

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 12 October 2000

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**Mr Speaker (The Hon. John Henry Murray)** took the chair at 10.30 a.m.

**Mr Speaker** offered the Prayer.

## ADDRESS BY PARALYMPIANS JULIANNE ADAMS AND HAMISH MacDONALD

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Pursuant to the resolution of the House yesterday, it is my honour and privilege to welcome Paralympians Ms Julianne Adams and Mr Hamish MacDonald onto the floor of the House to address honourable members.

**Ms JULIANNE ADAMS:** Mr Speaker and honourable members, I would like to begin—quite predictably, I think—by thanking you very, very much for this amazing opportunity to speak this morning on behalf of the Australian Paralympic Team and especially the 285 athletes. We realise that this is a wonderful opportunity and I thank you sincerely.

When I was thinking about what to say today—I must confess that I have not had a lot of time to prepare, as I have been a little distracted with other things—I thought perhaps I could talk to you about the Paralympic Games, but there is no point in doing that because there is a lot of literature around that will give you that detail. Instead what I would like to do this morning is give you a little bit of a personal perspective on what it is like to be a Paralympian, how I came to this point and what the Paralympic Games mean to an athlete. Perhaps a small personal overview will put you more in the feel and the spirit of the Games. Please do not panic: I am not going to go over the past 34 years, which is my age. I will just pick out certain relevant points.

Contrary to a question that I and several Paralympians have been asked by members of the media and, indeed, members of the public, as a child I did not lie in bed at night dreaming of winning a Paralympic gold medal. It was quite the contrary. I actually lay in bed dreaming of winning an Olympic gold medal and I had quite a promising career as an elite gymnast. I worked over 12 years for 30 hours a week and reached the ripe old age of 17. I realised that I was not going to make that goal and went gently into retirement at 17 and a half. I then moved on, fairly predictably, through year 12 studies, on to university and picked up the typical university activities—the study, the extracurricular activities and the part-time job which, when the parental allowance dries up, you have to have.

My part-time job was related to my previous sporting background as an elite gymnast and I was employed to put some routines together that were going to be videotaped for national standards. One day I was in the gym rehearsing a move that I had done thousands and thousands of times—it was run-of-the-mill—and I did not quite complete the move. My hand slipped. I bounced off my neck and onto my back and severed my spinal cord. In the course of 10 seconds, my life changed irreversibly. I will not go into detail because there is no need to do that. Suffice to say that there was resuscitation, followed by ambulances, calls from mother, flights by father interstate, intensive care and surgery. Very shortly afterwards—though it may seem surprising—there was that realisation that this is a horrible situation, but this is life. This is the life that I have been given and I am going to live it the best way I can.

Honourable members may think that is strange, but it is a survival instinct. The will to survive is very, very strong. I started looking forward and I did not look backward. I did not look back at the fact that I could not continue with my chosen course of study. I thought my physically active life was over. This is when wheelchair basketball entered my world. It happened while I was still lying in a hospital bed. An elderly gentleman in a wheelchair wheeled himself into my hospital room. I was not very keen to see him. I did not know him and I was not keen on the whole wheelchair idea, having newly come to one. I said, "What are you doing in my room?" He said, "Well, I have heard you have a bit of a sporting background and I thought you might like to come and play wheelchair basketball. We are recruiting."

I was actually quite horrified—in fact, absolutely horrified. I had just finished 12 years as an elite gymnast and I did not want to have anything to do with disabled sport. I had the impression that was a pastime or recreation—just something to fill in the time and a little bit of something to do while not being able to fulfil a

normal role in life. Well I soon did not have a choice about that because as part of my physiotherapy program I was dragged down to the basketball court. I played it once and was hooked for life—and I have a lot of life, hopefully. It was physically challenging; it was exciting; it raised the adrenaline; it had physical contact; and it challenged me and gave me back the physical side of myself which, as an athlete, I needed. What made it really important was that I was useless—absolutely useless. I could not reach the ring with the basketball. Of course, as you do, I started to set goals. My goal was to reach the ring and put the ball through the hoop, and so it built until I made the first State team and went to my first national event. Life was pretty much getting back on track.

To start with, sport for me was a way to get back into life. It was a way to build my physical strength and find a part of me that I thought I had lost. Of course, it did not stop there because there are always higher goals to aim for, and I kept going. I went back to university and kept playing basketball. In that first year of university, I made my first Australian team. It was in the very early days of women's wheelchair basketball. It was the first international tournament that the Australian women's wheelchair basketball team had been to. We went to St Etienne in France and finished sixth, which was amazing. Life was back on track with international travel and I was physically competitive again. Sport did an awful lot for me in those early days. Unfortunately—or fortunately for Australia, but unfortunately for me—the Paralympic movement in Australia is so strong that one has to be incredibly committed. At that stage I was juggling university and sport and probably the preference or priority was given to study.

When it came to selection for Barcelona, I had had a great training camp and I was looking really good going in. The coach sat me down and said, "Julianne, you have had a great camp. You did really well but you are not going to Barcelona. You are not on my team." He also said to me—and I will never forget this; I objected at the time but he was so, so right—"You're not going, not because you are not one of my team's best but because you're not one of my team's most committed. To make it to an Australian Paralympic team, you have to put in 110 per cent, and then some. At this point, your life is not in the situation where you are doing that." Australian Paralympic sport is as strong as that and we have the strength to say that athletes must put it as a priority. And that is a fair call. There is a lot of time, effort and expense going into it and it should be given priority.

I stopped playing for a few years. At that stage, there was not today's State and Federal support and we had to find a lot of the funding ourselves. For example, I paid for my first trip to France. I went back to complete my study and I went on and went to work. In 1995 I received a phone call from the Australian coach who said—and this is very funny—"Are you any more committed than you used to be, Julianne?" Of course, he could not see my facial expression. I said, "Of course I am, coach." I had not touched a ball for three years. He said, "That's good, because I will put you in the squad." I said, "The squad?" And he said, "To go to an Atlanta. I just have a suggestion for you, though. I would really rather that you were in Melbourne." I have not said that at that point I was living in Western Australia. Of course, yes, I decided, I will move my whole life—and I did, because I was ready for that challenge and I was ready to commit.

It was a gamble, sure, because I was given no guarantee of making that team, but there was a confidence that I had it in myself, that I could do well if I put the effort in and chose to make the trip to Victoria. I did so. I was terribly nervous during the selections for the Atlanta team and I was thinking: Did he know about the training session I had missed—because, of course, there has to be one sometime? Did he know about that morning I slept in? He either did not know, or he did not care. I made the team and went to Atlanta. The standout experience in my mind from Atlanta is being so proud of representing my country. The support the Australian community gave was just phenomenal. I will never forget the hero faxes and messages from kids, members of the public and members of Parliament. It was just sensational. It was feeling like you were part of the family, and that is a very special feeling.

However, the results were not quite what I wanted, so I had to go on to another Games. I went on to do the four years to Sydney. In that time, thankfully through the support of your Federal colleagues and the Australian Sports Commission and through your State Government contribution to funding athletes and other State Government programs, funding and arrangements have now been honed so that we can actually be fully dedicated athletes should we choose. That has made an incredible difference to me personally. In the last eight months I have been a full-time athlete. If I am going to do this one, I am going to do it properly and hopefully come out with a gold medal.

At this time it has very much been in some respects the power of one that brought me to this point in my life; it had to take a lot of internal strength. But something stronger than the power of one, which is incredibly strong, is the power of the nation. I have reached this point but I could not have done so and been as

prepared as I am mentally, physically and emotionally without the power of the nation. That is where Australia has done so very well in preparing the Australian Paralympic team. Hopefully, that will continue in supporting us through the Games and our performances. I am sure it will. It is something we are relying on, as the Olympians have done, because that will get us over the line.

Thank you so much for this opportunity to speak to you today. The strength and power the athletes have put in hopefully will be reciprocated by everyone in New South Wales and Australia. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

**Mr HAMISH MacDONALD:** Good morning. Right off the bat, like Julianne, I thank you very much for this tremendous opportunity to speak to you this morning. Ladies and gentlemen, over the next few weeks there will be a new chapter in Australian sporting history. The community will be introduced to a new group of sporting heroes whose names, like those of Thorpe and Freeman, will be etched into our psyche forever. The Paralympics, as we heard already from Julianne, are the most elite and prestigious competition for all athletes with a disability. No doubt this Australian team is the most well resourced and best prepared team we have ever produced. For the first time, at these Games Australia will be represented in every one of the 18 sports to be contested.

These Games are set to be the greatest Paralympics ever staged, with the largest number of participating nations ever and community support in the form of ticket sales already far exceeding any expectations. Having attended two previous Games and having just witnessed what is considered to be the greatest Olympic Games ever, I am sure that once again the people of New South Wales and Australia will deliver the goods. However, it is our aim that these Games leave a lasting legacy: a legacy that enables all future Australian Paralympians to continue to receive support and be adequately resourced and prepared to perform at their best; a legacy that will showcase the talent and potential of all people with a disability; and, above all, a legacy of elite performance and goodwill.

Most importantly, through the New South Wales Parliament I thank the people of New South Wales for their continuing passion and commitment, from the decision makers here in this room to the thousands of supporters who will attend the Games and to the many volunteers who will help make it happen. From every athlete attending the Games from every corner of the globe, I invite you all to join me, my Australian team mates, the elite athletes from around the world and all the people of New South Wales out at Homebush Bay to help us create some history. Thank you.

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

### Time Limits on Speeches: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

#### Motion by Mr Whelan agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to provide for the following time limits on the debate on the Sydney Paralympic Games:

Premier	-	Unlimited
Leader of the Opposition	-	Unlimited
Minister for the Olympics	-	Unlimited
Shadow Minister for the Olympics	-	Unlimited
Any other member	-	15 minutes

## SYDNEY 2000 PARALYMPIC GAMES

**Mr CARR** (Maroubra—Premier, Minister for the Arts, and Minister for Citizenship) [10.45 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) thanks Paralympians Julianne Adams and Hamish MacDonald; and
- (2) wishes the Australian team every success at the Sydney Paralympics.

I do not think anyone could have held this Parliament in the palm of their hand better than Julianne and Hamish did this morning. I congratulate you because you can now add to the list of your other qualifications, determination and the high athletic prowess that has made you what you are today the fact that you are great communicators. You are great communicators because you told this Parliament the story of your lives and gave

us some feeling of the commitment that lay behind your sporting successes. Over morning tea before we came to the Chamber I discussed with Julianne and Hamish their experiences of Atlanta, and in the case of Hamish of Barcelona also.

I believe we can be fairly confident as a community and nation that we have laid the base for a Paralympic Games that will get the world's vote of confidence the same way our Olympic Games did. What pride it will be for us Australians if the world says that Sydney set the benchmark for the Paralympics as it did for the Olympics. That is our goal. Agreeing to come here and address the Parliament I suppose might have been a formidable ask for people who are not used to walking in and commanding Parliament, but I tell you what, you have set a bit of a benchmark today as professional communicators in this place!

You have helped to focus the attention of New South Wales on the Paralympics. This morning I was at Moss Vale, where it was my honour to greet the Paralympic torch with the honourable member for Southern Highlands—who probably did not have the advantage of a helicopter to get back here; this unanimity that embraces the House is okay, but I am not going to give any breaks! There was a tremendous turnout in Moss Vale as the Paralympic torch entered New South Wales. Tony Lockett ran with the torch into the sportsground. Every school was represented and there was a great community turnout. It was interesting that after the success we had with volunteers for the Olympics that volunteers were there this morning bursting with pride as they are going to be working on the Paralympics. If the reception at Moss Vale is any indication of the response across New South Wales, these Games will enjoy terrific community support. But, of course, that is already indicated by ticket sales.

As the Minister for the Olympics reported yesterday to the Parliament, to have the opening ceremony sold out, many events sold out, and tickets to the closing ceremony to be sold out soon, certainly points to the gathering momentum for the Games. We are all aware that in Atlanta our Paralympians gained second place overall. We remember also the achievements at Barcelona when our Australian competitors astonished Australian public opinion by the way they shot to prominence. Your visit to the Parliament today reminds us of how ready our athletes are. The State is ready. Those great facilities have been tried and tested.

Just last night, I am told, 2,700 athletes from 69 countries slept at the Paralympics Village, and you two are heading there after your address to this Chamber. Next week the village will house 4,000 athletes from 126 countries. All that remains now is the lighting of the cauldron for the commencement of the Games. The Paralympics are grabbing the attention of the people of New South Wales. We will be excited by the Games. We will be inspired by them. More importantly, we will be there, all the more dedicated, to see these great Games after the splendid addresses to this Parliament by Julianne and Hamish. New South Wales is with them and every Paralympian. I commend this motion to the House.

**Mrs CHIKAROVSKI** (Lane Cove—Leader of the Opposition) [10.50 a.m.]: I join the Premier in thanking Julianne and Hamish for joining us in this House. I must say that they have achieved something which does not often occur in this House. They were heard in silence and with great respect—a very rare commodity in this House, they may be assured—because they spoke passionately and from their hearts. As someone who has had the great joy of being involved in disability sport for 10 years, I know their level of dedication and commitment to achieve success at an elite level. We are delighted that Sydney is hosting the eleventh Paralympic Games. We have a reasonable expectation that the success of the Paralympics in Atlanta may be exceeded in Sydney. We are not putting pressure on Paralympians to come first in the medal tally but if they do so it will be a nice way to finish the Games.

I know that their Sydney experience will certainly be much better than that at Atlanta. Anybody who went to Atlanta knows that the athletes themselves were not treated as well as they should have been. For example, I know that a number of people who were placed in various accommodation provided there were not given wheelchair accessible showers. It was very difficult because young women literally had to be lifted onto chairs into baths and people had to help them have showers because their wheelchairs could not fit in the showers. It was very disappointing for athletes when they were competing at the swimming venues to see holes in the walls where television cables had been ripped out because the Games were no longer going to be televised. I know the crowds were not as good at Atlanta as they will be in Sydney.

I also know that the Sydney crowds, just as they did in the recent Olympic Games, will cheer on our Paralympians, and athletes from around the world, with loud voices. We all know that Australians are prepared to acknowledge and admire success and successful people. Good luck with everything that will happen in the next 10 days. I am as delighted as the Premier and everybody else that tickets for the Sydney Paralympic Games

are selling so well. It will be a truly magnificent operation if the Stadium can be filled not only for the opening and closing ceremonies but on a regular basis during the Games. People who have never been to a Paralympics or been involved in disability sports should go and see these elite athletes.

A lot is heard about Paralympians being inspiring but we need to remember that they are, to use the words of Julianne and Hamish, committed and dedicated. They are, in fact, elite athletes. They are competing against the best in the world and they deserve to be encouraged and supported in that competition. I was at the hugely exciting gold medal game for the men's basketball in Atlanta and that was just extraordinary. If one has never seen wheelchair basketball, consider the concept of people such as Julianne shooting baskets whilst moving around a regulation-size court in a wheelchair. The whole thing is quite extraordinary. If one really wants to see a truly unusual sport, one should watch people playing wheelchair rugby. Is it fair to say that those people are very aggressive?

**Ms JULIANNE ADAMS:** Yes.

**Mrs CHIKAROVSKI:** They are certainly very aggressive. It is a whole new concept and it is exciting to watch people tackling each other in wheelchairs. The participants in the Games deserve our encouragement, support and thanks for their level of commitment. I look forward to the Paralympic Games. As I said, during the past 10 years I have been involved with disability sport. I was actually at the Game to which the Minister for the Olympics referred earlier this week when we won the first ever bronze medal in boccia. I have been patron of the Cerebral Palsy Boccia Association now for 10 years. I have watched those young people develop from their very infancy in the game. Before Atlanta we staged the world championships here, so they qualified to go to Atlanta.

It is a game in which the players are truly competitive, in an environment that some people cannot understand, with ramp players, to which the Minister referred. These people are so disabled that they play with a ramp because they cannot control their arm movements enough to throw a ball. They have a helper who sits in front of them. The helper is not allowed, as one can imagine, to look at the game. The helper is only allowed to move the ramp up or down or either way in accordance with instructions given by the person playing the game.

When I first watched this game I was amazed that people whom I knew very well who were competing against one another during the national championships were friendly off the court but when they got onto the boccia court they had only one aim, and that was to win. They played very aggressively. They played very aggressively to win in Atlanta. I know that they have been further honing their skills over the past four years. We hope that they will do better than a bronze medal in boccia this year. To watch them play with a pointer on their heads to control the speed of the ball and use their skill level to control the direction of the ball and win using the last ball as they do in a game shows the level of training that these people go through. That is something we all need to remember. We all need to remember that people who are competing in the Paralympics are elite athletes, committed, dedicated, aggressive and competitive. All those words apply to them and I know that at the end of the day they will do this nation very proud. We are very proud of what happened in the city during the Olympics. I know we will be even prouder of what happens at the Paralympics.

**Mr KNIGHT** (Campbelltown—Minister for the Olympics) [10.57 a.m.]: I join with the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and I am sure all honourable members of the House in thanking both Julianne Adams and Hamish MacDonald for their contributions addressing the House this morning, and in wishing the whole Australian team every success. On Tuesday I addressed the House on preparations for the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games. Rather than simply repeat those comments today I want to briefly wish Australia's Paralympic team all the best of luck for the Games and to say a few things about the team and about the athletes. Australia's team at the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games will be our largest ever with 278 athletes representing us. In fact, just like at the Sydney Olympic Games, the Australian team at the Paralympics will be the largest single team from anywhere in the world.

As I said the other day, the Australian team is hoping to improve on its successes from the Atlanta Games. In Atlanta, Australia led the medal tally right up until the last day of competition and finished with a staggering 106 medals—42 gold, 37 silver and 27 bronze. We won medals in 10 out of 13 sports contested by Australians, and it is no exaggeration to say that the 1996 Paralympic team is the most successful sporting team ever to have left Australian shores. Over the years I have had the pleasure to meet many of our great Paralympians and I have been lucky enough for them to have shared their stories with me. On Tuesday I mentioned some of these athletes and their stories and today I would like to mention a few more as examples of the fantastic spirit that exists amongst our Paralympians.

There is the equestrian Sue Ellen Lovett, who is vision impaired, who rode her horse Mudgee from Melbourne to Sydney and from Brisbane to Sydney to raise money for the Paralympic Games. What about our tandem cycling duo of Kieran and Kerry Modra? Kieran is vision impaired and sits on the back of the bike providing a lot of the power while Kerry his wife steers from the front. At the Atlanta Games, Kerry, who is able bodied, badly hurt her leg and was in doubt for the competition. However, she was determined that she would not let her husband down. She had the support crew carry her to the bike and place her on it. Despite the immense pain Kerry and Kieran tore around the track and won gold in the sprint event.

One story I will never forget is that of judo player Anthony Clarke, who is totally blind. Anthony usually competes against able-bodied athletes. Indeed, he has won medals in judo in South Australia against all comers. He has written a book about his life which I commend to anyone in the House as an inspiring and emotional read. I would like to read a brief story from Anthony's book on how he won gold in Atlanta. It illustrates his great character and sense of fun in the face of adversity. Anthony writes:

I can remember having a grip on my opponent similar to how you hold someone when doing a waltz ... We were at one stage cheek to cheek when all of a sudden I burped right in his face. Then I started giggling. Then I thought to myself, "What the hell am I doing burping and giggling in the Gold medal match at the Paralympics!"

Anthony's unique style certainly worked. He threw his opponent off, and he won that bout and the gold medal in a total time of 35 seconds. I first met Anthony in person in Atlanta at the wheelchair rugby. While he obviously could not see the game, he was there. He had his coach describing the action for him, and he was wildly cheering on the Australian team. I have since seen Anthony at several functions. He is one of the real characters of Australian sport and one of the funniest after-dinner speakers in Australia.

Who else but Anthony Clarke could have an audience of business people in stitches explaining how his disability was a huge advantage in his younger days when he would go out drinking to excess with his sighted mates. "We'd all get blind drunk," said Anthony, "but I was the only one with a seeing-eye dog to get me home!" Our Paralympic team is full of real characters and heroes like Anthony Clarke in every sport. We have heard from two of them this morning. They are people to admire and enjoy. It is a privilege to know them.

Hamish and Julianne have already explained what motivates them to compete, and I am sure the whole House wishes them personally every success in the coming Games. Today they have both given sensational performances in addressing the House. I have seen both of them compete, and I have no doubt they will give sensational athletic performances at the Games. Indeed, I have been lucky enough to train on one occasion with Julianne and the Australian women's wheelchair basketball team. It was a very bruising time for me, both physically, because they were pretty tough and tipped me out of the chair—

**Mr Hazzard:** A few of us would like to do that!

**Mr KNIGHT:** —and emotionally, Brad, because their insults were far more cutting than yours. They refused to let me train any further unless I wore a Berlei sports bra in common with the other members of the team! Our Paralympians are a great inspiration for all Australians. I wish them enormous good luck in the competition ahead. I urge all Australians to be out there and give them the support they deserve and to have the fun that the crowd will surely have.

**Mr HARTCHER** (Gosford) [11.07 a.m.]: Hamish, Julianne and all Paralympians, Australia is very proud of you. The Australian people will be supporting you, just as they supported the Olympic athletes over the past couple of weeks. Often at immigration ceremonies we commemorate the fact that people have chosen Australia from all countries in the world. That is an added dimension to their citizenship over those who are born into Australia. The same can be said for Paralympians. Olympic athletes use their natural ability: Paralympians when competing use their natural ability and overcome their disability. They have an extra dimension to their athletic prowess.

Every Australian will be with you, and every Australian will be acknowledging not only the great achievements of past Paralympic teams but also the great achievements that we hope will be yours in these Paralympic Games. We do not necessarily expect you to win medals. What we do expect is that you will take part in and enjoy the Games. They are, after all, a demonstration of your zeal, your courage, your determination and the culmination of those hundreds of hours that have gone to make you the people that you are.

With you there will be the enthusiasm of the volunteers. As everybody who participated in the Olympics knows, the thousands of volunteers that we met were saying, "I'm coming back for the Paralympics." That zeal, that enthusiasm is there. The enthusiasm is in the schools. People from every New South Wales

school that I have visited over past months have told me that they are coming down to see the Paralympics. Those children will be seeing you as their role models, their idols and their athletes for tomorrow. You will be doing not only yourselves proud, but also them, and along with you the entire Australian community. The anthem will ring out, the flag will fly, the crowd will chant, "Aussie! Aussie! Aussie! Oi! Oi! Oi!". All of Australia is with you. All of Australia wishes you well.

*[Mr Speaker left the chair at 11.11 a.m. The House resumed at 11.24 a.m.]*

**Ms MEGARRITY** (Menai) [11.24 a.m.]: It is with great pleasure that I speak to the motion moved by the Premier relating to the staging of the Paralympic Games. I wholeheartedly support the Premier's motion. When I spoke yesterday in debate on the motion relating to the Olympic Games I referred to the night I attended the Olympics and saw the two demonstration finals in the women's 800 metres and the men's 1,500 metres wheelchair events. All honourable members would know that Louise Sauvage won the gold. There was a lot of pressure on her to do that, just as there was a lot of pressure on Cathy Freeman a few nights before. Louise, a true champion, won that gold medal but, unfortunately, it will not count towards the full medal tally. We are hoping for great things when she participates in her Paralympic events.

Yesterday I also said that my heart sank when John MacLean, a family friend, came out of his chair during the 1,500 metre wheelchair race. John, a true athlete and a true champion, will come back. He was an able-bodied athlete prior to a tragic accident. He was training for a triathlon and was hit by a truck on the M4. John was not daunted by his level of disability. Since that time he has swum the English Channel and he also completed the Hawaiian iron man competition—running, swimming and cycling—under the time requirements. He is the first wheelchair athlete ever to have achieved that feat. Those two people are the athletes with whom most people would be familiar. The two demonstration events to which I have just referred gave wheelchair sport a high profile. However, the Paralympics will involve much more than wheelchair races.

My association with wheelchair sports goes back some 15 years. My husband has coached teams in the National Wheelchair Basketball League, also known as the NWBL. I have watched that sport from its infancy—a sport which is now getting the attention it deserves; attention that it should have had all the way through. Sponsors have not always been forthcoming because of that lack of attention and the fact that the crowds have not been big. People do not fully appreciate the fierce competition that goes with these sports. The West Sydney Razorbacks Wheelchair Basketball Team which my husband currently coaches, is associated with an NBL able-bodied team also known as the West Sydney Razorbacks. That has given members of the wheelchair basketball team an opportunity to play curtain-raiser games and to showcase their real talents. Two team members have now been recognised in their selection for the Australian Paralympic teams.

One of the players in my husband's team is a woman called Jane Webb, who is competing in the Australian women's wheelchair basketball team. These Paralympic Games will be Jane's second Paralympics. Jane, a tough competitor, will certainly do us proud. She is a valuable member of my husband's team. Jane is engaged to a young man by the name of Troy Sachs, who is also in my husband's wheelchair basketball team. Troy will be competing in the Australian men's wheelchair basketball team. Those who watched the 1996 Atlanta Games might remember that Troy, to the surprise of his family, friends and spectators, shaved his head for the event and played one of the hardest games that anyone has ever played in any sort of elite sport. In fact, he was responsible for 42 points in the final event. Just to demonstrate how significant that is, that is the best effort by any athlete in any Olympic final. So Troy's performance in the 1996 Atlanta Games to win gold was better than the achievements of somebody like Michael Jordan.

Honourable members have no better example of the intensity and the fierce competition of this sport than Troy's performance in 1996 at Atlanta. My family and I have known Troy since he was about 14. He is now 24. We have seen him grow and mature as a person as well as an athlete. As a result of a birth defect Troy, as a young boy, had to have an amputation. For as long as my family has known Troy's parents they have constantly had to buy new artificial limbs as Troy outgrew them. Troy is now at least six feet two inches tall. He says that his only regret would be that he was not born black as he suggests that would have made him an even better basketball player. As I said earlier, Troy is now engaged to Jane. We look forward to their wedding and to their dual success at the Sydney Paralympic Games.

Paul Croft, another gentleman who is a resident in my electorate, currently plays a different sort of disabled sport, that is, sitting volleyball. Today Paul is running with the Paralympic torch in the Illawarra, which is quite an honour for him. Paul, who has only one arm, is a TAFE teacher during the day but every other minute

of his time is spent training and competing. These Paralympic Games will be the fifth Games that he will have attended. His first competition goes back to 1984, when he competed in the 1,500 metres event. In 1984 Paul participated in athletics, but this year he will participate in sitting volleyball. In the 1984 Paralympics Paul came seventh in the world. He also competed in the 5,000 metres event and came fourth. In 1988 he competed in the 10,000 metres event and came sixth and in 1992 he competed in the 10,000 metres event and came seventh. In 1996 he qualified for the marathon but, due to the size of the Australian team, he was not chosen to go to those Games.

Paul, who is now a youthful 49, was keen to participate before his home crowd at the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games and tried to get into the standing volleyball team. However, he was told that there were a lot of younger and fitter men. Paul realised that the best Australian team should be chosen, so he then tried his hand at sitting volleyball. To Paul's and everyone else's surprise he was not selected for the sitting volleyball team. Paul did not take that sitting down. He stood up and said, "I think there is something wrong here." He challenged that decision, and it was overturned. To his great excitement and joy he is now competing in the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games in sitting volleyball—another aggressive and demanding sport.

Players virtually have to sometimes knock each other out of the way to play this game while sitting down. We throw around the word "inspiration", but Paul's dedication and inspiration is extraordinary. It is something that he shows his TAFE students and it is certainly something that is evident in his community work in my electorate. He loves sport and has a determination to succeed, and that is why he did not accept the decision when he was not selected. He is running with the torch today, and I know that he will be extremely proud.

Paul has seen his sport come a long way over the years. At the Paralympics there will be wheelchair basketball, swimming and a whole range of sports on show for the world to see. I hope that after this period of infancy the sports will be fully appreciated and that sponsors will come forward when they see that there is something to be gained by supporting these athletes, who incur many expenses. As I said, they have day jobs and cannot become professional athletes as such, and they must compete in national and international competition. As one can imagine, there is a financial burden in having to fly to Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane for national competitions. Wheelchair basketball players for instance compete in the same way as able-bodied athletes. They do doomsday double weekends—they go to Adelaide and Perth in the one weekend—then come back to their day jobs on the Monday. And they train, train, train. As Julianne said this morning, they must be 100 per cent committed to what they are doing. Of course, they also have families and other commitments, just like the able-bodied athletes.

