keating, put it—the xenophobic cat got out of the bag. It has escaped and it is doing a great deal of damage. The increase in xenophobia in this country in the past two or three years, during the reign of the Howard Federal Government, has had disturbing results. Australia is in the world spotlight—not because of the Olympic Games, not because of the country's achievements, not because of the sort of country it is—simply because of the one-line grabs from people like Pauline Hanson and her followers in the past three years.

Unfortunately, they have been left unchecked by the Prime Minister, who has shown no leadership at all in relation to the matter, and were reported worldwide. The damage that has been caused is now obvious. There are weekly comments in the media in the Asia-Pacific region about Australia being an undesirable place to visit because of alleged racist behaviour and activities. Australia has a powerful multicultural heritage which had its genesis more than 200 years ago. That heritage has continued, but unfortunately the perception of our achievements in this great country is changing dramatically because the race debate has not been properly checked at the right level. I hold the Prime Minister to be ultimately responsible for what has occurred—I hope he will not be the next Prime Minister.

One of the shameful results is that when I meet delegations from Singapore, Hong Kong and Indonesia, members of those delegations ask, "Tell me what is happening in Australia. We have heard that Asian people are beaten on a daily basis." Those sorts of newspaper reports are prevalent. These reports are incorrect and have little relevance to the facts. The one-line grabs that newspapers often publicised have put Australia in a negative light and the Prime Minister is ultimately responsible for this unchecked debate. Recently I was fortunate enough to visit the United Arab Emirates, where I heard strong reports about Australia being racist.

Lakemba has a strong multicultural society and I have always said in this House that my electorate could be taken as a microcosm of multiculturalism. It does not have the tensions, problems, concerns and racist behaviour suggested by Pauline Hanson and reinforced by John Howard's failure to put forward formidable arguments against her. It was necessary for me to talk at length to people in the

United Arab Emirates to convince them that it was safe to visit or emigrate to Australia. The attack on our multiculturalism has had a detrimental effect on tourism, despite Australia being one of the most desirable tourist destinations in the world. The suggestion has been that foreigners will be placed at risk if they visit Australia.

One must ask what has happened to this country over the past three years. This unprecedented attack on the multiculturalism of Australian society is of great concern. The Federal member for Oxley has argued that multiculturalism should be abandoned because it is divisive and it is a failure. My electorate and many other electorates demonstrate that the policy is not a failure. Approximately 120 nationalities are represented in my electorate and all of my constituents live together in harmony and peace. My electorate does not experience the tensions that Pauline Hanson would have us believe exist in multicultural societies. It is regrettable that she is supported by at least one member of the House of Representatives and many media commentators, who give her the opportunity to pursue her agenda.

I wonder whether critics of multiculturalism understand what they are attacking. They are criticising a unique achievement. Overseas dignitaries, Presidents, Prime Ministers and, most recently, the President of Ireland have said that Australia's most precious treasure is the success of its policy of multiculturalism. Other countries would do well to model themselves on Australia's successful recipe for multiculturalism. Sadly, the attack on our country's multiculturalism is based on mistaken premises. One myth is that multiculturalism erodes our core values and undermines the importance of Australian institutions. That is incorrect.

Australian multiculturalism explicitly places at its centre the primacy of Australian laws and institutions and the primacy of English as our national language. That is the primary foundation of multiculturalism. That has always been an element of the national agenda for multicultural Australia and was found in a bill previously before the Parliament. The allegations about the horror and shame of multiculturalism are clearly unfounded. English is the national language of Australia and it is understood that Australia comes first. However, we celebrate the foundation of our multicultural society, its cultural heritage and its contribution to this country. Australia would not have become such a diverse society had it not been for its multicultural framework. The wording of the second principle of cultural diversity could not be much clearer. It states:

All individuals and public institutions should respect and accommodate the culture, language and religion of others within an Australian legal and institutional framework where English is the primary language.

I do not know where Pauline Hanson and her defenders get their codswallop. The Prime Minister is continually hiding in the shadows, frightened to make a comment. When he did so, the horse had bolted. The Hon. Helen Sham-Ho, a respected member of the upper House, resigned from the Liberal Party because from day one she wanted the Prime Minister to say something decisive and to support the multicultural fabric of this country. John Howard took the approach that multiculturalism does not work and that one should not criticise Pauline Hanson.

The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Philip Ruddock, supported the Prime Minister by destroying family reunion programs under the guise of addressing immigration concerns. That has resulted in the disintegration of hundreds of families who deserved to be united. Those families would support their next of kin; they would not put them on social welfare. Those families have lost the basic right to have their mothers, sisters or brothers join them—and those reunions would not have been at the expense of Australian taxpayers. That program has been butchered under the guise of reducing immigration. Targeted immigration is needed—*[Time expired.]*

Ms FICARRA (Georges River) [11.57 a.m.]: An issue as important to this nation as multiculturalism should be given bipartisan support. The honourable member for Lakemba always starts off nicely in a debate, but in true Labor Party fashion he always becomes political and has a go at John Howard. He allowed the debate to degenerate by lowering himself to that level. His politicisation of the debate in that way has detracted from the great contribution that multiculturalism has made to this country. Many ethnic people have been in this country for many years. For example, my family came to Australia after the Second World War from the Eolian Islands, which are off the coast of Sicily and are now a tourist mecca.

However, when my family left to come to Australia they were very depressed. The farmlands were not producing anything and money was not coming in. The people sought an opportunity to come to Australia and they now love this country very much. I remember my parents settling in an area called Dumbleton, which is now Beverly Hills, and our family were the only ethnics there at that time. The early migrants from Italy and Greece adopted this country quickly and considered

themselves to be Australian citizens, although they never forgot their heritage. When we talk about multiculturalism, we should not talk about immigration programs and how the Federal Government has disadvantaged migrants by changing the immigration program. That is wrong.

The majority of Australians, including those from overseas, overwhelmingly agree with what the Federal Government has done, which is to target immigration programs much more selectively. Family reunions are still the major component of the immigration program. The Federal Government and the State Opposition would never want to stop family migration and family reunions. That is the basis of Australian society. Honourable members are aware of that because we all attend citizenship ceremonies in our electorates and we witness families coming together.

Overwhelmingly, the major part of the immigration program is still based on the family. However, there must be a skilled component. The majority of Australians, including those of overseas background, believe that selective immigration—that is, the immigration of skilled and focused professionals, tradespeople and academics—will bring to Australia the sorts of attributes that this country needs to make it strong. There is undoubtedly strength in diversity. Learning from each other and each other's cultures does not fragment society; it actually makes it stronger. People of different cultural backgrounds have contributed to the wonderful lifestyle that we have here in Australia, including the food we eat, which is now so diverse and wonderful.

Australia has the best cuisine of any country. One has only to travel overseas to realise how difficult it is to purchase an interesting meal of another culture. I remember that when I visited Rome it was almost impossible to find a good Asian restaurant. When I did find one that was the most highly recommended, I thought how poorly it compared with Australia's Asian cuisine. Migrants have contributed greatly to Australia's lifestyle, not only in food and fashion but also in the arts and culture. All Australians, those of Anglo-Saxon background, know that we have all benefited from multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is strong in the St George area, where more than 130 different nationalities are represented. The St George area is a vibrant place in which to live because of that.

In days gone by we have had the Greeks, the Italians, the Yugoslavs, the Macedonians and the Lebanese. Indeed, the Lebanese have made great inroads in the St George area. Mr Sam Nasser, the

president of the Hurstville Chamber of Commerce, is of Lebanese background. The Nasser family has contributed greatly to the area. We have the Arabic Welfare Council, the Amal Charitable Association and many other Arabic organisations, which all work well together regardless of religious background, be it Islamic, Sunni Shiites, Maronites or Orthodox. They are a credit to our society.

Recent migrants to Australia have included the Chinese. Originally, a majority came from Hong Kong, and subsequently a minority came from mainland China. Now it seems to be the other way round. The Chinese element in Hurstville is now evident. The Chinese have contributed greatly to the area. The Forest Road strip of the Hurstville regional centre was dying; when Westfield commenced trading many shops closed down, traffic changes took place, and so on. However, the Chinese revitalised the city centre, with their great family values and respect for law and order. They recognised that the St George region had excellent transport facilities, a law-abiding society, great educational institutions and the wonderful Georges River with its recreational facilities, and that it was an ideal place for them to settle down with their families. They have done so successfully.

I congratulate the southern Sydney Chinese organisation, which is headed by the president, Mr Terence Tang, and the secretary, Ms Shirley Chan. The organisation has an excellent committee that works closely with all other ethnic groups, the Chamber of Commerce, the local council and all members of Parliament. The honourable member for Hurstville would be the first to acknowledge that. Apart from the senior citizens association, we have an Italian senior citizens association and a Chinese senior citizens association, and they work well together. They go on community bus trips, and hold barbecue days and festivities together. It is wonderful to see. At the school level all the children play together, regardless of where their parents came from, the difference in colour, the shape of eyes or their religious background. At the other extreme the senior citizens enjoy each other's company. The great thing about Australia is that it is a wonderful and tolerant society.

Mr Stewart: Talk about multiculturalism!

Ms FICARRA: That is multiculturalism. That is part of the Australian community. We should not seek to segregate ethnic groups on one side and everyone else on the other; that is crazy. Australian society is now mixed. When we talk about multiculturalism we talk about enjoyment of lifestyle. That is what has made Australia such a

wonderful and safe place in which to live. It has fabulous government services provided to it and a fabulous way of life. We must ensure that those of ethnic background who have settled in the country and become good Australian citizens are represented in our spheres of government. The next Hurstville council elections will involve Australian-Chinese and Australian-Lebanese candidates. We should make them feel a valued part of Australian society by giving them the power to make decisions on services for their communities. I am sure that at the next council election, and subsequent State and Federal elections, lots of people of Australian-Chinese background who live in the St George area will stand for preselection to be involved in those political positions of responsible representations.

So far as Pauline Hanson is concerned, I think the Chinese community know that it is being used as a political issue. Whether we like the message or not, Pauline Hanson has given the major parties a kick up the backside. Frankly, we deserved it, because we have not paid enough attention to rural Australia. The policies brought forward by the Prime Minister and the Federal Leader of the Opposition show that attention is now being given to rural Australia, so Pauline Hanson has achieved something. But people discount what she says and they talk about her lack of recognition of multiculturalism. Even Pauline Hanson is now reneging on that aspect.

Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [12.07 p.m.]: In preparation for my participation in this debate I went through my diary entries from the beginning of this month until next Saturday. This Saturday I have been invited to and will attend an Indian dance function and a Turkish women's function. Yesterday I participated in the Black Parliament. Last weekend I attended the Chilean National Day organised by the Cobreloa Club of Fairfield. Last Saturday I attended the Sudanese National Day. On that day I also attended the opening by the Minister for Information Technology, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Western Sydney of an artistic exhibition titled "Devotions" at the Casula Powerhouse. Part of the exhibition was curated by Mira Martic.

Among other exhibits, it featured paintings by Samih Louka, a Coptic artist, and Ali Siddiqi, an Afghani artist, which demonstrated the breadth of the different sorts of religious convictions of people in that part of Sydney. Earlier that morning I had attended an international judo function organised by the Judo Federation of New South Wales. On Thursday, 10 September, I met with a delegation from East Timor consisting of Fretilin operatives

and members. On Sunday, 6 September, I attended Nigerian Children's Day and the India Fair. On Saturday, 5 September, I attended a Friends of India function and the South American Festival. On Friday, 4 September, I attended a launch arranged by the Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre featuring artistic exhibits from the Maltese, South American and Indo-Chinese communities.

Mr O'Farrell: You're a hardworking local member—a shining light.

Mr LYNCH: The honourable member for Northcott interjects correctly that I am a hardworking local member. I have recited the diary entries not only to indicate the sorts of functions a local member in western Sydney attends over a 2½ week period but also to show that multiculturalism is not, as members opposite sometimes argue, simply a term or a philosophy; it is an accurate indication of the sort of society in which we live. It is not a policy that one can abolish or alter; it is a social reality. Despite the best efforts of members opposite to undermine it, multiculturalism is part of the Australian lifestyle.

The particularly interesting thing is that the critics of multiculturalism fundamentally misunderstand the nature of our society. With the exception of the Aboriginal community, the absolutely inescapable reality is that we are pre-eminently a migrant society. The previous speaker's parents came to this country more recently than mine. My grandfather fled the black and tans in County Tyrone in about 1919. I dare say the honourable member for Northcott was probably working with them. It does not matter terribly much whether one's grandparents came to this country from another country, whether one's parents came to this country from another country or whether one came to this country from another country, everyone has an equal right to be in this society and to participate within its structures. That is essentially what multiculturalism is about.

The arguments that lunatics such as Hanson put forward, that to be Australian one must be narrowly defined—Anglo, white and speak English without an accent—are not merely absurd; they fly completely in the face of reality. Instead of criticising a multicultural society we should celebrate it. What particularly annoys me about debates about multiculturalism these days is that we won this argument 30 years ago. We should not have to fight it again now. We won the argument about the White Australia Policy. We won the argument about the nature of the society in which we all live.

I become considerably annoyed when I go to the sorts of functions I mentioned earlier and have to explain that mainstream Australian politicians do not accept the Hanson nonsense, despite the fact that Howard, in an appalling performance, gave her succour and support. Notwithstanding that, members of the Liberal Party want to give her preferences—as one member of this House wants to do, and the Opposition cannot get away from it. Despite the fact that people in the Liberal Party want to give succour and support to Hanson, it is nonetheless the case that mainstream Australia supports multiculturalism. Mainstream Australian politics puts Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party last. I know that at long last the Liberal Party, in some cases, has come to— [*Time expired.*]

Mr MacCARTHY (Strathfield) [12.12 p.m.]: When we have motions of this kind that should unite members of the House, problems always arise because of idiotic comments from people like the honourable member for Liverpool. He tried to create division and get away from the thrust of the motion moved by the honourable member for Lakemba. Most Australians are strongly committed to a fair and just society—our multicultural society. This House should agree to the motion not only unanimously but in the spirit of bipartisanship. It is a pity that the previous speaker chose to speak as he did. I will not talk in great detail about the Labor Party's track record on this matter. Every week we could delve into the past and find little black pages in many elements of Australian history. We are talking about 1998 and moving into the new millennium as a united country with a common goal for the betterment of all. We need to focus on the positives. The problem with multiculturalism is that many people do not understand what the term means. A good definition given to me by my friend the honourable member for Northcott, which comes from the Human Rights Commission, states:

Multiculturalism is a policy based on rights and responsibilities which has been endorsed by Australian governments for managing a unified nation which is culturally diverse. The policy of multiculturalism replaced the previous official policy of assimilation.

There are important overriding principles of multiculturalism which can be summarised in the following way:

- **loyal to Australia:** all Australians should have an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia's interests and future first and foremost—

no-one would disagree with that—

- **acceptance of the Australian system:** all Australians are required to accept the basic structures and principles of Australian society—the Constitution, Australian laws, tolerance, equality, democracy, freedom of speech and

religion, English as the national language and equality of sexes; and

- **mutual respect:** all Australians have the right to express their culture and beliefs and this involves a reciprocal responsibility to accept the rights of others to express their views and values.

The definition says that multiculturalism is about inclusion and recognition, to which I say, "Hear! Hear!" If we define it in that way, how could any rational Australian disagree with multiculturalism? No-one can argue with it. We can look at the contributions of people from a variety of cultural backgrounds to Australian society, and I will mention a few. In the entertainment field—I was recently in the company of Kamahl, that great singer of Tamil background. He is a great Australian. In medicine—who could have been a greater Australian in the field of medicine than Dr Victor Chang? Another area is business—I could go on and on. I do not need to list names because there are so many.

In sport—Michael Klim and Daniel Kowalski are both of Polish extraction. Recently in private members' statements I spoke about a couple of people. Yesterday I spoke of Quong Tart, a prominent Chinese citizen of Sydney in the last century and early part of this century. A few days earlier I spoke in memory of a great Australian from my electorate, Dr Siva Subramaniam, who died recently. All these people demonstrate that it does not matter what one's ethnic background is, what country one's ancestors came from or how long ago they came to this country. What is important is one's contribution to Australia. The Liberal Party is happy to support the motion. Its track record is second to none.

The Liberal Party abolished the White Australia Policy. It brought about the referendum of 1967. It had the first person of non-English speaking background in the Australian Senate, my good friend Misha Lajovic. It had the first Aboriginal representative in Parliament, Neville Bonner. It had the first person of Chinese background in an Australian parliament. It has a great track record, and it is glad to join with the Australian Labor Party in this motion to support our proud commitment to multiculturalism. [*Time expired.*]

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta) [12.17 p.m.]: I represent in this Parliament the most ethnically diverse community. The electorate of Cabramatta is a community predominantly made up of a large, diverse Asian community. It is also a community that is remarkably successful. It is a community where Serbs, Croatians and Macedonians send their children to the same primary schools. It is a

community where Buddhists, Christians and Muslims shop in the same supermarkets. It is a community where two-up gets a good run on Anzac Day. It is a successful model because reasonable-minded people are prepared to accept the differences of others; they are prepared to accept the differences among them within the community. It is also a successful model because people are united in the similar goals for which they strive.

Cabramatta is a community where people want a decent job, job security, a good education for their children, and access to good quality health care. For those reasons, those goals, they are more united by their similarities than they are divided by their cultural differences. I am astounded that we are talking about multiculturalism in this Parliament yet again. The national debate is raging. Race will dominate national debate into the year 2000. It is unfortunate that we have to reaffirm our commitment to multiculturalism. Indeed, it appears with the media and political debate in some circles that "multiculturalism" has become a dirty word. It is such a dirty word that the Prime Minister has not used it in the Federal Parliament in the past 2½ years. In the age of computers one is able to scan for these things, and John Howard has not had the wherewithal, the moral conviction, to walk into the Federal Parliament and say the word "multiculturalism".

The Prime Minister said the word "multicultural" on nine occasions, but he said it only when referring to the Federal Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs. I have a fairly good indication of why we are in the grip of a national debate about race in this country: the Prime Minister does not have the courage of his convictions in this matter. He has flip-flopped on the Pauline Hanson issue and has allowed this debate to run away from him. He is coming back to the fold a little too late. I saw him squirming and attempting to smile on television on Sunday night. When Ray Martin asked him whether people should speak English in this country he said, "Yes, of course they should speak English." What he failed to say is that he single-handedly dismantled the Adult Migrant Education Service. The Prime Minister said that people should speak English in this country, but they do not have access to a quality education system and they will not get any help from John Howard on that score.

When the Prime Minister was asked whether migrants made a worthwhile contribution in this country he said, "Migrants do not have access to Commonwealth employment services for two years upon arrival in this country." What sort of messages

are we getting from Canberra? The Prime Minister cannot say the word "multiculturalism"; he has cut the number of people allowed to migrate to this country for the purpose of family reunion; he has said to migrants, "You are on your own for two years. You get no help upon arrival, so we are denying you access to a job and access to benefits"; and then he says to migrants, "You must speak English, but do not expect us to help you. We will not provide the services. We will not fund a quality service to give you a go." Those messages, which are coming out of Canberra, have filtered into the New South Wales Parliament.

In the last session of this Parliament members of the coalition had three opportunities to vote to put Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party last on preferences. On three occasions they flip-flopped. They introduced amendments relating to multiculturalism but did not vote on those amendments. They could not vote for the legislation they had introduced because they would have had to publicly state their intention to put One Nation last. Some members tried to worm out of it by making personal explanations. What an impotent, weak and uncourageous response from some honourable members who said, "I am not racist but I cannot vote that way." [*Time expired.*]

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI (Lane Cove) [12.22 p.m.]: It is a great disappointment to Opposition members that every time the honourable member for Cabramatta speaks in these debates she erupts in what can only be described as a diatribe instead of making a rational, considered and compassionate contribution. Opposition members regard as an insult the fact that the honourable member for Cabramatta is incapable of recognising that some issues should be bipartisan. She has failed to recognise that on every occasion on which she has contributed to debates of this nature. She is not alone. Earlier, the honourable member for Liverpool, instead of debating the topic in a friendly and bipartisan way, sought to make cheap political capital out of something which I believe the honourable member for Lakemba introduced in good faith.

I congratulate the honourable member for Lakemba on introducing this matter for debate. He recognises that there is a genuine commitment on both sides of the House to the concept of multiculturalism. The honourable member for Cabramatta and the honourable member for Liverpool regard these debates as an opportunity for attack and do not make a positive contribution. The honourable member for Lakemba, however, is a true gentleman and is committed to the concept of multiculturalism. The honourable member for

Cabramatta is not truly committed to the concept of multiculturalism. Instead of trying to score cheap political points she should join her constituents. I believe that the flat at Cammeray is still unoccupied.

The north shore, a diverse area of Sydney, is often ignored by members of the Labor Party. They tend to accuse us, as they are wont to do, of being silvertails, Anglos, whites and people who live in exclusion on the north shore. That is not true. Members of the Labor Party who talk about diversity should recognise the diversity that exists across the city. The north shore is as diverse as any other area. To those who do not believe that I say: come to the end-of-year concert at Chatswood Public School. More than 40 nationalities are represented at that school.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills): Order! The honourable member for Fairfield and the honourable member for Georges River will cease shouting at each other across the Chamber.

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: The children who attend Chatswood Public School represent more than 40 nations. When I, as the local member, attend the end-of-year concert, I look at the stage and realise how truly multicultural this nation is. Those children work, play and learn together. They have no concept of colour and do not perceive as a problem any child from any other nation. Those children represent what is true and good about this country. Australia is a diverse nation. We should be proud of that diversity. It is somewhat surprising that the best speech I ever heard on how well we have managed our cultural diversity came from the President of the United States.

I attended the function at Mrs Macquarie's Chair and listened to the President's speech. He said that we should be proud of what we have in this country and that we should be the model for the rest of the world. I agree with him. It was wrong and ill-informed of the honourable member for Liverpool to suggest that Opposition members have no understanding of multiculturalism. I can claim to have more experience of multiculturalism than the honourable member for Liverpool. I married a Macedonian—a migrant to this country. My experience in the Macedonian community and many other communities in this State is at least equal to, if not better than, the experience of the honourable member for Liverpool who referred earlier to the functions that he had attended.

He should live with those communities and then tell me that he understands what multiculturalism and diversity are all about. We in this Parliament will not be conned or damned by the

Labor Party. We will not accept that members of the Labor Party have ownership of diversity in this country. They do not. In this country we are all supportive of the concept of diversity; we are all supportive of multiculturalism; and we will not listen to the rubbish that comes from the honourable member for Cabramatta or the honourable member for Liverpool. [*Time expired.*]

Motion, by leave, by Mr Woods agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow three further members to speak on the motion before the House for up to five minutes each.

Mr TRIPODI (Fairfield) [12.28 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the honourable member for Lakemba. I am proud to say that I come from probably the most culturally diverse local government area in the whole of Australia. My electorate of Fairfield, unlike Chatswood which might have 40 different nationalities, has 133 different nationalities and 88 different languages are spoken. The diversity in Fairfield is unmatched. I believe that Fairfield is the hub from which a lot of benefits flow to this nation. Migrants make an enormous contribution to this country. How we help those people is a measure of the degree of civilisation we have attained. Look at what has happened in the Federal sphere. Shame on the Federal Government! It is not giving migrants a chance to make a contribution. For the first and last time, I support the statements made by the honourable member for Liverpool. I also spend a lot of time attending ethnic functions and I enjoy it. It is a wonderful opportunity to meet people and experience and enjoy different nationalities and cultures.