It is important, as I said yesterday, that we support these athletes and go to the Games not out of a sense of pity or sympathy or because we think we are doing a good service, but because we will see some amazing competition. There is always controversy—it is no different to able-bodied sports—about who is selected and who is not. The Minister for the Olympics mentioned earlier some of the sledging that occurs on the courts. No holds are barred. When wheelchair athletes first get knocked out of their chairs the crowd usually feels for the person who is knocked out. The next minute that person is back in the chair and competing as if nothing had happened. Of course, injuries happen and, in this case, because of paraplegia the players may not even be aware that an injury has occurred. They play on regardless. Their ultimate aim is to win, and they put everything they can into doing that.

I also wish to acknowledge those in my husband's team who are not competing in the Paralympic Games. In the National Basketball League there are people who have been playing this game for many years and perhaps because of their age and circumstances they are not in the current Australian team. Michael Callaghan for instance captained the team for many years and runs his own Mogo wheelchair business, which has supplied many state of the art sporting wheelchairs. Even sports wheelchairs were not very common until recent years. Another experienced and capable player in the team is Errol Hyde. Each of those gentlemen is over 50 years old and, when they get court time, they fiercely compete and are role models for others to follow.

When one sees characters like Errol and Michael—I was going to call him Gary, because Michael Callaghan is also known as Gary, as a reference to Gary O'Callaghan—and see the way they joke and compete, at times it is hard to remember where many of these players have come from. They have usually come from rehabilitation following car accidents. They do not dwell on the turn their lives have taken but, as Julianne Adams explained this morning, they are fulfilling a need for physical activity. Many of them, like Julianne, were athletes prior to their accidents. Many are young men who have suffered due to reckless car usage in their early 20s, while others may simply have dived into a shallow pool or like Donna Ritchie, Captain of the Australian Women's Basketball Team, fallen off a wall. It can be as simple as that. In the space of 10 seconds their lives change forever.



Full credit should go to the people who have gone through the selection process and made it to Homebush Bay. They will take up residence in the Olympic village, and I am proud to say that Sydney has accommodated them in the best facilities, which I know they appreciate. They have experienced accommodation of varying quality when they have competed overseas, not only in the Olympics but in world championships. The effort that has gone into this is characteristic of what we do in Sydney and what we have done with the Olympics. Every last detail has been planned for, and I hope and pray they will achieve success. For them, competing is what it is all about. We will be proud of them no matter what they achieve.

Many sports are on offer and spectators have the opportunity of day passes to wander in and out of various sports. I echo the Minister's statement: Do not go just to one sport, experience all the sports. It will certainly give the people in the trains plenty to talk about on their way home. I hope we will see the crowds build up for the sports as they subsequently compete in national league competitions and local league competitions in the future. My ultimate hope is that the sponsorship dollar will flow and more and more people can be involved in this sport at the elite level.

**Mr HAZZARD** (Wakehurst) [11.39 a.m.]: It is an enormous pleasure to be able to speak in this debate and to support the bipartisan motion that has been moved, acknowledging the wonderful Paralympian athletes who have been here today and who will be joined by many of their colleagues in the next couple of weeks at Homebush and, for that matter, at other venues around Sydney and New South Wales. I was very honoured to have been the shadow Minister for Sport. At present I am the shadow Minister for Disability Services.

When I was shadow Minister for Sport I met some incredible people: athletes, elite athletes and people who support athletes, athleticism and the role of sport in our community. Some of those athletes had disabilities and some did not. One abiding force I saw in all those people was their enormous level of commitment to their particular sport or sports. The character of those people was the sort of character we would like to see in so many of our young people but, for various reasons, those characteristics may not yet have developed. These athletes are the sorts of people who can provide the role models for our young people, to show them how commitment can change lives.

As the shadow Minister for Sport I saw some fantastic sports—again, played by athletes with and without disabilities. In the context of this motion today I note that some of the most aggressive and fantastic sports I saw included some of the sports mentioned today by our athletes, particularly Julianne Adams. Wheelchair basketball is an incredible sport to watch. One member observed earlier that spectators might be surprised when they first see an athlete tipped out of his or her wheelchair. I admit to being one of those people who was very surprised.

One of the most ferocious endeavours I saw—and the honourable member for Menai would know—was men's wheelchair basketball during the Gold Cup two years ago at Homebush. As I recollect, it was held in the State Sports Centre because the Dome and the SuperDome were not being used for the competition. I was sitting ringside and I did not know what to expect, because I had never seen wheelchair basketball. I expected that there would be a degree of respect and decency in the way the athletes moderated their behaviour. There was respect and there was decency, but it did not equate with being peaceful or calm around their colleagues. There seemed to be an unwritten rule that anyone who could tip the other team out of their wheelchairs was doing pretty well, because it would give them an advantage.

**Ms Megarrity:** Especially when you get a foul.

**Mr HAZZARD:** Yes, especially when you get a foul. The next few weeks will be a real eye-opener for the people of New South Wales. They should get out there and support these sports because they will learn a lot not only about sport generally but also about the competitive nature and commitment displayed by these athletes. I was lucky enough to watch perhaps a calmer sport, wheelchair tennis. Athletes who play wheelchair tennis do not get an opportunity to tip each other out of their chairs because a net separates them. And that is probably a good thing! I have enjoyed watching wheelchair tennis on a number of occasions. In the past few days I have heard some of the athletes talking on the radio about wheelchair tennis. I would certainly encourage all the families of New South Wales to get along and see this sport, as well as the other sports which make up this wonderful sporting event.

This morning I did not hear anyone say so, but the Paralympic Games will be the second biggest sporting event ever held in Australia. They will be bigger than the 1956 Olympics. That of itself is worthy of both note and celebration. It is wonderful that we as a country can celebrate, within the space of only a month,

the two largest sporting events this country has ever hosted—and that the community of New South Wales and, indeed, of Australia is able to take part in them. Perhaps those who did not attend the first part of this sporting festival—that is, the Olympics—should get along to see some phenomenal sports at the Paralympics. Earlier I said that we see a certain quality in some of these athletes. One great thing is that in addition to my exposure as the shadow Minister for Sport and Recreation and the shadow Minister for Disability Services to some of these athletes, as a local member of Parliament I have also had an opportunity to meet many of these people. There are quite a number of elite athletes with disabilities in our local community on the northern beaches.

One of the first elite athletes with disabilities I met was Allison Quinn. I have seen this young girl grow up over the past few years. She is a phenomenal local athlete. Last year she went to the summer games of the Special Olympics. As we are celebrating the forthcoming Paralympic Games we should remember that athletes with disabilities also compete in other major sporting events. Again, I acknowledge the commitment of athletes such as Allison to take part in those sporting events and to ensure that they represent their country or their State, if it is a national competition, to the best of their ability by training with absolute commitment.

Earlier we heard about John Maclean. I had the pleasure of meeting John Maclean after he swam the English Channel. Indeed, I first met him while I was watching the basketball gold cup a couple of years ago. People such as John Maclean, the basketballer Lisa O'Nion and Donna Ritchie present an incredible role model for young people. I acknowledge that they may not realise exactly what role model function they serve in the community, but understanding how these athletes have overcome the disabilities they were either born with or suffered from during their lives is an enormous incentive for other people to get on with life. These athletes do not let anything hold them back; they simply get on with life. That is a message that our schools, families and communities should be getting across to young people, giving them great hope and a sense of future.

Before Hamish MacDonald addressed the Parliament earlier today he reminded me that had I met him about three months ago. I do not think he mentioned in his address that he is a shot-putter, although I think he does other things as well. Hamish and I, together with Lisa O'Nion, launched a book entitled *Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games*, which was being distributed by Dominie books. Whilst I do not give companies free plugs and I have no commercial interest in the matter, I draw to the attention of honourable members that there is an increasing interest in schools and in the resource area of schools in relation to the Paralympics.

I found the book interesting because, although I had some involvement as the shadow Minister for Sport and Recreation and the shadow Minister for Disability Services, I was unaware of the history of the Paralympic Games. As this was not mentioned earlier, I point out that while the Paralympic Games is the second largest event ever to be held in Australia, it has a much shorter history than the Olympics. For that reason it must be acknowledged that it is an achievement to have sold all the tickets to the opening ceremony, many tickets to the closing ceremony and most of the pre-booked seats for a number of the sporting events. People like Lois Appleby from the Sydney Paralympic organising committee and Brendan Finn from the Australian Paralympic committee deserve credit for the role they have played, along with their workers and organisational people, in ensuring that this event comes to fruition. As for the history of the Paralympic Games, the book states:

After World War II many people were left **severely** disabled due to injuries received in battle. Many of these injuries were spinal injuries and a leading **neurosurgeon**, Sir Ludwig Guttman, was very involved with treating these people. Sir Ludwig was one of the first to recognise the need and value of sport and **recreation** to assist **therapy** and rehabilitation of injured service men and women.

Sir Ludwig was to become known as "the father of sport for disabled persons". His dream was to have a games for disabled people that would match the Olympic Games.

I think his dream has now been largely acknowledged and realised. The book further states:

To support his treatment methods and ideas, Sir Ludwig organised a Wheelchair Games to coincide with the 1948 London Olympic Games. At this time the Wheelchair Games were not about fierce competition and **elite** athletes. They were about giving some quality of life to the large number of people with **spinal** injuries which was very important in the period following such a destructive war.

Four years later the Games were held again at the same location—Stoke Mandeville Hospital in England—and this time competitors were joined by a Dutch team, making it an international event.

This is the crunch. The book further states:

It was not until 1960 that the first Paralympic Games was held in Rome to coincide with the 1960 Olympic Games.

The Paralympic Games are only 40 years old, and to have achieved what they have achieved and to have that achievement being manifested here in New South Wales—I like to think we are a society that is at the cutting edge of development of community—is a great thing. The book further states:

At these Games sports of archery, basketball, fencing, javelin, shot-put and swimming were held. Ever since this event the Paralympic Games has been held to link with the Olympic Games in the same city and country wherever possible.

The Paralympic Games has grown enormously since these simple beginnings. Over 4 000 athletes from 125 countries will compete at the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games.

Finally, I note that nothing happens without an enormous level of family and organisational support. All the athletes appearing at the Paralympic Games, and indeed at other sporting events, are doing so because of their commitment and the commitment of their families and sporting organisations. While I was the shadow Minister for Sport and Recreation I attended the Homebush centre for disability sports, of which Ken Grinham is the chief executive officer. At the centre I met amazing people such as Ken Grinham, Jim O'Brien, who heads the tennis, and a gentleman whose name escapes me—and I apologise for that—who headed the blind sports association. A number of sporting organisations have their headquarters at Homebush. There is a tag for the headquarters: they are called the Grinham centre because it was Ken Grinham's vision to bring all the sports together.

This blind gentleman arrived at the centre at 7.30 a.m. and did not leave until 6.00 p.m., 7.00 p.m. or 8.00 p.m. He put in an enormous number of hours, and they were voluntary—he did not get paid for them. He was working at the centre voluntarily to enable people with a similar disability to pursue their sport. I commend not only this motion but also all those involved in sports for athletes with disabilities. I can assure all those people that we recognise their great and intrinsic worth to our wonderful community.

**Mr BARTLETT** (Port Stephens) [11.53 a.m.]: It gives me a great deal of pleasure to endorse the Premier's motion and to invite the athletes of the world to the eleventh Paralympic Games, which are to be held in Sydney. I hope that the athletes enjoy their stay in Sydney, as others obviously did during the Olympic Games. I also hope that they enjoy our hospitality. I feel sure that our volunteers and the people of New South Wales and Australia will make them very welcome. As became apparent after the Atlanta Games, the importance of the Paralympic Games is that they raise the profile in the eyes of the community of all people with disabilities. I have been on a big learning curve since I moved out of local government into State Government. Some of the statistics I have come across show that something like one million people in Australia have some form of disability.

I would have thought that the number of people in our community with disabilities would be decreasing, but in fact the reality is the exact opposite. Because of modern medicines and the great abilities of surgeons to treat accident injuries and the like, the medical system is keeping people with disabilities alive much longer. In New South Wales alone some 500 people a year are becoming disabled in some way. This morning it was absolutely magnificent to listen to Julianne Adams and to hear the way she coped with that 10 seconds that changed her life. It brought tears to my eyes. I thought it was an amazing speech. Julianne has an optimism and attitude to life that fully able people would be wise to adopt. My experience with people with disabilities relates to facilities. At the Atlanta Games the Australian Paralympians achieved a great result in coming second in the medal count; they almost came first. That was a fantastic effort given our population compared to that of other countries.

The honourable member for Wakehurst spoke about the period since the 1960s and the idea of the Olympic movement becoming a Paralympic movement. In the Port Stephens electorate there is a great focus on people with disabilities, and I should like to list some of the facilities that are being developed. In 1983 the Tomaree Peninsula cycleway project was started. The project involved building dual-purpose cycle paths for people in wheelchairs and elderly people, safe cycle paths for kids, and walking trails. There are now something like 20 kilometres of those cycle paths throughout the Tomaree Peninsula and other areas of Port Stephens. The cycle paths not only provide an incentive for people with disabilities to become more mobile and to get around our beautiful environment but they also encourage others with disabilities to come and share the facilities. We now have disability maps of the Port Stephens area from which people can ascertain the location of the cycle paths and accommodation that is suited to their disabilities.

Over the last three years Little Beach, which is a beach on Port Stephens, has been developed as a focus for people with disabilities. Not only does it have specially designed playground equipment for children with disabilities, but it also has pathways which lead to amenities blocks. People with disabilities are provided with keys which allow them to enter disability amenities all over the electorate. A jetty and ramp system was constructed that allows people in wheelchairs to go into the water, take themselves out of their wheelchairs on their own if they are able to, float off into the sea, have a swim, and return to their chairs. A lot of thought, time and effort have gone into providing facilities for people with disabilities. About six Port Stephens Council engineers were sent out into the local community in wheelchairs and asked to assess the needs of people with disabilities. That worked very well: they came back and made changes to the local environment.

I turn briefly to the 15,000 wonderful volunteers who will work during the Paralympic Games. Many of those volunteers also worked during the two weeks of the Olympic Games. Given their enthusiasm last time, I am sure the volunteer aspect of the Paralympics will go very well. To those volunteers I say thank you. As I said yesterday, they almost stole the show from the athletes at the various Olympic Games events. They did a wonderful job for New South Wales and for Australia.

I should like to make a few comments about ticket sales to illustrate how communities become involved. Port Stephens Council has bought about 150 Paralympic Games tickets for people with disabilities in the Port Stephens area. Apparently the posting out of the tickets has not gone smoothly. Last evening during the dinner break I wandered down to the booking office on Broadway where the ticket sales are being conducted. I thought it would be a 10-minute trip each way, but it turned into a 35-minute trip each way. The queue of people waiting to buy tickets was about 50 metres long. Some time today an officer from Port Stephens Council will come down to Sydney to pick up those tickets. The whole Port Stephens community will benefit from the generosity of the council and its interest in the Paralympic Games. It was obvious from the comments of Julianne and Hamish what elite athletes they have now become as a result of their dedication. I was not aware that they are now funded as athletes in full-time training.

**Mr Hazzard:** Not all of them.

**Mr BARTLETT:** Not all of them, I understand, but some of them are paid full-time to become the best they can possibly be in their sport. Their dedication and commitment is to be commended. Having listened to the debate, I now intend to try to buy some tickets to the wheelchair rugby. Having been a rugby player myself and having listened to the comments of speakers in the debate, I am very much looking forward to buying one of the multi-event tickets so that I can participate in the Paralympic Games. A total of 278 athletes will represent Australia. That is the biggest group of athletes we have ever put together for the Paralympic Games. In fact, it is the largest team of athletes from any country—as one would expect, given the cost involved with moving people with disabilities around the world.

Regardless of whether our athletes win 106 medals at these Paralympics, the Olympic idea of bringing people from all over the world into a form of community to break down barriers and to break down racism and nationalism is a truly commendable idea. I wish all the athletes the best of luck, whether they are Australian or overseas athletes. When I went to the Olympic Games I enjoyed non-Australian athletes winning as much as I enjoyed Australians winning. The community is really getting behind people with disabilities. We are all aware of the tremendous amount of work that organisations such as the Rotary Club, the Lions Club and the Apex Club do for people with disabilities. I know that in the Port Stephens area the Tilligerry Lions Club is buying movable frames valued at \$5,000 each to allow young children to become more mobile. There is a great deal of work being done by the Lions Club for people with poor sight. The service clubs, local councils and governments are right behind them.

I had not realised that during the previous term of the Carr Government there was a 600 per cent increase in funding for people with disabilities and for Paralympian athletes. I have no idea of the amount that has been spent on running the Paralympic Games or the cost of the facilities that have been built. However, on my visit to Stadium Australia I was impressed with the ramps that replace stairways. I was also impressed by the fact that those facilities were included in construction right from the word go rather than retrofitted. That shows how the community at Federal, State or local level has found the funds to provide these facilities.

In conclusion, I express my appreciation of the time and effort taken by Julianne and Hamish to address the House today. They are great communicators. Their love of life and their excitement about what is to happen during the next couple of weeks was wonderful to see. One can imagine the excitement of the children and the athletes who have come from all over the world to Australia for this event. Having just seen the magnificent Olympic Games, I am sure that the Paralympic Games will be a wonderful event for them. I wish all of them well. Whether they win medals or not, I hope they have a wonderful time and enjoy Australian hospitality.

**Mr ARMSTRONG (Lachlan)** [12.05 p.m.]: I am not sure whether those who have participated in this debate mentioned what I am about to say or not, but my understanding is that the title "Paralympics" is not a derivative of "paralysed Olympics" but refers to parallel Olympics—an event that is held in parallel with the summer Olympics. It is important to make that point. At the outset, I heartily congratulate the organising committee and the people working for SOCOG and the Paralympic committees. They have worked darned hard over the past seven years to bring about the forthcoming Paralympic Games. They have not only had the usual problems associated with putting on a unique event that is second-largest sporting event in Australian history, as other speakers have mentioned, but they have also been constantly overshadowed by the summer Olympics.

When raising funds, getting media attention or raising public awareness of the Paralympic Games, they have had to deal with the cloud of the summer Olympics. Those people have worked hard and the great majority of their efforts have been voluntary. I pay the sincerest compliment to them for their tenacity and wish them every possible success with the Paralympic Games. I hope the Paralympic Games enjoy the same gold medal weather, as I like to refer to it, as the summer Olympics did earlier this month and last month.

I join other honourable members in offering my heartfelt congratulations to Julianne and Hamish, who addressed the Chamber this morning. This House is a bastion of speakers, speeches, egos and honourable members who think they can communicate. I will be frank: I have not heard a better communicator in this place than Julianne. Her speech was brilliant, and I admit that she frightened the socks off me. I suspect that if she wanted to challenge any of us, she would probably beat us at preselection to become a member of this House. Life is all about what is between one's ears: if one can get the right stuff between the ears, the rest will follow. This morning Julianne certainly demonstrated that she has that.

The way in which those who are either born with disabilities or who have become disabled handle their lives is unique. I grew up with a father who at a very early age suffered from what was known in those days as infantile paralysis or what is now termed poliomyelitis. He was quite severely handicapped, but he would never ever use the word "handicapped"; he would never accept anything to do with the term. He could play tennis and cricket, he could ride a horse, he could shear a sheep and he could run, but he had an absolute tenacity in always seeking to win. He had to achieve. That is the great thing about nature. In many ways, nature compensates for handicaps or disabilities. One sees evidence of that time and time again.

Honourable members have heard me speak about the horse ride from Broome to Sydney which took place earlier this year. One of the horse riders who spent 122 days on the road was 72 years of age. He comes from Rockhampton and had only one and half arms because his left arm had been amputated just below the elbow. But throughout the whole journey, he shod his own horse and helped other people. Honourable members should try to shoe a horse with one hand and see how they go. I can tell them that that is a pretty fair achievement. The mental focus possessed by people with a disability who become superior athletes, academics or achievers in life is extraordinary.

I was on the SOCOG board for four years and I attended many functions held for athletes who were competing in the summer Games and the Paralympics. The energy and electricity in a room full of Paralympians is approximately 10 times greater than that in a room full of able-bodied and able-minded athletes. It is impossible to describe it but as soon as one walks into the room, one can feel it: the atmosphere is electrified. Those people are extremely focused and energised with life and exuberance. They have an absolute will to succeed. It is a wonderful experience to share a few moments with them socially. In the next couple of weeks, Australia and the world will have the chance to share with them the excitement of sport and competition.

During the limited opportunities I have had to observe Paralympians competing, I have admired their superb sportsmanship. This morning honourable members heard from Hamish and Julianne that Paralympic sport is extremely competitive. We have heard from other honourable members who have attended many events about how tenacious Paralympic athletes are in rugby and all other sports. But it is their sporting attitude towards each other that is a fair example for all of us as to how we might live many aspects of our lives.

The Paralympic Games will allow the dream that was created over the last few weeks to continue. This morning I was seated next to the honourable member for Manly, who said, "You know, Ian, the tears almost come to your eyes every time you think about the Olympics because of the whole excitement value of it." I must say that last Monday as I was driving to Sydney to attend this session, I had the car radio on for four hours and every time the Olympics theme music was played, it made my hair stand up on the back of my neck. The feeling is still with me. In the next two weeks, the excitement of the summer Olympics will continue for us and bring us together again as Australians.

I do not know how true this anecdote is, but I noticed in one of the newspapers last week that two electric train drivers were allegedly overheard talking at Central station. One said to the other, "There they are—last week they were all talking to each other happily in the trains but this week it is all over. They are looking out the window and are ignoring each other again." The Paralympics will allow us to talk to each other once again on the trains and in the streets and to be truly Australian with our friendship, exuberance, enjoyment of sport and enjoyment of each other's company.

I extend a very warm welcome to all the carers and helpers of Paralympians from around the world. I extend a welcome also to tourists who have come to visit Sydney for the first time and to those who are

revisiting Sydney. I hope they enjoy the exuberance of the Games, the warmth and friendship of Australia, and Sydney in particular. I wish the organisations, the athletes, Sydney, New South Wales, and Australia well for the next two weeks. I congratulate everybody who has participated in any way in the organisation and structure of the Paralympic Games. I also acknowledge the sponsors for their contribution. I know that once again many people associated with the Olympic Co-ordination Authority [OCA], SOCOG and the other support organisations will never get to see an event, but they have worked their hearts out over the past seven years to make these Games succeed. In most cases, their jobs will disappear in about six weeks, so I pay them a tribute for the job they have done.

**Ms BEAMER** (Mulgoa) [12.14 p.m.]: I also congratulate Julianne Adams and Hamish MacDonald on their address to this Chamber. Those two outstanding people spoke about a very significant event for them and Australia, that is, hosting the 2000 Paralympic Games. There will be 4,000 athletes from 126 countries around the world. They will be spectacular Games in Sydney where we will set, once again, the benchmark. Parents of children with disabilities have said to me that if disabilities are talked about throughout the world Australia is indeed a fortunate country because it does far more for disabled people than a lot of other countries.

That is borne out by the fact that in Atlanta Australia came second in the gold medal tally with a base of only 18 million people compared with the huge populations of other countries. That was again highlighted in the Olympic Games when we came fifth despite our tiny population base. We are indeed sports-minded people. We have a lot of community support because we enjoy sports, we have a fair community and we think that everybody should be involved in sporting activities which allow us to express ourselves at the elite athlete level whether it is in the Olympics or at the Paralympics.

We should think about some of the achievements of Paralympians. Honourable members should consider that Tim Matthews from Victoria runs the 100 metres sprint on the track as an amputee in only 10.87 seconds, which is a tremendous time. The world record held by a Nigerian is 10.72 seconds and that is a tremendous achievement. Donovan Bailey holds the world record at 9.84 seconds; there is not much difference in the times run by Paralympians. We are looking forward to some of these world records being beaten in Australia. It demonstrates the real commitment of these athletes to sports. It has been said that Australia has the largest single team. Having all the tickets sold for the opening ceremony will show the kind of support that Sydney, New South Wales and Australia once again will give for the Games.

I will be a bit parochial and refer to some Paralympians from my area. John McLean from Penrith has been mentioned by some honourable members. The honourable member for Londonderry and I have had the fortune to meet John a lot in our community. He is a great athlete who will represent Australia in the 1,500 metres. He has competed in the Hawaiian ironman competition against able-bodied athletes and qualified to be an ironman in Hawaii, which is an extraordinary feat. He is wheelchair-bound, but he has swum the English Channel. He is one of the most inspirational people one could meet. He does not talk about his achievements but about what can be achieved if one tries. He speaks at schools and tells students what they can do if they set goals. I defy any honourable member to do some of his incredible feats. I have also seen him at fundraising events for sports in the area for able or disabled people.

My electorate has been lucky enough to have a number of representatives: David Selibi represented Penrith and Australia in wheelchair basketball; Jeff Clark in athletics in 1996; and Collin George in goalball in 1996. The late Ched Towns was blind and he represented Australia in cycling in the 1996 Games. He died early this year whilst trying to climb Mount Everest. As someone pointed out to me, it perhaps was not the best idea at the time but he decided he would set a goal and nothing would stop him. Blindness certainly did not stop Ched and he tried to do anything he set his mind to. Ched was picked to carry the torch through Penrith. Probably one of the most moving events in Penrith was that his son, Kane, lit the cauldron. In front of 50,00 people who turned out to watch, his son lit it on his behalf and on behalf of the citizens of Penrith. That was one of the most moving parts of the torch coming to Penrith. Judy, his wife, will carry the Paralympic torch through Penrith. Once again I look forward to seeing the citizens of Penrith support our Paralympians just as they supported our Olympians.

There will be 14 sports at the Homebush Bay site. There will be equestrian and shooting events in western Sydney, which we look forward to. I urge all people of our area to watch the events. A lot has been said about the demonstration sport at Atlanta, wheelchair rugby, which will be a sport in Sydney. My sister who has a son with severe disabilities said it is the one event which, out of sheer curiosity, she just had to see, and she has her tickets. What are they going to do and how will it be done? It is a sport about which we do not know much because it has not had the profile of wheelchair basketball.

A lot of people will go to sports such as wheelchair rugby, a somewhat novel sport, or to sports where we have watched Australia win gold medals and excel, for example, wheelchair basketball which has a higher profile. I hope that at the end of the Games once again Sydneysiders and Australians realise that the Games are not about disabilities but about ability and what can be achieved doing our best. A lot of us will not be able to go anywhere near these athletes. Of course we did have competing in a race at the Olympics a woman who had competed in a previous Paralympics. That goes to show the depth and breadth of commitment that all of these athletes have. I commend the motion to the House. I commend the athletes from throughout Australia who will be representing us. I wish them all the best.

**Mr O'DOHERTY** (Hornsby) [12.24 p.m.]: It is a privilege and a pleasure to commend the motion to the House and to commend the Paralympic Games to all Australians and to all citizens of the world. The slogan of the Paralympic Games is "Set no limits". There is one thing for sure about the Paralympic Games: the one thing they are not about is disability. Anyone in the community who thinks these Games are about disability simply needs to listen to the inspiring comments made to us earlier today by Julianne Adams and Hamish MacDonald and watch the Games—either on television but, better still, at the events because, sadly, there will not be enough of it on television. I think it is a great shame and it reflects badly on our media that we are not able to have greater coverage. But this is not a day for criticism.

Anyone who absorbs the Games will know for sure and certain that the one thing the Paralympics are not about is disability. I listened with great interest to Julianne's story delivered today. There was in that story one moment when she told us about the fact that she severed her spinal cord and as a result her life changed. The rest of the story was a story that could be told about any member of our community, whether able-bodied or with a disability, because Julianne's story is about someone with a desire to succeed in a sport. Through circumstances, she changed her sport. That would happen to many athletes many times in Australia. It is a very common story. Common to it were her character as a human being, her ability, her talent and her desire to succeed in a chosen field. She changed to a different field through circumstance.