At such events one experiences the genuine spirit of groups wanting to become part of Australia. Often at these functions communities come together to raise money for charitable causes. For example, the Italian Affairs Committee based in the Fairfield local government area has raised in excess of \$3 million for the Spastic Centre of New South Wales. Members of this community are grateful for the opportunity this country has given them and want to give something in return. They targeted their assistance to one of the most needy sectors of the community. Such a contribution to our society is very Australian. Although the group is called the Italian Affairs Committee, it is very Australian. These people came to Australia with nothing, this country gave them everything and now they want to give something back. They established themselves and attained achievements. They feel so thankful for what this country has given them that they want to reciprocate.

Multiculturalism is not a choice in my electorate. We must have multiculturalism and tolerance because the community is so diverse. Any other proposition, policy prescription or choice would not work. My local community must be tolerant because Chinese live next to Italians, and Italians live next to Lebanese. One nationality lives next to another, and they share each other's way of life, foods and traditions. "Tolerance" is the wrong word, because they are more than tolerant. They celebrate and enjoy the diversity of their experiences. They go further than mere tolerance; they celebrate the diversity that exists in the community and love spending time together learning about the various cultures.

Taking it one step further, it is not about tolerance, it is about celebration. That genuine spirit of celebration in diversity exists in the Fairfield community. Multiculturalism provides enormous value, especially for our children, who may one day travel the world with prior knowledge about many different cultures. Because of the opportunity to grow up in a multicultural society, our children will become progressive, intelligent and experienced people. Whether from an Australian background or other cultural backgrounds, they will benefit from living in a diverse community. Their experiences of that upbringing will help them in their business and private lives and in their personal satisfaction and enjoyment of life.

The enormous benefits of multiculturalism are measurable and immeasurable, tangible and intangible. At the end of the day, we enjoy a much richer quality of life because of it. Also, economic strengths are derived from multiculturalism. Many multinational companies chose Sydney as a base to spring into Asia because of its cultural diversity, experience and knowledge. [*Time expired.*]

Mr O'FARRELL (Northcott) [12.33 p.m.]: I support this motion. Like many honourable members in this place, I shared the Australian multicultural experience as I was growing up. I was educated in northern Australia. Some of my fellow students at school were from Bathurst Island and Melville Island, and in those politically incorrect times they were called full-blooded Aborigines. They included Stan Tipaloura, who went on to become a Labor member in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly—Bob Collins' brother-in-law—Vivien Kerinua, and Maurice and Emmanuel Rioli, who made their mark in Australian Rules football. Some of my fellow students were also Chinese. At that time Chinese settlement had long been established in northern Australia. Darwin gave Australia its first Australian Chinese lord mayor, Alec Fong Lim, whose son I went to school with.

Darwin also had a strong Lebanese community and, towards the end of my time at school, a large Timorese community. I grew up with those people. As the honourable member for Fairfield correctly said, in those days it was not an ism, it was a way of life. We simply associated with people who were human beings. Despite what Government members would suggest, we on the North Shore live in culturally diverse communities. There is a significant Chinese community in the suburb of Cherrybrook—as the honourable member for Georges River said, largely from Taiwan, mainland China and Hong Kong. I am proud to be a life member of the Cherrybrook Chinese Community Association. I support that association and its work in Cherrybrook, which has a youth problem.

This association is working with the community to try to resolve these issues. The majority of students at Cherrybrook Technology High School, John Purchase School and Cherrybrook Public School are of Chinese descent. Thornleigh has a significant Lebanese community. Over the recess I had the opportunity, courtesy of that community, to visit Lebanon. Qubani, the leader of the Sunni community in Lebanon, referred to the similarities between Lebanon and Australia and our future hopes. He summed it up as unity through diversity—the strength that we gain from our immigration programs and the fact that we are able to put our diverse cultures together behind a uniform common purpose.

It might surprise Government members to know that there is a Sikh temple in Turrumurra. The north shore has a significant Sikh community. Cultural diversity does not stop at Parramatta River and the Sydney Harbour Bridge. As the honourable member for Georges River said, it does not stop as one travels south. People across Sydney live with the multicultural experience daily, and I am sure it is much the same across New South Wales, including the Hunter. We support multiculturalism but we do not support, and will never support, an attempt by Government members to claim multiculturalism as their own. The best contribution I heard today—with due respect to the honourable member for Lakemba, the mover of the motion and a committed proponent of multiculturalism—was from the honourable member for Strathfield, who pointed out a few home truths about the Liberal Party's record on multiculturalism.

I will never forget the opposition of Gough Whitlam and Bob Hawke to the entry of Indochinese refugees to this country in 1975. I note that the honourable member for Cabramatta did not mention that. But when the ALP had the chance to select a member to represent the electorate of Cabramatta—

an electorate which the honourable member for Cabramatta has described as Australia's most culturally diverse electorate—it chose an Anglo import from the north shore rather than a member of the local community. At least the honourable member for Fairfield represents his constituency and community as one of them. When the ALP had the chance at Cabramatta, it did not go down the multicultural path. That displays the hypocrisy for which the Labor Party is renowned.

I also remind members opposite that in 1995 as State Director I ensured that the Liberal Party put the Australian Against Further Immigration party last on its how to vote ballot card. That cost us votes in marginal seats. At that time the ALP was prepared to play footsie with racist political parties in order to win marginal votes. I am pleased to support the motion put forward by the honourable member for Lakemba. I am pleased to support the Liberal Party, nationally and in every State, in putting One Nation last on its how-to-vote card at the Federal election and the next State election. Given the history and record of the Liberal Party we could do no less.

Mr STEWART (Lakemba) [12.38 p.m.], in reply: Thucydides, a great Greek historian, wrote about the Peloponnesian War, "I am writing this history because I don't want it to be repeated." The honourable member for Northcott must understand that pertinent point when he refers to the past. He needs to understand that the Australian Labor Party is an evolutionary party; we look at our past and move on to our future. We can best be measured in the context of immigration and multiculturalism because we have moved on from past styles and trends—with which I do not agree today and would not defend. I am not defending the matters put forward by the honourable member for Northcott, but they happened in the past and we have moved on to a much more constructive and positive future.

The motion supports multiculturalism as a fabric of Australian society today, for which we all should be proud. We should not hide in the past, as Pauline Hanson has approached the issue. As I said in my earlier contribution, to a significant degree blame can also be laid on the Prime Minister for hiding in the shadows. I mentioned the Minister for Immigration, Philip Ruddock, not for hiding in the shadows but for being bullied by the Prime Minister's tactics and being constrained to put forward policy that clearly has been detrimental to immigrants coming to Australia on a fair and reasonable basis. The policy is not treating them fairly and reasonably.

I come from an ethnic background. My father's mother, Mary Gallagher, was Irish and his father, Cyril Stewart, was Scottish. My mother's mother, Santina Pizani, is now 85 years old. She can provide an important legacy in my family: she can tell me about what immigrants to this country went through to make this country as great as it is now. My maternal grandfather, who is deceased, Paolo Pizani, from a Maltese background, also contributed to this country. When he came to Australia he got a job in the ACI glassworks and worked very hard to bring up a family of seven children to succeed in this country. Those children, like many thousands of others, have been the foundation stones of this great democratic country. People who visit this country see Australia's achievement as a positive example and want to repeat it elsewhere.

I am very proud of our approach to multiculturalism in our society. It should not be denigrated. It should be understood that multiculturalism has never been about separatism and privilege; it is about achieving unity out of diversity and mutual respect. We must respect one another irrespective of background or creed. If people wish to replace that policy, what would they replace it with? The honourable member for Cabramatta and the honourable member for Fairfield spoke on this. Would we go backward to the policies of the past that clearly failed us, the policies the honourable member for Northcott talked about? Assimilation created alienation. Multiculturalism, if it is properly understood and permitted to work—and it does work as we have seen from the examples at Fairfield, Cabramatta, Lakemba and many other electorates—

Mrs Chikarovski: Lane Cove, North Shore.

Mr STEWART: Yes. If it is permitted to work, it offers us unity and strength. It will provide the ingredients for future success as a nation. We can still reach our goal. If we do, it will be a remarkable Australian achievement based on uniquely Australian values such as tolerance and goodwill. Those values are clearly at risk at the moment. The honourable member for Strathfield talked about the need for unity in adopting a positive approach, but I think it is fair to say that the unity has not been as strong as we on this side of the House would like. We would like people not to be afraid to defend multiculturalism or to say the word.

The barometer has been the debate surrounding Pauline Hanson and some of her unusual ideas. The coalition decision on preferences should not have remained ambiguous for so long. National Party

members are still on the fence and have not stated how they will allocate preferences in New South Wales. One Federal candidate has already stated that his preferences will go to One Nation. Members on this side of the House hope that multiculturalism will survive the next 100 years because it is a beautiful part of the fabric and foundation of this country. We should never lose sight of what we are and who we are—and be proud of it.

Motion agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Postponement of Business

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) Nos 15 and 16 called on and postponed by Mr Smith, on behalf of Mr Cochran.

LANE COVE AND GLADESVILLE POLICING

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI (Lane Cove) [12.44 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes the Council on the Cost of Government proposal to close Lane Cove patrol and Gladesville patrol.
- (2) expresses concern that such a proposal will weaken community policing and the local fight against crime.
- (3) calls on the Government to reject the proposal.

I draw the attention of the House to the fact that the Lane Cove patrol in particular has suffered very badly under the Labor Government. When the Labor Party was elected to office it promised that it would introduce a fair law and order policy. One would have assumed that that meant that it would maintain police numbers across the city and the State but for some reason the concept of fairness, when it comes to north shore patrols, has been lost on the Minister for Police. It was with great concern that the Opposition read the recommendation from the Council on the Cost of Government to close Lane Cove police station.

Prior to becoming the member for Lane Cove, in the pre-selection process for that seat for the Liberal Party, I went to Lane Cove police station to discuss the concerns of officers there. One was that for the size of the area for which they had responsibility they were housed in what can only be described as an inadequate police station—a pokey and dark old house. It was not suited to the needs of modern policing. I told the then patrol commander that if I were lucky enough to be pre-selected as the

Liberal candidate for Lane Cove and then lucky enough to be elected as the member for Lane Cove I would make the upgrading of Lane Cove police station a priority. History proves that I was elected as the member for Lane Cove and I honoured that promise.

Under the coalition Government Lane Cove police station was refurbished and provided with additional buildings. It became a 24-hour patrol, a thriving patrol. We were very proud of it because it maintained very low crime rates. The coalition Government introduced beat policing and the beat police at Lane Cove were prominent within the Lane Cove shopping centre and community. The officers were well known to many people and they did a good job. Unfortunately, that has all now gone by the by. In large measure the Lane Cove patrol has been absorbed into the Chatswood patrol. I have already raised my concerns about the physical structure of Chatswood police station. The Minister for Police, who is at the table, is nodding his head. He is well aware of the problems of Chatswood police station, but that is a debate for another day.

The Lane Cove patrol has been downgraded. At times only a single officer is at the station with, supposedly, a single car available. But on recent occasions not even that car was available. So it is no surprise that the local community is complaining bitterly about the lack of police resources within the area. The local business community has complained to me that it no longer feels that the Lane Cove shopping centre area is receiving due attention and due care. People in the suburbs around Lane Cove complain that there is no point ringing the police to catch the perpetrators of an offence because by the time the police arrive from Chatswood the perpetrators are long gone.

I am bitterly disappointed about the way in which the Lane Cove patrol has been treated. The motion also refers to Gladesville. I am grateful to the Minister for maintaining the Gladesville patrol. I would not suggest that this would have anything to do with the fact that at the time the decision was made Gladesville was a marginal seat. Heaven forbid that politics would come into a decision as important as police staffing requirements, but it seems curious that Gladesville police station—a very fine station built by the coalition Government—has maintained its staffing level. Having said that, I put on record that members of the Gladesville business community are concerned that they may be taken for granted and run the risk of losing the current police staffing level should the Government decide that it is more politically correct to pull people out of Gladesville now that part of that seat has been

included in the newly extended electorate of Lane Cove.

I seek an assurance from the Minister that current staffing levels at Gladesville Police Station will continue and that there will be no political interference in any decision about such levels. People previously served by the Lane Cove patrol feel they have been hard done by due to the change in staff numbers at that station, especially through the lack of beat police. People have become very anxious because they can no longer see police in their local community. When the structural change was implemented on 1 July last year I was given an assurance that police resources in area would not be reduced. That promise has not been kept.

I do not blame the police, who are concerned about their inability to service the Lane Cove part of my electorate in the way they used to. However, the last time I saw the police walking around Lane Cove I was so shocked that I actually went up to them and said, "What are you doing here? Are you back on patrol?" They said, "No, we are here getting lunch." The only reason they were there was to get lunch at the Subway shop in Lane Cove. The physical presence of police is sorely missed. Members of the local business community have rung police at Lane Cove seeking a response, only to be told, "No, we cannot go out, there is no-one here, and no car is available." Often the police car that is supposed to be available is not in the area.

It was no surprise that when the Food Plus store at Northwood was robbed for the third occasion the proprietor did not bother ringing Lane Cove police because he knew he would not get a response. He rang 000 but he ended up in strife because his call was put through to Melbourne. Not only could he not get a response from the local patrol, he could not even get a response from the New South Wales Police. But that is another story. What most irritated residents, and especially the business community, was that Coles Supermarket, located across the road from the police station, was robbed. When that supermarket was robbed the staff at Coles went across to the police station to report the robbery, but the station police officer said, "Well, I can't come over and investigate this crime because there is no-one here to take my place." He actually asked one of the Coles staff members to stay in the police station so that he could go across the road.

What sort of police service is the Government running? What will happen to our police if they are not given resources and treated fairly so that they can do their job. There is no doubt that actions taken by the Government have weakened community

policing and increased the potential for crime in areas such as Lane Cove. Criminals know that they may as well commit their crimes in Lane Cove because there are no police around to stop them. How on earth does the Government justify that in the face of its professed commitment to a strong law and order policy? How on earth does that fit in with the Government's promise to the people of New South Wales prior to the 1995 election: "We are going to look after law and order. We are going to be fair. We are going to be fair when it comes to policing." Labor may have looked after parts of this State and city, but it has not cared equitably and fairly for other areas of New South Wales or Sydney which are represented by Liberal Party or National Party members. Labor is not governing for the whole of New South Wales or for all the people of this State.

The Government is about selective governing, about marginal seats, and about trying to win the next election. The Government is certainly not about providing our citizens with a sense of comfort, security and safety in the streets, in the shopping centres, and in their homes. I ask the Minister for Police to take local concerns about the Lane Cove patrol into account and reinstate substantial numbers of police at the Lane Cove patrol, so that my community can regain a sense of safety and of being treated fairly. They have not been treated fairly by the Government. They look forward to the coalition being elected in March next year because they know we will reinstate police numbers at Lane Cove to the staffing level in place prior to the 1995 election. We want a safe community. The people of Lane Cove know that a coalition government will deliver it to them.

Mr WHELAN (Ashfield—Minister for Police) [12.54 p.m.]: The motion of the honourable member for Lane Cove, dated November 1996, as a result of prorogation of the Parliament was restored to the business paper in September 1997, after the restructure of the Police Service on 1 July. I did not listen intently to the honourable member's speech, but I can assure her that there were sufficient announcements by me, by the Premier and by the Commissioner of Police that it is not Government policy to close police stations, notwithstanding the view of the Council on the Cost of Government. The part of her speech I did listen to extolled her wonderful virtues as a local member when the coalition was in office.

If the honourable member compares police strength in the Lane Cove local area command in November 1994, under the coalition Government, with current strength, she will find—and I have the figures—that there are 37 additional police in that

command. The motion mentioned Gladesville. Actual police strength has increased by 24 since November 1994. There are 24 additional police. How they are deployed in the Police Service is determined by operational imperatives within the local area command. The furphy about inadequate funding is exactly that.

There are record numbers of police in New South Wales and the Police Service has a record budget, as was acknowledged by the shadow minister for police at the police conference this year. I can extract the Lane Cove figures, but deployment of police in Lane Cove is a matter for the local command. There is no merit in the honourable member's motion, and there is no basis upon which this House should consider it. Closure of police stations, whether at Lane Cove or elsewhere, is not on the Government's agenda and we will not be doing it. The restructure that has taken place since 1 July has been a great success. The bottom line is the hypocrisy of the local member.

Mr Windsor: They are not in the Lane Cove area.

Mr WHELAN: They are in the Lane Cove local area at the moment, which deals with—

Mrs Chikarovski: They are absorbed by Chatswood.

Mr WHELAN: No. Chatswood is a separate local area command and it has separate numbers.

Mrs Chikarovski: They are all coming out of Chatswood.

Mr WHELAN: You can say the same thing about Gladesville. The honourable member is saying impliedly that if the coalition wins the next election she is going to close Gladesville Police Station.

Mrs Chikarovski: No. I did not say that.

Mr WHELAN: Yes, you did.

Mrs Chikarovski: I did not.

Mr WHELAN: You are going to shift the numbers from Gladesville into Lane Cove.

Mrs Chikarovski: They are both in my electorate now. I look after both of them, Minister. That is not what I said.

Mr WHELAN: I give an assurance to the people that that is not the Government's position.

We are putting police where they are needed. The coalition Government opened the Gladesville Police Station in a big flurry at the tail end of the last election campaign and immediately put forward a proposal to reduce its effectiveness and its police numbers, notwithstanding that it was newly built. That was the coalition Government's meretricious approach: build a big edifice of a police station but give the police no support. They did similar things throughout the Police Service. The coalition announced the establishment of the Child Protection Enforcement Agency with a big fanfare of trumpets, but gave it no office or staff. Certainly there is a Child Protection Enforcement Agency, but it has nothing. The coalition was trying to do exactly the same thing in Gladesville. The Government, however, has increased police numbers. I give an undertaking that that police station is not going to close.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.

COMMITTEE ON THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN AND THE POLICE INTEGRITY COMMISSION

Report: Second General Meeting with the Commissioner of the Police Integrity Commission

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle) [1.00 p.m.]: I speak to the report on the second general meeting with the Commissioner of the Police Integrity Commission, which was held on 10 December 1997. The House will later deal with the third general meeting, but it is important to put on the record the issues that were discussed at the second general meeting. The report contains a transcript of the proceedings of the meeting and the written answers to questions provided to the committee prior to the meeting. The committee met with the commissioner and his senior managers at an interesting time. The commission had been operational for approximately 18 months and by then a number of important issues had arisen.

The first was categorisation of complaints against police. The category of complaints that fall under the jurisdiction of the PIC—that is, category one complaints—is determined by agreement between the Ombudsman and Commissioner of the Police Integrity Commission. At the time of the general meeting the agreement was under review. The committee was informed that in the commission's experience some of the classes of category one complaints were being adequately investigated by the Police Service. In particular,

complaints relating to unlawful access to and dissemination of information by police officers were investigated to the satisfaction of the PIC. As a result, the commissioner did not feel it was still necessary for the PIC to be involved in the investigation of those complaints.

Together with the Ombudsman, the commissioner was reviewing class or kind agreements to ensure that the types of complaints which fell under the jurisdiction of the PIC warranted the involvement of the PIC. The draft revised schedule included the following changes: complaints about unauthorised dissemination of information were removed from the jurisdiction of the PIC and complaints against police officers of or above the rank of superintendent were also removed from the jurisdiction of the PIC, although the commission was still to be informed of all complaints against very senior officers. Since the general meeting the committee has followed up on this issue and Commissioner Urquhart has informed the committee that the final schedule, as agreed by the Ombudsman and the Commissioner of the Police Integrity Commission, contains the following as category one complaints:

- A. A complaint that a police officer has or may have sought, or may seek, to pervert the course of justice by giving false evidence, by destroying or interfering with evidence, withholding evidence or fabricating evidence, or by influencing another to do so;
- B. A complaint that a police officer has or may have committed or may commit
 - (i) an assault which has caused or may cause a serious injury and which could lead to a charge of maliciously wounding or inflicting grievous bodily harm upon a person pursuant to s.35 of the *Crimes Act 1900*; or
 - (ii) an offence (including larceny) relating to property where the value exceeds \$5000; or
 - (iii) any offence (other than assault occasioning actual bodily harm) punishable on conviction on indictment by a maximum sentence of imprisonment or penal servitude for five years or more.
- C. A complaint that a police officer has or may have solicited or accepted, or may solicit or accept, a benefit for himself/herself or for another in return for failing to carry out his/her duties.
- D. A complaint that a police officer has or may have sought or may seek to interfere improperly in the investigation by another police officer of an alleged offence.
- E. A complaint that a police officer investigating an offence alleged to have been committed by another police officer has or may have improperly failed to carry out, or may improperly fail to carry out, his/her duties in the course of that investigation.

- F. A complaint that a police officer has or may have manufactured, or may manufacture, a prohibited drug, cultivated or may cultivate a prohibited plant, or supplied or may supply a prohibited drug or a prohibited plant, unless the amount or number of such drug or plant is less than the indictable quantity therefor as specified in the *Drug Misuse and Trafficking Act 1985*.

The complaints I have categorised are by far the most serious complaints a police officer may be involved in. Therefore, those would be the complaints that fall directly within the jurisdiction of the PIC. The commissioner informed the committee that 440 complaints had been considered and decided upon and 390 complaints were referred to the commission from the Police Service and the Ombudsman, of which 369 were referred back to the Ombudsman to be dealt with under the Police Service Act. With respect to the 22 cases referred back, the PIC requested reports from the Police Service on the progress and outcome of the investigation. The PIC took over 21 investigations.

The commissioner informed the committee that the commission's budget for this financial year of \$12.3 million was sufficient for it to perform its functions. The new powers to intercept telecommunications would, however, mean that additional funding would be sought for the acquisition of telephone interception equipment. At the time of publishing the annual report of the PIC interest was shown in the commissioner's statement that the commission does not have the resources to investigate each complaint in category one. The commissioner expanded upon that in the general meeting and explained to the committee that although the commission did not investigate each category one complaint received by or referred to the commission, it would be directly involved in the investigation of all category one complaints, either investigating them itself or monitoring and auditing them when they are referred back to the Ombudsman and the Police Service. That is anticipated by the Police Integrity Commission Act and the provisions of the Police Service Act. On page 30 of the transcript the commissioner told the committee:

Given a matter is going to be investigated by the police, there are various ways in which we can have involvement. We can monitor it, we can audit it, or we can manage or oversight it. Those two concepts of management or oversight mean that we provide to the Police Service guidelines or detailed guidelines as to how they should go about that particular investigation.

With respect to telecommunications interception, the commissioner expressed concern at the time of the meeting that the commission was not then able to seek its own interception warrants but could only view telecommunications interception product

obtained legally by other agencies. The commission awaited a declaration by the Commonwealth Attorney-General to enable the PIC to obtain warrants for telephone interception. It is pleasing that since the time of that report and meetings with the commissioner that power has now been conferred by the Federal Government, although it took a long time.

The commissioner reported to the committee that the passage of the Law Enforcement (Controlled Operations) Act 1997 had removed the restriction on the use of investigations involving controlled operations. Prior to the passage of the legislation the commission avoided using the techniques of controlled operations because of uncertainty surrounding the legality of evidence contained during such operations. The commissioner noted that it could now use controlled operations where appropriate without being inhibited by the lack of statutory support.

Honourable members would recall the work of this House during the passage of the controlled operations legislation. The Police Integrity Commission is a crucial part of the reforms proposed by Justice Wood in his report on the Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service. It is the committee's role to oversee the functioning of the PIC to ensure that it operates as intended by the legislation. The committee found the general meeting to be a useful mechanism for overseeing the Police Integrity Commission.

I thank Commissioner Urquhart; Assistant Commissioner Tim Sage; Director of Operations, Special Services, Andy Nattress; Information Manager, Denis Lenihan; and Director of Corporate and Information Services, Mr Rawson, for their co-operation and attendance at the meeting. I also thank my fellow committee members for their participation and, in particular, convey my thanks to the committee secretariat for its assistance in the production of the report and in the ongoing work of the committee.

Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [1.08 p.m.]: The Police Integrity Commission is a comparatively new institution and at the time of this general meeting it was a very new institution. Naturally enough, therefore, it has been the subject of ill-informed and ill-directed criticism. In particular, I refer to the avalanche of criticism directed at the PIC in the wake of the commissioner's first annual report. Much of that criticism was made by people who should have known better. Certainly it was a live issue at the time. The meeting led to the report with which we are now dealing.

The criticism has two broad trends. One was that the PIC had done nothing and was thus simply window-dressing. I regarded that comment at that point in the history of the PIC as puerile and childish. Those who levelled the criticisms soon had to withdraw them as a result of an equally simplistic event: a notorious set of public hearings in the PIC with the attendant media hoopla. Perhaps the moral of the story is that one should not simply base an assessment of how well an institution is doing on how well it does in the media. Another equally misguided but more substantive complaint was made in the wake of the first annual report. That was a claim, which was made after taking a comment in the report completely out of context, that the PIC did not have the resources and funding necessary to investigate all police corruption.

That meant that both the PIC and the State Government were failing and that police corruption would rage unchecked. It is clear from the report that those criticisms were ill-founded. The meeting dealt precisely with what matters the PIC would investigate and what matters it would not investigate. It is useful to remember the genesis of the PIC. It resulted from the Wood royal commission. It is also useful to remember that the Wood royal commission did not recommend that the newly established body ought to investigate all police wrongdoing. That was never intended, and is not to be particularly desired. The PIC certainly has a role in monitoring the quality of police internal affairs investigations, as recommended by the royal commission. In broad terms, the more serious allegations of corruption and wrongdoing are investigated by the PIC.

The actual decisions as to what ought to be investigated by the PIC are made in light of a classification of offences into different categories and the reaching of formal agreements as to what the PIC will investigate and what other agencies will investigate. The use of such class and kind agreements is not unusual; their precedent is the agreement between the Ombudsman and the Police Service. There is a clear regime about what should and should not be investigated by the PIC. Some of the complaints that have been made publicly against the PIC for not investigating every allegation of police misconduct are simply misguided and wrong. As a matter of practicality, that is an absurd position to adopt. As a matter of principle, it is certainly not what the PIC was requested to do, and it was certainly not what the Wood royal commission recommended it should do.

Report noted.

**Report: Sixth General Meeting with
the NSW Ombudsman**

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle) [1.13 p.m.]: The sixth general meeting with the Ombudsman was part of a series of ongoing meetings held between the Committee on the Office of the Ombudsman and the Police Integrity Commission and the Ombudsman in relation to the role and function of the PIC. The report is a collation of the evidence taken at the hearing on 10 December 1997 and written answers to questions on notice. As with previous general meetings, the sixth general meeting provided a valuable opportunity to discuss with the Ombudsman, the Deputy Ombudsman and the Assistant Ombudsman salient issues in relation to the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman and the functioning of her office.

The committee heard evidence about conciliation of police complaints. The increasingly high failure rate for conciliation of police complaints remains an issue of concern to both the Ombudsman and the committee. The committee was informed that, while some action had been taken by the Police Service to improve the success of conciliation, a number of recommendations arising from the Ombudsman's special report on conciliation of police complaints had not been adopted. They included completing the review of the authority of conciliation officers to settle matters on behalf of the Police Service, improving procedures to review unsuccessful conciliations and trends in the conciliation process and enhancing the profile of conciliation. As failure rates had increased to 35 per cent of conciliation hearings, an increase from 27 per cent in 1996-97 and 12 per cent in 1994-95, conciliation of police complaints is clearly an issue that needs to be resolved and one which the committee will continue to monitor.

The second item dealt with by the committee related to the employee management scheme, often referred to as the EMS. The committee was also interested in the Ombudsman's ongoing evaluation of the employee management system of the Police Service. An independent evaluation is crucial in determining the success of the EMS, and the committee looks forward to examining the evaluations by the Ombudsman and the consultant to the Police Service. Subsequently this House has passed legislation, of course, putting in place the external audit of the reform of the Police Service. It will be important for the Ombudsman, the Commissioner of the Police Integrity Commission and the committee to monitor exactly what happens in that process. The committee also dealt with key issues contained in the Ombudsman's annual report.

The Ombudsman noted the increasing levels of complaints. In 1996-97, 8,111 formal written complaints were received. That represents an increase of 5 per cent on the previous year and 37 per cent in five years.

The committee was informed that the increase in complaints did not necessarily reveal a deterioration in standards in the public service, but may indicate that the public's expectations of accountability have improved and that the issues of access and awareness of the Office of the Ombudsman have also improved. The Aboriginal complaints unit was also discussed. The committee was informed of the work of the unit during 1996-97. Of particular note was the access and awareness program run in rural and remote areas, which had contributed to a 50 per cent increase in Aboriginal complaints about police misconduct. We also discussed complaints about councils. The Ombudsman noted that conflict between general managers and councillors remains a problem. Another source of concern was the use and abuse by councils of legal advice and threats of defamation suits by councils. The Ombudsman will have ongoing oversight of those issues.

During discussion about the youth liaison officer who had been appointed, the Ombudsman noted that this had increased the Ombudsman's accessibility to young people. A large increase in complaints from or on behalf of young people about police had resulted. The Ombudsman was hopeful of constructive change arising from a co-operative approach by the Police Service regarding its relationship with young people. Police initiatives in relation to the recruitment of further Aboriginal officers was noted, which is a welcome measure. The Protected Disclosures Act also falls within the ambit of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction and that of the committee. In the past year the Ombudsman audited more than 100 internal reporting systems for protected disclosures. Of these, 72 per cent were found to be inadequate, as they contained mis-statements about the Protected Disclosures Act or failed to provide advice or guidance to employees about protected disclosures.

Subsequently, as disclosed at the seventh general meeting, an enormous amount of work has been undertaken by the Ombudsman to review the protected disclosures procedures of government departments and also to take up with them their responsibility to provide a proper method for their employees to make protected disclosures. It is anticipated that a further review of the Protected Disclosures Act will take place during the year. The Ombudsman raised several issues relating to the

Freedom of Information Act. The first was the low level of compliance with annual reporting requirements of the Act. A review of approximately 100 annual reports of agencies revealed that many failed to put sufficient information in their annual reports.

The Ombudsman informed the committee of a difficulty with the Act that had emerged as a result of a complaint about a refusal to release documents sought by a complainant. The Ombudsman explained that she was unable to report on a particular matter uncovered through an investigation about an FOI request, because the Act prevented her from disclosing information about exempt documents. However, the subject of the exempt documents was a matter that would have fallen under the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman had the original complaint related to the subject matter rather than being an FOI appeal. On a more positive note, the Ombudsman noted that, generally speaking, agencies were complying with FOI requests and that New South Wales compared favourably with other States in relation to releasing information to applicants.

Like the committee's previous general meetings with the Ombudsman, the sixth general meeting was a valuable opportunity for the committee to question the Ombudsman about the functioning of her office. I thank the Ombudsman, Ms Irene Moss; the Deputy Ombudsman, Chris Wheeler; Assistant Ombudsman, Steve Kinmond; and the staff of the Office of the Ombudsman for their co-operative approach to the meeting and the important information they provided to the committee. Once again, I thank my colleagues on the committee for their participation. I note again the excellent work of the committee secretariat both in the organisation of the meeting and its ongoing work in deliberative session of the committee.

Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [1.20 p.m.]: As is often the case, a significant amount of time at this meeting revolved around local councils. One issue discussed at some length—which had been discussed at previous meetings and, no doubt, will be discussed at future meetings—is the relationship between general managers and councils. The Ombudsman noted in her opening address that a key area of concern was the high level of breakdowns in relations between general managers and mayors and/or councillors. Subsequently, the Ombudsman indicated that the rate of separation of general managers from councils is inordinately high. She quoted figures from the Institute of Municipal Management that show 83 general managers leaving 177 councils over five years. I am profoundly

sceptical that that signifies any massive crisis in western civilisation. I am not even sure it means a particular deterioration in the comfort level of general managers, although that is not a particularly bad thing.

Some 83 out of 177 sounds, and no doubt is meant to sound, high. But it is over five years, which, in general terms, means it is only 10 per cent per annum. On the face of it I cannot accept that is an alarming figure. Frankly, it would seem to be not terribly different from private sector rates. I remember, as a councillor, going through many explanations about the new Local Government Act and the brave new world it would introduce. There would no longer be jobs for life, and people with outside qualifications would obtain senior council jobs. I do not have access to the separation figures before 1993, but I would assume that for town clerks the figure would be less than 10 per cent. If the separation figures are not now greater, the 1993 Act has been a failure. It was one of the inevitable consequences of the Act.

If there is now some generalised whine from senior council ranks about town clerks and general managers not having lifetime tenure, the object of complaint is the 1993 Act rather than anything councillors are doing. The Act introduced five-year contracts. Unless contracts are not, at least on occasion, renewed the introduction of the new five-year system is a joke. I am certainly sceptical that a 10 per cent per annum increase suggests any serious overall problems. I am particularly sceptical if the complaints come from general managers or bodies closely associated with general managers. There are certainly breakdowns between general managers and councils, but often they have nothing to do with the introduction of the new Act. I am concerned, however, that the complaints are being used as representative of all separations when the real issue is about changed positions as a result of the 1993 Act.

The way in which the issue is put—that general managers are being forced out of jobs—implicitly suggests that the responsibility lies with the elected mayor and councillors. On a number of occasions at these committee meetings I have put proposals to various witnesses that whatever is happening is not solely the responsibility of councillors. Invariably, the witnesses agree but continue to describe a situation that imputes blame to councillors. It is not unusual to find conflict between councillors and non-elected staff, as I have said many times. In general terms councillors who do not disagree with staff are probably not doing their job.

Councillors are democratically elected to implement a platform of election promises. On some occasions those promises will be opposed by council staff, for good or bad reasons. None of that in any way suggests any great surprise, or that anyone with any experience of local government would have a problem with it. Another point worth making is that it is a little absurd for general managers to complain about the consequences of the 1993 Act. Although the Act introduced five-year contracts, it also introduced far greater powers for general managers as opposed to councillors. It seemed to me that was a trade-off. If general managers want to go back to jobs for life, they also need to have their powers dramatically reduced.

Report noted.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE HEALTH CARE COMPLAINTS COMMISSION

Report: Third Meeting on the Annual Report of the Health Care Complaints Commission

Mr MILLS (Wallsend) [1.24 p.m.]: I am pleased to speak to the report of the Joint Committee on the Health Care Complaints Commission on the third annual general meeting with the Health Care Complaints Commissioner. Such a meeting is required each year by section 65(1) of the Health Care Complaints Act. During these meetings the committee discusses with the commissioner any issues arising from the commission's latest annual report. In this case, the annual report for 1996-97 was examined. The process not only ensures that the commission has greater accountability to the Parliament of New South Wales, but also serves to increase the committee's understanding and appreciation of the work of the commission and the particular issues it faces in its day-to-day operations.

It seems that every year some of the key issues the committee focuses on are time taken for investigations, numbers of complaints referred to conciliation, and budget and resources. Obviously all these issues are extremely important to the effective running of the commission and the faith of health consumers in its investigatory and prosecutorial activities. As such, they will continue to be examined by the committee in future years. Last year all these areas showed improvements. In 1996-97 the commission took an average of 318 days to resolve complaints, compared with 365 days the previous year. The commissioner acknowledged that the length of investigations was a perennial problem, although a great deal of administrative energy had gone into improving them.

The committee was told benchmarks for investigation time are now set externally. It is accepted that 18 months is the outside time frame within which the commission can conduct an investigation for various reasons, in particular time frames prescribed under the legislation for respondents to comply with commission requests for information. The number of cases referred to conciliation were up on the previous year. Further, the commissioner reported to the committee that as at February 1998 the health conciliation registry was finding that parties to conciliation conferences were reaching agreement in around 80 per cent of cases. In relation to budgetary and resourcing issues, the commission reported that in administrative and legal cost matters the commission is substantially more cost effective than other government bodies.

Rising legal costs, in particular, have been an ongoing concern for the commission in recent years. To restrain this escalation the commission has refused to pay excessive senior counsel rates. No more than \$2,000 is paid, whether the commission is briefing senior or junior counsel, and no barrister approached to act on its behalf has knocked it back. The commission has also made savings by requiring only one peer review report per case instead of the previous two. This policy was implemented with the consent of the medical defence organisations and the health registration boards. So far it has saved the commission more than a quarter of a million dollars per year. Each year the commission's operations improve significantly.

The committee was established in tandem with the commission. It has, therefore, had the opportunity to watch the commission mature from a unit within the Health Department into a much stronger and more autonomous organisation. It would probably be fair to say that at first the commissioner found it difficult to get used to the idea of answering to a watchdog parliamentary committee, particularly one that has taken its obligations under the Act as seriously as the present committee membership. However, throughout the process she has been unfailingly responsive to the committee's request for information, and implemented many of the committee's suggestions in the commission's policies and procedures. I believe it has been a productive relationship.

As chairman of the committee for the past three years I take this opportunity to congratulate the commissioner on the many initiatives she has undertaken during the past year. The introduction of the patient support office has been a major success and, as recommended in the committee's report into local complaint handling, should ultimately be

expanded into every area health service region in New South Wales. Patient support officers offer a way for the commission not only to facilitate health care complaints at the local level but also to improve the quality of service offered to complainants by health care providers. Between July 1997 and January 1998 the patient support office showed a 61 per cent increase from the previous six months in the number of complaints it handled.

The commissioner advised the committee that the patient support office has now also targeted divisions of general practice by addressing their divisional meetings and advising on what it has to offer. It is hoped that this will facilitate and improve the handling of complaints received by practitioners in private practice which, at present, is an area that falls through the cracks in the health system as it does not come within the Health Department's jurisdiction. It is sometimes said that the investigation and resolution of individual health care complaints does little to improve the overall quality of health care because these are one-off adverse events, and any action taken is reactive rather than pro-active. I therefore praise the commissioner for taking the commission further than its basic investigatory and prosecutorial role, and establishing it as a key player and motivator in the field of quality assurance within the New South Wales health system.

The commission has consistently worked to raise the standard of clinical practice in New South Wales through competency based reregistration for physicians. I believe this issue is important to the ongoing credibility of our medical profession. Last year I was fortunate to be part of a committee delegation that visited Canada and I was impressed by the implementation there of a system of random auditing of target groups. I would fully support a replication of that system here. To this end, I would also like to congratulate the commissioner on the work she has done in relation to the establishment of a peer review reference panel to ensure the integrity of expert medical opinion.

Lastly, I turn to the ministerial review of the Health Care Complaints Act 1993 which was undertaken in the latter part of 1997 and chaired by Dr John Cornwall. The review's final report recommended some important extended powers for the commission, such as the power to require the production of information from health providers without the need for a subpoena. The committee endorses that recommendation and it is hoped that if those powers are introduced, even better investigation time frames and outcomes will result.

On behalf of the committee I thank the Health Care Complaints Commissioner, Ms Merrilyn Walton, for her attendance at the meeting and congratulate her on the 1996-97 report, which I understand the Public Bodies Review Committee, which examines the annual reports of all New South Wales public bodies, found to be of a high standard. I also thank the committee secretariat for their efforts in preparing the committee report, in particular the director, Catherine Watson, and the committee officers, Susannah Dale, Glendora Magno and Susan Want. I also thank my parliamentary colleagues for their continued high level of interest and co-operation.

Report noted.

Report: Unregistered Health Practitioners: The Adequacy and Appropriateness of Current Mechanisms for Resolving Complaints

Mr MILLS (Wallsend) [1.31 p.m.]: On 6 May this year the Joint Committee on the Health Care Complaints Commission resolved to conduct an inquiry with the following terms of reference:

That the Committee examine the experience of consumers in dealing with unregistered health practitioners (including those practising in alternative health care fields) with a view to establishing:

- (a) what complaint mechanisms exist for consumers;
- (b) whether these complaint mechanisms are effective;
- (c) whether there is scope for strengthening voluntary codes of behaviour or conduct;
- (d) whether the provisions in the Health Care Complaints Act 1993, relating to unregistered health practitioners are appropriate or whether they need strengthening;
- (e) any other related matters.

An effective complaints handling system is one of the principal ways in which the community can maintain the highest standards of health care delivery and protect health care consumers. The pattern of health care delivery in Australia is changing. Until recently, all but a small percentage of health care was provided by registered professionals, well trained in western scientific medicine, operating within the legal framework of guaranteed qualifications and training, annual reregistration, licensing, peer review and so on. Now, possibly more than one-quarter of health care services are provided outside the registered health practitioners system. Yet only as few as one-twentieth of the number of complaints made to the Health Care Complaints Commission last year

related to services provided by unregistered health care practitioners.

The reasons for this low rate of complaints are not clear, and may include a different level of expectation about the service to be provided by unregistered health care practitioners, compared with those who are registered. The joint parliamentary committee that oversees the HCCC is inquiring into the experience of consumers in dealing with unregistered health practitioners, so as to be able to recommend any improvements needed in existing complaint-handling mechanisms concerning unregistered health care practitioners, and any regulatory mechanisms that may involve consumer protection in the expanding unregistered and alternative health care fields.

This discussion paper has been prepared to assist practitioners, organisations, community groups and individuals to present submissions to the committee's inquiry into unregistered health practitioners. The committee looks forward to receiving this assistance from the community. Registered health practitioners have clearly identified complaint systems and systems to monitor and control the minimum standards, as specified in each of the health registration Acts, but unregistered practitioners mostly do not. Section 4 of the Health Care Complaints Act provides that unregistered practitioners include dietitians, masseurs, naturopaths, acupuncturists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, audiologists, audiometrists and radiographers. In 1996-97 the commission received approximately 50 complaints against unregistered health practitioners. The commission is concerned that this number is not reflective of the true extent of consumer dissatisfaction with these occupational groups. Under the legislation the commission has jurisdiction to investigate complaints about unregistered practitioners, but because there is no relevant disciplinary body little can be done.

The committee believes it would be in the public interest to examine whether there are sufficient codes of conduct and mechanisms to empower consumers to complain about alternative health practitioners, and whether there are adequate disciplinary mechanisms to deal with those complaints. The commissioner has continually raised ongoing problems regarding unregistered practitioners in her annual reports and during her meetings with the committee. For example, during the first annual general meeting with the committee, the commissioner referred to deregistered health practitioners working as therapists, especially when they have been struck off for sexual misconduct. Page 31 of the evidence taken by the committee states:

Given that there is no responsible board in existence any more because all these people have been struck off from the Psychologists, Medical and Nurses Boards, and given that if the public interest demanded their removal in terms of potential harm to clients, that does not automatically go just because they are not registered anywhere. So the Commission, because we are also responsible under the Act for alternative health practitioners, even though they are not registered, we see we have a clear responsibility to advise the government of the day whether there might be a necessity for legislation or not.

The commissioner has written a discussion paper on the subject entitled "The Public Interest and the Struck-off Therapist", dated April 1996. It discusses the problems encountered when discussing sexual misconduct in the context of the struck-off health professional or unregistered health practitioner. I mentioned some alternative health care fields covered by the Health Care Complaints Act, but there are many other alternative health care fields that are not defined in the Act but are of interest to the committee in this inquiry. They include counselling, iridology, reflexology, social work, homoeopathy, herbalism, traditional Chinese medicine, kinesiology, depth tissue therapy, aromatherapy, reiki and hypnotherapy.

The Act allows the commission to investigate and conciliate complaints against registered and unregistered health practitioners but it does not empower the commission to impose the same disciplinary procedures on both categories of practitioner. The action that the commission can take against an unregistered practitioner is restricted to speaking to the practitioner about the complaint, terminating the complaint, or referring the complaint to the Director of Public Prosecutions. The impact of the commission's restricted powers to discipline unregistered practitioners needs to be considered in the context of the self-regulated nature of alternative health care. Alternative health care is characterised by a proliferation of disciplines, modalities, concepts and techniques and a wide range of standards, educational qualifications and efficacy. At present any person can practise as an alternative health practitioner without having to meet any objective criteria.

Self-regulation is effective only for practitioners who are members of a professional association with appropriately structured entry criteria and the capacity to enforce minimum standards of practice, regular upgrading of clinical and professional skills, and adherence to an ethical code of conduct. Recently the Victorian Ministerial Advisory Committee issued a paper entitled "Traditional Chinese Medicine: Report on Options for Regulation of Practitioners". This document arose from a request by the Australian Health

Ministers Advisory Council to the Victorian health department to carry out research into traditional Chinese medicine, which is perhaps the leading form of alternative health care in Australia. It was funded by the Commonwealth, Queensland, New South Wales and Victorian governments to commence studying traditional Chinese medicine and options available for dealing with complaints, the training of practitioners, and so on. So other work is going on in this field, and it is supported by Australian governments.

Issues principally to be considered by the inquiry are: whether the existing mechanisms offer consumers an effective means of dealing with their complaints against unregistered health practitioners; whether the provisions of the Health Care Complaints Act relating to unregistered health practitioners require amendment; whether there is scope for strengthening self-regulation in unregistered fields of health care; and whether statutory regulation of unregistered health care practitioners is required. One other issue that arises is the impact of the national competition policy and whether regulation or self-regulation needs to be progressed. That is an outline of the discussion paper and the issues to be considered by the joint committee in its inquiry.

Report noted.

[Mr Deputy-Speaker left the chair at 1.41 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

PARLIAMENTARY PRECINCTS POLICING

Mr SPEAKER: I wish to update members on the outcome of discussions that have taken place between the Commissioner of Police and the Presiding Officers since the commencement of the Parliamentary Precincts Act 1997 on 10 July 1997. Under section 27 of the Act a memorandum of understanding may be entered into between the Commissioner of Police and the Presiding Officers "regarding the exercise by police officers of functions (under this Act or otherwise) in the parliamentary precincts or the parliamentary zone or both". After negotiations between Police Service solicitors and the Parliament, a memorandum was signed by the commissioner and the Presiding Officers on 23 June 1998. The intention of the memorandum is to set out in clear terms the important aspects of the legislation and some additional matters in order to clarify the respective roles of authorised officers of the Parliament and police.

The memorandum is in three parts. Part 1 contains background information about what is in the Act, such as what the parliamentary precincts and zone are, who are authorised officers and what they can do, and the provisions relating to directions and the removal of persons from the precincts and the zone. There is then a section specifically on the role of police and authorised officers under the Act. It should be noted that neither authorised officers nor police have power to give directions to members of Parliament.

Part 2 of the document contains the actual memorandum. There are agreed protocols for when police are called to Parliament House. The most important provisions are that: police are exempted from the protocol if they are in pursuit of persons into the zone or precincts; the Parliament can require an urgent or non-urgent response from police; police attending are able to enter with their appointments, including firearms; police will take control of any situation when called out until they relinquish that control back to Parliament House; and there are certain restrictions on police in carrying out investigations, executing process and interviewing, holding in custody or arresting members or staff within the precincts. Members should be aware that, although police can carry firearms within the precincts in emergency situations, by long-standing practice they voluntarily hand firearms into the Parliament's custody while they are in the building.

Part 3 comprises attachments such as copies of the deposited plans for the parliamentary precincts and zone, any resolutions of the Houses in respect of the parliamentary zone and any agreements entered into between Parliament House and its neighbours, the State Library and Sydney Hospital. Another issue that has been required to be addressed since the Parliamentary Precincts Act was passed is whether the provisions of the recently passed Security Industry Act 1997 apply to Parliament House. An opinion from the Crown Solicitor has been received that indicates that the Security Industry Act does not fetter the ability of the Presiding Officers to administer the security of the parliamentary precincts. The Crown Solicitor advised:

Those who would assert the Security Industry Act as has derogated from what I consider to be a broad power conferred by the Parliamentary Precincts Act to carry out "security activities" in the Parliamentary precincts must demonstrate an intention in that later general act to do so. I am unable to find an intention in the Security Industry Act to subject to the licensing and liability regime of the Security Industry Act the powers preferred by the Parliamentary Precincts Act in relation to the parliamentary precincts and the exemption from liability.