It does not matter to the story that that circumstance was a serious disability. The point of the story is that the person Julianne is is the reason she is now succeeding at the highest level in her chosen field. That is what the Games are all about. They are about the character, ability and talent of our athletes coming to the fore in an environment in which they will give of their best. Irrespective of any other consideration, every citizen can share in their success and be inspired by what they achieve. Because of the inspirational nature of what they do, we therefore are inspired to do better in the things that we set our minds to—again, irrespective of any difficulties, disabilities or disadvantages that get in our way.

In other words, the inspirational message for the world, and indeed for the community of New South Wales and Australia for the next 10 days, is: If you have economic disadvantage, if you are a child growing up in disadvantaged circumstances, if you have a disability of some kind, if you have any kind of difficulty in your life, whatever that is, your character and your drive as a person using your innate talents are what will get you through and see you succeed. Every human being, irrespective of background, has the ability to do the same, drawing on the talents with which they have been blessed. I look forward to seeing the blessings that have been bestowed on some of our great athletes shining forth over the next 10 days. The mission statement, for want of a better term, for the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games is:

To inspire the world by successfully staging a Paralympic Games which sets new standards of excellence to enable athletes to achieve their best performance.

We will see that over the next couple of weeks. We will see athletes achieving their best performance, because the Paralympic Games will indeed set new standards of excellence. I believe we have had just a small taste of that in the performances at Olympic venues and in the undoubted organising ability and performance of the Sydney organising committee and offshoots during the Olympic Games. As a curtain-raiser for the Paralympics, the Olympic Games were fantastic. I look forward to seeing those Games surpassed over the next 10 days.

I have had for a very long time a view, a sneaking suspicion that, while Australia was inspired by what we saw in the Olympic Games just past, because of the character of our nation and because the Australian community is so open, generous and friendly and looks for and enjoys seeing achievement in others, we will enjoy the Paralympic Games even more than we enjoyed the Olympic Games. So it was that at 9 o'clock in the morning of the very first day that tickets went on sale for the Paralympics I was on the telephone to book some tickets for our family to go and see certain events. We got some day passes. We particularly wanted to be able to see the wheelchair basketball final. I was delighted when the results of the ballot came back and we were able to purchase tickets for the wheelchair basketball final. We are looking forward to that. And, on our day pass, I hope we can get around and see most of the other 14 of the 18 sports being held at the Homebush complex itself—four of them being held at different venues.

Fourteen of those events are shared, in common with the Olympic Games. I think there are four events that are unique to the Paralympic Games. Other honourable members have mentioned those. We will use our tickets at the first available opportunity. I am pleased that already the Australian community is showing its great support. The fact that the opening ceremony has sold out indicates that what I suspect may indeed turn out to be true, and that Australians will take the Paralympic Games to their hearts in a way that they did not even take the Olympics, as important as they were, to their hearts. I know how big the statement it is that I have made. But I think it is just part of the Australian character that we like people to have a go. That is why we cheer for Eric the Eel, or cheer on the person coming last in the marathon to get them over the line—because, above all else, while we like seeing winners, we want to see people have a go. People having a go is indeed what we will see throughout the Paralympic Games.

We also like to see people who support others in a community. I want to pay particular tribute to those who support the athletes, the carers and their coaches and other team supporters. When the honourable member for Wakehurst and I were speaking privately just a little while ago he was telling me about the coach of the boccia team, Tom Organ, whose wife Julie coincidentally teaches the children of the honourable member for Wakehurst. The honourable member was making the point that stories about the Paralympics had been coming at him from all different directions. As the shadow Minister for Disability Services and a member of Parliament, he has had a certain involvement at that level as well as through his official involvement with various organising committees for the Paralympic Games. I should mention here that those committees are doing a fantastic job.

The honourable member for Wakehurst has had an involvement through people he knows in his own community who are Paralympic athletes and so on. He now knows the family of someone who is a coach and supporter of the Paralympic athletes as well. The honourable member was making the point that few people probably fully appreciate the level of personal commitment and sacrifice of both the athletes and those who support them. He has been inspired to see the commitment that Tom Organ has made. That is a joint commitment that he shares with his family, because one can just imagine the amount of time it takes from other activities and events. I think the family is very much looking forward to seeing the Australian boccia team doing extremely well. With their inspiring patron, being the Leader of the Opposition, how could they do otherwise! I think the Organ family is looking forward to spending a bit more time with Tom after the Paralympic Games are over. I am pleased to mention that on behalf of my friend the honourable member for Wakehurst.

The world—as I mentioned in relation to the Olympics the other day—will see Australia once again achieving great things with the Paralympics and see what Australia can do. They saw that in the way we staged the Olympic Games. They will see it in the way we stage the Paralympic Games. The world will be inspired afresh, and in a different way, by the achievement they see on the part of our Paralympic athletes. I hope it is true of the Australian community, just as it was for the Olympics, that the world will see something that happens every day in our communities—that people volunteer, achieve and win gold in their own personal way every day in the Australian community. We saw that during the Olympics at Homebush. But it is true of us every day. I hope that when the world sees us being the kind of open society that the honourable member for Mulgoa spoke about a few minutes ago, enjoying and being inspired by the achievements and abilities of the athletes at the Paralympic Games, the world will know that is simply a reflection of the open society and community that we have every day of the year.

As the honourable member for Mulgoa said, Australian society is probably one of the more open societies in the world for people with disabilities. However, I am not sure whether we are getting it entirely right. This is an opportunity for me to say that I hope we are able to take a lot more out of the Paralympics so that our communities can become even more open than they are now. A few months ago I was talking with someone who represents people with disabilities from a non-English speaking background who said that, because of Australia's important and genuine efforts over the past few years as legislators and as communities to ensure that we do everything we can to make our society fully accessible to everybody, we are leading the way and we are doing a lot better than many other societies.

That is partly due to the fact that we have changed the language that we use to refer to people with disabilities in our community, and it is partly due to the fact that we have attempted to ensure that we integrate students with disabilities into their local schools, which is where they ought to be. It is their community. They need to be with other children from their own community. I am pleased to see that happening in many schools that I have visited throughout New South Wales over the last few years. As I walk down the streets in my electorate I increasingly see the friendliness and ability of Australians to look beyond whatever physical characteristics their fellow community members have and to speak to and engage with those people, regardless of their physical characteristics.



We are amongst the best countries in the world as having an open society but we still have some way to go. In the future, when people with disabilities read this debate in *Hansard*, they will say, "These are good words from our legislators." Honourable members should remember that a number of years ago the New South Wales Parliament passed the important Disability Services Act which set out the principle for an open society. However, words are not quite enough. If we want to make the dream of a fully open and accessible society a reality in New South Wales and in Australia we need to back up those words with resources and we must continue to change the practices and attitudes of government agencies, private enterprise, the non-government sector and individual members of the community.

I hope the lesson that we learn from the Paralympics is that these Games are not about disability—that is the last thing that they are about. The Paralympic Games are about people achieving because of the gifts and talents that they have. They have been given an opportunity to show those gifts and talents and to surpass their greatest expectations. I hope that we can apply the lessons we learn from the Paralympics to community life. Irrespective of anybody's circumstances, whatever they may be—physical, intellectual or economic—as community members, as legislators, as policymakers, we must look to individuals and say, "How can we assist you to do the best that you can do with the abilities, talents and gifts that you have? How can we see you achieve your best performance?" How can we, as the logo for the Paralympics states, "be inspired by the achievement of all" in our community every day? How can we make sure in our policies and in our practices as a community that we set no limits as the Paralympic Games sets no limits for the achievements of its great athletes?

**Mr GIBSON** (Blacktown) [12.38 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure today to speak in debate on the motion moved by the Premier. Yesterday I spoke in debate on the motion moved by the Premier relating to the Olympic Games. It is appropriate that the Paralympic Games be given the same recognition as the Olympics. The XXVII Olympic Games gave us an opportunity to show the world the Australian sense of humour. It also gave us an opportunity to show the beauty of this country to the rest of the world. I am certain that the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games and the athletes who participate in them will be an inspiration to the world. I am sure that they could teach us how to overcome hard times and adversity and teach us to achieve.

The Paralympic Games will go down in history as the Games of real guts. I am sure that all Australians will support the athletes at these Games by attending every event. Australians love winners, but they also love competitors, which is what these Games are all about. Congratulations must go to Julianne Adams and Hamish MacDonald who spoke in the Chamber today. It was delightful and interesting to hear the addresses of those two people. I am sure that every honourable member would echo the sentiment: There but for the grace of God go I. Julianne said that in just 10 seconds her life was changed completely. She was reborn. She adopted a totally new outlook to life just because of an accident that occurred in the space of a few seconds. I wish Julianne and Hamish all the best in the Paralympic Games.

Julianne said that she accepted her new challenge and that she has moved on with her life. This morning she said that she used sport as a lever to life. Sport is used by many people as a lever to life. It has taken a lot of guts to overcome the problems that faced these two young people. Julianne also said today that Paralympic athletes are just like every other athlete—totally committed to what they are doing. That is the only way that they can achieve. The Australian Paralympic team comprises about 280 athletes—the largest Australian team that has ever participated in any Games—who will take part in 18 different sports over a two-week period. Four thousand athletes from 126 nations will come to Australia for these Games. As I said earlier, these Games will become known as the Games of guts and determination. Ticket sales for the Games have been good.

I hope that every event receives the support that the Games of the XXVII Olympiad received. In Atlanta Australia won 106 medals—42 gold, 37 silver and 27 bronze. Some great stories can be told about the Atlanta Paralympics. Louise Sauvage, a competitor at the Atlanta Games, received a lot of publicity. During the Olympics I had the pleasure of meeting Louise—one of the highlights of my life. I do not think I have ever met a more knowledgeable or caring person than Louise Sauvage. It was a real pleasure to meet her. Louise won four gold medals in Atlanta—no mean feat by any stretch of the imagination. I am sure that she will attempt to win another four medals in Sydney. I also had the pleasure of meeting Amy Winters, a sprinter, who won a gold medal for the 200 metre event in Atlanta and broke the world record.

These athletes not only win gold medals; they also break world records. One athlete who will be competing in wheelchair tennis at the Sydney 2000 Paralympics is David Hall. What a delightful athlete David is. He not only plays tennis in a wheelchair; he is probably one of the best speakers to whom I have ever

listened. He is the first person to admit that he can speak. Today David travels the world playing tennis. David's sporting life, like the life of any athlete, has been mapped out. He travels from tournament to tournament and he has won eight world tennis titles. He won the US Open in 1995 and again in 1997 and 1998. He was world champion in 1995 and again in 1998. Last year he was male athlete of the year, and that is no mean feat. No doubt he will be striving to achieve the same when he performs over the next few weeks.

We have heard a lot today about wheelchair rugby. One of the weekend newspapers wrote it up as "chariots of fire", and that is true. The report also stated, "mad men clash". The captain of the side, 30-year-old Steve Porter, maintains that it is dodgem cars in wheelchairs. I asked him once about the rules of the game, and he said, "The rules of the game are very straightforward. You cannot touch another player but you can do what you like to the wheelchairs." Believe me, they do a lot of damage to those wheelchairs. Steve was another fellow whose life changed very quickly because of an accident. A few years ago he was State karate champion. He was top of his field in that sport. He was also a top-line Australian Rules player. Because of circumstances he has changed his life; he was reborn. He said that the only difference now is that instead of walking he travels in a wheelchair. The girls basketball team is very competitive and very good. The team's motto—strive to be the best you can be—probably says it all. If everybody adopted that principle this would be a far better nation. These people are elite athletes.

The honourable member for Mulgoa spoke about John MacLean. John MacLean's life also changed in a few seconds. I first met John a few years ago, when I was one of the coaches of the Penrith rugby league side. In those days John MacLean was a top-line rugby league winger. I can still remember him, with his blond hair, scoring many tries for Penrith. Of course, he had an accident and has been reborn. Today John flies around in the wheelchair almost as quickly as he used to fly when he played rugby league. John has many achievements. He is always the first to compete in marathons and raises money for charities and people who are disadvantaged. He swam the English Channel. He has achieved what most of us only dream about achieving. I am certain that none of us will get as far as John has.

We could go on talking about individual athletes all day. The main point is that these people's lives have changed, but they have made the best of their situations. They have all become better people. I read a report in a newspaper this week in which one athlete said that if she could have her life all over again she would not change a thing. That says it all. She is striving to be the best she can be. The fact that she is in a wheelchair today and is not running around has not changed anything. I wish all the athletes and their families the best for the coming Games. I am sure these Games will be of the highest quality, just as we witnessed with the able-bodied athletes. I am certain that the rest of the world will be inspired because of the Paralympics. With the performances of our able-bodied athletes and our sense of humour we sold Australia. All those things will happen again in the Paralympics but, more important, the Paralympians will inspire this nation and the whole world.

**Mr GLACHAN** (Albury) [12.48 p.m.]: I join with other honourable members in wishing every success to the 4,000 athletes who will compete in the Paralympic Games, especially to the 278 Australians who will make up the Australian contingent. I wish them well. The Albury-Wodonga area will be represented in these games by Dianna Ley, who is in the Australian swimming team. I take this opportunity to wish her every success as she takes part in these Games. Ninety-three Paralympians from the Ukraine carried out their pre-Games training in the Albury-Wodonga area. They stayed at the Lake Hume Resort. They made an enormous impression on the people in Albury-Wodonga. They built up some wonderful friendships that will last for many years to come. Although Albury-Wodonga is right behind the Australians, we will have a very soft spot for those Ukrainian Paralympians as well.

I hope they enjoy their participation in the Games and do well. I know they will take home very fond memories of Australia and of Australians, which is most important. They were delighted with the way they were received in Albury-Wodonga and they will be great ambassadors for us when they go back to the Ukraine. We realise that a great deal of skill and determination is needed by Paralympians, but one does not understand what is required until one has a go at it. Some time ago the member for Benambra in Victoria and I, and others in the area, were asked to go to the centre in Wodonga to take part in a wheelchair basketball game. I saw disabled athletes playing the game and it looked fairly easy. But when it was my turn to take part I found it extremely difficult and it required an enormous amount of skill. The game is played at a cracking pace and one has to be fit and determined to take part. After having a go at the sport my respect and admiration for those people taking part in the Paralympic Games has grown at an enormous rate.

It is significant that we are conducting this debate today, as the Paralympic torch arrives in New South Wales today. That marks a great event, one that I know will help the general community to become more and

more enthusiastic about these Games. As the Games progress everyone will admire the determination and grit of the participants. The great advantage of the Paralympic Games is that they highlight for all of us the needs of those with disabilities. For a long time—and not so long ago—our society made very little provision for and provided minimum assistance to people with disabilities. Events like the Paralympic Games make us realise that they do have needs and we have to respond to those needs. Now we are interested in providing better access for people with disabilities to our transport systems and our buildings. Changes that have been made in the past few years are revolutionary.

As I walked up Martin Place this morning I could not help but see on the front of that magnificent Commonwealth Bank building a brass sign that reads, "Wheelchair access around the corner in Elizabeth Street." It is a great step forward to see that sign and realise that people now are conscious of the needs of disabled people. Twenty or 30 years ago no-one gave it much of a thought and disabled people had to get on as best they could. Now we are taking steps to see that they have access to buildings and transport, and I am delighted to see that our community recognises their needs and is taking positive action to help them. The Paralympic Games will help to reinforce community understanding of the needs of these wonderful, courageous people.

**Ms ANDREWS** (Peats) [12.53 p.m.]: It is with a great deal of pleasure that I support the Premier's motion on the forthcoming Paralympics. The addresses this morning by Julianne Adams and Hamish MacDonald were most enlightening. I must admit that I too had tears in my eyes as I listened to Julianne relate to the House how she became a Paralympic basketballer, how she overcame her adversities and got on with her life. It was a great story for all of us to hear and to bear in mind as we listen to coverage of the Paralympic Games over the next couple of weeks. Hearing Julianne and Hamish speak reinforced the very reason that tickets for the Paralympic Games are selling out fast. Without exception, the Paralympians represent courage, determination and dedication.

Last year I had the honour of attending a presentation for the Paralympians at the Mingara club in Tumby Umbi. It was a most moving experience. I take this opportunity to congratulate Lois Appleby, the Chief Executive Officer of the Paralympics organising committee, and her team, who have done a tremendous job in promoting the Paralympic Games. It is not an easy thing to do, because I have always felt that the Paralympic Games are in the shadow of the Olympic Games. I do not think that will be quite the case in Sydney, and that is largely due to Lois Appleby and her team, and of course the Minister for the Olympics, who has gone out of his way to give every encouragement to the success of these Games.

At the presentation at the Mingara club I had the honour of meeting the Central Coast Paralympic swimmer Melissa Wilson. Melissa, who is confined to a wheelchair following a road accident, has an excellent chance of winning a gold medal in Sydney. Also from the Central Coast and with very good chances of taking gold at the Games are swimmers Kirra O'Cass and Elizabeth Wright. I had the privilege of meeting Elizabeth Wright when we jointly opened a swimming pool at the Wesley Mission's Mangrove Mountain Retreat some time ago. Elizabeth is renowned for being one of the best disabled swimmers in the world and won a bronze medal in Atlanta. At 14, Kirra O'Cass is the youngest member of the Australian swimming team.

Wheelchair basketball is a popular sport on the Central Coast and many events are held at the Niagara Park Youth Centre in the electorate of Peats. This is largely due to the encouragement given to wheelchair basketballers by the centre's manager, Mark Pittman, and today I pay tribute to Mark. Central Coast wheelchair basketballer Liesl Tesch, who is a schoolteacher on the Central Coast, has a very good chance of bringing home gold from the Sydney Paralympic Games, as does wheelchair tennis champion David Hall from Buff Point, to whom my parliamentary colleague referred. I should mention the fact that David has been in the world's top five for a number of years, and he won a silver medal and a bronze medal in Atlanta in 1996.

Other Paralympians from the Central Coast who will represent Australia at these Games are Natalie Cordowiner of Erina, who is competing in archery, Andrew Newell who is competing in athletics and Adam Lusted who is competing in standing volleyball. Evangelos 'Lucky' Anagostou, who is also a Central Coast resident, is an assistant coach with the national shooting team. The Paralympic torch will arrive at West Gosford in the electorate of Peats around noon this Saturday and will spend three days on the Central Coast.

On Monday 16 October the torch will wind its way through the streets of Woy Woy Peninsula before going on to Patonga, where a Paralympic torch celebration has been planned to take place in the Eve Williams Memorial Oval at 11.00 a.m. The torch will arrive at Patonga at midday and at 1.00 p.m. will depart by a waterways boat for Palm Beach. I encourage all local residents to line the streets where the torch will be carried. A number of people from my electorate of Peats will be participating in the Paralympic torch relay, and I congratulate them on the honour which has been bestowed upon them.

I pay tribute to the schools on the Central Coast, particularly those in my electorate, for supporting the Paralympic Games with such gusto. I am aware that thousands of Central Coast school students will be coming down to Sydney to encourage the home team at the forthcoming Paralympic Games, and to give words of encouragement to Paralympians from the other 125 participating nations. To the 15,000 volunteers, many of whom are doubling up from the Olympic Games, I say thank you. I am sure they will do as excellent a job at the Paralympic Games as they did at the Olympics.

The arrangements for the bouquets to be presented at the Paralympic Games will be the same as those for the Olympic Games. The Australian Native Flower Growers and Promoters Association was instrumental in ensuring that the floral bouquets presented to all Olympic and Paralympic medal winners comprised Australian native flora, the centrepiece of which is, of course, the State's floral emblem, the waratah. I am pleased to inform the House that 70 per cent of the native flowers used in the bouquets were grown on the Central Coast.

Two ladies from my electorate who are prominent members of the Australian Native Flower Growers and Promoters Association, Kay Ezzy of Mangrove Mountain and Nola Parry of Karingong, worked very hard to have Australia's unique and beautiful native flora showcased to the world at both the Olympics and the forthcoming Paralympic Games. To all the participants at the forthcoming Paralympic Games, particularly our home team, I wish you well. I am sure they will give their best, and I am sure they will receive all the encouragement they deserve from the spectators. I know that Australians attending the Games will once again deck themselves in green and gold, paint their faces, wave their flags and yell that now famous catch call, "Aussie! Aussie! Aussie! Oi! Oi! Oi!" Good luck to all of them.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Anderson.**

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

### **Postponement of Business**

**General Business Orders of the Day (Committee Reports) postponed on motion, by leave, by Mr Woods.**

*[Mr Acting-Speaker (Mr Lynch) left the chair at 1.00 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]*

## **BILLS RETURNED**

The following bill was returned from the Legislative Council with amendments:

Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Bill

### **Consideration of amendments deferred.**

The following bill was returned from the Legislative Council with an amendment:

Rural Assistance Amendment Bill

### **Consideration of amendment deferred.**

## **NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH WEEK**

### **Ministerial Statement**

**Mr KNOWLES** (Macquarie Fields—Minister for Health) [2.16 p.m.]: Last Tuesday I had the great pleasure of launching National Mental Health Week in New South Wales. This morning, at a building site in Sydney, I launched a major fundraising drive amongst trade unionists, construction workers and the building industry for specific research by NISAD into schizophrenia. In less than half an hour a \$10,000 donation by Boulderstone Hornibrook was matched by subcontractors and workers as they passed the hat around.

These are just two of more than 300 events that are occurring statewide as part of National Mental Health Week involving thousands of carers, clients, non-government organisations and government employees. Mental health problems affect one in five Australians. By the year 2020 depression alone will comprise one of the greatest health problems worldwide. The focus of National Mental Health Week is to encourage the bipartisan efforts of all governments throughout Australia to destigmatise and raise awareness of mental illness. I urge all members to take part in and support the statewide activities.

**Mrs SKINNER** (North Shore) [2.17 p.m.]: I am very pleased that the Minister has used a ministerial statement to raise the issue of National Mental Health Week. As the House may be aware, I had sought to have this matter debated as a matter of public importance. Because that did not occur, I intend to move a motion a little later today because of very serious allegations that have arisen in relation to the Morisset Hospital in the Newcastle area. I refer in particular to a newspaper article published today under the headline "Inhumane", which depicts a photograph of a sedated patient lying on the toilet floor asleep. The Minister should take the opportunity to set the record straight if he does not believe that these photographs are legitimate. However, he refuses to allow these matters to be debated. I would have been happy to move a motion, but I am sure the Minister would not have supported it. I commend industry for donating to awareness of mental health and hope that the Minister will address the other issues I have referred to.

## **INTERNATIONAL FIREFIGHTING TEAM**

### **Ministerial Statement**

**Mr YEADON** (Granville—Minister for Information Technology, Minister for Energy, Minister for Forestry, and Minister for Western Sydney) [2.18 p.m.]: As fires rage across the State, the New South Wales Government would like to take this opportunity to thank the thousands of volunteers involved in fighting those local fires, as well as officers from State Forests, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Rural Fire Service. Today we are fortunate to have in this House most of the nine New South Wales firefighters who recently volunteered to battle massive bushfires in the United States of America, and who now face a potentially serious fire season at home. The New South Wales Government congratulates those firefighters from State Forests and the Rural Fire Service who represented our State so professionally and proudly in the United States. It is terrific to see them back home safe and sound and with us today.

While the rest of the nation was enjoying the Olympics, these brave firefighters returned quietly to their homes to face yet more fires here in New South Wales. They were selected to go to the United States for their expertise in managing large and complex fires in difficult terrain, and were deployed in the rugged Rocky Mountains region of northern Montana, to relieve United States fire managers who were exhausted from many months on the fire frontline. They were the worst fires in the United States of America for 50 years, raging through two million hectares of forest and threatening hundreds of communities across 13 States. I have no doubt that the experience in the United States provided a good opportunity to broaden our own firefighting expertise as we enter what could be a most severe fire season in New South Wales.

I am told that since their return many of the firefighters who went to the United States have already begun fighting fires in New South Wales—in the Hunter, on the North Coast and in the southern and western regions of New South Wales. For example, I understand that Paul de Mar is co-ordinating State Forests firefighting efforts right across New South Wales, Paul McBain from the Hunter has been helping to manage fires near Bulahdelah, while Karel Zejbrlik is using his considerable experience to train firefighters battling a series of fires in State forests around Grafton and Wauchope.

In the meantime, the Government is taking action to ensure that our firefighting efforts in New South Wales are improved. State Forests is now adopting a system using new technology to track and monitor lightning strikes in time for this summer's fire season. Lightning is a major cause of bushfire, and the new system will allow fire managers to view the location of a lightning strike on a detailed map within five to 10 minutes of the strike occurring. This means that crews can be despatched more precisely and quickly to a fire. The system uses lightning strike data from Global Position and Tracking Systems [GPATS]. This company has developed state-of-the-art techniques to detect the time and position of lightning strikes. The lightning strike data from GPATS—including roads, drainage lines and tenure boundaries—is displayed over State Forests' detailed global information system data. That data is made available to State Forests over the Internet. Hard copy maps can be quickly generated and provided to fire crews.

The Government is also teaming up with employees from four forest contracting firms to fight fires on the North Coast. These crews will stop work when necessary to join State Forests crews fighting fires around the towns of Coffs Harbour, Grafton, Urunga and Dorrigo. These additional locally experienced timber harvesting crews will greatly assist our firefighting effort. Importantly, the expertise of those personnel is our greatest resource and our greatest weapon in fighting fires. I am sure I speak on behalf of all honourable members in congratulating all those firefighters who went to the United States and did this State and this nation proud.

**Mr D. L. PAGE** (Ballina) [2.22 p.m.]: The Opposition joins with the Government in welcoming home our firefighters from the United States. We are proud of what they did there. These firefighters were selected

because of their expertise in field management and incident control. They are the best firefighters in New South Wales and, as such, they have played a very important leadership role in fighting fires, which, as the Minister pointed out, were the worst in United States for the past 50 years. Firefighting is an extremely dangerous business, as all honourable members would know because of recent experiences in New South Wales. Over many decades this State has lost many firefighters. I am thankful that our firefighters have returned safely. As everyone knows, many fires are burning across New South Wales, so these firefighters will have little, if any, time to be with their families. I take this opportunity to thank the firefighters for what they have done in the past, what they are doing now, and what they will no doubt continue to do: save lives and property both here in New South Wales and overseas. I wish them well for the future.

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

### **Routine of Business**

*[During notices of motions]*

**Mr Whelan:** Point of order: The length of the notice of motion given by the honourable member for Coffs Harbour and the argument it contains simply mean that the notice is out of order.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the House has pre-empted the advice I was about to give the honourable member for Coffs Harbour. He is well aware that the notice is out of order. I ask him to edit the notice, and I will accept the edited version before the conclusion of question time.

## **PETITIONS**

### **North Head Quarantine Station**

Petition praying that the head lease proposal for North Head Quarantine Station be opposed, received from **Mr Barr**.

### **McDonald's Moore Park Restaurant**

Petition praying for opposition to the construction of a McDonald's restaurant on Moore Park, received from **Ms Moore**.

### **North Wallarah Peninsula Development**

Petition praying that community concerns relating to the north Wallarah peninsula development be not ignored and that an inquiry into the process be considered, received from **Mr Orkopoulos**.

### **State Taxes**

Petitions praying that the Carr Government establish a public inquiry into State taxes, with the objective of reducing the tax burden and creating a sustainable environment for employment and investment in New South Wales, received from **Mr Debnam** and **Mr Maguire**.

### **Kings Cross Policing**

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

### **Redfern, Darlington and Chippendale Policing**

Petition praying for increased police presence in the Redfern, Darlington and Chippendale areas, received from **Ms Moore**.

### **Paddington Policing**

Petition praying that the House prevent the closure of Paddington Police Station and praying for increased police presence in the Paddington area, 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 the East Sydney and Darlinghurst areas, received from **Ms Moore**.

### **Manly Hospital Paediatric Services**

Petition expressing concern at the decision of the Northern Sydney Area Health Service to discontinue paediatric services at Manly Hospital and praying that full services at Manly Hospital be maintained, received from **Mr Barr**.

### **Coffs Harbour Health Services Funding**

Petition praying for increased funding for health services in the Coffs Harbour area and a reduction in surgery waiting lists, received from **Mr Fraser**.

### **Wallsend After Hours Primary Care Service**

Petition praying that assistance be provided to enable the continuation of after hours primary care services to residents of Wallsend and surrounding districts, received from **Mr Mills**.

### **Genetically Modified Food**

Petition praying that the House take action to prohibit the sale and distribution of food containing genetically modified organisms, received from **Ms Moore**.

### **Macksville Hospital Funding**

Petition praying that sufficient recurrent funding be allocated to Macksville and District Hospital to enable restoration of hospital services to the level that existed prior to cutbacks instituted by the Mid North Coast Area Health Service, received from **Mr Stoner**.

### **Non-government Schools Funding**

Petitions praying that the Government reimburse the \$5 million in funding that has been withdrawn from non-government schools and reverse its decision to withdraw a further \$13.5 million in funding in 2001, received from **Mrs Chikarovski**, **Mr Debnam**, **Mr Hartcher**, **Mr Hazzard**, **Mr O'Doherty**, **Mr O'Farrell**, and **Mrs Skinner**.

### **Yass Public School Special Support Unit**

Petition praying that the Government reverse its decision to close the special support unit at Yass Public School and that it guarantee the continued existence of the unit to permit educational security for students, parents and staff, received from **Ms Hodgkinson**.

### **Moore Park Light Rail**

Petition praying that consideration be given to the construction of a light rail transport system for Moore Park, received from **Ms Moore**.

### **Eastern Distributor Tunnel Ventilation**

Petition praying that air purification systems be installed on the Eastern Distributor and cross-city tunnel, received from **Ms Moore**.

### **South Dowling Street Traffic Management**

Petition praying that the Roads and Traffic Authority investigates all possible traffic management options and implements measures to restore residential amenity and safety to South Dowling Street between Flinders and Oxford streets, received from **Ms Moore**.

### **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**.

### **Surry Hills Clearway Restrictions**

Petition praying that the clearway restrictions on Albion, Fitzroy and Foveaux streets, Surry Hills, introduced by the Roads and Traffic Authority, be removed, received from **Ms Moore**.

### **Oxford Street Pedestrian Crossing**

Petition praying that an additional signalised pedestrian crossing be installed on Oxford Street, Paddington, received from **Ms Moore**.

### **Windsor Road Upgrading**

Petitions praying that Windsor Road be upgraded and widened within the next two financial years, received from **Mr Merton, Mr Richardson and Mr Rozzoli**.

### **Warrell Creek Pacific Highway Realignment**

Petition opposing the Roads and Traffic Authority's design and access arrangements for the realignment of the Pacific Highway at Warrell Creek and praying that the House rejects the authority's proposal and provides proper access to nearby properties, received from **Mr Stoner**.

### **Kempsey and Macksville Pacific Highway Upgrade**

Petition praying that the House improve safety on the Pacific Highway and fast-track the proposed bypassing of Kempsey and Macksville, received from **Mr Stoner**.

### **Old-growth Forests Protection**

Petition praying that consideration be given to the permanent protection of old-growth forests and all other areas of high conservation value, and to the implementation of tree planting strategies, received from **Ms Moore**.

### **Wagga Wagga Electorate Fruit Fly Campaign**

Petition praying that the Government resources the Fruit Fly Campaign for the years 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003, upgrades the Wagga Wagga electorate to a fruit fly control zone, and develops and implements a fruit fly strategy to eliminate fruit fly from the electorate within the next five years, received from **Mr Maguire**.

### **Animal Experimentation**

Petition praying that the practice of supplying stray animals to universities and research institutions for experimentation be opposed, received from **Ms Moore**.

### **Animal Vivisection**

Petition praying that the House will totally and unconditionally abolish animal vivisection on scientific, medical and ethical grounds, and that a new system be introduced whereby veterinary students are apprenticed to practising veterinary surgeons, received from **Ms Moore**.

### **National Parks Entry Fees**

Petitions praying that the proposal to introduce a \$6 entry fee per car per day into national parks be rejected, particularly in Bundjalung National Park and Iluka Nature Reserve, received from **Mr Fraser, Mr George, Ms Hodgkinson, Mr Piccoli, Mr J. H. Turner, Mr R. W. Turner and Mr Webb**.

### **White City Site Rezoning Proposal**

Petition praying that any rezoning of the White City site be opposed, received from **Ms Moore**.



**REGULATION REVIEW COMMITTEE****Report**

**Mr Martin**, on behalf of the Chairman, tabled the report entitled "Report on Regulatory Controls Relating to Dingoes", dated October 2000.

**Ordered to be printed.**

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

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**POLICE STATION CLOSURES**

**Mrs CHIKAROVSKI:** My question is directed to the Premier. Given the Premier's guarantee just two months ago in this House that, and I quote his words, "We are not closing police stations", full stop, how does he explain today's announcement that at least six stations will be axed, leaving residents in areas such as Woolloomooloo, Malabar and Randwick without police based in their communities?

**Mr CARR:** What a cunning trick! You quote the answer, you don't quote the question! Here is the question from the Leader of the National Party on 8 August:

My question without notice is addressed to the Premier. Given that the Premier has frozen police numbers until 30 November, and given his promise not to close one-officer stations in the country, will he now give a guarantee that all country stations will be returned to full strength after the Olympic Games?

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

**Mr CARR:** The question answered by me was about country police stations. That magic date is getting closer and closer.

**Mr Tink:** Mr Speaker—

**Mr CARR:** More about that after the interruption!

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst has been called to order on a number of occasions. He cannot hear the calls because he is constantly interrupting. The Chair will keep a close watch on him for the remainder of question time.

**Mr Tink:** Point of order: The Premier mentioned punctuation. He should be reminded of what is on this tape. He said there would be no police stations closures, full stop. He lied to the electorate of Maroubra. He lied to the people of Malabar. He lied to the Parliament. He lied to the people of New South Wales. He said there would be no police station closures, full stop. He lied to the people of Maroubra.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! After the last occasion on which the honourable member for Epping behaved in that way he apologised to me. On this occasion he will not have an opportunity to do so. I ask the Serjeant-at-Arms to remove the honourable member for Epping from the Chamber.

*[The honourable member for Epping left the Chamber, accompanied by the Serjeant-at-Arms.]*

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I place the honourable member for Gosford on three calls to order. I place the honourable member for Wollongong on three calls to order.

**Mr CARR:** It is that sort of behaviour that saw Photios not only out of the Parliament regularly but out of the Parliament for good. October 26 draws closer by the day. We know those movies that have special effects to show the dates coming off calendars. Well, October 26 is getting closer by the day. That is the date they publish *The Bear Pit*, by Peter Collins. I am still waiting to be asked to launch the book! I am available. I am told, however, that Jeff Kennett has been lined up to do it. So there will be some fireworks that day. I am holding the *Daily Telegraph* to the promise it made to have me review the book.

**Mr O'Doherty:** Point of order—

**Mr CARR:** But let me return to the matter under discussion. Enough of these interruptions!

**Mr O'Doherty:** My point of order it is that if the Premier cannot answer the question and explain why he lied to the House and lied to his electorate, he should sit down.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Hornsby will resume his seat.

**Mr CARR:** Further, on 27 July, before I gave that answer in the House to an explicit question about country police stations—only country police stations, mentioned twice in the text of the question by the Leader of the National Party—this is a question, he said, about country police stations. It is in fact about one-person small country police stations—

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I place the honourable member for Hornsby on three calls to order.

**Mr CARR:** Here is the transcript of a press conference I did on Thursday 27 July. Question from a journalist:

JOURNALIST: Are you concerned that any stations remain closed—that is, after the Olympic Games?

CARR: All I'd say is this. None of the police stations in country New South Wales are being closed. None of the police stations in country New South Wales, including those one-person police stations, are being closed. So the Police Association raised that issue this morning. I am able to give that as an absolute guarantee.

JOURNALIST: Is it an opportunity to keep metropolitan stations—

The rest of the question is inaudible. The transcript continues:

CARR: I'm sorry. I haven't been briefed by the police commissioner. I've got full confidence in his capacity to put resources where they're needed.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I place the honourable member for Pittwater on three calls to order.

**Mr CARR:** That is the essence of this argument: to put resources where they are needed. As the Police Association said on the news at only 1 o'clock and 2 o'clock today, police officers themselves in inner-city police stations are those best placed to judge where resources go. The community of New South Wales will not take advice from the Opposition, which opposed the royal commission into policing in New South Wales, and which even opposed our legislation on DNA testing which was designed to give police a new state-of-the-art tool to fight crime and to put criminals in gaol. The Opposition tried to block it in the upper House. What a disgrace! No wonder the police commissioner had to rebuke the Leader of the Opposition this morning.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Minister for Police will remain silent.

**Mr CARR:** No wonder the police commissioner had to say:

I'm guaranteeing more—

**Mrs Chikarovski:** I'm shaking in my boots.

**Mr CARR:** Oh, you are attacking the police commissioner again! You are never happier than when you are attacking Peter Ryan. You ought to withdraw that. As the police Commissioner said this morning:

I'm guaranteeing more police, more service, better, faster service.

While the Government has not been briefed on the draft plan of the police commissioner, it is my view that those plans must mean more mobile police and reduced response times. It must make it easier and faster for police to apprehend criminals, to use the DNA testing that the Opposition tried to deny them, and to use the increased powers given to the police under this Government. I note that the Police Association said:

If, at the end of the day, this means some of our officers are going to get better premises, we'll support it.

That is the view of the police on the job. But this House will wait a long time before there is any support from the Opposition for the police on the job or any support for the police commissioner, who is, on any test, doing a fine job, despite the endless criticism and offensive abuse of the Opposition.

## HEPATITIS C

**Mr McMANUS:** My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Health. How is the Government helping to tackle the increase in the number of cases of hepatitis C?

**Mr KNOWLES:** Honourable members will recall that earlier this year we launched a hepatitis C awareness campaign under the banner "Understanding is the Answer". The purpose of the campaign was to highlight the fact that hepatitis C is the most common infectious disease in Australia. Whilst many people contracted the virus in the sixties and seventies, it was not until 1989 that the hepatitis C virus was identified. There is no known vaccine for hepatitis C. It is estimated that about 200,000 Australians are infected. There are 11,000 new infections annually. Half of those infections occur in New South Wales.

Sadly, whilst those figures are large, they actually understate the extent of the problem because one of the most worrying aspects about hepatitis C infections is that less than half of those estimated to be infected are actually aware that they have the virus. Hepatitis C is a blood-borne virus. It is transmitted from person to person via exchange of blood. Whilst we have been screening for hepatitis C in our blood services since the beginning of the 1990s, the most common means of transmission is through the sharing of needles, with hepatitis C infections being potentially greater than HIV infections.

Other sources of transmission include non-sterile tattooing and body piercing and, with the growing trend in body piercing, particularly among young people, the risk profile for contracting hepatitis C is growing daily. For example, only two years ago there were fewer than a dozen body piercers in New South Wales. Today there are more than 150. So in that short period of time there has been a major increase in the activities of body piercing and tattooing. One Sydney studio alone reported conducting more than 10,000 body piercings in the period of a year.

Hepatitis C illnesses can vary from flu-like symptoms to chronic infections, and more serious cases can lead to cirrhosis of the liver and liver cancer, and ultimately death. For every 100 people infected, up to 85 per cent will progress to chronic infections, with up to 10 per cent of that group progressing to cirrhosis after 20 years. Based on the epidemiology of the virus, public health officials advise me that we are now facing a hepatitis C epidemic. That is why earlier this year we commenced the awareness campaign, and today we add to that, based on the advice of a potential hepatitis C epidemic, a \$3 million package as part of the New South Wales hepatitis C strategy.

The strategy is aimed at preventing transmission, providing clinical treatment as well as non-clinical care and support, training and education, and research and surveillance. The strategy published will be circulated to all honourable members by the close of business today. Projects contained in the strategy include improving case detection and management in prisons; general practitioner training, to raise awareness and skill levels; targeted education and prevention programs; training and education programs for health workers; and funding for increased case management of hepatitis C sufferers. The \$3 million allocated to those programs over the next two years is on top of the doubling of the recurrent hepatitis C funding that I announced last year, plus an additional \$1.8 million over four years from the Commonwealth Government.

The fight against hepatitis C and the hepatitis C epidemic must be bipartisan, as was our approach to the threat of HIV-AIDS. Because we learnt much from the HIV campaign I propose to establish a similar framework in New South Wales, including the establishment of a ministerial advisory council on hepatitis C. I am pleased to announce that Professor Geoff McCaughan of the Morrow Gastroenterology and Liver Centre at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital has kindly agreed to chair the hepatitis C council. I thank him in advance, as well as other members, for their ongoing commitment to improving public health. I am confident that, with a comprehensive and targeted approach and an Australiawide bipartisan strategy, we can control the alarming growth in hepatitis C infections.

## NEW SOUTH WALES GRAINS BOARD OPERATIONS

**Mr ARMSTRONG:** My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Agriculture. Will the Minister give grain growers a guarantee that, when the New South Wales Grain Board assets and liabilities are sold, the sale contract will prevent the purchaser applying inflated handling and administration costs on future crops, forcing grain growers to pay for the losses sustained by the present board? Will the Minister also guarantee that there will be no government-backed levy on future crops?

**Mr AMERY:** At this stage it is difficult for me to give complete assurances or to make any clear comments in relation to the issues outlined by the honourable member for Lachlan. I will explain the reason for

that in a moment. This is the first opportunity I have had to speak to the House about the matters concerning the New South Wales Grains Board. Honourable members would be aware that, under the requirements of the national competition policy agreement, the Grains Board underwent a competition policy review. After receipt of this year's report Cabinet deliberated on the matter and I talked to many industry players to determine what position the Government would take in relation to the review.

Some time ago I was advised by the board that it was experiencing financial difficulties. Honourable members would be aware that that matter has, to some extent, been reported by the media. The extent of the board's financial losses range between \$35 million and \$70 million—the figure referred to in the notice of motion foreshadowed earlier by the honourable member for Lachlan. At this stage I do not have the final figures of the true financial situation of the board. However, Price Waterhouse Coopers, which was commissioned by the board, the board and other people are working through that process.

As soon as the potential loss became known to me I called for a report. I was provided with a preliminary report on 4 August and a more detailed report on 30 August, which revealed that the board will be unable to trade out of its difficulties without a significant capital injection. Even before this issue arose the board was seeking either a merger or trading partners. On 16 August the Government decided to extend the board's vesting powers for a further five years and to sunset those powers at that time. The Government is currently working with the board to establish arrangements with other organisations involving an injection of sufficient capital to enable the board to meet its obligations to New South Wales coarse grain and oilseed growers. The board has since gone through a tender process.

There has been a lot of speculation in the media about those who have tendered either to be part of the merger or to take over the organisation. Most of the people who tendered are fairly well-known in the grain trading area. Cabinet is yet to meet and to make a decision on the recommendations of the Grains Board. It is difficult for me to give the honourable member for Lachlan an assurance about the board's financial commitments. I do not know whether the board knew anything about the levies to which the honourable member referred. I thought that I would be able to make a decision on this matter today.

**Mr Armstrong:** Point of order: I asked the Minister a simple question. Will he guarantee that the Government will not be party to inflated handling and administration costs that a future owner of the Grains Board might impose on New South Wales grain growers? That is a simple question. The Minister is not addressing the question. He should give a simple answer—yes or no.

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

**Mr AMERY:** I said earlier that I cannot give any guarantees at this stage. So I suppose my answer is no. As I said earlier, I was hoping to be able to make a statement to the House today. I have not been able to do so—something that has not been occasioned by any problems or deliberate delays by the Government or Cabinet. Treasury, Cabinet office, the Department of Agriculture and the Grains Board are holding sensitive negotiations with the financiers and future financiers of this organisation. Those negotiations are being conducted at the moment. I have always been concerned about the plight of New South Wales grain growers. Negotiations have always been predicated on the fact that in everything we do, for example, our negotiations with the banks, we will do all we can to protect New South Wales grain growers.

The Government is also attempting to help grain growers with their current crop. It would be inappropriate to give the House any guarantees today as I do not have final figures. I should be able to make a statement to the House when it next sits. I might be able to make a statement to the press early next week. I assure the honourable member for Lachlan, who I know represents grain growers in this State, that the Government is doing everything it can, through these negotiations, to ensure that it limits any losses or extra costs to New South Wales farmers who are going through a lot of uncertainty at this stage. I will make a statement either to the House or to the press as soon as negotiations with financiers and Cabinet have been finalised and a decision has been made about the successful tenderer.

### SCHOOL SECURITY

**Mr THOMPSON:** My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Education Training. What is the latest information on school security?

**Mr AQUILINA:** School security is a vitally important issue. In the wider community there are always a few mindless thugs who think that schools are easy targets for vandalism, arson and theft. That view is false.

More than 1,300 schools are fitted with electronic surveillance, movement sensors and alarm systems. Those systems are linked to a 24-hour monitoring and response service, which immediately dispatches security guards to the scene. Since 1995 the State Government has spent more than \$40 million on state-of-the-art security systems for our schools. Random security patrols, extra lighting and better fencing are further examples of how we protect government schools from attacks. No security system can prevent every attack.

Last night, a fire broke out at the historic Hunters Hill High School, severely damaging the school assembly hall and gymnasium. I am advised that the fire brigade, which was quickly on the scene, was able to prevent the fire from spreading to neighbouring classrooms. On behalf of all honourable members and New South Wales taxpayers and particularly the teaching and student fraternity I congratulate the New South Wales Fire Brigades on its speedy and effective response. Earlier today I spoke to Judith Felton, the relieving principal at Hunters Hill High School, who requested me to pass on her special thanks for the tremendous support—and these are her words—from the police and the Fire Brigades who assisted her in the wee hours of this morning from about 3 o'clock onwards.

She also asked me to acknowledge the fact that there was not one local school that has not rung up Hunters Hill High School with offers of support, emphasising again the tremendous strength of the education system in New South Wales and the support colleagues offer to one another. I acknowledge that today, and thank them for their offers of support. I understand Hunters Hill High School was fitted with electronic surveillance, and this will assist the police in their investigations. Today I can inform the House that an additional \$5 million is being spent on new alarms, movement sensors, random security patrols and lighting at government schools around the State. This funding will help make our schools among the most secure buildings in New South Wales. It includes more than \$800,000 for special security measures at the 15 government schools considered to be most at risk.

The message for would-be vandals and arsonists is clear: schools are not havens from the law. Anyone who attacks a school will be caught and will be charged. The maximum penalty for arson at a school is 10 years imprisonment. If someone is injured during an attack, the penalty increases to 14 years. Our security measures are working. The number of offenders apprehended at schools has risen from 770 in 1997-98 to more than 900 in 1999-2000. Around the State school security is tighter than ever, with new electronic surveillance movement sensors and security patrols. Overall, school security funding continues to rise in each State budget but there is always more to be done.

It is important to recognise that the best way of protecting schools from vandals and arsonists is to enlist the help of parents, students and the wider community. Schools are more than just government buildings. They are a focus for the entire community, and the entire community has a role in their protection. To involve the public in school protection, all schools have now been issued with new guidelines on school security and asset management, and I have a copy of these new guidelines here.

**Mr O'Doherty:** Are you going to table them?

**Mr AQUILINA:** I will be happy to send you a copy. The guidelines cover all aspects of school security, including school-based risk assessments, the school watch program involving neighbours of school property and the school parents and citizens associations, strategic placement of physical security measures such as fences and video surveillance, the training of teachers and support staff on how to deal with intruders and how to keep the schools secure, and the marking of all valuable school property, including computers, with electronic labels to identify stolen property and prevent on-selling by thieves. I strongly emphasise that final point. For just \$70 a school can electronically mark 1,000 items of school equipment. This equipment is easily identifiable as stolen property and can help link thieves with particular break-ins and attacks on schools. Microdot equipment is being made available to all public schools across New South Wales and all school property is being electronically tagged as soon as possible.

The new security guidelines explain ways to get parents, teachers and students involved in watching for vandals and in protecting our schools. Superintendents and principals are also currently being trained in the new guidelines. The guidelines also include details on how to deal with serious security incidents, the role of the school security unit and surveillance and evacuation procedures. All school staff will also be briefed on daily lock-up procedures, access restrictions, use of school keys and dealing with strangers. All school equipment will also be electronically marked to help identify stolen property and help catch thieves. The Carr Government is doing more than any before it to protect our schools and to catch offenders. The new security measures in schools and the ongoing involvement of parents and the community are instrumental in making our schools safer, more secure and better places to learn.

### PARALYMPIC GAMES TRANSPORT CHARGES

**Mr R. H. L. SMITH:** My question is directed to the Premier. Why is he discriminating against people living in areas such as Nowra, Goulburn, Bathurst and Scone, who will be forced to play up to \$54 to catch a train to the Paralympics, when just two weeks ago they were able to travel to Homebush Bay for free to watch Olympic sports?

**Mr CARR:** I was in Moss Vale today and there was enormous enthusiasm for the Paralympics and people were talking about coming to them. If there were any sense of grievance in non-metropolitan New South Wales, I would have heard about it there. I spoke to hundreds of people, including the local member, who was glowing in her support of the Paralympics. The opening ceremony is sold out. Has that not dawned on members opposite? Sales for other events are booming. The closing ceremony is nearly sold out. Furthermore, everyone involved with these Games says the level of support from the New South Wales Government is greater than that from any other host government in the history of the Paralympics. It is a matter of public record. No other host city has spent as much or organised as well to see that the Paralympics will be a thumping success.

For two months we sat here and heard members opposite predict disaster for the Olympics. I would not be rude enough to remind the House of the questions asked by the shadow Minister for Transport, when he was not asking about a job for David Hill or the demolition of the country rail system, which was being bulldozed by accident when he was adviser to the Minister for Transport. Everything Barry does is a blunder. There is no deliberate malice, it is all by accident. The Leader of the Opposition loves me talking about the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, but not as much as the honourable member for Gosford. The challenge is for the House to continue to do what it did so admirably this morning. That is to get behind the Paralympics and show its support. I am sure the majority of decent members opposite will be uniting with the Government in seeking precisely that result.

### RURAL FIRE SERVICE

**Mr HICKEY:** My question without notice is to the Minister for Emergency Services. How will the Government help our firefighters protect the community?

**Mr DEBUS:** I acknowledge the honourable member for Cessnock's continuing interest in the welfare of members of the Rural Fire Service. As always, Country Labor members in this House are very solid supporters of the service and particularly the efforts of our volunteers, who are facing a potentially quite extraordinarily difficult fire season. I am pleased to be able to announce today that the New South Wales Rural Fire Service's budget is the largest in the history of the bush fire fighting movement. The statewide allocation of \$91 million for 2000-01 is a record and confirms the Government's commitment to the service.

This is a major boost in funding. On a region by region basis, the 2000-01 funding for the Rural Fire Service is as follows: the Castlereagh region, which includes Gunnedah, Inverell and Tamworth, will receive \$6.6 million; the Hunter, \$12.3 million; the central east region, which includes Blacktown, Gosford, Lithgow, Sutherland and Wollongong has been allocated \$22.5 million; the Riverina will receive \$8.4 million; the central region, which includes Blayney, Cootamundra, Orange and Mudgee, will receive \$12 million; the northern region, \$11.7 million; the western region, \$5 million; and the southern region, \$12.1 million.

The record \$91 million rural fire fighting fund will provide, among other things, for the commencement of a three-year program to retrofit safety equipment to existing vehicles—\$4 million is allocated this year as part of a \$12 million program. An additional \$2.1 million is allocated for the purchase of advanced protective clothing and other safety equipment. The accelerated tanker replacement program continues, with \$25 million in funding available for 172 new tankers and 98 good quality second-hand tankers—a total of 270—and \$2.1 million will be provided for the acquisition of a fixed-wing aircraft to provide operational and logistic support.

Since the Carr Government came to office, \$128 million has been allocated for the acquisition of 914 new and 674 good condition second-hand bushfire tankers. That is a massive 1,588 tankers in all. During the past six years the Government has provided funding in the order of \$437 million, compared to just \$179 million by the former Coalition Government over a similar six-year period. That is almost 250 per cent more than was allocated by the former Coalition Government in its last six years. The previous Government provided funding for only 285 new tankers and spent only \$17 million on reconditioned tankers during that period.

Over the past six years the Carr Government has particularly concentrated on redressing the funding imbalance left by the Coalition, as has been highlighted by Country Labor members. Under the Coalition, areas

west of the Great Divide were especially underresourced and underequipped. This might seem a little surprising given the nature of the previous Coalition, but it is true. As a result of strong representations, particularly from the honourable member for Murray-Darling and the Hon. Tony Kelly, the Government has been very active in redressing the Coalition's neglect.

This year, funding for the western region is 176 per cent higher than the final allocation of the Coalition Government, and over the six years of the Carr Government funding for the western region has been 281 per cent higher than it was under the Coalition. Right around the State funding has increased for our volunteer rural firefighting movement and includes an increase in the overall budget from just \$50 million in 1994-95 to \$91 million this year, increases in funding for rural fire fighting vehicles, greater funding for community education programs, a boost in funding for training programs in the service and dedicated funds for protective clothing.

The Government—particularly Country Labor members—is committed to ensuring that rural fire brigades around the State continue to be better equipped and resourced to serve the community and to protect rural families. Members opposite spent their time in government neglecting the Rural Fire Service. While I am on the subject of the Coalition's record of neglect of volunteer bushfire fighters, I take this opportunity to respond to recent remarks, including a question asked yesterday of the Premier by the Leader of the National Party. Once again the Leader of the National Party has shown an extraordinarily irresponsible approach to the current spate of bushfires around the State.

Honourable members are well aware that this year's bushfire season has started early. It is no exaggeration to say that it has started with some ferocity. Indeed, the past six weeks have been the worst beginning to a fire season in the living memory of rural fire fighters. It was in preparation for exactly these conditions that over the past six years the Government has undertaken the most comprehensive reform of rural firefighting in the history of the volunteer movement. This was in response to Coroner Hiatt's analysis of the 1994 bushfire crisis.

The Government's response was to reform the antiquated Bush Fire Act of 1949; establish modern, scientific procedures for hazard reduction, resulting in better targeted fuel load reduction, especially at the urban-rural interface; improve the local and regional management of bushfire threats through the development of risk management plans; and increase involvement of the whole community in assessing local needs and planning for all contingencies. The efforts of fire fighters are therefore not at all helped by members of the National Party, particularly the Leader of the National Party, who has been making ill-informed attacks on the New South Wales Rural Fire Services Commissioner, Phil Koperberg, in recent days. When members opposite are not attacking Commissioner Ryan they are attacking Commissioner Koperberg.

The Leader of the National Party's attacks on Commissioner Koperberg are misleading the community about the service's policies. Let me make it clear: Commissioner Koperberg has not blamed and would never blame farmers as a group for being responsible for the present bushfires. Indeed, he has made it clear that most of the current bushfires that have been deliberately lit have been lit by arsonists who are in reality sick people. He has always acknowledged that the vast majority of farmers have been working co-operatively with the fire authorities. Indeed, many farmers are actually members of the volunteer fire fighting force.

The problem recently highlighted by Commissioner Koperberg is that in a number of cases bushfires are a result of back-burns lit by a small number of private landowners. Indeed, there are now seven established cases on the North Coast of New South Wales in which fires lit by land-holders have spread onto public land, most notably national parks. The statistics over the past six years show that national parks are in more danger of being burnt by a fire coming from outside than any private land is from fires in the opposite direction.

[*Interruption*]

Wilson Tuckey is the maddest of them. The small handful of land-holders lighting these fires contrary to established co-operative practices, in the mistaken belief that they are protecting their properties, are actually risking the property and livelihoods of their neighbours and the lives of volunteer firefighters from their own districts.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I place the honourable member for Oxley on three calls to order.

**Mr DEBUS:** Fire authorities have a responsibility for the safety of the whole community and of firefighters to ensure that the message about the very real consequences of deliberately lighting fires in

dangerous conditions is heard loudly and clearly. It would be much more helpful if Opposition members supported our firefighters, rather than opportunistically criticising them and trying seriously to mislead the community.

### WORKERS COMPENSATION PREMIUMS

**Mr GLACHAN:** My question is addressed to the Minister for Regional Development. Can the Minister explain to the owners of King of the Road Truck Wash in Albury, which employs 17 staff, why their compulsory workers compensation costs have jumped by 150 per cent in the past year, at a time when the Minister says he wants to encourage greater employment opportunities in rural New South Wales?