I have taken this opportunity to send a copy of the memorandum of understanding to every member of the House so they can become familiar with its provisions.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

Mr SPEAKER: I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of Mohamad K. Al Swaidi, First Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, United Arab Emirates. On behalf of all members I welcome him to the Legislative Assembly.

MINISTRY

Mr CARR: In the absence of the Minister for the Olympics, who is overseas on Government business, any questions relating to his portfolio will be answered by the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads.

ALLAN SPARKES BRAVERY AWARD

Ministerial Statement

Mr WHELAN (Ashfield—Minister for Police) [2.22 p.m.]: Honourable members would be aware that in June awards were conferred upon a number of New South Wales residents for outstanding acts of bravery and courage. One such award was particularly noteworthy. Allan Sparkes of Coffs Harbour was a police officer in May 1996 when he risked his life to rescue 12-year-old Jai Waddell from a flooded stormwater drain. His extraordinary display of courage will be formally acknowledged in Canberra tomorrow when Mr Sparkes will be presented with the Cross of Valour, Australia's highest civilian award, by His Excellency the Governor-General.

On 3 May 1996 Mr Sparkes and Gavin Dengate, a fellow police officer, responded to an urgent call for assistance to rescue Jai, who was trapped in a flooded stormwater drain. Mr Sparkes secured by a rope lowered himself into the drain system. He was washed downstream in his attempt to locate Jai. The rope was not long enough and Mr Sparkes was hauled back by his colleague. Despite the danger, he re-entered the pipe and secured a longer rope. Again, his efforts were unsuccessful and he was hauled out.

When screams were heard further downstream at the junction of six other pipes both officers entered the flooded system in complete darkness, without lifelines, torches or emergency air supplies, and began searching the maze of pipes. Finally, after crawling back up one of the drains, Mr Sparkes

made contact with Jai, three metres underground. He managed to calm Jai and coaxed him into letting go of debris he was clutching to allow him to be washed downstream, where Mr Sparkes caught him. Holding Jai in front of him, Mr Sparkes then allowed the current to wash both of them to the junction, where an ambulance officer, Michael Marr, was positioned. The pair were lifted from the drain.

Mr Sparkes suffered lacerations and abrasions and, throughout the dramatic rescue, was in grave danger of losing his life. Mr Sparkes was awarded the Cross of Valour, the highest civilian award Australia can confer on one of its citizens. It equates with the Victoria Cross and is only conferred for acts of the most conspicuous courage in circumstances of extreme peril. Since the introduction of the Australian Honours in 1975, the Cross of Valour has been awarded on only two other occasions. I am sure all honourable members will want to join with me in commending Mr Sparkes for his efforts in saving the life of a young boy and congratulating him on the receipt of the nation's highest civilian award.

Congratulations must also go to the others involved in the rescue. Gavin Dengate received the Star of Courage, Australia's second highest civilian bravery decoration, and Michael Marr was awarded the Bravery Medal. They will receive their awards from the Governor-General next week. This heroic effort at Coffs Harbour that I have singled out is but one of 50 incidents of bravery throughout Australia that have been recognised, among them 18 individual and two group citations for New South Wales recipients.

One such award was made posthumously to a young English tourist who gave his life at a house fire at Woolloomooloo whilst warning other occupants to vacate the premises. Bravery manifests itself in many ways. Some of the acts for which awards were conferred in June included apprehension of an armed robber, participating in mine and sea rescues and attempting to reason with an armed gunman. Such acts by people who so unselfishly commit themselves to the wellbeing of others deserve public acclamation. The recipients can feel justifiably proud of their courageous actions.

Mr FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [2.26 p.m.]: I feel privileged to have the opportunity to respond to the Minister's statement, which referred to the conferring of a bravery award on former Detective Senior Constable Allan Sparkes. Allan was at the time he performed this act of bravery—and still is—a personal friend. Honourable members who are

familiar with the north coast would know that at times it is hit by severe storms which often cause washaways, such as occurred in this incident. Detective Senior Constable Sparkes and a fellow officer, Gavin Dengate, responded to a call for assistance in the same selfless manner we often hear about displayed by emergency personnel, who too often are not given due credit for putting their lives at risk in the line of duty.

On this occasion both officers put themselves at considerable risk, but in so doing, they saved the life of Jai Waddell. The stress suffered by Mr Sparkes during that incident has caused him to retire from the Police Service. He now manages a bed-and-breakfast with his wife, Debbie, and his daughter, Nicola. I wish him and his family all the best.

I pay tribute also to Gavin Dengate, who is still a member of the Police Service. I congratulate the recipients of all the awards that will be presented during the next two weeks. In particular, it has been a privilege to count Allan Sparkes among my friends for the past nine years. Again I wish him all the best for the future.

PETITIONS

Governor of New South Wales

Petitions praying that the office of Governor of New South Wales not be downgraded, received from **Mr Blackmore, Mr Brogden, Mrs Chikarovski, Mr Collins, Mr Debnam, Mr Ellis, Ms Ficarra, Mr Glachan, Mr Hartcher, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humpherson, Dr Kernohan, Mr Kerr, Mr Kinross, Mr MacCarthy, Mr Merton, Mr O'Doherty, Mr O'Farrell, Mr Phillips, Mr Photios, Mr Richardson, Mr Rozzoli, Mr Schipp, Ms Seaton, Mrs Skinner, Mr Smith, Mrs Stone, and Mr Tink.**

Ryde Hospital

Petition praying that Ryde Hospital and its services be retained, received from **Mr Tink.**

Land Tax

Petitions praying that land tax on the family home be abolished, received from **Mr Blackmore, Mr Brogden, Mrs Chikarovski, Mr Collins, Mr Debnam, Mr Ellis, Ms Ficarra, Mr Glachan, Mr Hartcher, Mr Hazzard, Mr Humpherson, Dr Kernohan, Mr Kerr, Mr Merton, Mr O'Farrell, Mr Phillips, Mr Photios, Mr Richardson, Mr Rozzoli, Mr Schipp, Ms Seaton, Mrs Skinner, Mr Smith, Mrs Stone and Mr Tink.**

Land Tax

Petition praying that land tax on the family home be abolished, received from **Mrs Skinner.**

Kings Cross and Woolloomooloo Policing

Petition praying for increased police strength at Kings Cross local area command and police foot patrols in Woolloomooloo, received from **Ms Moore.**

Surry Hills Policing

Petition praying for increased police presence in the Surry Hills area, received from **Ms Moore.**

East Sydney and Darlinghurst Policing

Petition praying for increased police presence in East Sydney and Darlinghurst, received from **Ms Moore.**

Kings Cross Policing

Petition praying for increased police presence in Kings Cross, received from **Ms Moore.**

Hunter Koala Preservation Society

Petition praying for provision of a carers licence to the society, received from **Mr Martin.**

Transmission Structures

Petition praying that telecommunication carriers not be allowed to erect transmission structures within close proximity to residential homes, schools, child-care centres, hospitals, and aged-care centres, received from **Mr Brogden.**

Western New South Wales Traffic Access

Petition praying for improved access for vehicular and rail traffic into the western areas of New South Wales, received from **Mr Armstrong.**

Northside Storage Tunnel Ventilation Exhaust

Petitions praying that a permanent ventilation exhaust not be located in Tunks Park valley or the car park adjoining Long Bay, received from **Mr Collins, Ms Ficarra, Dr Kernohan, Mr MacCarthy, Mr Richardson, and Mrs Skinner.**

Corrimal Railway Station

Petition praying that Corrimal Railway Station be staffed at weekends and on public holidays, received from **Mr Markham.**

Moore Park Passive Recreation

Petition praying that Moore Park be used for passive recreation after construction of the Eastern Distributor and that car parking not be permitted in Moore Park, received from **Ms Moore**.

Moore Park Light Rail System

Petition praying that a light rail public transport system be established to serve sporting venues and the Fox entertainment centre at Moore Park, received from **Ms Moore**.

Lakes Way Link Road

Petition praying that the Government reinstate its commitment to the construction of the link road from the new Bulahdelah Mountain bypass to The Lakes Way, received from **Mr J. H. Turner**.

Mattara Lodge

Petitions praying that funds raised for an accommodation service for disabled people by Mattara Lodge be used for that purpose, received from **Mr Mills** and **Mr Neilly**.

On-site Sewage Management

Petitions praying that the guidelines for on-site sewage management be withdrawn, received from **Mr Fraser** and **Mr Rixon**.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Placing or Disposal of Business**

Business taking the place of matters of public importance Notice of Motion No. 1 postponed on motion by Mr Hartcher.

REGULATION REVIEW COMMITTEE**Report**

Mr Shedden, as Chairman, tabled the report entitled "Pawnbrokers and Second-hand Dealers Regulation 1997", dated September 1998.

Ordered to be printed.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**INVERELL HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT**

Mr COLLINS: My question is to the Minister for Health. Why do the budget papers show that

\$827,000 has been spent on a new \$1 million emergency department at Inverell District Hospital when work has not even started yet? Given that a New England health official has previously complained that capital works funding in the area simply vanishes, can the Minister now tell the Parliament where the money has gone?

Mr Whelan: On a point of order. The question is too long and contains three questions.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the House is correct. However, the Chair has always extended a degree of leniency to party leaders, and I include the Premier, of course, in that description. In this instance I have extended that latitude, but the Leader of the Opposition is reminded that the latitude is limited. The question is in order but should not be taken as a precedent for future questions. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat and the Leader of the House will refrain from responding to interjections.

Dr REFSHAUGE: I am delighted to receive a question from the temporary Leader of the Opposition. There is only about 2½ weeks left to go for—

Mr Collins: On a point of order—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I will not hear any points of order in relation to the Minister's answer. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

Dr REFSHAUGE: I have been assured by the Premier that we will do everything we can to make his job permanent. We want him to be the permanent Leader of the Opposition. Forever! He does not even smile at the moment; he does not need to. The honourable member for North Shore is gone too. The Labor Government's capital works program over the past four years has been of the order of \$1.8 billion. This compares with the \$1.3 billion the coalition spent on capital works in its last four years. We are rebuilding country hospitals that the coalition neglected. I have been informed that the electricity supply to Inverell is also being progressively upgraded as part of the expanded redevelopment.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for North Shore to order.

Dr REFSHAUGE: Peter McKenna, the Independent mayor—

Mr Photios: On a point of order. The question of the Leader of the Opposition was about the missing \$1 million; it was not about the Independent candidate for a seat. When will he tell us where the money is? Where is the \$1 million?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. I call the honourable member for Ermington to order. I call the honourable member for North Shore to order for the second time.

Dr REFSHAUGE: She is very vocal in the local paper too! She is very vocal. She is saying that that area has certainly benefited from Liberal representation, people like Phillip Smiles. Great representation! The man who forgot to put "not" in the letter.

Mrs Skinner: On a point of order. I know you allow preamble, Mr Speaker. I have been to Inverell District Hospital. I have seen—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Chair does not allow a preamble to a point of order.

Dr REFSHAUGE: That is the way the representation of the North Shore people is going. The local members love them and leave them and take them to Inverell to get them out of the area.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Coffs Harbour to order.

Dr REFSHAUGE: The electricity supply is also being upgraded at the hospital. There is a recommendation to improve the electrical switchboard which requires upgrading as well. The expenditure on the hospital and on the redevelopment is in line with the plans for the area.

SYDNEY WATER SUPPLY CONTAMINATION

Mr ANDERSON: My question is directed to the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning. What is the latest information on Sydney Water?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Manly to order. The Chair needs no assistance from those on the Government back bench.

Mr KNOWLES: Last week I provided an update on Sydney Water and I wanted to provide a further update today so I thank the honourable member for his question. As honourable members are aware, the McClellan inquiry found that the parasites in Warragamba Dam may be present in

layers. This has led Sydney Water to extract higher quality water from different points in the dam. I am advised by Sydney Water that this procedure of managing around the contaminated water by lifting and lowering the off-take screens remains in place. Sydney Water is still monitoring the procedure to see if this can be used on a permanent basis. As the weather has become warmer over recent days the layers of parasites have settled more rapidly than expected. They have dropped a further 20 metres from a depth of 11 metres to 31 metres during the past week.

Sydney Water has advised of a number of other initiatives being taken at the Prospect filtration plant to reduce the risk of parasite breakthrough. These include: a comprehensive audit of the plant to ensure that there are no cross-connections in the configuration of the plant which could lead to contamination; installation of six particle counters to provide an early detection system of particles breaking through the filters which are the same size as cryptosporidium and giardia; the use of a prototype testing plant at Prospect by Australian and international experts to further assist the performance of the filtration process; and a much stricter regime of flow control to avoid sudden flow surges. In addition, of course, extensive cleaning and inspection of the plant has now been completed.

The McClellan inquiry advised that a range of additional laboratory tests are proceeding in France, the United States and at the CSIRO laboratories in Hobart. Honourable members should note that this is the first time in the world that a contamination incident such as this has been monitored in real time. It also explains why there has been so much interest from the medical and scientific community. For instance, I draw the attention of members to an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* this morning by the University of Sydney's Clinical Associate Professor at the Department of Infectious Diseases, Peter Collignon. Mr Collignon makes the point that these parasites are:

... likely to have been in all water supplies for centuries and in varying numbers in nearly every city in Australia and internationally.

It is therefore not surprising that one of the main water reservoirs in Adelaide has now been shut down for almost two months following the discovery of giardia and only last night the Premier of Victoria found himself dealing with a giardia scare in a Melbourne suburb. The Victorian Government press release indicated that the test results for giardia and cryptosporidium showed that levels for both

parasites were, "no higher than normal". The question that obviously springs to mind is what does the Victorian Government define as normal, given the absence of national standards?

Mr Photios: On a point of order. I draw your attention to standing order 137 which relates to the general rules applying to questions. The Leader of the Opposition has foreshadowed an urgent motion today relating specifically to Sydney Water in the hope that for the first time this House can debate it with perspectives from both sides. The question asked by the honourable member for St Marys was not specific; it was very general, and therefore certainly embraces the motion. It is in direct contradiction to Standing Order 137(5) which states that questions cannot anticipate discussion upon an order of the day or other matter—not just order of the day.

Mr SPEAKER: The memory of the honourable member for Ermington is a little faulty. He will recall that when a similar point of order was taken earlier in the year I ruled that as the House had not decided which urgent motion should be dealt with, the standing order was not relevant.

Mr KNOWLES: As I was saying, the Adelaide and Victorian experiences point to the fact that this issue is certainly not unique to Sydney; indeed, it occurs all around the world. Nevertheless, the Government's focus remains fixed on dealing with the problem and protecting public health. I am advised by New South Wales Health, working with its independent expert panel, that the prognosis for lifting the boil-water alert on Saturday appears positive. Tests for parasites in the filtration plant over the past week have been clear or parasites have been present in very low quantities. Of course there continues to be no significant increase in reported illness that is attributable to the water supply. In addition, Peter McClellan will be signing off on the interim health protocol being developed by the expert panel and New South Wales Health prior to the lifting of the alert.

I am sure honourable members will be pleased to know that just last week Sydney Water won a prestigious award from the Australian Institute of Engineers, a national award for water. The category was specifically to commend Sydney Water for its contribution to improving our environment. Opposition members are laughing! I remind the House that water plant 21 is part of this Government's plan for cleaning up Sydney's waterways. The award is clearly an endorsement of

the Government's action in this regard. I am pleased to inform the House that the award I now have in my hand was presented to Sydney Water by none other than the Leader of the Opposition, Peter Collins. Thank you for the award and thank you for the endorsements of our plan. I seek leave to table the Peter Collins award.

Mr Photios: On a point of order. You have in the past immediately placed on three calls any member who did just that, including me. I ask if you have one rule for me and one rule for Government members?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Ermington has prompted my memory. I place the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning on three calls to order.

NEW ENGLAND AREA NURSES

Mrs SKINNER: My question is addressed to the Deputy Premier, Minister for Health, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Why is the Minister forcing nurses in the New England area, who have been stranded by the recent floods and cannot get to work, into taking compassionate leave, annual holidays and sick leave when flooding is an act of God?

Dr REFSHAUGE: The administration of the rosters is left to the local area.

SYDNEY CONVENTION INDUSTRY

Mr IEMMA: I ask the Minister for Energy, Minister for Tourism, Minister for Corrective Services, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Arts: Will the Minister tell the House what he is doing to secure international conventions for Sydney?

Mr DEBUS: As the honourable member for Hurstville has implied, Sydney is doing exceedingly well in this area. Sydney was recently named as the world's number one convention centre, which is no mean feat. However, it was not the first recognition of Sydney as an attractive tourism destination, nor will it be the last. Earlier this year this wonderful city was voted the best value city in the world by a travel and leisure magazine, one of the world's leading travel publications aimed particularly at the lucrative American market. A fortnight ago that same magazine named our city as the best destination city in the world for the third consecutive year.

Mr Hartcher: After they boil the water.

Mr DEBUS: I am pleased to be able to report also that the recent efforts of the Federal Minister for Tourism and the honourable member for Ermington to talk up doom, gloom and crisis in our tourism industry—as the honourable member for Gosford wishes to do now—have completely failed. Peak tourism bodies such as the Tourism Council of Australia continue to report in press releases that there is no evidence to suggest that tourism numbers have recently been affected. The Sydney Convention and Visitors Bureau has confirmed that not only is it business as usual for Sydney's convention tourism industry, but it has begun to boom even more.

Mr Photios: Your own department is on record as saying it has been affected.

Mr DEBUS: It is quite the opposite from that constantly implied by the honourable member for Ermington. In the very week that the honourable member for Ermington was scaremongering about the water situation, Sydney was winning the right to host four international conferences.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai to order.

Mr DEBUS: I am pleased to announce today that since 24 July, when Sydney was named the number one convention city in the world, Sydney has won the right to host eight international conferences which will inject more than \$14 million into the New South Wales economy. I repeat: eight new conventions representing 4,300 delegates and more than \$14 million in direct tourism earnings.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to order.

Mr DEBUS: The overall boost to the New South Wales economy stands to be substantially more than that because statistics show that about 50 per cent of international delegates to conventions in Sydney add a holiday onto their convention stay. To put these convention wins in context, I remind honourable members that in the last financial year Sydney hosted 24 international conferences. In the seven weeks since then Sydney has won the right to host eight international conferences. We have won those over Cairns, Argentina, Brazil and competition from around the world. In other words, Sydney's tourism convention business is booming.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Ermington to order for the second time. I call the honourable member for Gosford to order.

Mr DEBUS: Sydney continues to be an attractive destination for tourists and business travellers and remains the gateway for most international visitors into Australia.

JERILDERIE DISTRICT HOSPITAL

Mr ARMSTRONG: My question without notice is directed to the Deputy Premier, Minister for Health, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Why has Jerilderie's only resident doctor been denied medical visiting rights to his local district hospital, forcing him and his patients to make an 80-kilometre round trip to Finley Hospital if they require surgery? What is the point of having a hospital if the local doctor cannot use it?

Dr REFSHAUGE: For many years—when Labor was in office and during the term of the former coalition Government—the decision about visiting rights was the same. The proposals about how visiting rights are approved remains unchanged and if the Leader of the National Party is suggesting that every doctor in country and city New South Wales can have visiting rights to any hospital of choice—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of the National Party to order.

Dr REFSHAUGE: —that is an interesting new policy that has never been introduced.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of the National Party to order for the second time.

Dr REFSHAUGE: The Opposition may want to change the policy and allow doctors to do what they want, even if they have restrictions on their practising, rather than what the medical board would like them to do. It is interesting to see the new policy—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the National Party, having asked a question, has now interjected on four occasions. I have called him to order twice. He is fully aware that the Minister is entitled to answer the question without being subjected to constant interjections. If the Leader of the National Party intends to interject continually after asking a question I will think twice about giving him the call.

Dr REFSHAUGE: I will have the proposal of the Leader of the National Party costed, like his proposal to build an autobahn through the Blue Mountains. He seems to have grandiose ideas. I suppose he is the viagra of politics—

Mr Armstrong: On a point of order. The standing orders require the Minister to address the question. The Minister has not addressed Jerilderie District Hospital.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! No point of order is involved.

AMBULANCE SERVICE STAFF NUMBERS

Mr LYNCH: My question without notice is to the Deputy Premier, Minister for Health, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. What action has the Government taken to strengthen the Ambulance Service?

Dr REFSHAUGE: We shall see if they interject on this question. When the coalition lost office there were fewer ambulance officers than when the coalition assumed office. That was the coalition's commitment to the Ambulance Service. New South Wales has one of the finest ambulance services in the world. Every day across the State hundreds of ambulance officers respond to emergencies and care for patients. As at July there was a record 2,376 uniformed officers. By the middle of next year that number will be further boosted by an extra 53 officers.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for North Shore to order for the third time.

Dr REFSHAUGE: Those 53 new ambulance officers will include 10 paramedics, 27 general ambulance officers and 16 patient transfer officers.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Oxley to order.

Dr REFSHAUGE: The extra paramedics will mean that a new paramedics service will be available from the Castle Hill ambulance station in Sydney's north-west by the middle of next year. The Ambulance Service is also expanding the new patient transport officer initiative. The first 16 patient transport officers began work earlier this year transporting some of the routine and non-emergency patients. The new service is expected to be introduced by the end of the year at ambulance stations at Colyton, Concord, Liverpool, Macquarie Fields, Penrith, Randwick, St Ives and Summer Hill. Patient transport officers have already proved successful and will continue at Balgowlah, Blacktown, Drummoyne, Fairfield, Hurstville, Maroubra, Naremburn and Ryde. The patient transport officer scheme will free up frontline ambulances to respond to emergencies more quickly. The additional 53 ambulance officers will bring to

234 the total number of uniformed positions since Labor came to office.

I remind the House that prior to the last election Labor gave a commitment that it would increase the number of ambulance officers by 100 during its first term in office. The Government has more than doubled that number and will go further. The Carr Government has also dramatically reduced the age of the ambulance vehicle fleet. When the Government came to office, 45 per cent of ambulance vehicles were more than eight years old. This year more than 100 new ambulances have been purchased, which means that less than 20 per cent of the fleet will be more than eight years old. The Government has dramatically improved the quality of the fleet—an issue that the former coalition Government ignored; it constantly downgraded the ambulance service.

The newer fleet will help to ensure quicker response times and the best possible service for patients across the State. Most of the 40 new Toyota four-wheel drive ambulances designed to handle rough terrain have already been delivered. Many of my colleagues in the National Party and some Government members, particularly those from country areas, will be aware that all of those vehicles have gone to rural areas. I know that local members in country areas are appreciative of the work that the Government has done to provide extra ambulances, particularly four-wheel drive ambulances, for those areas.

The delivery of 60 new Volkswagen ambulances has begun and 10 patient transport vehicles are already on the road. The Government has built up the ambulance service, it has increased the number of ambulance officers by more than 200. By contrast, the former coalition Government had fewer ambulance officers at the end of its term than were employed when it came to office. The Government is committed to rebuilding the ambulance fleet. When the Carr Government came to office almost half the ambulances were more than eight years old—a legacy of the former coalition Government. The Government has reduced that proportion dramatically, to 20 per cent.

SYDNEY WATER SUPPLY CONTAMINATION

Mr O'DOHERTY: My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Education and Training. If Sydney Water is supposed to reimburse schools for water purchased during the prolonged water crisis, why did the Minister tell a school in Sydney's west yesterday that it had to use its education funds for the purpose?