**Mr WOODS:** I advise the honourable member that his question is more appropriately addressed to the Minister for Industrial Relations.

### SYDNEY PARKS AND OPEN SPACES

**Mr ASHTON:** My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning. How is the Government helping to improve Sydney's parks and open spaces?

**Dr REFSHAUGE:** I commend the honourable member for East Hills for his continuing interest in green spaces and open parks. Our natural open spaces contribute greatly to Sydney being one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Our green spaces and lend much to the special character of the city. As honourable members know, they were recently showcased to brilliant effect as international cameras panned across Homebush Bay, Penrith Lakes, Horsley Park and, of course, the harbour foreshore. Our open spaces are essential to bringing a quality lifestyle to the people of Australia's busiest city. They offset the urban landscape with a serene natural beauty, and provide a tranquil setting for family picnics, cycling, running, playing cricket and the like.

Since 1995 the Government has committed more than \$90 million to ensuring that green open spaces are available for people to enjoy. We have spent \$85 million on acquiring significant areas of open space in the Sydney region and in western Sydney in particular. On top of that, a further \$6 million has been committed to helping councils improve their park plans through the Metropolitan Green Space program. Councils contribute to the funding on a dollar-for-dollar basis, and \$12 million has been spent on Sydney's parks through government partnerships with local government since 1995. This represents an outstanding success—not only in greening Sydney but also in promoting collaboration between State and local governments. Since 1995 this Government has approved 130 Greenspace applications. That means 130 park improvements have worked directly to bring more enjoyment to the people of Sydney.

Foreshore open spaces along Sydney's waterways, including Sydney Harbour, Botany Bay, Parramatta River and the Hawkesbury-Nepean rivers system, have been greatly enhanced. We have seen the revegetation and development of regional urban space throughout Sydney. During Western Sydney Environment Week earlier this year I was pleased to announce a new draft plan to protect 5,400 hectares of parkland in western Sydney. This important open space stretches for 26 kilometres—that is, an area 25 times the size of Centennial Park. It contains major remnants of the Cumberland Plain woodland, as well as important recreational areas. Our move here ensures that the people of western Sydney will always be able to enjoy these wonderful parklands.

There is always more we can do. Today I am pleased to announce that this year we have allocated almost \$1.1 million under the Greenspace program. Under the 2000 program, people in 15 council areas across Sydney will enjoy improvements in local parks, cycleways and walkways. We are working to encourage a sustainable city with quality, attractive, enjoyable public spaces. We want the people of Sydney to have a wide choice of recreational parks that range from quiet neighbourhood parks to major open spaces that provide recreation and conserve important natural and cultural features. We are doing this through both the Greenspace program and our ongoing commitment to acquiring lands for regional public open space.

I am sure members will welcome news of specific examples of the 16 projects to be funded this year across 15 local government areas. The projects were selected for their capacity to improve public access to open space, for encouraging community involvement, and for enhancing natural and bushland features. They were evaluated by an independent panel containing representatives from the Institute of Municipal Engineers, Parks and Leisure Australia, the Local Government Association, the Royal Australian Planning Institute [RAPI] and the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects. By the way, why was the honourable member for Pittwater not



at the RAPI awards the other night? I had a seat for him, but he did not turn up, and he did not send an apology. He wants to lead this State, yet he cannot even turn up to a major institute's planning awards. He will not get to lead this State by being lazy.

At Salt Pan Creek in Riverwood a \$25,000 grant will continue major improvements by enabling us to landscape the recreation area north of the M5 motorway. Those improvements will include pedestrian parks and cycleways, park furniture and screen planting to provide a buffer zone between the M5 and sporting events. This grant brings the total of Greenspace grants for Salt Pan Creek to \$100,000, with previous funding having transformed it from a degraded waterway to a vibrant public setting. Our funding this year of \$37,000 to Mrs Macquarie's Lookout in Varroville will assist with the preservation of an important Campbelltown heritage site. It will help the council to begin working on weed control, fencing and revegetation, and to engage a consultant to assess the site and prepare a management plan.

The people of Botany Bay will benefit this year from our \$88,000 grant to improve walking trails, seating and shelter, signage and an off-road cycling park. Similarly, at Wymston Parade in Abbotsford, which is in your electorate, Mr Speaker, \$40,000 in funding will help to upgrade pathways, put in shade planting and revegetation, provide furniture and signage, and launch a Bushcare group. These are just a few examples of how this year's projects will work to make a real difference to the lives and lifestyles of local families. Today we add a further 16 projects to the important tally of results with another investment of almost \$1.1 million. We underscore that this Government remains fully committed to enhancing, preserving and extending parklands for a better lifestyle for Sydneysiders.

### POLICE STATION CLOSURES

**Ms MOORE:** My question is to the Premier. Why has a decision been made to close or amalgamate police stations in inner-eastern Sydney areas—the most densely populated areas in Australia, with severe crime problems and complex policing needs—without any community consultation?

**Mr CARR:** A decision has not been made. The plans of the police commissioner, about which I have not yet been briefed, will be fully discussed with the community. However, I repeat: the Government has made no decision.

### PUBLIC TRANSPORT DISABLED ACCESS

**Miss BURTON:** My question without notice is to the Minister for Transport. How is the Government assisting people with disabilities or limited mobility to access public transport?

**Mr SCULLY:** The Paralympians who addressed the House this morning reminded us that people with disabilities, like anyone else, want an active and independent lifestyle. The Government is committed to doing everything it can to support that. Public transport needs to be easily accessible to elderly people and parents with children in strollers and heavy shopping. Earlier this year the Government committed itself to nine easy access upgrades. Today I am pleased to announce that the Government has let a \$15.9 million construction contract for the first five of those CityRail upgrades. Engadine railway station will undergo an easy access upgrade.

I must acknowledge the work of the honourable member for Heathcote in pressing for that upgrade. Katoomba railway station will also be given easy access. The Attorney General, the member for the Blue Mountains, has been a very strong advocate for that station's easy access upgrade. Allawah railway station will also undergo an easy access upgrade. The honourable member for Kogarah has been particularly keen to ensure that that station is upgraded. The honourable member for Miranda has put a very strong case for Caringbah railway station. That station will also be given an easy access upgrade, as will Regents Park railway station.

Development applications have been accepted by the local councils and the contract has been awarded to Belmandar Constructions Pty Ltd. The upgrades will be completed during the current financial year. The improvements to the stations will include lifts with rail operating panels, ramps, wheelchair-accessible toilets, hearing loops at ticket offices, and tactile tiles on platform edges and stairs. The five railway stations I have referred to will increase the total number of easy access stations across the CityRail network to 50. We have already completed easy access improvements to three of Sydney's busiest railway stations—Central, Town Hall and Wynyard. In fact, the honourable member for Liverpool and I opened the upgrade of Liverpool railway station, a terrific upgrade with easy access facilities. The Government is also proceeding with a program to reduce the gaps on stations between platforms and trains. So far 47 platforms have already been modified.

The Government's program will ensure that a further 50 stations have easy access established by 2005, which will mean that 75 per cent of all CityRail customers will have access to easy access stations—a terrific improvement on the former Coalition Government's record. That Government completed only about 10 or 12 such upgrades. Over the first 10 years of this Government's term in office we will do in the order of about 80 easy access upgrades, which will be a pretty good achievement. State Transit has a very strong commitment to easy access. In fact, of its total bus fleet of about 1,900 buses there are 426 ultra-low-floor buses and about 300 buses with wheelchair ramps. About 40 per cent of the STA fleet are wheelchair accessible or modified to assist those with mobility problems. The Government is also proceeding with new SuperCat ferries, which are wheelchair accessible, and more wheelchair-accessible taxi plates will be issued.

In conclusion, I wish to comment on the Federal Government's decision to proceed with the accessible disability standards for transport. I am pleased that the Federal Government has finally done that. However, at the meeting of State and Federal transport Ministers some months ago the States agreed to encourage the Commonwealth to support those draft disability standards. We then endorsed a 20-year time frame whereby governments around Australia would implement those standards over a 20-year period. Thankfully, the Commonwealth has adopted a substantial number of those standards. However, it has extended the time frame to 30 years. As far as this Government is concerned, in terms of the provision of transport for which we are directly responsible we will continue on a 20-year time frame, will continue to buy STA buses with low floors, to implement easy access stations as much as possible, and to keep pressure on the private transport industry to do as much as it can for disabled access.

#### **Questions without notice concluded.**

### **POLICE STATION CLOSURES**

#### **Personal Explanation**

**Mr SLACK-SMITH**, by leave: In answer to a question by the Leader of the Opposition about police stations, the Premier stated that DNA legislation was opposed by the Opposition. That is absolutely untrue.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I place the Leader of the House on three calls to order. He should know better than to behave in the way he did. I ask the House to remain silent and thereby assist the honourable member for Barwon to make his personal explanation. Every member has the right to be heard in silence.

**Mr SLACK-SMITH:** The Premier also omitted to mention that he personally congratulated me in my position as the parliamentary representative for Barwon on having the first mass DNA testing carried out in New South Wales. I ask the Premier to withdraw his statement.

### **CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS**

#### **Australia Post Deregulation**

**Mr WOODS** (Clarence—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs) [3.30 p.m.]: This motion is urgent because the Federal Government is considering yet again downgrading basic services to the people of this State. The House should consider this matter today because the impact of that decision will be felt immediately. Intervention needs to occur now rather than later. We should urgently debate this matter for the sake of staff who stand to lose their jobs because of a downgrading of the service. This matter is also of immense importance to my portfolio constituency—the people of rural and regional Australia—and it is urgent because I want to see Australia Post continue to deliver letters throughout rural Australia.

**Mr Hartcher:** Mr Speaker, I move:

That this House expresses grave concern over the Government's plan to close a number of police stations in the metropolitan area.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The honourable member for Gosford will resume his seat. I now seek the attendance of the honourable member for Epping. Unfortunately, he is not present. As a consequence, I will put the question that the Minister's motion should proceed.

**Mr Hartcher:** Mr Speaker, I move:

That this House expresses grave concern over the Government's plan to close a number of police stations in metropolitan area.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I thought the honourable member for Gosford was taking a point of order.

**Mr Hartcher:** No, I was not.

**Mr SPEAKER:** The honourable member for Gosford will resume his seat.

**Mr Hartcher:** I have moved a motion.

**Mr SPEAKER:** The honourable member for Gosford is out of order.

**Question—That the motion for urgent consideration of the honourable member for Clarence be proceeded with—agreed to.**

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

### **Precedence of Business: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders**

#### **Motion by Mr Whelan agreed to:**

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow the resumption forthwith of the debate on the motion on the Sydney Paralympic Games.

## **SYDNEY 2000 PARALYMPIC GAMES**

### **Debate resumed from an earlier hour.**

**Mr WATKINS** (Ryde—Minister for Fair Trading, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) [3.33 p.m.]: I thank the House for its forbearance. I was unable to take part in the debate this morning because I was at Darling Harbour for the launch of a new high-tech boat which heralds a new era for disabled sailing. I saw a world first when Nava George, a woman of 21 years of age who has been on a respirator since the age of four, was able to go sailing on Darling Harbour in this new boat by herself. It was great to see that. I also watched Amy Barnwood, who was born with just one leg, go sailing also, through the good offices of Sailability, in one of the new high-tech boats. It was truly wondrous. I apologise to the House for not being in the Chamber earlier to participate in the debate.

I speak in response to the speeches made this morning by Hamish MacDonald and Julianne Adams, who are two Paralympians. We know that the 2000 Paralympic Games will be our chance to show Australia and the world the spirit of the Paralympics and to demonstrate the courage and determination of our Paralympians. The performances of our Australian Paralympians are already creating excitement in the sporting community. Paralympic sport not only involves a high level of competitiveness and skill; it is fast and physical, exciting to watch, and maintains a unique sporting spirit. In Sydney over the next few weeks we will see many incredible performances that will be remembered for years and establish a lasting place in Australian sporting history for many of our Paralympians.

We can only begin to imagine the intense training programs that Julianne, Hamish and their teammates are going through and all the other commitments they have at this time. On behalf of all honourable members, I say a hearty thank you to both Julianne and Hamish. The whole of Australia applauds their personal efforts to reach the top of their chosen sport. As elite athletes, they are important role models for other Australians. They have been an inspiration to many and now they have achieved the goal to which so many others aspire. I would have to think that being selected to represent one's country would be the greatest honour for any athlete. The two Paralympians who were present in this Chamber today must know that feeling well.

Julianne will be competing in the women's wheelchair basketball. She was part of the Atlanta team which was placed fourth in the competition. Since then, she has been a member of the bronze medal winning team at the Gold Cup World Championships held in Sydney in 1998 as well as a member of the team which defeated the United States of America in the series earlier this year. With a track record such as that, Julianne has to be a definite medal chance at her home Games. At the 1996 Atlanta Games Hamish won the gold medal in his classification for shot-put while at the same time setting a new world, Australian and Games record. Hamish was also placed fourth overall in the discus throw. In 1998 he won the bronze medal for shot-put at the International Paralympic Committee Athletics World Championships. At these Paralympics in Sydney, he will be competing in both discus and shot-put and is also well in the running for a medal.

Hamish and Julianne are just two of the 393 athletes whom Australia will have competing in this year's Paralympic Games. In 1996 Australia sent 166 athletes to compete at the Games in Atlanta. Australia was second in the medal tally after being beaten by the America on the very last day of the competition. But Australia's medal tally was something for all Australians to be proud of. Our 166 athletes managed to bring home a total of 106 medals, consisting of 42 gold, 37 silver and 27 bronze. The first ever Paralympic Games were held in Rome in 1960. The Games derive their name from the term "parallel" as they are held alongside the Olympic Games and are now recognised as the premier international event for elite athletes who have a disability.

At the Rome Games 400 athletes competed and represented 23 countries, including Australia. The Games have been progressively increasing in both size and status ever since. At the Sydney 2000 Games more than 4,000 athletes from 125 countries will compete. This is the first time in the history of the Paralympic Games that they have been hosted in the southern hemisphere. There are 18 sports at the Sydney 2000 Games, 14 of which are also Olympic sports. The exceptions are boccia, goalball, wheelchair rugby and powerlifting. Australia has athletes competing in all 18 sports.

Athletes compete in all these sports according to their type of disability and functional ability against others with similar functions. There are six disability categories including amputee, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, vision impaired and wheelchair. Within the six categories, further classification occurs depending upon the individual's level of ability. As well as that, classification systems differ between sports.

In some sports, records are comparable with those set in the Olympics. A great example is Troy Sachs, a member of the men's wheelchair basketball team, who shot 42 points in the gold medal match against Great Britain at the Atlanta Paralympic Games. That feat resulted in Troy setting a new Paralympic Games record and exceeding the Olympic basketball record. Tim Matthews is the only Australian Paralympian, other than wheelchair athletes, to break the 11-second barrier for the 100 metres sprint on the track. Tim clocked 10.87 seconds at the German nationals in August 1999. Looking back to Atlanta in 1996, the Australian Paralympic team included 49 New South Wales athletes who contributed eight gold, nine silver and 10 bronze medals to the impressive Australian tally. Team 2000 includes 89 New South Wales athletes and 48 New South Wales staff, ensuring a contribution that is equally impressive.

With the success of the Sydney Olympic Games still fresh in everyone's minds, it is fantastic that the opening ceremony for the Paralympics and many of the reserved seating finals have completely sold out. Australians are known for their love of sport and are preparing themselves for another spectacular two weeks of outstanding performances. All our athletes have had to start somewhere in their pursuit of excellence for these Games. On a State level, athlete preparation for the Games has been supported through several initiatives.

My Department of Sport and Recreation has established a centre of excellence at the Sydney Academy of Sport, Narrabeen, for athletes with a disability. Funding of more than \$230,000 has been provided for the elite unit for athletes with a disability, as well as special live-in intensive sport programs, with the twin goals of optimising the talents and independence of youth with disabilities. Team support programs provide financial assistance as with individual scholarships. Sports science and sport services are delivered to the team as a whole in the form of field testing and group education sessions delivered in the form of residential camps.

The Talented Athletes with a Disability program is an initiative of the New South Wales Government and is believed to be a world first. For the first time children with a disability will be offered the opportunity to intensively develop their talents and thus establish pathways for participants to progress in their sport, with the aim of eventually being included in the High Performance Sport program. The Coach Improvement program was established with the aim of increasing the number of coaches with an interest in athletes with disabilities and improving coach education in this area.

The Coach Improvement program provides workshop opportunities, disability education and the provision of support to coaches and associated support staff to fulfil the aims of the program. The Sport Unit for Athletes with a Disability is located at the Sydney Academy of Sport, Narrabeen and was established with the aim of improving the quality of services and level of support to athletes with disabilities within New South Wales. The facilities and services currently available are among the best in Australia. New South Wales is now leading all other States in the level of services provided for athletes with disabilities. The New South Wales Institute of Sport also provides \$70,000 for the National Wheelchair Track and Road program.

My involvement in the Paralympic Games extends beyond that of Minister for Sport and Recreation. As the attaché to the Australian Paralympic Team 2000 I am extremely excited about what lies ahead, and I am

looking forward to getting involved as much as I can in the atmosphere of the Games. It is truly a great honour to be a part of a magnificent group of athletes at one of the biggest sporting festivals ever held in Australia. So now the countdown is on. In six days Sydney will once again take centre stage with the world spotlight focussing on our city. Our athletes will perform to their highest level possible, and our nation is ready to show their support. As I said earlier, the Paralympic Games will be our chance to show Australia and the world the spirit of the Paralympics and demonstrate the courage and determination of our Paralympians.

The legacy of these Games will be a lasting one—one that hopefully will see sport take a leading role in promoting equality for all. The heroes from this team will be spoken of down the years for generations to come, in every hamlet and village, suburb and town in every school and workplace right across this great nation from the sprawling western suburbs of our great cities to Western Australia and up the beautiful valley towns of the Great Dividing Range. They will be urged on, and watched and encouraged. The members of the team carry the dreams, best wishes, love and regard of millions of our countrymen. They will carry that responsibility with honour and pride. They will make us all proud. Finally, I say good luck to Hamish and Julianne and thank them for your comments today. Every Australian is behind them and is cheering them on.

**Mr OAKESHOTT** (Port Macquarie) [3.45 p.m.]: I endorse the comments of the Minister for Sport and Recreation and the Government, and I support the motion. I fully support the Paralympics and wish all the athletes, staff, volunteers and supporters throughout New South Wales the best of luck in having a successful Paralympic Games. I know that all honourable members are behind the Games and its process, and I hope that it will be a great success. I wish to particularly mention a couple of close friends of mine from Port Macquarie who are on the Paralympic team.

**Mr Orkopoulos:** Nightclubbers?

**Mr OAKESHOTT:** Yes, I confirm they are both very good nightclubbers in Port Macquarie. Brad Dubberly and Tom Kennedy are both in the wheelchair rugby team. Also from Port Macquarie Paul Hyde, a weightlifter, will compete in the Games, and has competed previously. These men have been training hard and the Port Macquarie community and I know of their efforts to get to this elite level. We wish them the best of luck. I know that they are confident about one of the games. They are very keen to knock off the United States of America, the world champions, in their third or fourth game. They are not making any bold predictions, but having seen the team train and play we all hope that each will come home with a gold medal around his neck.

The New South Wales Coalition fully endorses the Paralympics and I am in the process of taking a block booking for the wheelchair rugby, not only because of these local blokes but because many honourable members will find it highly entertaining. It is a good exhibition of the diversity of Paralympic sports. I believe that people will be absolutely amazed when they see the heavy contact and entertainment value that comes with being a spectator at wheelchair rugby. We have taken a block booking and hopefully during the two weeks of the Games every member of the New South Wales Coalition will attend the Paralympics and the wheelchair rugby. That would be a significant and positive step to demonstrate our support for the Paralympic Games.

I endorse the comments made by the Minister for Sport and Recreation in relation to the Institute of Sport's Elite Athletes program and the Government's support for people with disabilities in general in New South Wales. I also personally wish the Minister the best of luck in his role as the attaché for the Australian team. I certainly hope to see him at several events throughout the Paralympics. The Minister knows of my family connection with people with disabilities and the Paralympic movement. My family is an example of the positive feeling throughout New South Wales for the Paralympic gains. I encourage people far and wide to get right behind these Games and make them the great success that we have seen with the Olympic Games. I wish all the athletes, volunteers, staff and supporters who get behind the Games, including, importantly, sponsors who are willing to put money behind the Games, the best of luck and support in the next two weeks.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Woods.**

## **AUSTRALIA POST DEREGULATION**

### **Urgent Motion**

**Mr WOODS** (Clarence—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs) [3.50 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) expresses its concern over the Federal Government's plan to make major changes to Australia Post, which will force the closure of up to 1,700 post offices and put 17,000 jobs at risk;

- (2) notes that these changes would hit hardest in remote and rural communities in New South Wales; and
- (3) calls on the Federal Government to immediately abandon its plans for any further deregulation of Australia Post.

This debate is about fairness; it about making sure that country people get their fair share and a fair go. The Federal Government's plans, which are due to come before the Federal Parliament next month, are a kick in the teeth for country people. They will lead to the closure of up to 1,700 postal service outlets, put 17,000 jobs at risk and diminish services to country people. So much for the Nyngan declaration of the Prime Minister, John Howard. First, it was the phones; now they are going after the postie. The Federal Government would have it that this is all about giving consumers a better deal, to make Australia Post more efficient. Last year Australia Post recorded a 4.7 per cent increase in profits. The Federal Government's take from that is more than \$100 million—not bad for what the Prime Minister described as an inefficient organisation!

What of its record in delivering the post? In the year to 30 June Australia Post delivered 4.8 billion articles, which is 6.5 per cent up on the previous corresponding period. Australia Post Managing Director, Mr Graeme John, told AAP on 10 October that the affordability and reliability of mail would likely result in volume growth of more than 4 per cent in the coming year. As those results show, Australia Post already is one of the most efficient postal services in the world. Even the World Bank has recognised that fact. This is not brought about by an improvement over only one year; the improvement has been made over a decade.

Not only is Australia Post efficient, but it has been profitable for the Australian people as well. It has maintained services in country areas at the same time. So I say to the Federal Government, "If it ain't broke, it doesn't need fixing." It is doing very well for both the people it serves and for those to whom it pays dividends. I have real concerns about this whole issue, not only with this current Howard plan. For a number of years I have been concerned about a stripping of Australia Post's capacity to deliver basic services to all consumers. In 1994, when I was a member of the Federal Parliament, I chaired an inquiry into Australia Post and its ability to deliver to country areas. The concerns then are the same as the concerns today. Speaking on a bill before Parliament in November of 1994, I said:

Economic thoughts generally have pushed the bias in these issues away from the public interest and towards purely economic interests. We need to bring that back a little.

It is about social responsibility, not always profit. Let the private industry worry about profits and what the bottom line is. The Government's role is far more than that. It has to act in the national interest and in the people's interests. The Government's role is far more complex. Of course, the Government has to ensure that taxpayers get the best value for their money, but it also has to keep in mind its social obligations in providing services and facilities to all Australians, particularly those in country areas.

Under the Federal Coalition's deregulation plan, Australia Post would have exclusive rights only over letters that originate in Australia and are for delivery in Australia. Currently, Australia Post has the exclusive right to carry letters within Australia, whether the letters originate within or outside Australia. Australia Post's monopoly traditionally has been over letters weighing up to 250 grams. The Howard plan would reduce that to 50 grams while the monopoly on carrying incoming international mail would be removed.

It is interesting to note, however, that Australia Post's requirement to deliver a standard letter anywhere in the country for 45¢ would be retained. Communications Minister Mr Alston has said that this is to ensure that Australia Post has an effective monopoly in that area. So the secret is out. The Federal Government knows that Australia Post must keep an effective monopoly in standard letter delivery to ensure equal service delivery for remote families. Yet, in the same breath it is still trying to argue that services for items above 50 grams will not be affected. If this is the case, why not open up everything for competition? After all, there is continuing growth in this area. We know why. It is because remote families would not get any service at all if that were to happen. This is just more of the same from the Federal Government: let the market rule, make the people pay; do not take into account the national interest or the people's interests; and, what is more, make the people of the bush pay the most.

Indeed, the Corporate Secretary of Australia Post, Gerry Ryan, admitted to the Senate inquiry in May this year that removing the monopoly on letters weighing more than 50 grams could lead to different prices for mail in different regions. How long will the standard price remained at 45¢ under that regime? Senator Alston said in a media release on 16 July 1998 that the standard letter rate would remain frozen at 45¢ until 2003. What guarantee of price is there for customers, particularly rural customers, after that date? Australia Post chairwoman Linda Nicholls said Australia Post was not hampered by Federal Government price restrictions on basic postal charges with the 45¢ stamp price freeze due to expire in 2003. She said:

As we go into the ninth year of the price freeze, the surge in mail volume says that the model works. Over 75 per cent of our profit comes from our competitive businesses and the drivers of our profitability are from those competitive practices.

So, if Australia Post loses that business to other commercial enterprises, what chances are there for reasonable services to rural and remote areas of Australia? The Commonwealth Government's proposal defies logic. As Labor Senator Sue West told the Wagga Wagga *Daily Advertiser* on 29 September this year:

Any corporation losing that level of revenue within a year would not only face rationalisation but would consider closure.

As Sally Nicholl of the Country Women's Association told a Senate committee of inquiry that investigated the reforms in June this year:

Postal service is a matter of vital concern to all in rural and remote areas. If deregulation prices fall in high-volume areas but increase in lower density and remote areas, we can see this as a problem because many of our members live in rural and remote areas where there is only a small community in towns.

The Senate committee also heard that 1,700 of the 4,000 postal service outlets across Australia would be at risk. Other evidence presented to the committee stated that up to 17,000 postal jobs may go as Australia Post struggles with its slashed business. Now Senator Alston assures us also that no post office or mail centre in regional Australia will close as a result of the reforms. Yet the Post Office Agents Association, which is one of two organisations representing the 3,000 licensed post offices and 5,180 mail contractors, said many licensed post offices could still close their doors. That association said many licensed post offices would not be viable businesses without some income support from Australia Post's top-up payments. It noted this had decreased from \$9 million in 1995 to \$3.7 million now. Licensed Post Offices Australia also said that rural and isolated post offices are already operating under great financial hardship. Any further cutbacks in payments would seriously affect a great number of those officers, with some already contemplating closure.

We then come to the issue of the community service obligation. As it stands, under the community service obligation Australia Post services must be reasonably accessible to all people in Australia on an equitable basis, wherever they reside or carry on business. Also, under the obligation, Australia Post's performance in providing those services must reasonably meet the social, industrial and commercial needs of the Australian community. The community service obligation also states that Australia Post must maintain at least 4,000 retail outlets and at least 50 per cent of those outlets must be located in a rural and remote zone.

Australia Post relies on cross-subsidies to meet its community service obligation. The Howard Government plan means that the community service obligation is out the window. The obligation will not be worth the paper it is printed on when new commercial operators enter the mail service market. Those companies have shareholders to answer to, and they have to make a profit. I understand that. Because of their different priorities, they will aggressively go after the markets that can yield a profit. And those markets are in our cities. Country consumers can expect no benefit from these changes. In fact, they are likely to face reduced services from the one organisation on which they depend most, and that is Australia Post. As I said earlier, this motion is all about fairness and about enabling country people to carry out their day-to-day activities at the same levels as their city cousins. It is a shame that Canberra is just not listening. The community service obligation was written into the legislation a long time ago. It should remain in the legislation, and the present Howard Federal Government should live up to it. Leave Australia Post alone.

*[Debate interrupted.]*

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

### **Order of Business: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders**

#### **Motion by Mr Whelan agreed to:**

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow:

- (1) the conclusion of the motion for urgent consideration;
- (2) the resumption of the debate on the motion on the Sydney Paralympic Games with four speakers only; and
- (3) private members' statements to then proceed.

**AUSTRALIA POST DEREGULATION****Urgent Motion**

*[Debate resumed.]*

**Mr ARMSTRONG** (Lachlan) [4.01 p.m.]: Earlier this afternoon when the Chair asked whether there were any motions for urgent considerations the Minister for Regional Development got up from his seat and approached the lectern. I thought that the Government had finally got it right. I was looking forward to being able to support the Minister's expression of genuine concern about an announcement this morning that resulted in 74 people in country areas losing their jobs through the closure of a major factory. Alas, I was wrong. The Minister either has not heard of the closure of that factory or he has chosen, by introducing a matter of a Federal nature, to deflect attention from the failure of the Government to maintain rural and regional jobs. The Minister might have been sold a pup by his superiors, who said, "Harry, get out there, flick the points on the line and get the attention off us while we are riding on Olympic euphoria. We do not need bad news."

Let me set the record straight. With the closure of Laminex Industries in Wagga Wagga, one of the oldest factories in the Riverina and, indeed, in New South Wales, 74 jobs have been lost. Productivity from those 74 jobs will go to other Laminex factories in Queensland and Victoria. Once again, New South Wales comes last in industrial development. So it is with a deal of regret that I address the motion moved by the Minister. The Minister engaged in a diatribe which resulted only in wasting the time of the House. He put his spins and those of the Government on what has been a successful Federal Government program. Members representing country electorates, and even those who masquerade under the group called Country Labor, would have to admit that in small country towns post offices have been opened right up and in most cases are now one-stop shops.

Everything from Christmas cards, postal assistance and packages to all sorts of everyday merchandise is available in most post offices, which have created new businesses for many people. Hundreds of small business people are now working for themselves. These days former postal employees are small business entrepreneurs. The Federal Government's postal policies have enabled an expansion of business in country towns. Let me give honourable members a classic example. I do not have an Olympus watch, but many people do. If something goes wrong with those watches, which are under guarantee, they will not be repaired in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide or Brisbane: they will be repaired in Condobolin in a 24-hour time frame. The jeweller in Condobolin works for 22 other major jewellers from Darwin to Melbourne and most major points in between. Australia Post enables this jeweller to honour the terms of that guarantee. A postal courier delivers the watches to the jeweller and they are returned the next morning.

Another operator, under the conglomerate of the Plymouth Brethren Church, manufactures plastic ware, for example, sophisticated siphons for irrigators and dog kennels which are delivered by Australia Post. Anyone wanting a siphon, a shovel for shovelling grain or some of the well-made plastic injection moulding from Condobolin, which is sent all over Australia and New Zealand, can obtain those items through Australia Post. It is a great service. In 1998 the Federal Government introduced minimum performance standards which guaranteed a minimum retail presence of 4,000 Australia Post outlets across the country, 2,500 of which are required to be located in rural and remote Australia. It is no surprise to see staggering statistics in this year's annual report of Australia Post, which was released this week. Before going through those statistics I will refer to the media release issued by Senator the Hon. Richard Alston on 6 April this year, which states:

The Postal Service Legislation Amendment Bill is another important plank in the Government's commitment to improve the quality and cost of postal services to all Australians. Australia Post will be retained in full public ownership. The price of a 45 cent stamp will remain frozen until at least 2003—

I remind honourable members of the saying, "No Australian child will have to pay more than 45¢ for a stamp—guaranteed until 2003. The media release continues:

—with Australia Post absorbing the cost of the GST.

The Government will not allow a reduction in postal services for regional and rural Australia. Both the Government and Australia Post have provided a firm commitment that no postal outlet or mail centre will close in regional Australia as a result of these reforms.

The media release then states:

In addition, the Government has received an undertaking from Australia Post that it will continue to provide vital subsidies to 700 Licensed Post Offices in regional and rural Australia and will maintain current concessional rate arrangements for the delivery of distance education material to isolated children. The GiroPost banking program is also being upgraded to provide for business transactions in regional Australia.



In the Minister's opening remarks he mentioned some of the successes of Australia Post. It is important to reinforce those remarks by stating that in 1998 the Coalition introduced the historic postal services charter. That resulted in 98 per cent of delivery points receiving a minimum of five deliveries a week and 99.7 per cent receiving no fewer than two deliveries a week. That charter provided for a minimum retail presence of 4,000 postal outlets. On 11 October Australia Post released its annual report, which the Minister might not have seen. It states:

1999-2000

- completing the \$510 million modernisation of the nation's mail delivery network in one of the most far reaching change programs undertaken by any Australian service business
- achieving rises in profit, productivity and return on assets
- recording the highest mail volume growth in nine years.

This is a growing business. Despite email the Australia Post system has had its highest growth rate in nine years. The report continues:

- maintaining for the eighth year, the 45 cents standard letter rate—the fourth lowest cost in the Western world.

In this continent of ours, the largest continent with the smallest population in the world, our letters are the fourth cheapest to post. The report also states:

- paying more than 170 million bills for 390 companies through Billpay
- piloting major new initiatives including business banking, electronic Billpay and an internet fulfilment service.

That paved the way for an average 6 per cent cost saving for business arising from the reduction in small letter bulk pre-sort prices, and the absorption of the GST on the standard letter rate. The operating pre-tax profit was \$391.9 million from a record \$3.7 billion revenue.

**Mr Woods:** Why would you put all that at risk?

**Mr ARMSTRONG:** We are not. The Minister has not been listening. He should get a watch so he can keep up with things. A strong 6.5 per cent surge in mail volumes came alongside major initiatives, including a total reconfiguration of the national delivery network. This motion is an exercise in diverting public attention from the Government's failings and not acknowledging that we are talking about a Federal issue that is really a positive. While people working in the Laminex factory in the electorate of Wagga Wagga, and in Coolamon and Ganmain in my electorate of Lachlan, do not know who will pay the bills tomorrow, the Minister has chosen to talk about an issue that is not of vital importance. The Minister should do his homework properly. He should at least ring up Laminex and tell the people that he is sorry he neglected them in Parliament today and chose instead to tell some furphies about a Commonwealth matter.

**Mr BLACK** (Murray-Darling) [4.10 p.m.]: I am more than pleased to support my Country Labor colleague the Minister for Local Government in this debate. What we heard today from the honourable member for Lachlan was a disgrace. Not once did he address the motion. All members of Country Labor applaud the successes of Australia Post. We are not applauding what the Federal Government proposes should happen to Australia Post, a proposal that is supported by the National Party in Canberra and obviously defended by the National Party in New South Wales. For some reason the National Party will not stand up on issues relating to communications. We have seen that betrayal before. At the National Party annual conference in June this year one branch moved a motion that there be no further sale of Telstra, but it could not get a seconder. The bush was sold out again. While I am talking about telephone calls, they are popular in Canberra this week, aren't they?

A bill is due to come before Federal Parliament to further deregulate Australia Post. The National Party has an ideological passion for the competition policy, deregulation and privatisation. Bearing in mind the reference earlier in this debate to the line in the sand at Nyngan, I will tell honourable members about it. When he was in Bourke before he went to Nyngan he got the nickname Roofing Nail because of the hat he was wearing. At Nyngan Honest Johnny, or Roofing Nail as he was known, said he would draw a line in the sand: no more services to be withdrawn from the bush. Two weeks later I had to remind the Federal member for Farrar about that statement of Honest John when it was rumoured that the Australia Post mail run Moulamein to Swan Hill was to be reduced. Mr Fischer then issued a press release which said that the mail run would not go, but I

had to use that line in the sand statement to ensure that Australia Post was not used as part of something else. Currently, Australia Post has the exclusive right to carry letters within Australia, whether the letters originate within or outside Australia.

That is the point of this debate. Australia Post's monopoly has traditionally been on mail up to 250 grams. The National Party in Canberra is pushing for the monopoly to be reduced to mail weighing 50 grams. Christmas cards were mentioned earlier. I send between 500 and 600 Christmas cards a year and I put little notes in them for my friends. I have a lot of friends out in the bush, lots more than the National Party has. This year I will write the notes on tissue paper to try to get them under the 50 grams. That is not on. Australia Post will effectively have to compete for its own business, which is worth some \$3 billion at the moment. The real losers out of this exercise are the people in the bush. The honourable member for Lachlan, a member of the National Party in New South Wales, did not mention the subject of this debate at all. Let us look down south. The analog service was withdrawn and there was no replacement. The community service obligation stopped there. The analog service went and, under this Liberal Government, with Richard Alston presiding at the beginning of this year, the code division multiple access [CDMA] system that was promised was not turned on.

*[Interruption]*

I am pleased the honourable member for Murrumbidgee is interjecting because at least that shows he is in the House. He was not here yesterday when a matter of vital importance was debated. He wants to put Deniliquin in Victoria. I am more than happy to see the honourable member for Murrumbidgee go to Victoria but the good people of Deniliquin want to stay in New South Wales because they know that is where the best things are. I will finish on that note, and remind those opposite that the debate is about the reduction of the monopoly of Australia from letters weighing up to 250 grams to letters weighing 50 grams, a proposal that is not on.

**Mr PICCOLI** (Murrumbidgee) [4.15 p.m.]: The motion is essentially about jobs in rural and regional New South Wales and about deregulation. I fully support the comments made by the honourable member for Lachlan about the Federal Government doing the right thing by the people of Australia—and, more importantly as far as I am concerned, the people of regional and rural New South Wales—with respect to postal services. The National Party is keeping a close eye on postal services and what is happening to Australia Post to ensure that the service will be maintained at least at the current standard, if not an improved standard. The whole of Telstra has not been sold. At the last State conference the National Party adopted a policy that it would not support the full privatisation of Telstra.

Only yesterday the report of the Besley inquiry was released, an inquiry instigated by the National Party and supported by the Coalition Government to examine the level of Telstra services in country New South Wales and whether those services need to be improved. From my brief reading of the report it says that Telstra has a long way to go before its services are sufficient for country New South Wales. As a result of that inquiry the privatisation of Telstra will be delayed, if not stopped, until those services are adequate. That is relevant. Who has been the party of deregulation over the past 10 to 15 years? Which party has cut jobs in rural and regional New South Wales? It has been the Labor Party. The motion moved by the Minister is hypocritical in the extreme, bearing in mind that he was in Federal Parliament when Paul Keating signed off on getting rid of the old telephone service, perhaps the greatest blow to telecommunications in rural New South Wales. The Coalition Government had to come to the rescue with CDMA, and I am pleased the honourable member for Murray-Darling raised that earlier, because the removal of the analog phone system has been the single biggest blow to rural and regional New South Wales.

Let us look at banking in regional and rural New South Wales. In the mid-1980s our good friends Paul Keating and Bob Hawke deregulated banking. The Federal Labor Party privatised the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs. There was no inquiry into the impact of that privatisation on regional and rural New South Wales or, indeed, rural and regional Australia. There was no inquiry when they signed off on getting rid of analog telephones. They could not give a damn what happened to rural and regional New South Wales and this Minister was a member of Federal Parliament at the time.

The Labor Party has a great history of deregulation. When the Federal Government deregulated the banking industry I did not hear members opposite raise even a whimper about rural and regional New South Wales. I imagine that the number of people now employed by the Commonwealth Bank is only a small percentage of the number it employed in the late 1980s when it was privatised. The number of bank branches in rural and remote Australia that have been closed since deregulation has been absolutely unprecedented. Therefore it is a little rich for Government members to accuse the Federal Government of impropriety.

In conclusion, I refer to the privatisation of FreightCorp. As the Leader of the National Party said, members opposite, including the honourable member for Murray-Darling and the honourable member for Cessnock—I do not even like saying the words "Country Labor"—would lie down and let Egan and the Premier drive a bulldozer over the top of them. In terms of the privatisation of FreightCorp, the greatest irony is that if the greatest Labor leader, Ben Chifley, was employed by railways today he would lose his job as a result of the actions of the New South Wales Labor Party. Members opposite have been completely rolled. Although FreightCorp, which is a \$1 billion industry employing 2,200 people, is the heartland of the Labor Party—indeed, probably 90 per cent of those employed by FreightCorp are members of the Labor Party—its workers have been abandoned by the Labor Party. I hope members opposite drown in their own hypocrisy. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr HICKEY** (Cessnock) [4.20 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the Minister for Regional Development, which called on the Federal Government immediately to abandon its plans to further deregulate postal services, which is not in the interest of country people. Clearly, the honourable member for Lachlan and the honourable member for Murrumbidgee fully embrace the deregulation of postal services. People in regional and country New South Wales deserve better than to be represented by National members who embrace deregulation which potentially could result in the closure of 1,700 postal outlets. That is the bottom line. The Government is concerned about the potential loss of 74 jobs in Wagga Wagga, and it is addressing that issue. Sadly, the National Party is embracing the loss of 1,700 outlets, which will hurt a lot more than 74 people. Reducing Australia Post's guaranteed delivery limit from 250 grams to 50 grams will mean job losses and, as I said, the closure of 1,700 postal outlets, which will impact greatly on country, rural and regional New South Wales.

Deregulation will mean that any new commercial postal carrier will focus on profitable and high-margin areas, such as the cities, and have a major impact in country areas. Country Labor supports people in country areas who in turn support Country Labor members for chasing the issues. The Government is addressing the issues at Laminex Industries and trying to get the best deal for its workers. Yet again the impact of the Federal Government's latest plans will hurt country areas the most, simply because of geography. Make no mistake: The Prime Minister's Nyngan declaration of drawing a line in the sand and pushing for the provision of services in rural areas will be another slap in the face for people in country New South Wales. So much for drawing a line in the sand! Once again the Liberal-National Coalition has left it to Country Labor members to raise this issue, and that is sad. Country Labor is fighting to ensure that people in rural, regional and remote areas can access the services they deserve. Clearly, National members think that people in country areas do not deserve access to services, because they will not support this motion.

The Coalition's plan means that Australia Post business worth more than \$3 billion would be affected and services to small towns would be jeopardised. As a result, general parcel services in remote, rural and regional areas, where profits are small or non-existent, will suffer greatly, in many areas to the point at which they will be cut altogether. All this comes at a time when Australia Post's 1999-2000 net profit was \$247.8 million, which is an increase from the previous year. Revenue rose 8.5 per cent to \$3.743 billion, partly driven by record mail volumes boosted by the flood of correspondence associated with the goods and services tax, the Olympics and the constitutional referendum. In the year to 30 June Australia Post delivered 4.8 billion articles—an increase of 6.5 per cent on the previous corresponding period. We certainly do not want to see Australia Post affected, and we do not want its delivery service lost to regional and rural areas. However, the National Party accepts and endorses that.

**Mr WOODS** (Clarence—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs) [4.25 p.m.], in reply: I do not want to get off the point, but in this debate the honourable member for Lachlan raised an issue relating to Laminex Industries in Wagga Wagga. If the honourable member is so concerned about Laminex Industries he had ample opportunity to ask me a question during question time today. Had he asked me such a question, this is what I would have told him. Laminex informed its staff today—the honourable member is quite right on this point—that its plant in Wagga Wagga will close over the next eight months. I understand that this is a commercial decision made by the company and will involve the loss of about 80 jobs.

I am advised that the company intends to pay workers their full entitlements. The company has also advised my office that it will help displaced workers by providing counselling and job seeking skills assistance. The Department of State and Regional Development and Wagga Wagga City Council have held discussions with prospective local purchasers of the site. My department is confident that activity on the site will continue to provide jobs for the people of Wagga Wagga, and the department and I will continue to work that way. Had the honourable member for Lachlan asked me an important question on the matter, that is the answer he would have received.

I am confused about the Opposition's position on Australia Post. I do not know whether members opposite are fair dinkum or whether they are simply wrapping a story in order to support their colleagues in Canberra. We are not talking about privatisation, although one might wrap it in the words "privatisation by stealth". It is not a hard proposition to understand. Australia Post does certain things; some of them are open to competition and some are a monopoly. The Federal Coalition Government is talking about reducing Australia Post's monopoly. The profitable section allows Australia Post to cross-subsidise and provide the level of service it currently provides. No-one is arguing about that. Indeed, members on both sides of the House have praised Australia Post for the performance. If Australia Post's monopoly is reduced and competition is increased, its ability to provide the expensive services, which are subsidised in country areas, will be reduced. That is why the motion states that 1,700 post offices and 17,000 jobs are at risk. That will hit hardest in remote and rural Australia, and that is why the Government calls on the Federal Government immediately to abandon its plans for further deregulation.

Judging by the performance of members opposite this afternoon, I am left wondering whether they will support the motion. Whether they support it is their decision. However, it stands to reason that if they do not support the motion they will be supporting the Federal Government's plan to deregulate Australia Post. And members opposite will pay the price, because they know that the ill effects of this policy will hit people in country areas in the loss of delivery of postal items, job losses and the closure of post office branches in country areas. I do not doubt that it is a challenge for members opposite. But they need to stand true and straight with their country constituencies and be a bit fair dinkum about this, even if it means stepping out against their Federal colleagues. I should like to refer to some of the things that people have said about this. Jenny McLennan of the Isolated Children's Parents Association told the inquiry:

We feel that the delivery of mail in rural and remote areas should be written in as a basic right under the community service obligations of Australia Post for our families and the people that we represent, although . . . has produced a lot of changes and there are various alternatives to letter services for rural and remote residents. Their letter and postal services are absolutely essential for educational, business, health and social reasons.

The Federal Coalition is driven by ideology. It is not concerned about those service obligations that are written in. This is not a difficult proposition to understand. These services and jobs will suffer if the deregulation of Australia Post goes ahead. I urge members opposite to take up the challenge. They should not be scared to give Anderson and Howard a bit of a kick on this.

**Motion agreed to.**

### **SYDNEY 2000 PARALYMPIC GAMES**

**Debate resumed from an earlier hour.**

**Mrs LO PO'** (Penrith—Minister for Community Services, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Women) [4.31 p.m.]: So much has been written and said about the ongoing legacy of the Sydney 2000 festival and how this city, New South Wales and indeed all of Australia will benefit. There can be no doubt that the future is looking good and there is so much to anticipate in our wonderful country. It shatters the myth held by so many people overseas that we are all wrestling crocodiles in a fly-blown, kangaroo-infested dust bowl. The future is one thing, but it is still very easy to delight in the present. As the world's elite athletes gather again in Sydney for the Paralympics, we are about to be treated to another inspirational chapter of human endeavour.

It has been said that the Olympic Games have moved thousands of lounge lizards into gymnasiums. It is quite a graphic example of how an outstanding achievement can motivate all of us to give it our best shot. To me, this high level of competition is not about victory or defeat; it is about the ability of gifted and determined athletes to become the ultimate role model for new generations. Much has been said about the legacy of stadiums, venues and infrastructure, which are all very important. However, no matter how impressive their function and design, bricks and mortar will never be more enduring than that the strength of the human spirit. That spirit was in abundance before us this morning in this House. Just as we cling to every word from the two magnificent young Australians who addressed us, we will be watching and delighting in their every move on the fields of competition. I urge all Australians not to miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The Ageing and Disability Department [ADD] has been very busy trying to provide every assistance possible to the Paralympic sports. To that end, the department has supported the Paralympic Arts Festival in a groundbreaking activity—a remarkable program of theatre and dance involving artists with and without a

disability. ADD's support has enabled the Paralympic Arts Festival to offer tickets at very reasonable prices, between \$15 and \$25, to encourage maximum attendance. The department made it possible to have a program each evening at the Seymour Theatre Centre.

The Ageing and Disability Department has also sponsored athletes Denise Beckwith and Alison Quinn. Both Denise, a swimmer, and Alison, a track and field star, are favoured to win medals for Australia. Both athletes have raised awareness of the Games and of disability issues by attending the numerous Seniors Card events for older people. Sponsorship has allowed them to concentrate on training with less financial worry, and has given them the opportunity to meet many people in the community who are pledging to cheer them on during the Paralympic Games. In September 2000 the Seniors Card Members Guide to the Paralympic Games, along with the annual directory, was mailed to 635,000 Seniors Card households. The guide provides Seniors Card members with information on Seniors Card days at the Games, a dedicated entertainment program and other benefits for card members.

In November 1998 I launched the A Million Smiles project. The aims of the project are to raise funds towards the cost of staging the Paralympic Games, encourage seniors to attend the Games, and encourage seniors to volunteer and cheer for the Games. Much work has been done over the course of the project. Seniors groups throughout New South Wales have made a significant contribution through their own fundraising activities. Each group that contributed to the project was able to follow that commitment through by purchasing day passes to the event at half price. A Million Smiles has raised approximately \$450,000 in cash contributions and identifiable ticket sales. With the large number of seniors visiting the Games, the total contribution will be enormous. The Ageing and Disability Department has been very pleased to participate in the Paralympic Games.

I would like to inform the House of my experience with some very skilled disabled athletes. Madam Acting-Speaker, you would know them well, because both you and I were mayors of the city of Penrith. It is compulsory for the mayor of the city of Penrith to play cricket. The Mayors Eleven plays against the blind cricketers. The blind cricketers are some of the greatest athletes we have ever encountered. They also cheat. I will tell the House about that later.

I was very deferential about blind cricketers, and I approached my task very concerned about how I should address them. They floored us all by coming out and singing as their theme song the theme from *Batman*. That stunned all of us. We did not want to talk about their disability, but they were up front about it. The ball in blind cricket is hollow and has bells in it because the blind cricketers have to hear it. We who could see the ball were outplayed, outflanked and outsmarted by these blind cricketers. They also make sure that they keep you there long enough so that you are playing in the dark, which puts us at a total disadvantage. They are used to playing in the dark, and we who had to play in the dark lost soundly to the blind cricketers.

It was my first encounter with people who have a disability and are sportspeople at the same time. Until that point I would have thought that their disability was the most important issue. It is not. They see themselves as sportspeople first and people with a disability second. I believe that that came through this morning when Julianne said that she saw herself as a sportsperson, not a person with a disability. I think that she will feature largely in the Paralympics. We thought the Olympics told a lot of great stories and adventures. I look forward to seeing the splendid effort of people who could easily drop out of their sport and do nothing but who have chosen to put themselves through the extra exercise of taking up a Paralympic position.

Before the Paralympic Games begin I congratulate all athletes on merely being Paralympians. I wish them all well. I particularly wish the Australian athletes well. I will be there singing their praises and egging them on, as I encourage everyone else to do. It will be my very first witnessing of a event that has so many people with disabilities, and I look forward to it. The Department of Ageing and Disability Services continually deals with people who have some form of disability. The thing that amazes me most about them is the way in which they move everything aside and insist on leading the same lifestyle that we able people live. I regard it as such an act of bravery that I find it very daunting to be in their company. I think everyone was impressed with the two Paralympians who spoke before the Parliament this morning. Premier Bob Carr was correct when he said that their ability to communicate is absolutely outstanding. I wish them well in their endeavours.

**Mr WEBB** (Monaro) [4.39 p.m.]: I, too, take pleasure in speaking about the Paralympic Games which are just about upon us. I echo the words of honourable members who preceded me in this debate to say how moved I was when Julianne Adams and Hamish MacDonald spoke in this House this morning. The ability of these people to set goals, focus on those goals and then follow through decisively with their commitment—with or without accolades or results but, hopefully, winning gold, which was the case with Hamish and hopefully will be the case for both of them during the Sydney Games—is a lesson for all of us which should be borne in mind.

For me, the Paralympic Games began in Queanbeyan well over a month ago when fundraising for Paralympians came through Queanbeyan in the form of a trek from the top of Mount Kosciuszko to Sydney. The aim was to raise money for the Australian Paralympic team of 89 athletes to assist them to compete in the year 2000 Paralympic Games. On that occasion, Michael Milton, the Australian world champion downhill skier, was in attendance. Michael is a great ambassador not only for Australian sport but also for disabled sport, his chosen sport of skiing and certainly for the Paralympic Games. Also present on that occasion was the Australian world champion downhill skier—who just happens to be blind. He skis down massive slopes at great speed with a chap skiing in front of him to tell him when to turn around the flags. I had a chat to him and I found incredible his commitment to, and love of, the sport and his endeavours in pursuit of participation at the Games.

As part of the fundraising, a wheelchair race was organised around the Riverside Plaza in Queanbeyan. The Mayor of Queanbeyan, Frank Pangello, and Chief Superintendent Charlie Sanderson, who is the commander of the Monaro local area command [LAC], selected wheelchairs and jumped into them. We all thought that this would be good. I commentated on the race so I probably had an advantage. Some people from the crowd who were already in wheelchairs said that they would have a go too, so this group went for a big lap around Riverside Plaza. Of course, honourable members would not have to guess that the local person in her own wheelchair blitzed the field. The mayor and Charlie Sanders were both humbled and embarrassed. The occasion was held to raise funds for the Australian Paralympic team to compete in Sydney.

Like many other honourable members, throughout my life and in my family I have had contact with various disabled people. This morning when Julianne Adams spoke about her accident, I vividly recalled an incident approximately 30 years ago when I was riding a horse in a paddock near North Star in northern New South Wales. A workman whom I respected, Bruce Smith, was also on a horse and we were chasing some cattle. I suppose that within two or three minutes he went from flat out on the back of the horse to flat on his back after hitting a tree and falling. As a result, he ended up in a wheelchair which shows that life can change very quickly. I also have an aunt who contracted polio when she was two years of age. All her life—until well over the age of 80—she was in callipers and wheelchairs, but that did not stop her. She travelled the world and for many, many years she taught piano in Warrawee in Sydney. I have fond memories of my Auntie Doffy Walker. She certainly showed that that type of disability was no disadvantage at all.

I also spent some time as a carer looking after somebody who was in a wheelchair. That was a very difficult time. We are able to understand some of the problems and implications facing people who find themselves disabled and some of the problems that they have to put up with because of their changed lives, but I would have to say that most of us will never be able to fully appreciate the difficulties and the problems they confront. I am also moved at this time because I think that the Paralympics are a great spectacle. It has been intriguing for me to hear of the different events that will be staged and the different stories about blind people chasing balls and about wheelchair rugby. I am sure that those games as well as many other events will be fantastic to see. Recently I was talking to someone who told me how much he loves the Paralympics. Without intending any disrespect to people who have a disability, he was saying that it is just wonderful how a person can size up a high jump, bend to take off an artificial leg, stand, hop over to the jump and then clear more than two metres. I do not think that I could clear even one metre and I would have to say that most honourable members certainly could not.

The focus, commitment and love of sport of disabled athletes are an example to us all. Three people from Queanbeyan will be taking part in the Paralympic Games. One is Angie Ballard who will be participating in the wheelchair track athletics. Recently I was speaking to her mother who told me that she is also competing in a number of distance events such as the 200 metres, the 400 metres, the 800 metres, the 1,500 metres and perhaps even the 3,000 metres. Her mother said that she may be participating in the marathon as well. Last year most of the events were held on one day, but this year the events have been staggered enabling her to compete in more of them. I wish her very good luck. She has not been as prepared previously as she is now, and I am sure that she will do very, very well. Mike Dowling is also from Queanbeyan and he is competing in the discus and javelin events. Wayne Bell is competing in the pentathlon. I particularly wish those Queanbeyan people good luck and other good wishes.

I also add my best wishes for good luck to the other 86 Australian athletes who will be competing and representing their country. I extend my compliments, best wishes and good luck to the other 4,000-class Paralympic athletes who will be attending these Games in Sydney over the next fortnight—those who have travelled across the world to see our wonderful city, our wonderful State of New South Wales and our wonderful nation of Australia. A feature of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games will be repeated when 15,000 volunteers direct and assist people during the Paralympic Games. Those volunteers will be showing the happy,

smiling face of Australia and will be ambassadors for New South Wales in the eyes of people throughout the world. Again, volunteers will be one of the main features that will be remembered by people who attend these Games.

One of the implications of the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games has been the disrupted sittings schedule of the New South Wales Parliament this year. The timeframe has enabled honourable members not only to represent their constituents, promote legislation and address problems that are very important and relevant in New South Wales but also to acknowledge and pay tributes in this House to competitors in the Olympic Games and the forthcoming Paralympic Games. This House is an important venue for the performance of all those tasks. I again draw the attention of honourable members to the address given by Julianne Adams and Hamish MacDonald. We all were truly transfixed by their demonstrable ability in all walks of life and in whatever role they perform—either as ambassadors for Australia or as dedicated sportspeople.