Mr AQUILINA: The Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning dealt with this matter in the House this morning. The Minister gave an undertaking that the policy in relation to schools being compensated for water used remains. I confirm that that is the case. The point I made yesterday in relation to schools was that it is ludicrous for any school to be considering charging students 5¢ a cup for water when the school has \$144,000 in the bank.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT DISABLED ACCESS

Mr WATKINS: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads. What is the Government doing to improve access to public transport for people with disabilities?

Mr SCULLY: This morning I had the pleasure, together with the Minister for Disability Services, to announce an important new public transport initiative for disabled people. I was disappointed that none of the members opposite turned up to hear the announcement. Mobility is absolutely vital to people with disabilities. They have every right to expect the same level of access to public transport that other members of the community expect. The Government wants to encourage people with disabilities to use public transport. To do that, it must offer fully accessible services that make it easier for people with disabilities to get around. As at 31 July this year 227 ultra-low-floor buses, including 116 buses with a ramp for wheelchair access, were delivered to the State Transit Authority. The new buses have been distributed to all Sydney depots and to Newcastle.

Mr Photios: A coalition program.

Mr SCULLY: The credit must go to Brian Langton.

Mr Photios: Brian told you so.

Mr SCULLY: We call him Gumby because he has more positions on policy than the Kamasutra. Brian Langton initiated the purchase of wheelchair-assisted buses. The Government made the decision to ensure that all future bus purchases by the State Transit Authority are wheelchair accessible. Honourable members opposite should not have the gall to suggest otherwise.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai to order for the second time. I call the honourable member for Pittwater to order.

Mr SCULLY: People with disabilities not only have a right to be able to access public transport, but they also have a right to know when those services will be available. Therefore, I was pleased to announce today a major expansion of timetabled wheelchair-accessible bus services in the Sydney metropolitan area.

[Interruption]

I do not think I should respond to the interjection.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I agree with the Minister. He should ignore the interjection and address his remarks through the Chair.

Mr SCULLY: I am under orders from the Premier to keep the honourable member for Ermington in place.

Mr Photios: We want Peter.

Mr SCULLY: We want Peter; we want him there forever. We love him. Timetabled wheelchair-accessible bus services have been operating only in the Rockdale-Sans Souci-Miranda area and on the route 888 Circular Quay-Darling Harbour city shuttle. The announcement made today was that an additional 18 routes across Sydney will have a special timetable for wheelchair-accessible buses. I am pleased to inform the House that the routes include a large area of Sydney—that is, the city, the inner west, the northern beaches, the lower north shore and the eastern suburbs.

Mr Carr: This is such good news, but they all look so glum over there.

Mr SCULLY: They do.

Mr Photios: We called for this policy. He is my puppet.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Ermington to order for the third time.

Mr SCULLY: The Minister for Disability Services and I were quite moved by the words of Clive Mowbray at today's announcement. Warren Mowbray is a quadriplegic who has been in a wheelchair for 33 years. He told us that he had not been on a bus in all that time. The Minister for Disability Services and I were pleased to hear Mr Mowbray say that the provision of wheelchair-accessible buses means that he will now be able to use public transport. It was a real buzz for both the Minister and I to hear that a person in his position

will now be able to access a bus without assistance. Timetabled wheelchair-accessible services are being progressively introduced around Sydney, with priority given to routes that provide links with other accessible transport services, including train stations and ferries. Routes that stop near medical services, shopping complexes and entertainment, sporting and recreational venues are also given priority.

As if that was not enough news for today, a further announcement was made which was also received well by the local community. The Minister for Disability Services and I unveiled four new Bondi and Bay Explorer buses, which will provide a high-quality, professional bus fleet to transport thousands of visitors who use the service. The Bondi and Bay Explorer service is strongly supported by the local member. It takes visitors and tourists around Sydney's eastern harbourside and Bondi Beach, stopping at popular destinations such as Elizabeth Bay House, Vaucluse House, and Watsons Bay. The buses feature a striking blue and white design depicting a coastal scene that reflects the Sydney scenery. They also feature the latest fully accessible technology—

Mr Phillips: Boring.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will ignore the interjection.

Mr SCULLY: I am insulted. He said he is bored with this. I will give him all stops.

Mr Phillips: No, wrap it up. It is a boring speech.

Mr SCULLY: Listen, I have nine minutes and 46 seconds left. Elderly sightseers, the disadvantaged, people in wheelchairs and families with young children will no longer have to struggle to get up the stairs. It also means airconditioned comfort for State Transit customers.

CITYRAIL TICKET INSPECTORS

Mr PHOTIOS: My question without notice is to the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads. Why is he forcing rail ticket inspectors to act as tax collectors, with instructions to issue nine fines a day? Now that he plans to take staff off Sydney railway stations at 3.00 p.m., will this not increase the number of honest commuters fined \$100 because they cannot buy a ticket?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The question has two parts. I will allow the member to rephrase it.

OLYMPIC REGIONAL PRE-GAMES TRAINING

Mr NEILLY: My question without notice is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. What is the Government doing to attract international athletes to train in New South Wales?

Ms HARRISON: The question is certainly of great interest to the regional areas of New South Wales.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Pittwater to order for the second time.

Ms HARRISON: We all know, following green and gold sock day this week when all my colleagues were good enough to wear their green and gold socks, that Sydney is only two years out from the Olympics. Many of us will not have time to train for a gold medal, but if there were a gold medal for disloyalty to a leader, some members opposite would get one. Following Sydney's successful bid for the 2000 Olympic Games, my department established the pre-Games training task force, a joint venture between the Department of State and Regional Development and Tourism New South Wales, to maximise the benefits of pre-Games training for New South Wales.

I am happy to say we have been successful in attracting overseas teams to a number of locations throughout the State, and the work of the unit is continuing. In individual sports, 20 of the Olympic teams have so far committed to pre-Games training in New South Wales. The Ukraine Olympic team, as well as teams from zone two of the African nations, will train in Albury. I acknowledge that the honourable member for Albury has been a great advocate in achieving that goal. The economic benefit to the Albury-Wodonga area alone of its hosting the Ukraine Olympic team—which numbers around 350 people—is estimated to be worth at least \$4 million to the local community.

The United States and Swiss rowing teams will travel to Maclean. The Australian Paralympic archery and fencing teams will train in the Shoalhaven. Equestrian teams from Korea, Thailand and Swaziland will train in Lochinvar, and the US equestrian team will train in Scone. The Irish track and field team will train in Wollongong, where I had the pleasure of having a Guinness on St Patrick's Day last year, after a Cabinet meeting. Other contracts have been negotiated with the German and Italian rowing teams, including their canoe and slalom teams, to train at the Sydney International

Regatta Centre at Penrith. The yachting teams from Great Britain, New Zealand, Italy, the United States of America and Portugal will train in Sydney.

The Belgian track and field teams will also come to Sydney. In addition, most of the host regions are developing long-term plans for cultural and sporting exchanges with their new international guests as a continuing legacy of this experience. After the World Cup in Sydney in February, a number of international swimming federations inspected facilities at Blacktown, the Mingara sporting complex on the New South Wales central coast, and Newcastle. We are confident they were more than happy with the facilities on show in each of those areas.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister is explaining how various electorates may become involved in the Sydney Olympic Games. Members of the Opposition front bench may find some humour in that, but other members may want to know whether Olympic facilities will be located in their electorates. I ask those on the Opposition front bench to remain silent while the Minister provides this information to the House. I call the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai to order for the third time.

Ms HARRISON: The United States Olympic administration has contracted with Bankstown City Council to locate its operations in that area, while the Japanese are discussing similar arrangements with Campbelltown City Council. The Canadian Olympic administration is currently negotiating with Ryde City Council and Macquarie University for a similar arrangement following a recent successful visit. The pre-Games training task force and regional Olympic task force in the Illawarra and Hunter regions have also assisted to host various delegations to showcase prospective pre-Games training venues. The task force continues to work closely with the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games and Sydney Paralympic Organising Committee, particularly in relation to pre-Games training guides and visits from national Olympic and Paralympic committees.

The task force is also energetic in its approach to achieving its desired results through attendance at key international events, targeting specific countries and sports, and providing a range of host delegation services to countries and teams visiting the State. These plans have served to build relationships and foster co-operation, trust and understanding, resulting in a keen interest in this State's outstanding facilities and regions as a preferred destination for

pre-Games training. These facilities are the result of the Government's effort to develop them around the State, while its Federal counterpart has abrogated that responsibility.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of the National Party to order for the third time.

Ms HARRISON: Now we find, leading up to a Federal election, that all of a sudden John Howard is wandering around the State of New South Wales offering money hither and thither without any planning.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Gosford to order for the second time.

Ms HARRISON: We have been trying to get the Federal Government to put money into regional facilities for the past three years. Through the contacts the pre-Games training task force is developing with Olympic nations, it will continue its efforts to try to ensure that training is spread through the whole of New South Wales and the spirit of our Games is brought to as many of our communities as possible. It has not been the intention of the task force to become the dictator for all pre-Games activity, but rather to be the international contact point, to assist task forces in their activities and refer different requests from overseas to these groups.

From an internal point of view, State and Regional Development and Tourism New South Wales are working to ensure that regional New South Wales has access to all the business and tourist opportunities the Games offer. Rural areas are kept up to date with regular releases of forthcoming tenders listed by the OCA, and other business opportunities developed through the Investment 2000 program and Business Club Australia. Tourism New South Wales has developed a special regional program that highlights special attractions and suggested areas of activity for regional tourist councils. New South Wales Sport and Recreation also regularly communicates developments in pre-Games training to regional groups, hosting statewide task force meetings as well as providing written communication to each group, sharing recent initiatives and results.

New South Wales will also be staging the majority of Olympic test events prior to the Games. These events, which are SOCOG endorsed, are designed to load test the Olympic facilities and associated infrastructure to provide an advanced state of readiness for the Games. The major events committee is also supporting as many events as

possible so that we can truly test our co-ordination and major facilities. We have helped to fund a number of major events. An amount of \$30,000 has been allocated for the four continents rhythmic gymnastics; \$6,000 for the international badminton challenge; \$80,000 for the world women's squash championships; \$15,000 for the disabled world lawn bowls championships; \$35,000 for the world waterski racing championships; \$75,000 for the ITU Sydney world cup triathlon; and \$10,000 for the world cup fencing tournament.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Gosford to order for the third time.

Ms HARRISON: I do not have information about what the Government has done for major events but I will inform the House of those events later.

CITYRAIL TICKET INSPECTORS

Mr PHOTIOS: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Transport. Given that he has axed 250 jobs from Sydney's railway stations, many of them after 3.00 p.m., why is he turning ticket inspectors into tax collectors?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Kiama to order.

Mr SCULLY: I remember that, when we were in opposition and we asked questions about government policy, the present Leader of the Opposition would say, "What is the Minister likely to say?" The trouble is that the Leader of the Opposition never asks questions, so he therefore never gets any answers. This is probably the dumbest question I have been asked all session. John Howard will make every ticket office at every train station across the CityRail network a tax office for the Commonwealth Government. Opposition members reckon that only chiko rolls will be taxed. What about newspapers and coffee? Every train ticket will have John Howard's teeth marks on it.

The other problem is that the honourable member for Ermington believes what he reads in the newspapers. He gets the papers in the morning, reads them and thinks, "This is my story for the day. It must be true." Does the honourable member for Ermington want to know what really happens? A couple of employees pull out a bit of State Rail Authority notepaper, write a note, fax it to the union, and it is sent to the newspapers. It is put into the paper and it suddenly becomes CityRail's senior management policy, just like the Government's tax-related system. It is important to protect revenue on behalf of the taxpayers of this State.

At least people on this side of the House know that the Government is spending a lot of money on security. That money does not grow on trees. Some of that money comes from honest, fare-paying passengers who have valid tickets when they embark on a train journey. The vast majority of people in the community would expect us to have revenue protection officers ensuring that people on trains have valid tickets. The honourable member might be interested to know how the system works. At present he has no idea. We tell our revenue protection officers that we expect them to check around 300 to 400 rail tickets each day. That is part of their job; we pay them good money from taxpayers funds to do that job. We say to them, "If after checking those 300 to 400 tickets you find that someone does not have a valid ticket and he or she does not have a reasonable excuse, give that person an infringement notice." Government members believe that to be appropriate.

I have some good news for members of Parliament who live on the central coast. The Government conducted a survey and found that just over 99 per cent of people on the central coast pay their fares. I am pleased to say that this Government has in place an appropriate and balanced policy. CityRail staff, in particular revenue protection officers, must exercise their duties with sensitivity and responsibility and they must recognise that they have a duty to taxpayers to ensure that people have a valid ticket when they take a train ride.

NEW ENGLAND AREA NURSES

Dr REFSHAUGE: I have a supplementary answer to a question asked earlier today by the honourable member for North Shore regarding New England area nurses. I am advised by the New England Area Health Service that the hospital staff are being given compassionate annual and sick leave if they are unable to attend work due to flooding. This is occurring due to the inflexibility of the award under which these staff work. I am advised that the chief executive officer is dealing compassionately with each and every case of hardship.

INVERELL HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

Dr REFSHAUGE: Earlier today I was asked a question by the Leader of the Opposition regarding the Inverell hospital upgrade. I am advised that funding for the Inverell hospital upgrade is quarantined, like all capital works funding. I am further advised that the area health service is working with the Department of Public Works and Services to finalise plans for the upgrade. These

plans will be available for community consultation in November. I am advised that the upgrade will be completed by June 1999. Any delay in this project is largely the result of working with staff to ensure that the upgraded facilities meet their needs.

Mrs Skinner: On a point of order. The question made reference to the fact that this money had already been spent by the Minister. It did not refer to the fact that the money had been quarantined.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Questions without notice concluded.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

Goods and Services Tax Education Impact

Mr AQUILINA (Riverstone—Minister for Education and Training, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Youth Affairs) [3.27 p.m.]: This matter is urgent because the Howard Government is seeking to perpetrate a massive lie on the people of Australia. The Federal election is being debated right now in the Australian community and voters have a right to know that education will not be free of a goods and services tax, despite what the Federal Government has claimed. The Federal Government must be forced to give answers now as to whether it will compensate the States for the extra administrative burden it is placing on schools to claim back tax. The Federal Government must state how it will fund non-government schools if GST revenue is to be given to the States. People must be made aware before they vote on 3 October that the Federal Minister for Schools, Senator Ellison, has admitted that parents will have to pay for the goods and services that they buy to educate their kids at home. The Federal Government must be forced to explain itself. With the possibility of a GST only days away nothing could be more urgent than a debate about the devastating effects of a GST on education today.

Sydney Water Supply Contamination

Mr COLLINS (Willoughby—Leader of the Opposition) [3.29 p.m.]: The Opposition's motion is obviously more urgent. The Government wants to cover up Sydney's water crisis; the Opposition wants to solve it. Our motion is urgent because Sydney's water crisis is close to eight weeks old—eight weeks of inconvenience for the people of Sydney—and the Government still offers no solution. The Minister simply dithers and procrastinates. He had a

reputation for this even before the water crisis, but that reputation is now set in concrete. Week after week the public has listened to Labor cover up the problem and blame other people.

Mr Stewart: On a point of order. On my understanding of the standing orders the Leader of the Opposition has to debate urgency and not the motion. The Leader of the Opposition is not debating the urgency of the motion before the House.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I am sure the Leader of the Opposition will now deal with the reasons his motion should receive priority.

Mr COLLINS: The motion is urgent because we have heard the Government day after day in this Parliament blame everyone under the sun. The people of this State want solutions and answers. They want to know that there is a plan. Perhaps the Government is not in a position to roll out the whole plan today, but it should make a start. The Government should commit itself to fast-tracking a solution to overcome the lengthy delays that generally occur with an environmental impact study. This is the most universal environmental issue to have ever affected the people of Sydney. On this very day we cannot drink our water without it being boiled. At the least the Government could start the ball rolling today, clear the decks, cut the red tape and prepare the ground for a solution to be put in place.

If debate of this motion is allowed, the Minister will say that we have not heard the last word from the McClellan inquiry. That is so, and we look forward to hearing the recommendations of that inquiry. But, since we last debated this issue, the Minister has conceded that the water purity problem could continue for the next couple of years. That is simply not good enough. The people of Sydney want to know that the Government has a real sense of urgency and that the Parliament is prepared to get behind the Government to start putting a solution in place. Legislation should be introduced to establish a drinking water standard. The starting point for debate should be the drinking water standard of the United States of America. Let this Parliament set an example for every Parliament in Australia, because the people of Sydney need urgent answers and reassurances.

Mr Stewart: On a point of order. The Leader of the Opposition has misunderstood the standing orders. He should be debating the urgency of his motion.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I uphold the point of order.

Mr COLLINS: The honourable member for Lakemba asks why the motion is urgent. The motion is urgent because the people of Lakemba want an answer. They want to know that the Parliament is prepared to work together to find a solution and get the ball rolling and that their local member will support a solution, starting today. While we wait for the McClellan report and for the Government to digest its recommendations, we should start preparing the ground and clearing the decks for expedition of a major upgrade to the filtration system, which must inevitably occur. If this urgency motion is granted, the Minister will say that we do not know which technical solution will be adopted and the Government would want to take further advice. That may be so. However, this urgency motion should be heard because the water purity problem affects each and every citizen of Sydney, all 3.5 million people, and they want an answer. They want to know that the Government will act, and not procrastinate as it has so far. That is why this motion is more urgent than the motion of the Minister for Education and Training.

Question—That the motion for urgent consideration of the honourable member for Riverstone be proceeded with—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 45

Ms Allan	Mr McManus
Mr Amery	Mr Markham
Mr Anderson	Mr Martin
Ms Andrews	Ms Meagher
Mr Aquilina	Mr Mills
Mrs Beamer	Mr Moss
Mr Carr	Mr Neilly
Mr Clough	Ms Nori
Mr Crittenden	Mr Price
Mr Debus	Dr Refshauge
Mr Face	Mr Rogan
Mr Gaudry	Mr Scully
Mr Gibson	Mr Shedden
Mrs Grusovin	Mr Stewart
Mr Harrison	Mr Sullivan
Ms Harrison	Mr Tripodi
Mr Hunter	Mr Watkins
Mr Iemma	Mr Whelan
Mr Knowles	Mr Woods
Mr Langton	Mr Yeadon
Mrs Lo Po'	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Lynch	Mr Beckroge
Mr McBride	Mr Thompson

Noes, 42

Mr Beck	Mr O'Farrell
Mr Blackmore	Mr D. L. Page
Mr Brogden	Mr Peacocke
Mr Chappell	Mr Phillips
Mrs Chikarovski	Mr Photios
Mr Collins	Mr Richardson
Mr Cruickshank	Mr Rixon
Mr Debnam	Mr Rozzoli
Mr Ellis	Mr Schipp
Ms Ficarra	Ms Seaton
Mr Glachan	Mrs Skinner
Mr Hartcher	Mr Small
Mr Humpherson	Mr Souris
Mr Jeffery	Mrs Stone
Dr Kernohan	Mr Tink
Mr Kerr	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr MacCarthy	Mr R. W. Turner
Dr Macdonald	Mr Windsor
Mr Merton	
Ms Moore	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Oakeshott	Mr Fraser
Mr O'Doherty	Mr Smith

Pairs

Mr Knight	Mr Armstrong
Mr Nagle	Mr Hazzard
Mr E. T. Page	Mr Kinross
Mr Rumble	Mr Slack-Smith

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX EDUCATION IMPACT

Urgent Motion

Mr AQUILINA (Riverstone—Minister for Education and Training, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Youth Affairs) [3.42 p.m.]: I move:

That this House condemns the Federal Government's proposed GST for its devastating effects on families educating their children in government and non-government schools.

The Howard Government is trying to be re-elected on a lie. It is telling the parents of Australia that education will be GST-free. That statement is simply untrue even on the Federal Government's own evidence. Make no mistake: opposition to the Federal Government's proposed goods and services tax is both wide and increasing. Why? Because the GST is a tax on education. To use the words of Bryce Courtenay, that most distinguished Australian author, who recently expressed his disgust about the GST's impact on the price of books, "A GST is a tax on literacy, it's a tax on education, it's a tax on

learning." In a recent media release the Federal schools Minister, Senator Chris Ellison, stated that "levies or compulsory fees for a subject, materials or computer use will be GST free provided ownership does not pass to the student".

This is the sort of verbose and confusing message being sent to parents by the Howard Government. The people of this State want to know what that statement means. I would like the Opposition to explain it to me, to spell it out in precise terms. What exactly is Chris Ellison saying? Does it mean that a woodwork project would not incur GST if the project stayed at school but would incur GST if the student took the project home to work on? Perhaps the shadow minister can explain that to me. It would mean that if a school buys a computer for educational reasons it is tax free but if a family buys a computer for educational reasons the parents will pay the tax.

If a school bought a textbook it would be tax free but if the student bought a textbook the student would pay the tax. That is stupid. Even worse, it is unfair. Diligent students studying for their higher school certificate obviously would want to purchase their own copy of texts in order to make notes as they study. Mr Howard says that if they do this they pay the tax. University students as a matter of course have to buy both textbooks and computer software. They too will be sluggish with a GST. Do not forget the massive extra administrative burden the Howard Government is placing on the States to claim back the GST on so-called GST-free items in schools. Thousands of clerical and administrative hours will be wasted in schools, time which could otherwise be spent on meeting the schools' educational needs.

I am fairly sure that the shadow minister for education will come to me saying, "Administrative staff in schools cannot cope with the overload they have. We need more administrative staff because of John Howard's tax." I am about providing education staff in schools and in the department, not about providing administrative staff. I am about reducing administrative overheads. I am about making sure that John Howard does not impose a GST on education.

The people of this State demand that the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the National Party and all other Opposition members come clean on where they stand. I would like to know the opinion of the shadow minister for education on a GST—a tax on learning, a tax on students, a tax on parents, a tax on schools and a tax on universities. The State Opposition's silence on this proposal is

deafening. We have heard not one word. How can Opposition members stand by and condone a tax which will see the people of this State suffer?

The shadow minister for education promotes himself as assisting school students. He should say no to John Howard's GST. On behalf of students he should plead that we want more schools and more money spent on students, computers and literacy. We do not want money wasted in tax. The coalition's colleagues elsewhere in Australia have not been as subservient to the Federal Government's tax plans. Principals, parents and volunteer parent organisations are by no means the only ones concerned about the impact of a GST.

The Liberal education Ministers in South Australia and Western Australia have expressed their concern about this destructive tax. The South Australian Liberal Party Minister has described the advice he is getting from Canberra as contradictory. The Western Australian education minister has also expressed concern about the direct effect of the tax on education. The colleagues of the Leader of the Opposition are publicly expressing concern about the impact of a GST in their States. How does the Howard Government expect the Australian public to be at ease with a new national tax when John Howard's own colleagues, supposedly players on the same team, are nervous about its implications?

Mr Fraser: No-one could be meaner than Johnny Aquilina.

Mr AQUILINA: The nightmare in administering this tax could be called a joke—I am not referring to the honourable member for Coffs Harbour—if it were not such a worrying scenario. Who is worried? Parents are worried. Students are worried. The volunteer organisations that devote hours of their non-paid time to schools every day of the year are now pondering whether to raise the price of cakes at fete cake stalls to take into account the cost of a GST. Local parents and citizens associations, whose dedicated parents raised \$30 million each year for schools across the State, have labelled the tax as iniquitous and destructive, as a massive and unprecedented attack on volunteers across Australia.

The Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations is concerned, and rightly so, at the prospect of well-intentioned but inexperienced people performing the role of Commonwealth tax collectors. As has been rightly said, John Howard now proposes to make every small businessman a tax collector. Through the GST on education he also now wants to make every school a tax collecting

agency. Parents and citizens associations will also incur increased costs for advice on how to administer this tax along with open-ended liabilities and a risk of being severely penalised if the tax is collected incorrectly. All goods and services provided by parent organisations will incur a GST. That includes uniforms and book pools, educational enrichment programs run by parent groups, the operations of school canteens and general fundraising activities. All one needs to do is go through the cost of school uniforms: a girl's uniform, size 11 to 16, costs \$58. Now add 10 per cent! Winter uniforms: skirts, size 14 to 16, cost \$49. Now add 10 per cent!

Even the canteen will be affected. The cost of canned drinks—and the House will recall that the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai had a little to say about water earlier today—will increase by 10 per cent. Frozen yoghurt costs 75 cents. Now add 10 per cent! Loose sheets of A4 paper cost \$1.80. Now add 10 per cent! Even a cheese salad roll, which now costs \$1.50, will have 10 per cent added. That is what it means for the canteens and the schools. That is what it means for the uniforms, for the kids in our schools. The goods and services tax will eat into every action, every activity, whether it is in school or out of school, and, of course, it is a major impost on education. In a recent article in the *Canberra Times* the President of the Australian Council of State School Organisations, which represents some 3 million parents across the country, said:

All nonprofit organisations will incur a GST if their turnover is above \$100,000.

He went on to say:

That might sound like a lot but say there are 500 kids in school for about 200 days a year and each child spends \$1 a day in the canteen, parent organisations which operate school canteens will be over the threshold.

It is a pretty heavy toll on parents who are working hard to run canteens. That is why we must oppose the GST, particularly a GST on education. [*Time expired.*]

Mr O'DOHERTY (Ku-ring-gai) [3.52]: The Minister for Education needs a basic lesson in numeracy. It works like this: items that will be subject to a goods and services tax will first have the wholesale sales tax taken away. What are those items that relate to school education that currently attract a wholesale sales tax of 22 per cent? Those items include lunch boxes, A4 and foolscap paper, crayons, drawing pads, computer disks, oil paints, envelopes, post-it notes, pens and pencils,

computers, diaries, satchels, glues and pastes, manilla folders, backpacks, mouse pads, wall planners, computer games, stationery, rulers, calculators, sticky tape, exercise books, paper clips, printer paper, water bottles, watercolour paints, ring binders, drawing pads, notepads, batteries, compasses, cricket sets, footballs and ink cartridges, to name but a few. They attract a 22 per cent wholesale sales tax.

When that is taken away after the imposition of a 10 per cent goods and services tax, guess what? The parents of New South Wales will save money. I will say it again: they will save money. The Minister thinks, in relation to a goods and services tax, that you take the retail price and add 10 per cent. He then thinks that he can run a great political scare campaign. The Minister should be aware that the electorate is smarter than that. The electorate will not be fooled by his gee whiz, bogeyman scare tactics about a goods and services tax. The goods and services tax is only imposed after the wholesale sales tax is deducted on all of the things I mentioned, and many others as well.

People will save money. The family income will be increased as part of a comprehensive tax reform package, not only a new tax. In fact, income for single-income families with children going to school will increase; income will increase for dual-income families with children going to school. Families are the major beneficiaries of increased income because of the comprehensive tax reform package that the Howard Government is offering to Australia, a plan to fix, once and for all, some of the fundamental problems in a broken tax system, a tax system which even Paul Keating said had to be fixed.

I am amazed and surprised that a man like Kim Beazley, who claims he stands for the truth, was able to argue against a goods and services tax when every credible economic analyst and commentator and every family in Australia knows that the tax system needs fundamental reform of the kind proposed by the Federal Government. Will tuition fees be GST-free? Yes. What is tuition? It is anything that relates to core curriculum or assessment tasks. That gives the lie to the irresponsible scare campaign being run by the Minister for Education and Training. I feel sorry for him. He has been asked by his mates in Canberra to do a job on the Howard Government, and it was a pretty pathetic attempt. The Minister should not worry; the election will be over very soon.

Will the GST be imposed on things such as books and computers and musical instruments that

are sold or leased to students by schools? The GST will be applied in the same way as it will be in retail outlets, but guess what? Many of those items will cost less because the wholesale sales tax will be taken off. Will a GST be imposed on items which are hired out by schools to students? That is what normally happens in relation to musical instruments and other things. There will be no GST on hired items. And so it goes on. Item by item the scare campaign being run by the Labor Party and by the Minister for Education and Training falls down because of the detail, the reality and the truth. I was rather amazed to hear the Minister tell the House—and it really touched my heart—that he wants to pay for educators and that he does not want to impose an additional administrative burden on schools. Members can check the record; that is what he said.

The Minister for Education and Training is responsible for the greatest additional impost on the administration of schools in New South Wales in modern memory. The back-to-school allowance is estimated to have cost primary and secondary schools in New South Wales in the order of \$1.1 million at the school level, that is to say, money that comes out of their global budgets. In addition, the Government has admitted in the budget papers to an administration cost to the education system of about \$4 million, which was, from memory, four times what the Minister promised the estimates committee hearing he intended to spend on the administration of the back-to-school allowance in New South Wales.

The scheme was purely and simply designed to have the Carr Government re-elected. Members should not simply take my word for that. Let me tell the House what Brian Chudleigh, the spokesperson for the Public Schools Principals' Forum, says. The Opposition asked the forum to estimate the cost to schools of administering the back-to-school allowance. Mr Chudleigh said that, because of the complex, ridiculous, unworkable, and, quite frankly, irresponsible way the Government went about administering this scheme, the cost to his school was eight days administration time at \$100 a day.

That is \$800 out of the school's global funds. That is money that should be spent on textbooks, computer software, pencils, paper for students, and craft material. It could have been spent on the training of teachers in literacy programs, or on bringing additional literacy help into the school. Brian Chudleigh estimated the cost at about \$1.1 million to all school budgets in New South Wales. That is money from their global funds. As I said, there is then the additional cost of \$4 million of the

system itself, the Minister having promised this House that the cost of the administration of the scheme would be about \$1 million. If members want to talk about cuts to effective education budgets, they need go no further than the New South Wales Minister for Education and Training. I will list one or two of the cuts he has foisted on schools in New South Wales. There is \$55 million that has come out from school budgets, from their global funds, because of the 2 per cent productivity cuts that he imposed to help pay for teacher pay increases.

That \$55 million will be cut from global school funds. It is money that will now not be available for textbooks, additional teaching time and the training and development of teachers. If a school saves money on funding for its utilities, the Minister deducts that money from the budget for the following year. The Minister did not want schools to apply for a rebate from Sydney Water, but for those schools that do apply, will that amount be deducted from the global funding for utilities next year? Will the Minister take that into account when he calculates how much money will be allocated to schools for utilities funding?

Funding for casual teachers has been taken from schools. Every day my office is flooded with faxes from schools from all over New South Wales. Goodooga Central School has showered members of this House, including me, with faxes because it cannot find casual teachers. The Minister's cuts have affected payment for casual teachers. Under the former coalition Government special schools received a supplementation but they have not received it under the Carr Government. It is part of the \$55 million per annum taken out of school funding by the Carr Government, the \$55 million that has been diverted from education funding for the back-to-school allowance. That is apart from the administration costs that I discussed earlier. An amount of \$55 million has gone out in 1.1 million payments of \$50 to parents across New South Wales, who are supposed to be grateful for all the additional largesse of the Government.

Parents have told the Opposition that they wish the Government had given the allowance to the schools. I visited a school in Londonderry that is in need of airconditioners. I asked how many students were at the school and I was told there were about 400. I said, "Do you know that \$20,000 was sent out by John Aquilina to the parents in your community?" They could not believe it. The Government could not provide airconditioners for their students, who swelter in the summer in temperatures of 40 degrees plus in a classroom called the microwave and freeze in the winter. The

Minister is aware of the school I am referring to. Yet the Minister gives \$20,000 to the community, none of which is providing basic education for students in that school. In addition to that \$55 million that the Minister has taken away, this year alone the Carr Government has taken from schools \$71 million in annual capital works funding. I have visited schools near the electorate of the honourable member for Lakemba and those schools are asking for money to fix their buildings.

Mr Stewart: You have not been to my electorate.

Mr O'DOHERTY: With the changed boundaries I believe the schools are in the electorate of the honourable member for Lakemba. Those schools are asking for funding for additional buildings because the Minister has taken away one-third of the value of the school building program, which is equal to \$71 million annually, since 1995. The Carr Government should be condemned for imposing those cuts, and the Howard Government should be congratulated.

Mr STEWART (Lakemba) [4.02 p.m.]: I speak strongly in support of the motion and, in doing so, I point out to the House that I have been watching the gestures of the honourable member for The Hills, who was shaking his head. That is because he is dismayed at the codswallop put forward by the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai. He was supposed to speak about how the GST will affect schools, but he talked about everything except that. The motion deals with the unfortunate predicament the Howard Government has found itself in because of the great sham that will detrimentally affect our school system.

We know now that there will be a 10 per cent across-the-board GST that will affect most education needs. That includes the cost of food sold in canteens as well as the cost of uniforms, books, stationery, computers, and musical equipment. Fundraising projects will also be affected. Last year \$30 million was raised in New South Wales for schools by parents and citizens associations and other voluntary organisations. An amount of \$300,000 has gone into the Federal Government coffers to finance the Howard Government lie. The list goes on: school excursions, sports, craft programs, sporting equipment and occupational courses in the State school system, TAFE or university. They will all be affected by the GST. Opposition members should break their silence on this issue. Today is a golden opportunity for the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai, the shadow minister for education, to be bold enough to admit

that the Howard Government has got it wrong and that the GST will affect our children, and they are our future. Education is the backbone of our future and there should not be a GST on education.

Ms Ficarra: You ripped out millions.

Mr STEWART: The honourable member for Georges River interjects, and for good reason. She has received numerous letters from parents and citizens associations complaining about the effect of the GST on their fundraising activities and the fact that children buying their lunches will have to pay an extra 10 per cent. The honourable member for Ku-ring-gai has taken the high moral ground today, but the Government is highlighting the devastating effect that a GST will have on the education system because of this ruthless decision by the Howard Government. I have received numerous letters and media releases. I refer first to a press release from the New South Wales Teachers Federation, an apolitical organisation. It has produced a television advertisement opposing the GST because it knows what it will do to the school system. The Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations, a conservative organisation, also is actively opposing the GST. In a press release the president of that body stated:

We are calling on all our 2,200 affiliated Associations and for volunteers across Australia to campaign against the introduction of this iniquitous and destructive tax.

The Australian Council of State School Organisations has called on the Commonwealth Government to declare all school-related educational expenses as GST-free—not merely a few expenses but all. The honourable member for Ku-ring-gai put forward a lot of codswallop, but he still cannot clearly identify how the GST will affect the school system and education. He referred to a 22 per cent tax on rubbers and other bits and pieces. We still do not know the effect the GST will have because it is so confusing. However, it will certainly add 10 per cent to everything. Parents will pay more and the education system will have to endure the consequences of the imposition of a GST on everything. The GST represents what I call a government schools tax and it will apply to many so-called voluntary organisations in government schools. It will be detrimental to government schools and will cost parents an extra \$360 per annum. [Time expired.]

Mr RICHARDSON (The Hills) [4.07 p.m.]: It is clear that neither the Minister for Education and Training nor the honourable member for Lakemba have a head for figures. They certainly would not have majored in economics. They do not understand the GST because they do not want to understand it,

and I suggest they are incapable of understanding it. The need for tax reform in this country was identified as long ago as 1986 by the former Labor Prime Minister, Paul Keating. He understood the need for a GST but did a backflip. He underwent a conversion on the road to Damascus, which has subsequently cost this country dearly.

Honourable members would be well aware from their own pay slips that in the 1950s a taxpayer had to be earning 19 times the average weekly earnings before paying the top marginal rate of tax. However, unless there are systemic changes, by the year 2000 a taxpayer will have to earn only 1.2 times average weekly earnings to pay the top marginal tax rate. This is all about genuine tax reform and a better, fairer tax system for all Australians. Both the Minister and the honourable member for Lakemba referred to the devastating effect that the GST will have on the education system, but that is a farce and a lie.

Not only is education zero-rated so far as the goods and services tax is concerned, but a wholesale sales tax of 22 per cent has now been levied on educational prerequisites. My colleague the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai referred to some of those items. I have been provided with a list of educational prerequisites available at newsagents which also attract a 22 per cent tax. Those educational prerequisites include mouse pads, printer ink cartridges, printer paper, disks, disk storage boxes, letter pads, envelopes of every description, letter-writing kits, folders, ring binders, files, fax machine ink and paper, calculator and receipt paper rolls, whiteboard markers, and whiteboard dusters. I am sure that the Minister, as a former chalkie, would understand the importance of those additional costs.

Other educational prerequisites include notepads, notebooks, lecture and exercise books and pads, A4 feint blue-lined paper, foolscap paper, to-be-assembled cardboard, plastic and wooden office storage trays and holders, stencils of various kinds, compasses, wall planners, diaries, rulers, protractors, coloured papers and card sheets, drawing papers, canvasses, oil paints, water colour paints, water colour paper and pads, painting brushes, easels, knives and pallets, oil paint solvents, paint rollers, synthetic modelling clay, pens, pencils, drawing charcoals, crayons, sculpting tools, claywires, drawing pads, instruction books, and glues, pastes and Clag. The list goes on and on. At present those items are all subject to a 22 per cent wholesale sales tax, but under a Federal coalition government that tax will be reduced to a 10 per cent GST.

The Minister suggested that computers would attract a GST. Of course, computers already attract wholesale sales tax. The Minister was talking about computers used specifically for educational purposes. Obviously, if computers are bought for the school they would not attract a GST. However, if parents buy computers for home use there is a fair chance that those computers will also be used for playing games. The Minister suggested that a GST should not be levied on those computers because for some of the time they would be used for educational purposes. So far as the issue of parents and citizens associations is concerned, if an association has a turnover of less than \$100,000 it will be exempt from a GST. Profits raised on sales at fetes organised by parents and citizens associations will not be subject to a GST because the profits are then donated to the school. It seems to me that there is in the wind a better and fairer tax system for Australia that will have positive benefits for the education system of this State.

Mr CRITTENDEN (Wyong) [4.12 p.m.]: Last Thursday honourable members listened to debate about the Commonwealth Games. The honourable member for Lane Cove was waxing lyrical, delivering a leadership speech—or what passes for a leadership speech to her. Today she spoke about multiculturalism. She even supported the honourable member for Coffs Harbour on that stupid and ridiculous voting identification bill. But she is not in the Chamber this afternoon to support her Federal member. She knows that the GST is an anathema to the voting public of this State and she is not here to support the Federal member for Bennelong, John Howard.

This motion is critical to the vast majority of Australian families, who do not earn the sorts of incomes that members of Parliament earn. The honourable member for Ku-ring-gai certainly earns an income with which he could probably carpet the toilet if he wanted to. The fact is that the vast majority of families earn a lot less—and they struggle, on \$30,000 a year, to educate a couple of kids. This afternoon the House heard a lot of talk about the removal of wholesale sales tax. Honourable members opposite know that that is absolute rubbish, because they too opposed a referendum put forward by the Whitlam Government in 1973 to control prices. On 17 and 26 September 1973 two bills that would have altered the Australian Constitution were introduced into the House of Representatives: one to grant the Australian Government control over prices and the other to grant similar control over incomes. Both of those referendum questions were opposed by the

coalition: they were lost. The fact is that Costello and Howard know full well that they have no way of controlling prices. All this talk about removing wholesale sales tax is just that: talk. Howard and Costello have no control whatsoever.

Mr AQUILINA (Riverstone—Minister for Education and Training, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Youth Affairs) [4.16 p.m.], in reply: The claims made by both the shadow minister for education and the honourable member for The Hills are spurious nonsense in relation to a whole range of matters. There is no wholesale sales tax on books, uniforms, shoes, public transport, Internet services, excursions or camps—indeed, hundreds of matters that impact upon the education of New South Wales schoolchildren. It is nonsense to say that by eliminating the 22 per cent wholesale sales tax education prerequisites will be cheaper. A GST will mean that the Government's \$50 back to school allowance will buy a lot less because the tax will apply to items such as uniforms, books, shoes, and the like. A GST will be a great impost on education, and of course it will have a dramatic impact upon the capacity of parents to provide appropriate and adequate education for their children. It will also mean that education in this State and nation will cost a lot more.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 47

Ms Allan	Mr Markham
Mr Amery	Mr Martin
Mr Anderson	Ms Meagher
Ms Andrews	Mr Mills
Mr Aquilina	Ms Moore
Mrs Beamer	Mr Moss
Mr Clough	Mr Neilly
Mr Crittenden	Ms Nori
Mr Debus	Mr E. T. Page
Mr Face	Mr Price
Mr Gaudry	Dr Refshauge
Mr Gibson	Mr Rogan
Mrs Grusovin	Mr Scully
Mr Harrison	Mr Shedden
Ms Harrison	Mr Stewart
Mr Hunter	Mr Sullivan
Mr Iemma	Mr Tripodi
Mr Knowles	Mr Watkins
Mr Langton	Mr Whelan
Mrs Lo Po'	Mr Woods
Mr Lynch	Mr Yeadon
Dr Macdonald	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr McBride	Mr Beckroge
Mr McManus	Mr Thompson

Noes, 39

Mr Beck	Mr O'Farrell
Mr Blackmore	Mr D. L. Page
Mr Brogden	Mr Peacocke
Mr Chappell	Mr Phillips
Mrs Chikarovski	Mr Photios
Mr Collins	Mr Richardson
Mr Cruickshank	Mr Rixon
Mr Debnam	Mr Rozzoli
Mr Ellis	Mr Schipp
Ms Ficarra	Ms Seaton
Mr Glachan	Mrs Skinner
Mr Hartcher	Mr Small
Mr Humpherson	Mr Souris
Mr Jeffery	Mrs Stone
Dr Kernohan	Mr Tink
Mr Kerr	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr MacCarthy	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Merton	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Oakeshott	Mr Fraser
Mr O'Doherty	Mr Smith

Pairs

Mr Carr	Mr Armstrong
Mr Knight	Mr Hazzard
Mr Nagle	Mr Kinross
Mr Rumble	Mr Slack-Smith

Question so resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Motion by Mr Whelan agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow 17 members to make private members' statements.

CARDINAL STEPINAC ASSOCIATION

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta) [4.25 p.m.]: I want to place on the public record my sincere thanks to the Cardinal Stepinac Association for facilitating my recent visit to Croatia and Slovenia. The Cardinal Stepinac Association is an extremely well-respected Croatian community organisation based in my electorate. Recently it has undertaken the mammoth task of developing an aged-care facility that will provide necessary services to ageing Croatian Australians. The nursing home project in St. Johns Park will be completed by the end of the year, and is testament to the commitment and dedication of all those involved. The project involves both Federal and State funding, but has

only been made possible by community donations and volunteer efforts.

Since becoming the member for Cabramatta I have been closely involved with the project. In fact I recently attended the blessing of the site. Every year I attend the dinner hosted by the association, at which volunteers and donors are thanked for their contributions. I look forward to welcoming the Archbishop of Croatia to my electorate in November when he comes to bless the nursing home and declare the facility open. My congratulations go to all those involved in the project, all the directors of the Cardinal Stepinac Association, and the ordinary members of the community on their tremendous contribution. In particular I would like to mention Nat Smolchic and Boris Lauric, who have driven the project from its inception and who worked tirelessly, for long hours and under difficult conditions, to oversee its completion.

As the member for Cabramatta I have had the opportunity to become closely associated with those two men. I have had extensive discussions with them recently about Balkan issues and their impact on the community of Cabramatta. They considered that I would benefit from the experience of seeing Croatia and Slovenia first hand, and facilitated my visit. During the recent break I took the opportunity to visit the Croatian and Slovenian republics. I spent four days in Zagreb, where I met with the Assistant Minister for Immigration, Mr Nick Fidak, and also Mr Igor Alborghetti, the editor of a political weekly journal called *Globus Weekly*. I had extensive discussions with him about political issues affecting Croatians both at home and abroad.

Following my time in Zagreb I had the opportunity, at the behest of the Cardinal Stepinac Association, to spend some eight days travelling around the country to meet various people and broaden my understanding not only of ancient history but of more recent issues of concern to those involved. I take this opportunity to extend my sincere appreciation to the Cardinal Stepinac Association for its generosity and efforts.

Mr FACE (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [4.28 p.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Cabramatta on the interest she has taken in the Croatian and Slovenian communities. I met many of the people she has mentioned at a recent reception she hosted at Parliament House. I am aware of the good work conducted by the Cardinal Stepinac Association over the years. I know the association is looking forward to the opening of its facility at St Johns Park. In

1987 I, like the honourable member for Cabramatta, had the opportunity to visit Croatia and many of its cities, such as Dubrovnik and Korčë, two beautiful cities of the Venetian period. One thing that came home to me after my visit was the great change taking place in Yugoslavia. A visit to Yugoslavia would be a good learning opportunity for anyone in this Parliament who represents people from that area. I congratulate the honourable member for Cabramatta and the Cardinal Stepinac Association on the work that has been done in this area.

CALABASH BAY SEAPLANE ACCIDENT

Mr O'DOHERTY (Ku-ring-gai) [4.30 p.m.]: At about 1.00 p.m. on Sunday, 26 July, five people from Pittwater set out in a South Pacific seaplane, a number of whom were to attend a birthday celebration. The flight to Berowra Waters was to be part of the celebration. At 1.26 p.m. the plane crashed into a hillside just above the water, about a kilometre north of Berowra Waters and close to Calabash Bay, where the plane had been attempting to land—as do many seaplanes that operate in and out of Berowra Waters in my electorate every weekend. The Civil Aviation Safety Authority is investigating that accident. I call on both the Federal Government and the New South Wales Government to work together and to examine safety issues relating to seaplanes coming in and out of Berowra Waters at weekends and at other times.

Recently, I and a number of other constituents had an opportunity to travel along the water up to Calabash Bay. I spoke at great length with residents about the problems experienced by them when travelling in their boats to and from Berowra Waters, where most of them park their cars. I spoke also to the recreational users of Berowra Waters—families and children who use kayaks and canoes and who are regular users of that magnificent stretch of the waterway—about the problem they experience when seaplanes land on the water and taxi down Berowra Creek. It must be difficult for anyone inside a seaplane which is taxiing on the water to see small craft and young children paddling in kayaks and canoes.

Residents told me that on occasions they have even seen seaplanes taxiing right up to the two marinas at Berowra Waters and mooring there. On one occasion a resident took a photograph of a seaplane moored right next to a boat refuelling station at Berowra Waters, which is dangerous for a different reason. I suggested to residents on that day that they should approach the Federal and State governments and ask them to work together to identify safe operating guidelines for planes coming

into Berowra Waters. Planes coming into and out of this area are not regulated. Let me give honourable members some idea of the difficulties being experienced by residents in the area.

The residents who were with me in a small boat in Calabash Bay pointed out overhead powerlines in the area. When I visited the area it was a beautiful, clear day. On 26 July, the day of the accident, I recall that it was raining until about lunch time. On the clear day, when I visited with my constituents, it was impossible to see the overhead powerlines without fixing our eyes on a point on the hillside and tracing the powerlines across the sky. Those powerlines carry none of the oversized orange balls that are placed on similar powerlines, for example, at Berowra Waters and I had trouble seeing the powerlines on a clear day. I wonder how people operating aircraft in and out of Calabash Bay could possibly see them on a grey and rainy day.

Other safety problems pointed out to me by residents of Calabash Bay included fluky winds. A prevailing wind often switches around 180 degrees with no warning whatsoever. There is no windsock or anything to indicate to pilots who are landing in the area from which direction the winds are coming. A number of small, medium-size and large pleasure crafts and residents' crafts go up and down that stretch of Berowra Waters all the time. The Civil Aviation Authority and the New South Wales Waterways Authority should work together to inquire into the operation of seaplanes into Berowra Creek.