It has been eloquently stated in the House today that their ability to articulate their experiences, their goals and their ambitions illustrates the point that although to some extent or other we are all disadvantaged or have drawbacks or disabilities, these people certainly have greater disabilities than do most of us, yet they have met challenges in a fantastic way. They have accepted their disadvantages and their place in life and have concentrated on opportunities. Now in the eyes of the world they are the ambassadors for their sport and for the youth of Australia. In conclusion, I wish the Queanbeyan competitors, competitors from rural areas of New South Wales, other New South Wales athletes, other Australian competitors and competitors from right throughout the world the best of luck. I hope visitors to the Paralympic Games enjoy themselves and patronise the events as much as possible.

**Mr KERR** (Cronulla) [4.50 p.m.]: I support the motion. I appreciate that many honourable members wish to speak and I will not take up too much time. The honourable member for Monaro reminded us that any one of us could find ourselves with a severe disability as a result of an accident. One has only to think about Christopher Reeve, the American actor who played Superman and was totally paralysed as a result of a horseriding accident. His commitment to overcome his disability is an inspiration to people all around the world. Nevertheless, it is a warning that we are all mortal and any one of us could very quickly lose our physical or mental abilities. I was pleased to take part in a fundraising event with Bruce Baird, the Federal member for Cook, organised by Rotary clubs in the St George and Sutherland shires to raise money for the Paralympians.

I am aware of at least seven Paralympians in the St George and Sutherland area, and there may be others. I refer to Tony Marturano, Shane Allen, Stephen Wilson, Karen Farrell, David Horn, Janelle Falzon and Albert Lee. I was particularly interested in the speech today of the honourable member for Port Macquarie in relation to Port Stephens Council. It was interesting that council engineers sat in wheelchairs in order to be conscious of the restrictions for those with disabilities in future developments at Port Stephens. I would be interested to know if Sutherland Shire Council does something similar and if not, why not, and will it institute such a practice? The Paralympic Games allows us to focus on people with disabilities.

I am grateful for the information provided by the Australian Sports Commission. The Paralympic Games are the Olympic equivalent for the world's top athletes with disabilities. The Paralympic Games recognise the participants' athletic achievements rather than their disabilities. Athletes at the Paralympics include paraplegics, tetraplegics, amputees, blind people, those suffering cerebral palsy and people with intellectual disability. The Paralympics are held every four years, just after the Olympic Games and at the same venues. The name "Paralympic" comes from the Latin "para", meaning "with".

The history of the Paralympic Games is particularly interesting. In 1944 the British Government set up a spinal injuries centre for ex-servicemen headed by Sir Ludwig Guttman at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. As part of their therapy, patients were introduced to a number of sports. In July 1948 a sports competition took place involving patients from various rehabilitation centres. These were the first Stoke Mandeville Games. Three years later competitors from Holland appeared at the Games and the international movement, now known as the Paralympics, was born. In 1976 Sir Ludwig succeeded in introducing the concept of the Winter Paralympics, in which 30 nations now compete.

The 2002 winter Paralympic Games will be held in Salt Lake City in the United States of America. The summer Paralympics will be held very soon. The previous winter Paralympic Games took place in Japan. In relation to the significance of sport for people with a disability, whether at a social, competitive or Paralympic level, sport for people with a disability provides many benefits. It not only offers entertainment, recreation, social contact, and physical and mental achievement, common to all sports people, but also great improvements

in physical and intellectual strength and muscular co-ordination, as well as enhanced self-confidence and self-esteem. Participation at the international competitive level requires the same attributes as those required by all athletes: dedication, sacrifice, skill, determination and the will to win, with an even greater return in benefits to the athletes themselves. Their equal opportunity or fair chance to excel means a complete transformation of lifestyle and attitude. We wish all those involved the very best in the forthcoming Paralympics.

**Mr AQUILINA** (Riverstone—Minister for Education and Training) [4.56 p.m.]: I am delighted today to join the Premier and other honourable members of this House in expressing our support for the Paralympics program and for Paralympians everywhere. We all know of the outstanding statistics in relation to the Paralympics: 18 sports on the 2000 Paralympics program; the new medal sports in 2000—wheelchair rugby and sailing, which were demonstration sports in Atlanta; the 4,000 athletes from 125 countries to which reference was made earlier; and the record number of 278 athletes from Australia. These are outstanding people. It is very important that we recognise them in this House for their outstanding contribution to sport and to people with disabilities. They are people such as Julianne Adams and Hamish MacDonald, who were in the Chamber earlier today, to whom we should look up to and respect.

I am delighted to mention my close association with many people, whom I will name shortly, who have disabilities and have been part of the Paralympic movement. However, as Minister for Education and Training I make special mention of the contribution of the Department of Education and Training to this very important world event, the Sydney Paralympics. The Department of Education and Training has worked closely with the Sydney Paralympics Organising Committee to support the ceremonies team. The New South Wales public schools singers and the New South Wales public schools junior vocal ensemble, plus 125 staff, will perform at the Paralympics opening ceremony. It is important to recognise that students from 730 Government and non-government schools will take part. I once again acknowledge the outstanding contribution that our schools are making to the Paralympics as well as the outstanding contribution they made to the Olympic Games, which were such a huge success.

The choir will be conducted by George Torbay and Stephen Williams from the department's Performing Arts Unit and Sarah Corfield from the International Grammar School. George Torbay was a conductor in the opening and closing ceremony for the Olympic Games. More than 1,500 movement and dance students will also participate in the opening ceremony. In addition, 100 students from seven government schools will take part in team welcoming ceremonies at the athletes village prior to the opening of the Paralympic Games. Earlier this week I mentioned government school students who provide welcome ceremonies at the athletes village to all of the competitors who came from all over the world for the Olympic Games. I would particularly like to congratulate many of the people who have organised, assisted and taken part in the preparations for the Paralympics and who are going to play such an instrumental role in making the Paralympics a success.

I would like to mention particularly the 14,000 volunteers who are training for the Paralympics. All of those volunteers are being trained by TAFE New South Wales. They are being trained not only in customer services, to ensure that they provide appropriate hospitality and direction, but in matters related to disabilities, including the sensitivities that they need in assisting not only the athletes but also their supporters, the spectators, in recognition of the fact that a number of those supporters and spectators also will have disabilities of various kinds.

Whilst the Paralympic Games cater for people with various forms of disabilities, I should like to make the point that the emphasis of the Paralympic Games should be on ability, not disability. I have said previously that many of us have marvelled over the years at the outstanding performance capacity of Paralympians and of the wonderful way in which they have overcome not only their disabilities but severe personal hardships, and have done that in such a way that what we notice most about them is the way in which they use their ability to achieve outstanding performances.

I am happy to acknowledge that all Paralympians are able to achieve, with their ability and personal capacity, far beyond the achievements of the vast majority of us who do not have a disability. None of us would be able to compete against them and expect to come any better than second, third, fourth or fifth. I congratulate the Paralympians on their outstanding achievements so far. I know that they will be very worthy representatives and will be noted achievers at the Sydney 2000 Paralympics.

My particular congratulations go to the Paralympians who will represent Australia with great honour, as they did in Atlanta. Irrespective of the medals tally—which will nonetheless be huge—they will do Australia



proud and will project Australia as a country that respects, values and prizes its citizens who have disabilities and applauds them for the ability that they demonstrate and the great contribution that they make to Australia. This amalgam of people from all over the world has all sorts of talents and abilities.

I would particularly like to take the opportunity now to congratulate a young Paralympian from my electorate. I do so because I know this young person personally, but I also recognise that many other Paralympians come from my electorate and from the city of Blacktown generally. Alicia Aberley, who is formerly of Riverstone High School, has been selected in the Australian Paralympic swimming team. Alicia has been swimming for only five years, yet in that time she has won numerous medals at the State, national and international level. In Amsterdam recently she won gold in the 100 metres breaststroke and 200 metres freestyle and silver in the 200 metres individual medley and the 50 and 100 metres freestyle.

Alicia also holds the world record for the 100 metres and 200 metres breaststroke, the 16-year-old age record for the 50 metres, 100 metres and 200 metres breaststroke, and the Australian national record for the 50 metres, 100 metres and 200 metres breaststroke. Being chosen to represent Australia in the Sydney Paralympic Games is a great honour for Alicia. When I visited Alicia's home I was quite moved by her feeling about being chosen to represent Australia and the great pride of her family and of the Riverstone township, which has a marked tendency to support its own people. The Aberley family have been part of the Riverstone township for quite a number of decades.

Alicia Aberley is much loved by the people of Riverstone and the people at Riverstone High School. However, her family is not wealthy. Her parents so far have not been able to go and support Alicia at various international meets at which she has represented Australia because they could not afford to do so. I was quite touched as Alicia recounted to me her outstanding feats and world records in places like Amsterdam and London. I turned to the parents and said, "You must have been terribly proud to be there to see your daughter achieve these medals." Her mother, with a tear in her eye, said, "Well, we could not afford to see Alicia, Mr Aquilina. We were waiting on the telephone to see how she went." I thought that was tragic. It says so much about these real Australians and the great pride they take in representing their country.

Then I asked about the swag of medals that Alicia must have had, thinking of course that they would have been proudly displayed in a place where they could be readily seen by any welcome and honoured visitor to the home—as I was, for I was accorded every degree of honour and esteem as I entered the home. Her father at that stage said, "Mr Aquilina, we would love to show them all to you, but there are so many of them and we cannot afford to mount them or display them anywhere." These bundles of medals and ribbons were held with rubber bands and stored away in plastic bags. Remember, these are medals that Alicia Aberley had won for Australia, as our representative. She has broken world records. She has testamurs to the world records that she holds stored in cardboard boxes and put away somewhere because, firstly, the home is not physically big enough to display them and, secondly, the family does not have the financial means to display them in an appropriate place.

I have raised this matter with a number of people. I sincerely hope that this great representative of this school, community, town, State and country will one day be able to proudly display her medals and testamurs. All Australian representatives should be able to do that. Yes, I am keen to make sure that we provide some assistance to help in that regard. Alicia has no sponsors and no-one able to provide financial assistance. Her parents and this fairly large family, in their deprived economic circumstances, do all they can to assist and support her. They are very proud of her, as we are proud of Alicia and her whole family. But, at the end of the day, there is only so much that can be done.

That story alone points up some of the enormous sacrifices that many of our Paralympians make so that they may have the glory and honour to represent this great nation. I would think there would be many other stories similar to that of Alicia Aberley among the Paralympians of Australia. We should spare a thought for them and thank them most sincerely for the enormous sacrifices that they have made, not only in training and improving their ability so that they may become worthy representatives of Australia at the Paralympic Games, but also for the sacrifices and financial commitment that they and many members of their families make to enable them to compete.

Being chosen to represent Australia in the Sydney Paralympic Games is a great honour. It takes talent and an enormous amount of dedication to reach that level of achievement. But it takes much, much more than that. We should recognise that. I congratulate all the athletes and performers involved in the Sydney 2000 Paralympics. You are a credit to our country, your communities, your schools, your families and your places of

work. I wish to add my voice to those of many thousands of others in saying: Well done. You have made a great commitment. We know that by your representing us the world will stand up and take note of your great contribution.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Moss.**

**LEGAL PROFESSION AMENDMENT  
(INCORPORATED LEGAL PRACTICES) BILL**

**Bill received and read a first time.**

**BILL RETURNED**

The following bill was returned from the Legislative Council with amendments:

Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Miscellaneous Amendments Bill

**Consideration of amendments deferred.**

**Pursuant to resolution business interrupted.**

**PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**

**SUTHERLAND SHIRE CHINESE LANGUAGE SCHOOL**

**Mr COLLIER** (Miranda) [5.11 p.m.]: I am pleased to speak today about my recent visit to the Sutherland Shire Chinese Language School. The visit was to mark the Mid-Autumn Festival and the Festival of the Moon being celebrated by that school. I was fortunate enough to hear singing by children of all ages and to see traditional dances, rhythmic gymnastics and a display of self-defence. I also heard some modern and traditional Chinese songs. This was my first visit to the school. As a new member of Parliament one learns much about one's electorate. I learned much that day about the Sutherland Shire Chinese Language School just from being there and from talking to its President, Mr Philip Lo, and its Vice-President, Mr Don Gock.

The Chinese Language School, which has been operating for 25 years in Sutherland shire, opens every Saturday at Sylvania Heights Public School—a school in my electorate. Currently there are 60 pupils, comprising children and adults. China, of course, is one of the world's greatest and most ancient of civilisations. Chinese people have contributed much to the knowledge and progress of mankind for many generations. From China came inventions such as the compass, which helped people from Europe explore the world. China gave us philosophy, art and culture. It gave us one of the world's greatest teachers—Master Kung or, as we call him, Confucius. Many of the fine foods we enjoy today in Australia came from China. The fireworks we enjoy at special celebrations such as the Olympics and the New Year celebrations originated in that country.

Many people of Chinese heritage make an enormous contribution to our great nation—in Australia, in Sydney and in the Sutherland shire. We must recognise that contribution. We must recognise and understand the importance of our history, our heritage and our culture, whatever our origins. The parents of children at the Sutherland Shire Chinese Language School thought it important that their children learn about their history, their heritage and their culture. I believe that the best way for children to do that is to learn the language. Right there in the Sutherland shire a school is teaching the two great languages of China—Mandarin and Cantonese. In teaching those languages teachers are, of course, teaching those children the culture and traditions of Chinese people. In our modern world, a knowledge of Chinese and Cantonese are important in other ways. In a world of international travel a knowledge of those languages is important to those travelling to Asia.

Chinese people are well-known across the globe for their skill in commerce and business. As westerners, our knowledge of this goes as far back as Marco Polo, the first European to reach China in the thirteenth century. He met the Emperor, Kublai Khan—the great Khan—the emperor who fostered and promoted business and commerce amongst his people. Today many Chinese people are running businesses in Australia. China is now one of Australia's major trading partners. Our young must be able to communicate effectively with Chinese business men and women. They must be able to communicate with those of Chinese background who do not understand English. That involves learning the culture, the language and the traditions. I

have learned in a short time that the Mid-Autumn Festival is a traditional celebration of Chinese harvest time. I also learned that the Festival of the Moon marks the beginning of spring. In fact, I was given mooncakes. Mooncakes were produced many years ago by the ancestors of these people and were used to smuggle messages in times of war.

I congratulate the pupils of Sutherland Shire Chinese Language School on their work; the teachers of that school on their commitment and dedication; the President, Mr Philip Lo, and his committee on their commitment to the school; and the parents on their support for the school. I am pleased to inform honourable members that the New South Wales Government supports the Sutherland Shire Chinese Language School with an annual grant under the Community Languages program. The Government also provides free access to school facilities on Saturdays and meets the additional costs of utilities and cleaning associated with the attendance of the 60 pupils to that school through a contribution to the school. As I said earlier, that school was established 25 years ago. At the Chinese mid-autumn and moon festivals I met the founding President, Mr Albert Cumines. This school is not just for children; it is also for adults. I am pleased to have such a school in my electorate. I was pleased to attend the Mid-Autumn Festival and the Festival of the Moon, particularly in the Year of the Golden Dragon. I thank Mr Cumine and the school for their foresight and their contribution to the community.

### ALBURY ELECTORATE CHILD SEXUAL ASSAULT CHARGES

**Mr GLACHAN** (Albury) [5.16 p.m.]: I have spoken to people in the office of the Attorney General about, and they are aware of, the issue that I wish to raise today. On Friday last week an officer of the Albury sexual assault service and the mother of two young girls came to see me in my office about charges that had been laid against a 30-year-old male, formerly of Albury, for sexual assault against four young girls. The matter was to be heard in Albury court on Monday this week. When the matter was brought before the court the Director of Public Prosecutions decided not to give any evidence and the matter was dismissed. The parents of these children are concerned about this, as are the workers in the Albury sexual assault service.

Approximately 30 allegations were made against this 30-year-old male for offences against these four female children. The charges include many counts of digital and penile penetration, vaginal and anal penetration and a number of oral sexual assaults on these young children. I am told that the child protection investigation team at Albury police station conducted a thorough investigation and made strong recommendations that the matters should be tried. The medical evidence that was given to officers at the Albury sexual assault service indicated genital trauma in two of the children. In the case of two of the children these assaults occurred six years ago, when the girls were aged four and six, and in the case of the other two children—who are now aged six and eight—the assaults occurred over a 2½ year period, concluding around the end of 1999 or early 2000. I am told that the four children concerned were clear, articulate and frank when describing in detail the assaults perpetrated against them.

All honourable members would be aware that the Director of Public Prosecutions has an obligation to proceed only if there is sufficient evidence on which to proceed. But the parents of these children believe that a strong case has been made and they are particularly disappointed about the fact that this matter did not proceed. They are also upset about the fact that, in their view, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions did not give them a clear explanation of why that office was not going to proceed with the charges. The parents and I are concerned about this. Unfortunately, these people came to see me on Friday and the matter went before the court on Monday. Neither I nor the Attorney General had time to do very much about it—an issue which I recognise.

However, I appeal to the Attorney General to ask the Director of Public Prosecutions [DPP] to review this matter and, if the evidence is as strong as the parents and the workers from the Albury Sexual Assault Service claim, I urge the Attorney General to determine if it is possible for the matter to be reopened and the charges pressed in court. They are serious charges and they concern very young children. I believe the person involved had a relationship with the mother of two of the children and, although there is no hard evidence to back this up, I believe other children are involved as well as the four children of whom I am speaking. I ask the Attorney General whether something can be done about this matter. The parents are certainly very concerned about it.

**Mr DEBUS** (Blue Mountains—Attorney General, Minister for the Environment, Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Corrective Services, and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Arts) [5.20 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Albury for raising his concerns about this matter in the House today. It is always a matter of concern to a community when it perceives that the authorities have stopped short

of administering justice. However, it is also the case that we must be vigilant to maintain the independence of the authority in question. I have asked the DPP for a report on the matter and I am sure one will be furnished to me as soon as possible. The DPP may have any number of well-considered reasons for not proceeding with the matter at this stage, and I will not attempt to second-guess him.

As honourable members will be aware, it is inappropriate for me to direct the DPP to prosecute any matter, not only because on a day-to-day basis I do not have dealings with the carriage of prosecution matters and I would be directing him in the absence of carefully considered expert advice, but also because the integrity of the office of the DPP lies in its independence. I reiterate that the Government appreciates the concerns of the community of Albury and the respected body that has made a strong recommendation that a series of allegations against an accused person should proceed to trial. In a letter to me earlier this week the honourable member requested that I ask the DPP to review a decision to not bill the matter. I have asked the Attorney General's Department to seek a report. I checked on progress today. The department advises that the DPP is expected to reply shortly. I will in turn reply to the honourable member's correspondence on this issue as soon as that information is to hand.

### **FISHING INDUSTRY COMPULSORY BUY-OUTS**

#### **MURRAY AND MURRUMBIDGEE RIVERS WATER FLOW**

##### **SELECT COMMITTEE ON SALINITY**

**Mr BLACK** (Murray-Darling) [5.22 p.m.]: I wish to comment on some matters pertaining to water. Water is a source of major interest in western New South Wales, the Riverina and any other area in New South Wales where industry irrigation is thriving. Before I talk in particular about salt I want to mention two matters relating to water that I find more than heartening. The first relates to a fishing club. On one of my recent southern interview tours a chap came to see me at Tooleybuc. It was pleasing to hear from him about the success of the program to buy out the commercial fishermen along the rivers—a number have been bought out. The only ones left now are those for carp and yabby licences. The upshot is that the Piangil-Tooleybuc fishing club was formed in June this year with 23 members. Two weeks ago it had in excess of 200. That is an indication of the success of the buy-out program. Once again people are taking to fishing because it seems from what I am told that people are again catching fish in numbers.

The second matter I want to comment about is water flows in the Murray and Murrumbidgee rivers. This time last year allocations were down to as low as 17 per cent. Many irrigators in my area, and in the Murrumbidgee area as well, were more than anxious about their survival. This year we have had exceptionally good snowfalls in the Snowy. The river is at a very high level, and the allocations are now more than 50 per cent and rising. We are looking forward to a very good rice season, and with a good rice season those with a high security supply in horticulture will continue to develop.

Yesterday a meeting was held in this place of the Select Committee on Salinity. That committee has been formed in part as a response to the recommendations of the salinity conference held in Dubbo earlier this year. I want to read into the record of this House the names of the members of the committee. They are Pam Allan, Wentworthville; Gerard Martin, Bathurst; myself; Kerry Hickey, Cessnock; Jim Anderson, Londonderry; Tony Windsor, Tamworth; Tony McGrane, Dubbo; Darryl Maguire, Wagga Wagga; and Don Page, Ballina. This committee of nine has a significant job in front of it. It could be argued that it is one of the most significant committees formed in this place in recent years. Certainly the magnitude of the job in front of the committee is significant.

So far the committee has had two meetings. The first was a formation meeting. Yesterday's meeting was a little more detailed. I am very pleased to report that the decisions made at the meeting of the select committee included a decision that the select committee should visit parts of southern New South Wales. It is proposed that the committee visit Wagga Wagga on 6 November and possibly Griffith the following day. At Wagga Wagga various meetings will be held with interest groups, including representatives of local government and irrigators, and various inspections will take place. It is anticipated that the following day the committee will visit Griffith. It is anticipated that following that the committee will visit Murray shire and, in particular, examine a notorious salinity problem at Green Gully, before going on to Kerang, Lake Boga and, I hope, to Wakool shire to look at a significant salt interception scheme. I commend to the House the work thus far of the salinity committee. I hope there will be regular good reports to the House on the subject.

## WORKERS COMPENSATION PREMIUMS

**Mr D. L. PAGE** (Ballina) [5.27 p.m.]: Recently an employer in my electorate, Terry Dempsey from Brumby's bread shops, came to see me to express his deep concern about the huge jump in his company's workers compensation premiums. The company has five shops in northern New South Wales: at Byron Bay, Ballina, Coffs Harbour, Tamworth and Armidale. It employs up to 55 people in regional New South Wales. Many of these people are now facing retrenchment because of a huge jump in workers compensation premiums from \$42,000 to \$107,000, which, the company advises me, it is unable to pay. The company advises me that with payroll tax already stealing \$60,000 out of its cash flow this year it will be unable to meet the payments of \$10,822 per month over 10 months and will be forced to try to sell the business as a result.

This is the result of one employee sustaining a knee injury that required minor surgery and where the maximum amount of time off work would normally have been six weeks. In other words, the injury sustained in this instance was relatively minor and in no way could justify a more than doubling of workers compensation insurance premiums. What happened in this case highlights the fact that workers compensation arrangements in New South Wales need a complete overhaul before they singlehandedly kill off thousands of jobs and send thousands of businesses broke. The workers compensation system in New South Wales is out of control, and the Government had better do something about it straightaway. I highlight some details in this case to demonstrate how badly the workers compensation arrangements are failing the people and communities of New South Wales.

The initial doctor's report in January indicated that the employee needed minor knee surgery and that she would be off work for a maximum of six weeks. The insurance company, EMI, disputed the claim and started an investigation. This investigation delayed the minor surgery until early May 2000, when liability was accepted by EMI. On 30 May the operation went ahead. On 3 July the employee returned to work part time, and on 4 August she returned to work full time. On 22 September 2000 the employer received a statement of account showing a workers compensation experience premium of \$100,000. Advice received from WorkCover stated that this premium is calculated on 30 June each year. Any employee still on workers compensation on that date and one month prior to this date is assessed at the maximum time out of work allowed by WorkCover—in this instance 285.6 weeks, or more than five years.

Honourable members will remember that this employee was back at work full time on 4 August, that is, seven weeks after the assessment date of 30 June, but she was being assessed under WorkCover rules as being off work for 285.6 weeks. The assessment shows 285.6 weeks at a weekly wage of \$256, making a total of \$73,114. On top of this, medical costs of \$9,800 and investigation costs of \$5,725 had to be added to the \$73,114 bill, as well as other costs, taking the total cost to around \$100,000—all of which in the end has to be paid by the employer! When the employer contacted WorkCover to lodge an appeal he was advised that the only basis for an appeal is whether the calculation was done correctly, not whether the experience premium was grossly excessive in the circumstances. What a ridiculous state of affairs!

Let me highlight a few points. First, the actual sum paid by EMI on the claim was \$9,531, yet Brumby's were invoiced with an experience premium of \$29,123 on actual wages for 1999 and \$24,669 on estimated premiums for 2000 as a direct result of this employee's claim. This means that WorkCover made an immediate profit of \$20,000 at the company's expense for 1999 and a possible further profit of \$24,669 this coming year. Second, why was the operating doctor not consulted prior to 30 June to find out when the employee would return to work? Third, it is most unfair that there is no avenue for retrieving money paid in premiums this year even though the employee is back at work. Fourth, the latest information reveals that experience premiums must cover three years in case the employee re-injures the knee. So Brumby's will have to continue payments for another two years at this rate. I understand that there is no refund if the knee is not re-injured.

WorkCover debts have blown out from a surplus of \$1 billion seven years ago under the Coalition Government to a \$2 billion deficit under this Government. Attempts to reduce this debt by implementing policies like the one I have just described are sheer madness if the Government wants employers to survive and employees to keep their jobs. Many things should be done to fix WorkCover and workers compensation arrangements in New South Wales. A good place to start would be to fix the ridiculous situation in which experience premiums bear no relationship to whether an employee is actually back at work. No-one outside of WorkCover—and it seems even some within WorkCover—understands how the calculations are arrived at.

It is obvious to Brumby's, which is a business trying to employ people in regional New South Wales, that the Government does not care about employing people in country areas. Small to medium-size businesses

are continually hit with add-on employee costs which drain any profits that may be forthcoming. In addition, imposing such long-term excessive penalties removes any incentive to spend money on improving safety in its shops. I call on the Government to get serious and do something to correct this ridiculous situation, which is causing small companies to go broke and employees to lose their jobs.

### **BLAKEHURST HIGH SCHOOL**

**Miss BURTON** (Kogarah) [5.32 p.m.]: I inform the House of the excellent achievements of students at Blakehurst High School. This school has an outstanding record of achievement not only in academia but in sport and cultural studies. Blakehurst High School is a multilingual school that places great importance on leadership. To that end, it encourages its students to attend the Global Young Leaders Conference in the United States of America. Last year six students attended the conference: Luke McCathie, Scott Rindfleish, Peter Schofield, Stuart Walker, Beau Wheeler and Angela Yong. The conference is held in Washington and New York, with 175 students from around the world and 175 American students participating in the conference.

During the conference students have the opportunity to pose questions to distinguished guest speakers, discuss the meaning of leadership amongst themselves and learn about an international leader they admire. They are also required to participate in a global summit simulation, which is designed to help students understand issues facing world leaders in the twenty-first century and practice leadership skills. They are randomly assigned the roles of Cabinet Ministers and diplomats representing a nation. In those roles they debate various international issues, such as the abuse of human rights and weapons of mass destruction. Other activities include a crisis simulation. The students, again representing their assigned country, are given a scenario that threatens peace and the security of the world, and they are asked to provide a solution that is plausible, given their country's interests and capabilities.

Each year the school approaches me to help provide financial assistance to the students who have been chosen to attend the conference. On behalf of the Government I was pleased to provide \$600 towards the cost of the trip this year. Last Thursday I was asked to present the cheque to the school at its official assembly. Blakehurst High School is a special school that provides a wonderful learning environment for its students. I draw to the attention of honourable members the outstanding results that the students achieved in the recent annual Australian mathematics competition, which is sponsored by Westpac Bank. This year 487,000 students from 36 countries in the Southern Hemisphere entered the competition.

Blakehurst High School students have been competing in the competition for at least 22 years and they have a dedicated advocate in Mr Magdi Andrews, who has been competition manager for most of that time. This year the students excelled themselves. Mr Andrews said that he has never seen such a good result on a school level. Special mention must go to Kevan Song of year 12, who not only scored in the top 1 per cent of students but also received the highest possible award that can be given in the competition. Kevin was given \$50 from Westpac Bank, a medal and a letter of congratulations from the director of Westpac Bank. Daqian Wang of year 11 also received a prize. The school was awarded one high distinction, which was received by Frank Chen. For most schools, about 40 per cent of students receive a high distinction, distinction or credit. This year, 67.5 per cent of the students at Blakehurst High School received one of those awards, which is an amazing result. My research shows that Kevan Song and Daqian Wang were also in the top 1 per cent of the competition last year.