They should consider a number of points. First, they should identify a suitable and safe landing area for planes somewhere in Berowra Creek, but away from heavily utilised boating areas and away from residences all along that stretch of the river. Second, they must look at the possibility of limiting or regulating the number of plane movements into the area. Third, they must identify a no-taxi zone to prevent conflict between planes and boats. In particular, seaplanes should not be permitted to come all the way down to Berowra Waters where most of the recreational activity occurs involving children in kayaks and canoes. I propose to write the Federal Minister for Aviation and I am raising this matter today in the House for the benefit of the Minister responsible for our waterways, the Minister for Information Technology, and Minister for Ports, in the hope that the Federal and State governments can work together in a bipartisan fashion to provide safe, regulated operations for seaplanes into Berowra Waters and ensure the safety of all.

Mr FACE (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [4.25 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai for his contribution. I will refer the matter to the Minister for Ports and the Minister for Transport for their edification. This has been a difficult area for many years. Some years ago someone wanted to use Lake Macquarie for joy flights and charter flights. I said in the House a few days ago that I used to look after the electorate of the late Harry Jensen when he was absent from the country. On one occasion I established from information received from the Maritime Services Board and the Department of Transport that this problem existed.

The Civil Aviation Authority has little jurisdiction in this area and this problem has never been properly addressed. The honourable member for Ku-ring-gai was correct when he said that the Waterways Authority—the former Maritime Services Board—and the Department of Transport have a role to play in this regard. A regular service is operating between Rose Bay and Newcastle and I am sure that that service is governed by guidelines. The honourable member raised a valid point. It is in his best interests to take up this issue at the Federal level. There have always been difficulties regulating seaplanes as opposed to land craft, which are governed by strict rules.

VISYBOARD FACTORY NOISE LEVELS

Mr TRIPODI (Fairfield) [4.36 p.m.]: I inform the House about the unacceptable noise levels generated by a VisyBoard factory located at 160 McCredie Road, Guildford. This matter was brought to my attention by a constituent who lives in the vicinity of the premises. He contacted the Environment Protection Authority on 20 January 1997 to express concern about the noise levels generated by VisyBoard. By 28 January my constituent had registered a total of 70 verbal complaints with the EPA. The number of complaints made to the EPA has doubled since that date. Despite all efforts made by my constituent and other residents in the area to reduce the noise levels emitted by VisyBoard, the problem persists.

I also made representations to the EPA on behalf of my constituent and was advised that whilst VisyBoard is pro-active in investigating any complaints received concerning operations, especially noise, a solution to the problem has not yet been identified. This is of little relief to residents affected by the high level of noise that is being generated. Each time my constituent has registered a

complaint with the EPA he has been assured that the noise levels will be reduced within a matter of weeks. On the last occasion he registered a complaint he was advised that the problem would be fixed within one month. Despite numerous assurances, those noise levels have still not decreased. The only relief that residents receive is a reduction in noise levels for two, or sometimes three, days following a complaint received by the EPA. However, the noise reverts to an unacceptable level.

As a result of the numerous complaints received by the EPA, VisyBoard was instructed to carry out a number of noise surveys at the premises. The results of those surveys have shown that the level of noise generated is unacceptable. The latest noise survey of the premises was conducted outside my constituent's home on 28 April at 4.15 a.m. The tests proved that the noise levels are still excessive. My constituent took it upon himself to make inquiries to ascertain the permissible noise levels that may be generated by an operation such as VisyBoard. These inquiries have revealed that the noise limit for such an operation is five decibels above background. VisyBoard is currently operating at 50 decibels.

Such high noise levels are unacceptable at any time of the day or night. However, what makes this problem even more unacceptable and disturbing is the fact that these noise levels were registered during the hours of 3.00 a.m. and 4.00 a.m. Noise level testing was carried out on three separate occasions in the early hours of the morning and all three tests confirmed that VisyBoard was operating in clear breach of the permissible noise limit. Despite the fact that the company has spent considerable time and money in an attempt to resolve the noise issue, residents are still forced to put up with excessive noise levels in the early hours of the morning.

Both my constituent and I cannot understand why, although the EPA has acknowledged that a noise problem exists, VisyBoard is allowed to continue its operations. A representative from the EPA has advised that the licence to operate cannot be withdrawn from VisyBoard as the company has spent considerable time and money in an effort to resolve the problem.

What about the residents? People who live in the vicinity of VisyBoard have to put up with excessive noise levels in the early hours of the morning on a daily basis. The people who constantly receive assurances from the EPA that efforts are being made to reduce the noise levels are the same

ones who are woken up daily by the excessive noise that is generated by VisyBoard. They no longer want assurances, they want action. I call on the EPA to investigate the noise levels generated by VisyBoard's operations and to take all action necessary to ensure that the company operates within environmental guidelines. This organisation should never have been approved so close to a residential area, but it seems that Holroyd City Council is developing a pattern of dumping its problems in the backyards of Fairfield residents.

The company has been shown sufficient leniency. I ask the Minister to give this problem particular attention and to finally provide some relief to residents, who have been given a range of assurances about how the EPA would address this issue. Another issue that my constituents continually raise with me is a problem of air quality relating to VisyBoard. However, today my concerns relate to addressing the excessive noise levels so that Smithfield residents can sleep at night rather than be woken up by the giant monstrosity that overhangs their homes. I ask the Minister to give this matter particular attention and to address the problem.

Ms ALLAN (Blacktown—Minister for the Environment) [4.41 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Fairfield for raising this matter and commend him for his efforts on behalf of his constituents, whose complaints about noise levels from the VisyBoard operations are genuine. At least two consultant studies have been conducted within the past three to four months about this problem. Following receipt of the consultant reports, the Environment Protection Authority has acted to attach a pollution reduction program to Visy's licence to operate. The pollution reduction program requires the implementation of the consultant's recommendations by 19 October, a noise survey to be conducted after the implementation of these recommendations and a report to be forwarded to the EPA on the survey's findings.

These works will cost Visy approximately \$250,000, but I assure the House it will be money well spent. The Government wants to ensure that this capital investment at long last solves what has been an ongoing noise issue, as described by the honourable member for Fairfield. The company recently met with the EPA to seek an extension on completing the works. The EPA has agreed in principle at this stage to extend the required completion date to 30 November. In granting an extension of time the EPA took into consideration that the company has co-operated in attempting to resolve the issue and has expended about \$1.5 million on environmental improvements at the site

over the past four years, including a significant investment in noise mitigation and stormwater management.

However, should these works not resolve the noise issue fully, the EPA has advised me that it will require the company to carry out further investigations and works to meet the appropriate noise goals. Throughout the conduct of this matter I am advised that the EPA has met with the residents who have complained about the noise nuisance. The authority is anxious to maintain constructive dialogue with those residents and with the honourable member for Fairfield. I look forward to the successful completion of those works, which I believe will solve the problem.

BELL RIVER EROSION

Mr R. W. TURNER (Orange) [4.43 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House the enormous problems that are occurring along the Bell River at Wellington. Problems have been occurring for a number of years, but, with the high rainfall in the area this year, it has got to the stage where urgent attention must be given before property is endangered. On 14 August Wellington Council made a submission to the Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation. I hope that the Minister gives the submission the attention that it deserves.

On two or three occasions I have inspected the damage to areas within the Wellington shire and also to a private property belonging to Jim and Pam Whillock. It is an absolute disaster. Part of their lucerne flats, totalling 3.75 acres, is dropping into the river. Mr and Mrs Whillock half seriously, half jokingly said to me that they expect to receive a rate notice from Wellington Council and another one from Warren Shire Council, or wherever their topsoil has ended up.

Since 1985, 40 or 50 metres of their paddock, totalling 15,200 square metres of beautiful alluvial river flats, has been lost. Another threat now is that unless corrected the river will alter course. If it alters another 100 metres it will undermine a low level bridge to the extent that it will be swept away. Prior to this particular damage—previous damage has been ongoing for many years—Wellington Council and various State governments have spent close to \$1 million installing gabions to try to stop the erosion near the bridge and around the sunken garden at Wellington. In this particular flood some of those gabion cages were ripped by logs and debris in the river. These cages were supposed to last 100 years against rust, but not against ripping. It

has now been recommended that they not be used any longer; rock fill will be used.

The general belief is that this erosion problem on the Bell River only started after the construction of the Burrendong Dam. Prior to the dam, the Macquarie River used to flood down through Wellington and back up into the lower reaches of the Bell River, slowing the river flow. Since the construction of the dam the Macquarie River is not flooding, which means that the Bell River travels at a much faster speed, causing part of the erosion problem. Ramps or weirs have been installed to try to slow the water flow and lift the river bed. It seems that on the Whillock's property the ramp has been installed at a slightly different angle to the natural river flow, directing more water at a much faster pace across to the river bank. At that point the river is now at least 10 metres deep; previously it was a quietly flowing river.

Over the years Mr and Mrs Whillock planted many trees to try to stem the flow of the water and to stop the erosion. All those trees they lovingly planted over many years have now been washed away. In that particular spot the river is now twice as wide as it used to be. Unless immediate action is taken, they will lose more of their very valuable rich alluvial flats and the low level bridge will be threatened. Many millions of dollars are required to resolve this problem, well beyond the capacity of Wellington Council. State Government and possibly Federal Government assistance will be needed. The Federal Minister for Primary Industries and Energy, John Anderson, today inspected the damage to the area, which is in his electorate. I hope that we get a sympathetic hearing from the Federal Government as well, because joint action is needed to stop the flow, correct the damage and avert an absolute tragedy.

Mr FACE (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [4.48 p.m.]: I will refer this matter about the Bell River at Wellington, which has been ongoing since 1985, to the Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation.

METROPOLITAN GREEN SPACE PROGRAM

Mr ROGAN (East Hills) [4.48 p.m.]: I am delighted to be able to thank the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning following the announcement of a green space grant for the East Hills electorate in the order of \$66,700, which will be used for improvements at Salt Pan Creek, Padstow. This grant is being provided through the New South Wales Government's 1998-99 metropolitan green

space program. Bankstown City Council will use the grant to construct a boardwalk under Henry Lawson Drive, Padstow, and for bush regeneration and revegetation.

The grant was approved by the Minister as part of \$1,068,700 in funding provided to the 20 Sydney councils that will participate in the program. The green space program is a highly effective way for the Government to help councils to plan and develop their regional open space. I am particularly proud of the Salt Pan Creek walkway initiative. In 1988 when bicentennial funds were being provided to worthy projects throughout New South Wales I proposed the project. The grant of \$660,000 from the bicentennial fund and the half a million dollars from Bankstown council, to its credit, were used to establish the walkway, which is of great benefit to the community.

I remember former Minister David Hay performing the official opening. Other money has been spent on the walkway, some coming from Federal Government unemployment programs. This assisted extension of the walkway, which now goes from the heart of Bankstown along Salt Pan Creek. Hurstville council saw the merit of being linked to the project and a couple of years ago it constructed a bridge to enable people from the Hurstville side of the Georges River and Salt Pan Creek to access the walkway.

Schools and citizens make good use of the walkway. Contributions under the green space program are matched by council contributions. So the amount of more than a million dollars I referred to earlier has been doubled, enabling a lot of work to be done on this very worthwhile project. The money has enabled a wide range of parkland in the Sydney metropolitan region to be greatly improved, to give people more opportunities and space for recreation. The projects were assessed for regional and tourism significance, improving public access to open space, enhancing gateway sites to Olympic venues, encouraging community involvement, enhancing natural features and bushland, and providing for special needs groups such as the disabled.

The money was allocated by a panel chaired by the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning. It contained representatives from the Institute of Municipal Engineers, the Royal Australian Institute of Parks and Recreation, the Local Government Association, the Royal Australian Planning Institute and the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects. The green space program is administered by the

department and uses funds from the Sydney Region Development Fund. It is a very worthwhile scheme which the Government and particularly the Minister should be commended for. People in my electorate and surrounding electorates would want me to express their appreciation of the work that has been done. [*Time expired.*]

Mr FACE (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [4.53 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for East Hills for his contribution this afternoon outlining the work undertaken around Salt Pan Creek as part of the New South Wales Government's 1998-99 metropolitan green space program. The project is coming to fruition at a time when, on 17 November, the honourable member will have been a member of this Parliament for 25 years. I congratulate him on all the things that he has been able to achieve and continues to achieve for the electorate of East Hills.

CITYRAIL STAFFING

Mr O'FARRELL (Northcott) [4.54 p.m.]: Today I pay tribute to CityRail station staff across my electorate. These men and women are not my natural allies. Indeed, I would suggest that at the last election most of them probably voted Labor because of Labor's promise not to cut station staffing numbers. How disappointed the staff have been about the performance of the Government since March 1995. In late August I was contacted by staff at local railway stations and advised of the Carr Government's plans to significantly alter station staffing arrangements. Staff had received notification of the changes on 19 August. A decision on the changes was originally to be made on Friday, 28 August.

I firstly pay tribute to my local station staff because their initial concern related to the Government's failure to either consult or inform the public about these significant changes. Station staff—in effect, CityRail's front-line commuter liaison officers—well understand the needs of rail travellers and recognise their extreme sensitivity to changes in timetables, staffing and the like. They also have the best on-the-ground knowledge of the practicalities of running stations. They understand better than anyone where inefficiencies exist and where changes could be made without affecting the quality of services offered to rail users. If the State Government and CityRail had genuinely involved station staff in consultation on these changes, rather than the sham flying visits which occurred, I believe that savings could have been achieved.

I pay tribute to station staff secondly because they clearly understand the problems the changes will cause. For instance, proposals at a number of stations mean that weekend shifts start later in the morning and shift overlaps are so reduced that they will prevent proper cleaning of stations. Station staff are proud of their stations and keep them in good order. Train travellers in my area have well-kept station platforms and surrounds. CityRail station staff understand that people are more likely to make use of trains if stations and trains are clean and safe. That is why they have concerns about the latest staffing proposals.

A more significant issue is that at least one station, Warrawee, staff will not be present at certain times during the week. The proposal removes staff from 5 p.m. week days and noon on Saturdays. This means that between 5 p.m. and 7 p.m., when on-train security patrols commence, passengers at Warrawee have no CityRail presence, that is, no-one they can go to with questions and no-one they can look to if anything untoward occurs. This is at a station which has both a commuter patronage and a significant school community which well patronises train travel. Regrettably, on the north shore line there have been problems on stations involving students from different schools. I fail to appreciate how the proposed removal of staff will assist schools, police and CityRail authorities in controlling the problem. The absence of staff from Warrawee on weekends has also caused concern to the school community, which uses rail to access sporting and other school activities.

Overall, the types of changes to occur at Warrawee are unlikely to make rail travel more attractive. My view is that if the changes are allowed to proceed they will contribute to greater use of cars by commuters and the school community alike. This is something which station staff and I would like to avoid—and something that I would have hoped the Government would have sought to avoid. Unless we encourage growth in train patronage, north shore traffic problems will become impossible.

Thirdly, I pay tribute to station staff because they are proud of their occupation, enjoy their jobs and are committed to rail transport. One of the other problems of the new staffing arrangements is that by abolishing a number of positions they detract from the career structure which station staff have previously enjoyed. There will now be fewer opportunities to advance and learn through on-the-job training. I think that is a pity. I know that it is something regretted by staff. In all my dealings with station staff over this issue I have been impressed that they are less concerned about themselves than

they are about the system. Staff could have "taken the money and run". The approach of the Carr Government and the unions was "take the pay increase and don't rock the boat."

Station staff did the decent thing. They looked to the future of their profession and saw that many of the changes threatened it. As I have said, if consulted they could help to improve things. But they know that the present proposals will not help rail travellers, will not help the future of rail, will not help them and certainly will not help those who in future want to take on a job in the same area. What reward have they received for their civic mindedness? Within days of contacting me staff had been threatened by CityRail management on the orders of the Minister for Transport. Staff were told that they could not speak to the media. They were warned not to talk to local MPs—a fact to which the honourable member for Lane Cove can attest.

It is outrageous that staff have been counselled by CityRail and effectively stood over and told not to speak to the public, to members of Parliament and to others about these significant changes. The public has a right to know. As I have argued before, these changes ought to be put on hold until the public is consulted. Members of Parliament have a right to deal with people on issues such as this. I think that it raises an issue of privilege if CityRail management—the Minister's office is giving the directions—infringes on the rights of a member of Parliament to be properly informed and to properly represent his constituents. CityRail staff are being threatened with possible loss of job or suspension from work if they continue to deal with people such as myself. [*Time expired.*]

ABANDONED MOTOR VEHICLES

Mr STEWART (Lakemba) [4.59 p.m.]: I wish to raise two problems relating to the slowness of the current system for removing abandoned vehicles left in our local streets, roads and public places. Currently, unless a vehicle is left in a dangerous position, police and council officers are obliged to follow a series of steps outlined in the New South Wales Impounding Act 1993 to ascertain if the suspect vehicle is abandoned. I have received many expressions of concern from my local constituents, the local government authorities and police about the length of time that both police and council officers consider should be allowed before it is designated reasonable in their interpretation to remove an abandoned vehicle.

Under the Act, before authorities remove any suspected abandoned vehicle they must make reasonable inquiries to ascertain if the vehicle in

question is abandoned. Reasonable inquiries can sometimes take weeks and the time and energy put into them by local authorities is very demanding on public resources. Consequently in most cases vehicles which are clearly abandoned must still pass through this system, according to local authorities, before they can be taken away. But what does "reasonable" mean? Most abandoned vehicles are left on our roads and in our public places for several weeks before being removed by authorities, due to the interpretation of "reasonable" in the Act. The local authorities are saying that "reasonable" means that they have to make extensive inquiries and that their inquiries often take up to several weeks before a vehicle might be removed. Abandoned vehicles are not only an eyesore to local communities but also potentially quite dangerous to young children who may enter a dumped vehicle, and possibly lock themselves in the car or the boot. Indeed, that occurred in my electorate recently.

The present system for removing abandoned vehicles from our local streets is in my view protracted and confused, at least at the local level. The system needs to be streamlined with more flexibility given to councils and police to quickly remove suspect abandoned vehicles from public areas along with local streets and roads. In terms of this matter, I have approached the Minister for Local Government. We have had discussions and the Minister has been very co-operative in looking for ways of dealing with this matter.

I would propose to the Minister that perhaps as an outcome of the initiatives I raised that strategies be put in place to examine what constitutes reasonable under the Impounding Act of 1993 so that local government authorities and police can at least have a very succinct definition of what reasonable means and how to apply that because clearly at the moment the position of what reasonable means under the Act varies from council to council or shire to shire.

The Department of Local Government could be requested to meet with local government and shire associations to raise the issue and work with councils to reduce the time taken to undertake the inquiries. A government circular could also be issued as part of this whole process. In addition, it is probable that the Minister for Local Government needs to consult with the Minister for Roads, who is responsible for the Roads and Traffic Authority, to look at ways of streamlining the process of identifying owners of abandoned vehicles through the vehicle registration system. A local council cannot ask the local police for registration identification of a vehicle based on data available

from an engine compliance plate; the council has to go to the RTA.

The feedback I have been getting is that the RTA, being a large organisation, is not as fast as we would like in providing local councils with that sort of information. Councils cannot go to the police because police are not empowered to provide those details to local government. Therefore, there is a problem with the system at the grassroots level. That problem probably could be improved by further consultation with the RTA so that the authority understands the needs of councils in pursuing such matters. I know that the Minister for Local Government is keen to put in place options that would hopefully limit the concerns that I have raised today in the House, and I hope that local governments co-operate with the Minister in relation to those options.

Mr E. T. PAGE [5.04 p.m.]: The honourable member for Lakemba has taken this matter up with me and I will respond to his concern. There are two issues. One is the need to make reasonable inquiries to ascertain that the vehicle in question is abandoned. I will certainly take this up with my colleague the Minister for Roads to see what can be done to streamline the inquiry system so that councils can be given a quick response to a request to identify an abandoned vehicle. That should overcome the general problem of unsightly vehicles being left around our streets. The second issue, dangerous vehicles, is specifically covered in the legislation. If a council is not taking action to quickly get rid of a vehicle which is a danger or likely to be a danger, the council in my view is at fault. Section 16(5) reads:

A motor vehicle may be impounded immediately (without following the procedures in this section) if the vehicle is in a public place and the impounding officer is satisfied on reasonable grounds that its immediate removal is justified because it is causing an obstruction to traffic (vehicular or pedestrian) or is or is likely to be a danger to the public.

In my view that provision gives council ample opportunity to get rid of a vehicle which is a danger or will be a danger. I will certainly reinforce that view with councils to make sure they are aware of that provision. I will also raise with my colleague the Minister for Roads the need to streamline the process of making quick identification of vehicles which are obviously abandoned in the streets.

SPEECH THERAPISTS

Mr CRUICKSHANK (Murrumbidgee) [5.05 p.m.]: I wish to speak about the difficulty of attracting speech therapists to country areas. That

problem has spread throughout New South Wales. It is a problem because there is not enough money. I had an idea that there were not enough speech therapists, so I rang Professor Reed at Cumberland College of Health Sciences, part of the University of Sydney, who said that there were enough speech therapists. But the two positions in the Griffith and Murray area health regions have not been filled. It appears that the positions have been frozen. Similar difficulties are being experienced throughout New South Wales. Many doctors are to be found near the coast but few in the country. How are doctors to be attracted to work in rural areas?

Nobody has yet dreamed up a good enough system to attract doctors to live and work in the country. Money is certainly not the problem. The money a doctor can make in a halfway decent country practice are enormous compared to the earnings of city doctors. However, much more imaginative ways of bringing speech therapists into country areas must be considered, such as paid return travel to Sydney, time off to attend clinics and seminars, and a living away from home allowance. I ask the Minister to investigate why speech therapists cannot be attracted to country areas.

Griffith has three employing agencies. The Griffith Base Hospital rehabilitation centre has been closed down but there is still a position attached to it which has not been filled. The community health centre has a position that has not been filled. The early intervention unit is a citizens group of parents whose children have some malady or defect which can be rectified by speech therapy. Unfortunately, a child's speech difficulties worsen month by month unless attended to with therapy soon after detection. A child whose speech problems are not attended to will be unable to benefit fully from rehabilitation. Teachers who become aware of such problems in the classroom can do much for some children, but the majority of sufferers require more therapy than a school can possibly make available. In any case, it is not the role of a school to provide speech therapy.

Lack of adequate services has a domino effect in attracting speech therapists to country areas. In the city if one area does not have a speech therapist, one can catch a bus or train to another locality to avail oneself of the services of a speech therapist. Speech therapists are available in this city oasis inhabited by four million people, yet none will go to country areas. Governments freeze positions and will not make funds available, yet even when money is allocated to country areas, those areas must then try to attract therapists. I ask the Minister for Gaming and Racing to pass on my comments to the Minister for Health.

Mr FACE (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [5.10 p.m.]: I shall refer the comments of the honourable member for Murrumbidgee about speech therapists to the Minister for Health.

WOLLI CREEK REGIONAL PARK

Mr MOSS (Canterbury) [5.10 p.m.]: For some time the Government has been planning the creation of a Wolli Creek Regional Park, which will be under the care and control of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Regional parks are equal to national parks in that their natural habitat is preserved. However, they have fewer restrictions than national parks. The Wolli Creek Regional Park will have fewer restrictions because it is envisaged that it will be a family recreation area. The Government is serious about the creation of the park, particularly as the M5 East has been diverted away from Wolli Creek. The Government has already agreed with all the current stakeholders in the Wolli Creek area on the boundaries of the park. That is an amazing achievement because of the diverse ownership in the area. No fewer than nine individual bodies either own or are responsible for managing the area.

The popularity of this regional park is demonstrated by the fact that those nine stakeholders, which included two councils, have agreed to forfeit their stake in the area for the sake of the regional park. The park will encompass 80 hectares and will run along the creek for 3½ kilometres from Bexley Road to Tempe station. That is a significant achievement bearing in mind the built-up nature of the area. Although the National Parks and Wildlife Service will control the park, the Minister for the Environment is keen for the community to be involved and may set up a community trust to manage it. Consultation is under way with the community to decide on the best form of community involvement. Children in urban areas miss out on the opportunity to enjoy and play in natural bush settings. The creation of this park will provide a wonderful opportunity for children in the inner west and inner south-west to enjoy and study this area with their families and school friends.

The park will provide tremendous environmental and educational resources for schools within the western and south-western areas of Sydney. The co-ordination that has gone into the establishment of the park has almost reached finality. Only a few machinery problems need to be ironed out. I congratulate the Minister for the Environment on her input into this wonderful initiative. The Wolli Creek area has a few parcels of

natural bushland. The first such area south of the city will become a massive regional park and will be a little over four miles from the centre of Sydney. That magnificent achievement of the Carr Government will be of tremendous benefit to the region.

Mr FACE (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [5.15 p.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Canterbury on his contribution and continued support for Wolli Creek Regional Park. Regional parks have fewer restrictions than national parks or State recreation areas. The Wolli Creek area is in desperate need of family-oriented places where people can relax or enjoy a variety of activities. The people in the inner-west and south-west have not traditionally had access to such areas.

The joining together of the nine bodies and land-holders have joined together to establish this regional park is a real achievement. I am reminded of an initiative of a former Government, which many years ago created Glenrock National Park. It has been no mean feat to bring together the various stakeholders to create a park 80 hectares in size which will stretch from Bexley Road to Tempe station, an area that became degraded over the years. The park is a wonderful initiative for the inner west and inner south-west, the most important ingredients being community involvement and the shared ownership between the community and the Government. That has resulted from the endeavours of the honourable member for Canterbury.

PITTWATER COUNCIL

Mr BROGDEN (Pittwater) [5.17 p.m.]: Yesterday during question time the Minister for Local Government referred to a report issued by his department entitled "Comparative Information on NSW Local Councils". The report made it clear that on a number of key indicators Pittwater Council was clearly lagging behind other councils in Sydney. In particular, Pittwater Council was identified as having on average the second highest rates in the State, that is, an average per household of \$832.47. Further, the report stated that Pittwater Council had the longest delay for building applications, with an average of 106 days, and the third longest delay for development applications, the average being 86 days.

That was a matter of some concern to me. Pittwater Council is the newest council in New South Wales, having broken away from Warringah Council six years ago. In the minds of some

members of the community the council still needs to prove itself, not so much in relation to its representation of important community issues and to the maintenance of character of Pittwater, but in relation to management issues. I have taken advice from the General Manager of Pittwater Council, Angus Gordon, with respect to some of the council's advancements since these figures were assembled and reported on yesterday by the Minister.

It is important to note that the report to which the Minister referred yesterday was for the year 1996-97. It is disturbing that the Government is releasing reports that are 18 months old when it should be releasing more recent information. Figures show that for the September 1997 quarter average building applications took 72 working days; for the December 1997 quarter approximately 54 days; for the March 1998 quarter, roughly 61 working days; and for the June 1998 quarter, the last quarter assessed, 55 working days. The figures, which are released to the community by Pittwater Council on a quarterly basis, indicate that the council is moving in the right direction to reduce its building application delay from being the highest in the State to a much more acceptable level.

Indeed, the current average delay is about 60 days, compared with an average of 106 days in 1996-97. That is a significant improvement. The report released by the Minister yesterday indicated that the delay with development applications was about 86 days, the third longest in the State. Unfortunately, according to the report for the September 1997 quarter, the figure had increased to 149 days. The report for the December quarter showed a delay of 57 working days; the March quarter report showed 69 days; and the most recent report, the report for the June quarter, showed a delay of 67 working days. That is a reduction of some 20 days, which is not as satisfactory as the reduction in the delay for building applications, but once again it is moving in the right direction.

Pittwater Council advises me that on a comparative basis its ratepayers are paying anywhere between \$37 and \$89 less in rates compared with the rates paid for a block of land of the same value in Warringah shire. I am pleased that Pittwater Council has improved significantly since the release of that report. That is important, particularly when there is discussion about amalgamation of councils. Recently there has been discussion in our community about the amalgamation of three councils on the northern beaches to form a city comprising the northern beach areas. The difficulty is that Pittwater Council was born out of a genuine community concern about the need for Pittwater to

have its own character, and to have that character identified through its own council. Under the re-elected mayor of Pittwater Council, Councillor Trish Giles, and the other councillors, the council management—particularly the general manager, Angus Gordon—is thought to be managing the shire better than it would be managed if the councils were amalgamated.

MULGOA BUSHLAND RESERVE

Mrs BEAMER (Badgerys Creek) [5.22 p.m.]: I should like to inform the House of the exciting developments at the Mulgoa bushland reserve at Glenmore Park in the Badgerys Creek electorate. In 1994 a little over 68 hectares of land was gazetted as a nature reserve for the people of this fast-growing area. The reserve is part of the Cumberland woodland habitat and is a great example of that habitat. Honourable members would be aware that the Cumberland woodland habitat is considered endangered, and there is no better example of this habitat in the Sydney Basin than in the Mulgoa bushland reserve. TransGrid opened a substation adjoining the reserve and is now in the process of rehabilitating the land surrounding that site, which will be added to the nature reserve and will provide a corridor of wildlife from the reserve through to the Blue Mountains National Park.

Another significant tract of land near the reserve was another beautiful example of the Cumberland woodland plain habitat. That land, which covers an area of some 70 hectares, was owned by the Department of Housing. The local council, members of the Mulgoa Landcare group and members of the local community made strong representations to both the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning and me to preserve the land for future generations. The land had been earmarked for private residential development as part of the Glenmore Park estate. It contained a range of rare flora and fauna species. Recently the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning visited Badgerys Creek electorate to inspect the land, as he had done in the past.

On this occasion he handed over the title deeds to the land to the National Parks and Wildlife Service. That doubled the size of the reserve and provided the community with a valuable resource which will now be preserved forever. That reflects the Government's desire to strike a balance between residential development and the need to preserve areas of natural bushland and vegetation, particularly when that bushland is endangered. The handover of the title to the land was welcomed by the community.

I take this opportunity to thank the Minister and the members of the Landcare group—Lisa Sinclair, Kerry Spurett and Margaret Stepniewski—who have been diligent in their efforts to protect bushland in the Mulgoa Valley. The group has been active in informing members of everything that is being done throughout the valley to ensure that this habitat is preserved. Penrith City Council, particularly Alan Stoneham and Roger Nethercote, also played an instrumental role in securing this land for future generations. There is, however, a section of land between the natural bushland reserve of Mulgoa Park and the area recently handed over to the National Parks and Wildlife Service which is of significant size. It is approximately twice the size of the land just handed over, and it has recently been put up for auction. I implore the Minister for the Environment to seriously consider the opportunity afforded by this land to add significantly to, and to preserve, the habitat of this area.

That would be a good example to the people of Glenmore Park and, indeed, to the people of the Penrith region, of how the Cumberland woodland plain, where the habitat is now dying, can be preserved. The land will be invaluable for passive recreation, bushwalking and picnicking. There are some incredibly wonderful sights throughout the area. If it is added to the two portions of land that have been handed over to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, it can be managed in such a way that future generations, rather than only seeing pictures of Cumberland woodland in books, will be able to experience this habitat in its natural preserve. This land will provide a wonderful habitat, particularly as it adjoins the Blue Mountains National Park, in which we will be able to see many species that are now threatened.

CREDIT CARD CONSTITUTIONAL VALIDITY

Mr OAKESHOTT (Port Macquarie) [5.27 p.m.]: A vocal constituent of mine, Mr Neil Campbell of Laurieton, has raised with me myriad concerns about alleged breaches of our Constitution by all parliamentarians. Before I continue I wish to emphasise that I do not agree with Mr Campbell's view, and I do not agree with the way Mr Campbell has sought to publicly criticise my Federal colleague because he disagrees with Mr Campbell's view. However, Mr Campbell is my constituent and, therefore, his view, along with those of others in the Port Macquarie electorate, deserves to be heard. Mr Campbell's concerns, as I understand them, centre around the use of credit cards as a form of money. Mr Campbell believes this is a breach of sections 115 and 51 of the Commonwealth of Australia

Constitution Act and of sections 9E and 12 of the New South Wales Constitution Act. According to Mr Campbell, section 115 of the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act provides:

A State shall not coin money, nor make anything but gold and silver coin a legal tender in payment of debts.

Mr Campbell therefore believes that the use of plastic credit cards is unlawful. He believes also that both the Commonwealth and State parliaments of Australia have breached the Constitution of Australia Act because of this and have therefore broken the law. He accuses all parliamentarians and governments, past and present, who have condoned, aided and abetted the breaches of the law in regard to sections 115 and 51 of the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act of being guilty of breaking the law. Mr Campbell believes also that all parliamentarians and governments have breached their sworn oath of allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II by not being faithful or bearing true allegiance.

I repeat that I do not agree with Mr Campbell's interpretation. If anything, it is a case of the 1901 wording not keeping pace with technological change. More important, I believe that the spirit and principles of the Constitution today are consistent with the spirit and principles that obtained at the time they were first written. I hope Mr Campbell will acknowledge that the concept of plastic credit cards would have been the furthest thing from our forefathers' collective minds when they drafted the Constitution. If an upgrading of the terminology of the Constitution were to take place in the near future, I suspect Mr Campbell's concerns would be addressed. I agree with the view held by the Director-General of the Cabinet Office, who, in response to Mr Campbell's concerns, stated on 10 July this year:

It appears that your concern is based upon a misunderstanding of the Commonwealth Constitution. While s. 115 of the Constitution places restrictions upon a State coining money or enacting laws about legal tender, these restrictions do not apply to the Commonwealth. Section 51 of the Constitution grants the Commonwealth Parliament power to make laws with respect to currency, coinage and legal tender (s. 51(xii)) and the issue of paper money (s. 51(xiii)).

The law concerning legal tender and currency in Australia is enacted by the Commonwealth Parliament (e.g. the *Currency Act* and the *Reserve Bank Act*). The validity of these laws has been upheld by the High Court.

I sincerely hope Mr Campbell respects the fact that I have raised his concerns in Parliament, as he has consistently requested. More important, I sincerely hope also that Mr Campbell respects the fact that I disagree with his view, not because I am a politician

but because I believe his concerns are formed on an outdated reading of our Constitution.

CELTIC AND GAELIC TATTOO

Mr ANDERSON (St Marys) [5.30 p.m.]: A week ago I had the great honour and pleasure of sitting in this Chamber and listening to the President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, address a joint meeting. Mary McAleese is a gracious lady of whom we are particularly proud. She and I come from the same region of Northern Ireland. She attended the same school as my wife, Kathleen. It was an opportunity for Kathleen and Mrs McAleese to discuss past teachers and activities, because they attended school at basically the same time. It was during Mrs McAleese's address to this Parliament that it occurred to me that not a great deal is heard about the Celtic and Gaelic communities, particularly those in western Sydney.

Everyone believes they have some tie with the old countries somewhere in their family history. I would like to bring to the attention of the Chamber a Celtic and Gaelic celebration which will take place this weekend. It has been organised by a group of people from western Sydney who want to bring to the fore the activities of the Gaelic communities. It will be an exciting weekend of a variety of activities from different types of people. I have worked at large with members of the organising committee on the preparation of this function, and I have assisted wherever I could. I would like to mention the members of the committee individually and congratulate them on their great effort.

Over the past 18 months or so Mr Jim Leggett, chairman of the committee; Mr Bob Brooks, vice-chairman; Jim's wife, Shirley Leggett, secretary; Lauren Stewart, treasurer; and Dave Carruthers, Kerry Lyon, Ellen McCawley, Caroline Morris and Jimmy Stewart have all been involved in the preparations for the function. The preparations have been overseen by the tattoo director, Mr Jim McConnell. I had great pleasure in accepting an invitation from the committee to be the honorary chief for the weekend. I and my wife, Kathleen, will attend almost all of the activities. I will be attired in traditional Celtic costume, kilt and tartan, and I look forward to the most exciting and entertaining of activities.

The activities will include a Ceilidh dance on the Friday evening, which is expected to attract many hundreds of people. There will be a haggis ceremony and an address by the President of the Nepean District Robert Burns Club. To show the multiculturalism of the function the Newcastle

Cambrian singers, a Welsh choir, will participate. There will also be Irish dancing. It is the sort of function that has been promised for many a day, but has never really occurred. The organising committee has taken this opportunity to stage the function.

It is with a great deal of pleasure that I, as honorary chief, will be before the massed bands of the tattoo on Saturday night. I will receive the massed bands. If anyone has ever had the pleasure of being in such a position they will know what a stirring occasion it is. A number of years ago I was chief for the day at a massed bands function at Blacktown. To stand before 24 pipe bands marching up the hill directly to me as the person in command is a thrill I had never before experienced and will never forget. I look forward to the same sort of thrill this Saturday evening when the tattoo takes place.

Mr FACE (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [5.35 p.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for St Marys on his involvement with the Celtic and Gaelic celebration. It is a great tribute to those who have organised it. He is aware of my interest in pipe bands. Recently I had the honour to represent Australia at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission ceremony on the Somme, on my eighteenth anniversary as a drum major. I hope the weekend celebration is the beginning of a resurgence of the tattoo for this State. As the honourable member for St Marys knows, I was the joint organiser of the Newcastle military and tattoo committee for many years.

Unfortunately, it fell by the wayside due to inclement weather and costs. This celebration has the opportunity of achieving the goals set for the Newcastle tattoo. It is unfortunate, but certainly not deliberate, that the event in western Sydney will clash with the Newcastle highland gathering, which will be held on Saturday and Sunday this weekend. Next year I hope the functions will not clash, and that many of the bands at the Newcastle function will be able to participate in the Celtic and Gaelic celebration. As the honourable member for St Marys said, it is a honour for him to be involved.

On many occasions I have had the thrill of doing similar things. It is a great tribute to him. It can also be a tourism drawcard for the west. Many people in this country, especially those in the west like the honourable member for St Marys, are of Celtic origin. I wish them well. I hope they have better luck with the weather than we had in Newcastle. Out of the 17 functions we held, it rained on 11 occasions and on three occasions it was

washed out. We tried to get various times of the year from the Australia Day weekend to May before finally settling on a weekend in September. I wish the committee well and I congratulate the honourable member on his contribution.

WINDSOR ROAD

Mr MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [5.37 p.m.]: The Windsor Road is of grave concern not only to the Baulkham Hills electorate, but to the whole of The Hills district, the Hornsby electorate and, indirectly, the electorate of the Minister for Energy, who is at the table. I do not wish to drag him into my complaints about the Windsor Road, but he is a former resident of Castle Hill and, therefore, is aware of the problems associated with the Windsor Road. Since the Minister left the Castle Hill area very little work has been done on the Windsor Road. I was a resident of The Hills area for some 38 years. The Windsor Road was inadequate in the 1960s, it is certainly inadequate in the 1990s, and it is inadequate approaching the year 2000. It is worse than one would expect for a main arterial road with normal traffic increases because of the north-west sector, which, when completed, will be the same size as the city of Canberra with something like 80,000 home sites and 250,000 residents.

Over the last 20 years very little has been done to improve the Windsor Road. Since becoming a member of Parliament in 1988 I have made a number of attempts to persuade the Roads and Traffic Authority to improve the traffic flow on the Baulkham Hills to Parramatta section of that road by providing additional lanes and right-hand turns. The former Government spent a considerable amount of the 3 x 3 levy on the Old Northern Road, Seven Hills Road and Windsor Road intersection. In fairness to the Minister for Transport, I note that \$60 million has been allocated for Windsor Road improvements over the next four years. Whilst that might sound like a lot of money it represents only \$15 million a year.

The problem on the Windsor Road is becoming serious. Houses are being built for the people moving to Kellyville, Rouse Hill, Schofields, Parklea and all those places which form part of the north-west sector, but the roads simply cannot cope with the additional traffic. Traffic on the Old Northern Road is horrific at most times of the day, but it is worst at weekends, in the early mornings and in the evenings. Notwithstanding my efforts and the efforts of my predecessors, people in The Hills area do not have a rail service. Their only source of transport is buses or cars, which all have to travel on the Windsor Road.

Mr Debus: We should revive the old railway at Rogans Hill.

Mr MERTON: We should revive the old railway at Rogans Hill. I stood on the old railway site at Winston Hills and observed a few minutes silence for that former railway. I ask the Minister—I asked the former coalition Minister on a number of occasions—to provide a rail network for The Hills. I assure the people of my electorate that that will be high on the coalition's agenda when it is returned to office in March 1999. The main thrust of my argument is that we need a rail line, and we will continue to work for it, and we need increased funding for the Windsor Road. The Windsor Road—the main road between Parramatta and Windsor—is the second main route across the mountains, the principal route being the Western Highway.

Most of the traffic that comes in from Bathurst comes along the Windsor Road instead of travelling through mountain towns. One has only to see the traffic jams on a Sunday afternoon on the other side of Richmond and Windsor to realise that that traffic ends up in the electorate of Baulkham Hills and that the long-suffering people of my electorate have the problem of bumper-to-bumper traffic. I congratulate the Minister for Transport on his \$60 million initiative. That is a start, but we have a long way to go. We do not want the present Government, which gave us the north-west sector, to shirk its responsibilities. It must provide an adequate transport network, which includes a considerable revamp of the Windsor Road.

PRINCES HIGHWAY AND SNOWY MOUNTAINS HIGHWAY FATAL ACCIDENT

Mr SMITH (Bega) [5.42 p.m.]: It is with regret that I inform the House of a serious accident that occurred two weeks ago at an intersection 10 kilometres out of Bega. Unfortunately, a lady was killed and two other people were injured. I, and I am sure all honourable members, express sympathy to the families of the lady who was killed. I wish the other two injured persons a speedy recovery and I hope that they are soon home with their families. I draw this matter to the attention of honourable members and the Minister for Roads to highlight the problems that are occurring at the intersection at which this fatal accident occurred. The intersection, which is roughly 10 kilometres north of Bega on the Princes Highway, creates problems for traffic travelling eastwards along the Snowy Mountains Highway. Most people travelling along a highway do not anticipate travelling through an intersection of this nature.

This unfortunate accident is not the first to have occurred at this intersection. Some years ago a milk truck and another truck collided at the same intersection. I spoke recently to some dairy farmers living in this quiet area 10 kilometres out of Bega who said that it is not uncommon for them to hear the screech of brakes because people travelling along the Snowy Mountains Highway have not anticipated this major intersection. On approaching this intersection motorists on the Snowy Mountains Highway are confronted with a bend in the highway and illuminated signs that confuse them at night. An added disadvantage is that in winter the Bega valley, an inland area which is surrounded by hills, has a lot of frost and fog and the roads are even more difficult to negotiate.

I wrote to the Minister on 11 September following this fatal accident but I know that his departmental officers have not had enough time to investigate the matter. I bring to the attention of the House and the Minister the importance of correcting this problem as quickly as possible. There are other intersections on the Princes Highway—for example, the turn off to Dalmeny—which are illuminated at night. The intersection at which this fatal accident occurred has electricity close by. The ultimate solution to this problem is a major upgrading of the road, some engineering solution or sufficient illumination of that intersection to ensure that people are aware of it. I have written to the Bega Valley council road traffic committee, of which I am a member. I hope that the Minister, the council and the RTA will find a solution to this problem as quickly as possible.

Mr WHELAN (Ashfield—Minister for Police) [5.47 p.m.]: I will refer the remarks of the honourable member concerning this tragic accident to the Minister for Transport. I am sure that the honourable member will receive a response from the Minister.

OLYMPIC YACHTING TEST EVENTS

Ms MOORE (Bligh) [5.48 p.m.]: Tonight I speak about Rushcutters Bay with its surrounding dense residential population and foreshore parkland, a vital resource not only for the constituents of Bligh but for the whole of the Sydney community. On 2 September the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the Olympic Co-ordination Authority had logged only two complaints on a hotline established to deal with residents concerned about its operations at Rushcutters Bay for the Olympic yachting test event. This report cannot be taken as evidence that there are no problems. Many residents have contacted my office to complain about the

current assault on Rushcutters Bay parkland and its residential amenity. I have been told that the 1998 Sydney Harbour regatta hotline has been unattended and that copies of the community comments form are not readily available.

Last month I invited the Olympic Co-ordination Authority to participate in a community meeting to provide an update on Olympic plans. However, the OCA refused to face residents and pulled out at the last moment. Construction noise has been a nightmare for residents who live in the adjacent densely populated area during the last two months it has taken to set up the Olympic sailing short base for the current regatta test event for the 2000 Olympics. If the problems are not addressed they will be repeated when the temporary facilities are removed for the 1999 test event and for the Olympics.

Residents support the Olympics and have tried to live with the disruption, but they have found that the ongoing assault is taking its toll. They fear that the public address system used for the regatta will add to the noise problems. New Beach Road which provides access to Rushcutters Bay is severely congested. That narrow road cannot handle existing traffic let alone additional cars attracted into the area by signs on New South Head Road directing motorists to the 800-vehicle car park on Rushcutters Bay parkland, and to street parking in surrounding residential areas.

The Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games, not content with fencing off large areas for the shore base at the Sir David Martin reserve, the 800-vehicle car park in Rushcutters Bay park and 25 containers parked on Yarranabbe Park, is also degrading the parkland and excluding the public from other areas of the parkland. During recent wet weather cars parked on areas outside the car park compound damaged additional parkland. A resident who asked why was told that the car park was unusable because of the rain and mud. Another resident told me that because areas for active recreation have been fenced off from the public, sport is now being played on and damaging areas of the park previously reserved for passive recreation.

Yet another resident told me about the increased safety risk since the fencing was erected, making the area lonely and isolated at night. Recently a constituent was hassled and threatened by five men in a car near New Beach Road, an area which has long experienced flow-on problems from Kings Cross, particularly in relation to drugs and prostitution activity. Our historic Harbour foreshore

parklands are being assaulted. When the eyes of the world are on our city during the Olympics, our foreshore parklands will be covered in cars and containers, degraded and fenced off. The much-touted green Games promotion will be a farce.

SOCOG must acknowledge the destruction that is occurring and make changes. It must find solutions to reduce the impact on residents and on our foreshore parkland. SOCOG's best chance to fix the problems is a comprehensive evaluation of the test event, undertaken with full input from the community. Residents must have a say in strategies to limit traffic, parking, noise and pollution problems during SOCOG's occupation of the park. A true green Games requires a commitment to a "public transport only" policy for all Olympic venues, including Rushcutters Bay and Moore Park.

The recent announcement that public transport will be integrated into Olympic ticketing is a welcome step, but it will not reduce official and participant vehicles and will provide no benefit for sports such as yachting where spectators do not need tickets. SOCOG must urgently remove the totally unacceptable car park from Rushcutters Bay parkland and promote public transport for all spectators, participants and officials. It must act to ensure we can be proud to show Rushcutters Bay foreshores to the world in the year 2000. Another concern relates to commitment by the Minister for the Olympics to the Australian Yachting Federation in respect of the Sir David Martin reserve.

Although in 1979 the reserve was transferred by the Commonwealth to the State for public recreation, the community has fought long and hard to gain access to it for its intended purpose. The Minister now proposes to give permanent headquarters to the Australian Yachting Federation and alienate that land from the public. I call upon the Minister to return the reserve to the public after the Olympics. Increased foreshore land for public recreation and restoration of heritage buildings are the Olympic legacy that the community longs to gain. They long to gain the reserve for its intended purpose, that is, public recreation for all the Sydney community.

Mr WHELAN (Ashfield—Minister for Police) [5.53 p.m.]: I have noted the honourable member's comments and I am sure the Minister will reply in due course.

Private members' statements noted.

House adjourned at 5.54 p.m.