I am extremely proud of Blakehurst High School. The principal, Mrs Judy Thompson, is extremely dedicated and works tirelessly to provide the best possible opportunities and encouragement for her students. I also thank the staff, who support Mrs Thompson in her pursuit of instilling the values of leadership, success and concern for others as core values of the school. The school takes great pride in its achievement, which inspires its students to do the same. Each month I receive the newsletter from Blakehurst High School, and I am constantly impressed by the wonderful things the students are doing. Not only does the school work hard to encourage those students presently studying at the school; it regularly recognises the achievements of past students in its newsletter. Blakehurst High School displays a community spirit that gives people the courage to achieve their goals. Once again I congratulate the students at Blakehurst High School on their outstanding results and wish them continuing success in the upcoming High Schools Certificate exams.

### **MORUYA QUARRY WORKERS MONUMENT**

**Mr R. H. L. SMITH** (Bega) [5.37 p.m.]: I draw the attention of honourable members to a recent request I made to several Government Ministers regarding the construction of a monument at Moruya in my electorate of Bega on the far South Coast. This monument will be put in place to honour the men who laboured

at the Moruya quarry in the mid-1920s to supply the stone for the erection of many of Sydney's present landmarks. I am sure many honourable members would not be aware that Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Cenotaph in Martin Place, the Sydney GPO, the Bank of New South Wales headquarters in Martin Place, the base of the Captain Cook statue in Hyde Park and a monument in the grounds of St Michael's Church of England at Vacluse, to name only a few, were all built from stone from the quarry at Moruya.

More than 300 men were employed at Moruya quarry, where more than 40,000 dimension stones were cut, dressed and despatched by steamer to Sydney for the construction of the harbour bridge alone. This work was carried out over a seven-year period. Three workers lost their lives in the quarry during this period, and to this day there is no monument to honour them. As members may well imagine, their descendants are most anxious to have this oversight rectified.

Many dollars have been spent celebrating the Sydney Harbour Bridge with no acknowledgement being made of the Moruya quarry workers. I feel that a small amount of money should be spent now in recognising those men, who were so instrumental in the construction of the bridge and many other Sydney landmarks. In this Olympics year, with so many hundreds of thousands of tourists having descended on Sydney and billions more throughout the world viewing our beautiful city on their television screens, and with the Sydney Harbour Bridge as the backdrop to so many of the Olympic events, now is the time to make some mention of the men who not only gave many man-hours in cutting and supplying the stone but also gave their lives to ensure the completion of such wonderful engineering feats.

The Moruya 2000 Committee has reached an agreement with the owner of the quarry, the Department of Land and Water Conservation, to supply the granite, and funding is being sought for the employment of a stonemason and for the erection of this much-deserved and overlooked tribute to these men. The committee also anticipates that the Eurobodalla Shire Council will support the proposed erection of the monument, offering assistance in the design and survey work. The proposed structure will consist of seven sections in the form of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, with the centre section a monument to the workers of the quarry. The names of the deceased will be etched into the granite using a laser sandblasting technique. The monument will also contain details of the many landmarks for which stone has been supplied throughout the history of the quarry.

On completion, the monument will become a tourist landmark for Moruya, which is a rural township situated on the far South Coast of New South Wales, approximately four hours drive south of Sydney, boasting a population of only 6,000. It is a most scenic town, with the shopping centre placed beside the Deua River. It has the Princes Highway as its main street. Many tourists pass through Moruya on their way to the coast and the snowfields. Moruya would benefit greatly from such a major tourist attraction; it would encourage passing travellers to stop and visit on their way north or south. A monument of this proportion in the shape of the famous Sydney Harbour Bridge would be a major attraction to the town. The people of the district, who are already proud of their association with many Sydney landmarks, will finally feel that some recognition has at last been given to the quarry workers and/or their descendants. I urge the Premier, and the Ministers responsible for heritage, public works, roads, tourism and the arts to contribute some funding from their respective budgets for this monument in Apex Park in the centre of Moruya. I also take this opportunity to congratulate Mr Col Cheshier and the Moruya 2000 Committee on their foresight.

### CENTRAL COAST SPORTING FACILITIES

**Mr McBRIDE** (The Entrance) [5.42 p.m.]: I speak about sporting facilities on the Central Coast. Recreation is a key aspect of the Central Coast way of life, and has been for the past 100 years. Huge growth during the past two decades and further projected population growth is putting great strain on existing local sporting facilities. Currently the population of the Central Coast is expected to increase by an additional 88,000 by 2021. In other words, over the next decade the population of the Central Coast, the third-largest population centre in New South Wales, will increase from around 280,000, the present population, to around 350,000. Currently the Central Coast does not have the necessary sporting and recreational facilities for the present 280,000 residents.

Last Friday I attended the Central Coast soccer presentation night, along with some 300 residents. I take this opportunity to extend special congratulations to the Umina club, which apparently scooped many of the awards on that evening. As an indication of growth in this sport, I ask honourable members to consider the following facts. In 1963 there were five clubs and 19 teams in the local competition. Today there are 21 clubs and 779 teams with a total of some 8,800 players. These figures do not include the increased number participating in female soccer. Already there are around 250 female soccer players on the Central Coast. I was advised that the major restraints on the growth of soccer on the Central Coast are the lack of weekend sporting facilities and in adequately lit training areas.

There is a need for new regional and local sporting facilities for nearly every other sport on the Central Coast. For example, there is only one hockey field, which is located at North Wyong, to service the whole of the Central Coast region. It has sand-based turf, not the water-based turf that is found at a number of facilities in Newcastle. The Central Coast is a long way behind country towns and other regional centres such as Lithgow, Wagga Wagga, Newcastle and Goulburn.

The Central Coast has a few swimming pools—for example, at Woy Woy, Gosford, Wyong and The Entrance—but they are all aged and worn down. The Central Coast has no regional facilities for AFL or cricket. It is a quarter of a century since the last golf course was built on the Central Coast, yet the Central Coast population today is four times what it was then. For years Kincumber has been trying to get an additional golf course. There are no adequate regional facilities on the Central Coast for cycling. In fact, there are literally no cycling facilities. Anyone who has been to Adcock Park to see what they call a cycling track there would understand what I am talking about. One would not be game to walk on it, let alone ride on it, for fear of damage.

I am pleased to inform the House that the State Government has begun to address this issue with substantial contributions to new regional facilities such as the NorthPower Stadium and Central Coast Regional Athletics Centre. The NorthPower Stadium cost around \$30 million. The State Government made a \$12 million investment and, to its credit, that was matched by the Federal Government. The NorthPower Stadium provides the Central Coast with vital community social infrastructure. It holds something like 20,250 people. On the night of the recent torch relay celebrations, some 25,000 people gathered in the stadium. The torch relay was the greatest local community event in the history of the Central Coast. However, it could not have taken place without that facility, which came about through the efforts of the State Government.

The Central Coast Regional Athletics Centre is a fantastic example of community co-operation. A partnership of five organisations—Gosford City Council, Wyong Shire Council, Mingara Recreation Club, Central Coast Athletics and the State Government—is involved in this unique project. The State Government contributed some \$520,000 towards the \$3.4 million cost of the project, which would not have come about without the State Government's co-operation. Chris Bastic, the former mayor of Randwick, said that nowhere has he ever heard of a local council putting funding into a facility in another council area.

I know it would never happen at Liverpool, Canterbury, Armidale or Newcastle—or anywhere else for that matter. It is the first time it has ever happened in New South Wales. We should be looking at providing more of these facilities. Last month the Minister for Sport and Recreation, John Watkins, opened the Central Coast Office of Sport and Recreation. All these projects have been developed by the State Government, but there is a long way to go. To catch up with other regional areas of New South Wales and Australia, the Central Coast needs more sporting facilities.

### WESTERN SYDNEY ORBITAL

**Mr LYNCH** (Liverpool) [5.47 p.m.]: I wish to address the House in relation to a matter of considerable significance to western Sydney, in particular the electorate of Liverpool. I refer to the proposed infrastructure known as the Western Sydney Orbital, which is a critical element in the infrastructure that is needed by western Sydney. Concerns have been raised not only about the orbital itself but also about the toll that is proposed to fund it. Whilst western Sydney needs the orbital, it certainly does not need the toll. I commence by congratulating Liverpool City Council, which on Monday evening of this week unanimously passed a resolution not only supporting the orbital but opposing the imposition of a toll, which the residents of Liverpool feel very strongly about. That is reflected in the fact that the Liverpool branch of the Labor Party has moved similar resolutions, as have other Labor Party units in the area.

Calling for the construction of the orbital but opposing a toll is consistent with the urgent motion I moved and which was passed by this House on 18 November 1997. The one thing agreed on by everyone who regards this issue seriously and participates in debate on it is the importance of the construction of the orbital. The proposed orbital will be a 39-kilometre stretch of road extending from the M5 at the Crossroads in Prestons to the M2 at west Baulkham Hills. It has a whole range of advantages, from getting traffic off the Hume and Cumberland Highways to economic development in western Sydney as well as environmental advantages.

A whole series of aspects of urban amenity will be improved by trucks being removed from roads in western Sydney and by their using instead the western Sydney orbital. There is pretty well unanimous support in western Sydney for the orbital being constructed. Equally there is close to unanimous opposition to the



imposition of a tollway. The funding of this roadway is clearly a Commonwealth Government responsibility. That is also an aspect of the debate that is widely agreed upon. In the last budget of the Federal Labor Government, which was in May 1995, \$260 million was allocated for the first stage of construction of the orbital. An additional \$220 million was allocated in August 1995, some three months later, for the second stage. Not surprisingly, the current Federal Government has adopted a very different attitude.

Those allocations were not expended before the change of government and were effectively removed from the budget papers. The wonderful scheme that now has been dreamed up by John Anderson and the Federal Government is to construct the orbital but to fund that through a toll. I should indicate that as far as I am concerned—and I think this is probably a general view throughout western Sydney—if that were to be a shadow toll, there would be no particular opposition to it. However, it is pretty obvious that the option that Anderson and the Federal Government will pursue will be a user-pay toll, with users having to pay a toll as they use the road.

It is that option which I oppose vigorously, as would most people who live in western Sydney. A user-pay toll is a very old-fashioned solution to the provision of infrastructure. As recently as several weeks ago, an economic forecaster, BIS Shrapnel, suggested that, in its view, Australia had reached the end of the period when user-pay tolls are adopted. The reasons for opposing the toll are twofold. The first and glaringly obvious reason is simple: fairness and equity. Other roads are built without the imposition of tolls. Apparently it is only western Sydney that is expected to cop the prospect of a toll to fund that type of infrastructure. The second reason to oppose the imposition of that toll is also glaringly obvious: it is something that has absolutely no support in western Sydney at all. The community, frankly, would revolt against anything smacking of a toll. Indeed, to use the word "toll" with the term "western Sydney" is almost a definition of political poison.

Certainly any parliamentary representative of western Sydney who has any connection at all with the community understands that the idea of any toll on a road in western Sydney provokes an absolutely venomous reaction. History says volumes about this issue. The basis upon which some people in the Labor Party—for reasons which I cannot understand—are interested in supporting a toll is that unless they support the toll, so they say, the orbital will never be built. The claim that unless the toll is accepted there will not be a road is simply political blackmail. I would have thought that the correct position is to oppose the blackmailers, not to try to work with them. The blackmailers trot out the overused line that there is not enough money and therefore the orbital cannot be afforded without a toll. Of course, that is nonsense.

The people who say that there is not enough money are actually saying that western Sydney is not a sufficiently important priority to them for the money to be allocated. It is not a question of whether there is money around; it is a question of what the priorities are. If the priority is western Sydney, the toll should be opposed. If the priority is not western Sydney, the toll is supported. It seems to me that anyone who claims to represent western Sydney and who does not oppose the toll is, frankly, unfit to continue to represent western Sydney.

### **RURAL COUNSELLING SERVICE**

**Mr TORBAY** (Northern Tablelands) [5.52 p.m.]: No news is not necessarily good news when it comes to funding of government programs in country areas. In my electorate, there is widespread concern about the future of the highly valued Rural Counselling Service. An announcement has been expected since August, but there has been no word from the Commonwealth Government about whether the service will be funded beyond June next year when the current contracts expire. Unless an announcement is made within the next few weeks, it is feared that many of the experienced rural financial counsellors will seek other jobs, which would be a disaster for this vital service for farming communities.

An evaluation of the Rural Communities program, through which the counselling services are delivered, began in February this year. Although the report has been completed and recommendations have been made, there has been total silence on the results. Many people fear this is ominous. They want an immediate announcement of what the position of the service will be after June next year. Some experts are saying that a decision will not be made until the main budget talks in 2001. That is much too late as far as country people and the counsellors who are employed by the service are concerned. In fact, rural communities in my area are looking for reassurance that the procrastination by the Commonwealth Government is not deliberate. They are in no mood to see the service disbanded by default and are finding the current area of uncertainty extremely unsettling.

My electorate office, those of other State and Federal members of Parliament and Government departments are all receiving anxious inquiries for information from farmers and the financial counsellors. With

a fairly good precedent, the farmers and counsellors are reading the situation as a negative and cannot imagine how such a successful service could ever be in question. In northern New England alone, 373 individual clients have received rural financial counselling over the last three years. Each of them benefited from an average of between 11 and 17 hours of personal advice. Also, last year an Inverell-based counsellor attended five mediations under the Farm Debt Mediation Act and has a further five mediations pending. That counsellor has also assisted several farmers with the Farm Family Restart scheme re-establishment grants.

Most clients using the scheme are seeking help with cash-flow budgeting, personal/family counselling, farm debt mediation and farms taxation planning. The recent survey showed that 82 per cent of the clients had changed their farm business, finances, personal or family issues in response to the financial counselling program—a good result in any terms. Another valuable role of the service has been intervention on behalf of farmers with banks that are all too often calling in loans without consultation or consideration of alternative payment arrangements which leave clients not knowing where to turn or how to handle the situation.

If this valuable financial counselling service were to be lost, it is difficult to imagine where cash-strapped farming families could obtain that type of assistance and advice. As most people would be aware, times are difficult for the rural industries and land-holders even more now than ever before. I remain hopeful that the Federal Ministers will continue their support for this service, but we need to know right now the extent of that support and the conditions that will apply beyond June next year. The counsellors need to know, and so do the communities that rely on them.

The Rural Counselling Service is funded under the Federal Rural Communities program [RCP] through the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, John Anderson, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss, and Ian MacDonald on a 50-50 basis whereby the New South Wales Government contributes 25 per cent and the community contributes 25 per cent. Funding from the State Government was sought to bolster the community's contribution. A review of the Rural Communities program was conducted this year by the Bureau of Resource Sciences. Recommendations have been made, but they cannot be allowed to remain on hold until budget talks in May next year. The situation will deteriorate by allowing the matter to remain in abeyance over that period.

The general concern is over the delay in making the announcement. Since the Rural Counselling Service comes under the administration of Warren Truss, a separate announcement regarding its future could be made outside any decision on the report of the full review. I urge the Minister to support this valuable service. I call on him and the Federal Government to make an announcement immediately so that all those concerned can plan their future activities. Dealing death by procrastination is not an option. The first line of a letter from the Rural Counselling Service to the Mayor of Glen Innes, Councillor Bob Dwyer, sums up the situation. It states:

Dear Councillor Dwyer

Our national and State associations have advised us that we cannot rely on the Federal Government renewing our current funding beyond June 2001.

I urge the Federal Government to make the decision as soon as possible.

#### **TIMBER AND RELATED ALLIED INDUSTRIES NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Mr FRASER** (Coffs Harbour) [5.57 p.m.]: I speak on an issue that I have raised twice in this House this week, namely, the dissolution of Timber and Related Allied Industries New South Wales [TRAIN]. I raised the issue on behalf of two constituents, Mr Vern Brazel and Mr Les Witchard, whom I have mentioned in the House during debate on these subjects on numerous occasions. Each time I have mentioned the issue, the Minister at the table at the time—the Minister for Information Technology, Minister for Energy, Minister for Forestry, and Minister for Western Sydney, Mr Yeadon—has given me and the House a guarantee that he will examine the situation. For the information of the House, I once again repeat that Mr Vernon Brazel is dying of leukaemia. Mr Brazel was forced out of the timber industry under the current New South Wales Labor Government's policy of restructuring.

Mr Brazel made an application and was told by members of the forest industry structural adjustment package [FISAP] that he was not eligible. Mr Les Witchard, who previously was a log haulier, was also forced out of the industry. He has also been forced by banks and other financial organisations to sell the home that he built over many years. He now lives in a caravan in Moree. He lost his trucks and his business because of this Government's policy. I note that when I attempted to give notice of motion in this House today, the notice of motion was ruled out of order.

The point I make is that the two men to whom I have referred were mentioned in the Department of Primary Industries report into allegations of corruption concerning the operation of the forest industry structural adjustment package. The quotations and incidents that were investigated and were the subject of the report specifically arose out of a statutory declaration which was provided to the Department of Primary Industries and Energy by Mr Vern Brazel. These allegations were about a meeting held in Coffs Harbour on 9 July. I have three statutory declarations that attest that at that meeting Mr Hillier said:

... if persons present believe the union would not have had a say in the outcome of the tender process, we also believe in and Humpty Dumpty and sugar plum fairies.

He then said that the Hon. Kimberley Yeadon and himself were very good friends and were very good at doing deals behind closed doors. The statutory declaration provided to me says that he also indicated to those assembled that day that:

My mates come from down south. They have luxury cruisers at \$250,000 a hit and take holidays in Switzerland.

The report of the Department of Primary Industry and Energy in relation to allegation six made by me, which is a matter of public record, concluded:

There does appear to be a concentration of influence in the timber industry in NSW with particular people holding numerous offices ... resulting in the perception of those individuals being in a position to obtain inside information and manipulate, intimidate, threaten or control various aspects of the industry should they be so inclined.

As a result of those allegations and the report nothing was done. I wrote to the Auditor General who told me that he did not have the authority to investigate TRAIN, which was a company formed and given a contract under a memorandum of understanding with the Forestry Industry Structural Adjustment Committee [FISAC]. Its job was to look after people such as Mr Witchard and Vern Brazil, collect their applications and send them to the Government, and hopefully they would get compensation. Mr Witchard put in three applications, to which he has received no response. As I said when I raised this matter, the Minister said he would look into it but nothing has been done. Mr Witchard ostensibly now is a broken man who has lost his home and is living away from the town in which he grew up and resided. TRAIN is now being dissolved and wound up. Mr Col Dorber, one of the remaining directors of TRAIN, said in his media release:

The recent decision on of a significant number of TRAIN staff to engage in direct union activities and stand for office in the current CMFEU State elections has, however, voided the efficacy of the TRAIN organisation.

I have made these allegations constantly during more than three years. The bubble has now burst. I call on the Minister to do everything in his power to give these people the money they deserve and to investigate this organisation. He should look at the whole operation of FISAP for the good of the people of New South Wales because \$140 million of taxpayers' funds has been spent.

**Mr MOSS** (Canterbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.02 p.m.]: What a sly way to get your message across!

**Mr Fraser:** Point of order: I do not like the aspersions cast on me by the Parliamentary Secretary across this Chamber. The private member's statement that I have made is within the rules of this House. It reflects the concerns of constituents of mine. If the Parliamentary Secretary wishes to attack me and cast aspersions he can do it by way of a substantive motion.

**Mr MOSS:** That's the pot calling the kettle black!

**Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lynch):** Order! There is no point of order.

**Mr MOSS:** That was precisely my point. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour said that I should put up a substantive motion rather than criticise him in this place but earlier today he tried to get the same message across by way of a notice of motion. He knew full well that the motion that he proposed today would be thrown out. He knew that because of its length and because it debated the actual issue. As I said, he has had one crack at it and he now raises the issue in private members' statements.

**Mr Fraser:** Point of order.

**Mr MOSS:** If you had the courage of your convictions you would put up a proper notice of motion and have the matter fully debated in this place to give the Minister the opportunity to answer you!

**Mr Fraser:** I have a dual point of order. First, the rules of this House say that when a member rises on a point of order the honourable member speaking will sit and hear the point of order, which the Parliamentary Secretary did not do. Second, the motion was ruled out in this House today because of the length of the motion, nothing else.

**Mr ACTING-SPEAKER:** Order! That is not a point of order.

**Mr MOSS:** The motion also debated the issue. You put it up knowing full well it would be thrown out! You do not have the courage to get up in this House with a proper motion and face the Minister with it!

### BOORI PRESCHOOL

**Mr W. D. SMITH** (South Coast) [6.04 p.m.]: In June this year I had the pleasure of formally opening the new Boori Preschool in Nowra, representing the Minister for Community Services, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Women. It was a special event not only for myself but for those families with young children who attend preschools and those who helped make it happen. The preschool is especially significant for those families. I acknowledge that Aunty Barb Timbery, Kate Davis and Sonny Simms joined us in the official opening, with Don Jessop and Gerry Moore. It was an honour for me to unveil the plaque with well respected and much loved Koori elder Aunty Barb.

Boori Preschool was established after several years of planning to meet the needs of a growing community. I was given the pleasure of attending the unofficial opening of the centre in March 1999, accompanied by the honourable member for Wollongong, whose advocacy for Aborigines and their communities is outstanding, both in my electorate and across the State. I was delighted to see such a wonderful project completed, built in a pleasant country setting and surrounded by native trees and shrubs. The dedication of parents and members of the community certainly paid off, and I congratulate them on their hard work. Those people gave up their time to take the preschool from an idea to a reality, demonstrating that the community spirit is an integral part of this service.

The story began in the mid 1980s when local community identity Gerry Moore helped to secure land for the preschool through the local Lands Council. Donna Jessop, Director of the Shoalhaven Community Development Aboriginal Corporation, auspiced the service and worked closely with the steering committee which included Bonny Lester, Gerry Moore, Rhonda Clarke and Gwenda Jarrett. The building was completed in June 1998 and the staff were appointed in January 1999. The preschool finally opened on 5 March 1999. The involvement of a dedicated group of parents and friends continues through the Parents Advisory Committee led by chairperson Donna Braddick. I must thank the Department of Community Services and the State Government for their support with this project. They have demonstrated a commitment to quality children's services for New South Wales families.

I am also pleased that the South Coast has once again drawn support from the Government for much needed services. The South Coast community is indeed quite diverse, with people from all walks of life. We see young children grow up and leave the area to seek out new opportunities, and others make the best of the opportunities in their home towns. Early childhood centres and preschools are among the best ways we have to encourage interest in the world around us and assist with the development of skills to deal with life experiences. I am delighted that centres and schools on the South Coast are teaching Aboriginal children to learn about their traditional culture, with their indigenous peers alongside. This is a great step forward for us all, and I am particularly pleased that the learning is beginning at a very young age. The barriers of ignorance are gradually falling away on the South Coast, with far more importance being placed on the need to recognise and value the region's Aboriginal culture.

The Boori Preschool is a wonderful example of youngsters learning traditional stories, painting and music. I am proud that this Government supports such projects and that the support for children's services in general is considered as a major priority. Since 1995 more than \$35 million has been added by the Government to the funding of children's services. We have seen the establishment of the office of childcare in 1998 and more than \$500,000 has been invested in early childhood research projects by the Minister for Community Services. We know that 50 per cent of learning can take place in the first five years of life and that children who receive high-quality care and education services can benefit through improved social skills, self-confidence, learning and physical development. The importance of children's services not only as a mechanism for promoting child development but also as a service for supporting families in their caring role is recognised with the model used for this terrific preschool called Boori Preschool.

### SILVERWATER PRISON ESCAPES

**Mr HUMPHERSON** (Davidson) [6.09 p.m.]: I have received both written and verbal representations to my electorate office and consequently I have undertaken to raise those concerns in Parliament and seek a response from the Minister for Corrective Services. The representations relate to the only security blemish on the Olympics and involves the escape from Silverwater gaol. The escape, unfortunately, involved some Koreans who were visiting Sydney for the Olympics. In that regard I quote from correspondence from Mr and Mrs Beach:

I trust you witnessed the news item on TV last night where two inmates escaped from Silverwater Gaol and hijacked an Olympic vehicle carrying four Korean visitors. What a disaster for the Koreans, and a terrible embarrassment for all Australians.

Further on in the correspondence Mr and Mrs Beach say about the four Korean visitors:

Can you imagine the concern of the four victims not to mention the fact that our Police Officers are placed in a dreadful situation whereby they must recapture these criminals.

I am sure all honourable members and community members beyond this Chamber would have been most concerned about the escape of two prisoners from the Silverwater complex and the impact that must have had in the eyes of the world, for it was reported. I repeat this was the only blemish on what were otherwise very well organised and well run Games. A number of other constituents rang me to raise this matter, and I do so on their behalf also. What I do not understand—no appropriate answer has yet provided by the Minister—is what action was taken in advance of the Games, given the close proximity of the Silverwater gaol site to the Olympic Village at which 15,000 Olympic guests were staying, to ensure there would be no escapes or, if something did arise, to provide at least a reasonable level of protection for those in our community, certainly protection of a higher level than was evident.

Clearly, either the risk was assessed and deemed insignificant, or security was ignored or overlooked. Whatever happened, security arrangements obviously were inadequate. Much higher security should have been in place given the proximity to the gaol of the Olympic Village, which is as close as 200 or 300 metres away. There were a number of media reports in relation to the escape. They suggest that the department was less than truthful in some of its reporting of what happened. It is interesting to refer to an article in the *Sunday Telegraph* quoting the account of a Japanese visitor to our city, Mr Maeda, who said it was "a few minutes" before Corrective Services officers from the gaol arrived to help the driver of the van containing the three official overseas visitors. Mr Maeda went on to say:

At the time, nobody was watching, and it took a few minutes before the guards came out. Then there were sirens and the police came, but it was too late to stop them.

That account of events seems to be markedly at odds with the release put out by the Commissioner for Corrective Services, Mr Leo Kelleher, who said that officers struggled with the escapees and pursued them, giving the passengers the opportunity to flee the vehicle. He went on to say that, at great risk to their own safety, officers bravely pursued the escapees, struggling with them as they attempted to drive away. Quite obviously, at least one of the reports is inaccurate. That calls into question whether the department was fully honest about the circumstances of the escape, because a further report suggested that the inmates who escaped were in fact on work release, when clearly they were not.

This incident calls into question the nature of the security at Silverwater gaol. I understand that security is provided by Sielox Security Systems. Strangely enough, the web site of a company called Advanced Security Systems claims that company provides security at the Silverwater complex. The company also claims, perhaps fraudulently, that it provides security at seven correctional centres in New South Wales, at the Silverwater complex, Goulburn, Long Bay, Parklea, Bathurst, Cessnock and Maitland. Yet I was advised only yesterday by the Minister, in response to a question on notice, that that company supplies security at only the Long Bay and Goulburn centres. That suggests that the Advance Security web site is falsely claiming it provides security to quite a number of New South Wales correctional centres. I would appreciate it if the Minister provided responses on all these issues.

### STATE DEBT RECOVERY OFFICE

**Mr MOSS** (Canterbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.14 p.m.]: On three separate occasions over recent weeks I have been contacted by persons concerning action taken by the State Debt Recovery Office to suspend their driving licences for their failure to play supposedly outstanding infringement notices. I should

point out that the infringement notices related to public transport infringements and not to driving offences. However, the State Debt Recovery Office does have authority, through the Roads and Traffic Authority, to cancel drivers' licences for failure to pay fines in respect of infringements for other than driving fines.

The three persons contacted me because I had previously forwarded correspondence to them on behalf of the Minister for Transport, and on each occasion I had advised that their respective infringement notices had been withdrawn. Understandably, those people were astounded to be informed that their licences had been suspended, with the threat of total cancellation, by one government unit, for failure to pay a fine that in fact had already been withdrawn by another government unit. Clearly, this problem has come about because the transport department and/or the State Rail Authority have failed to advise the State Debt Recovery Office of the withdrawal of the fines. This, I hope, will not occur again. In my capacity as Parliamentary Secretary for Transport, I am taking steps to ensure our transport bodies are more diligent in following through with procedures where fines are withdrawn.

Each of the persons, before contacting me, originally had contacted the State Debt Recovery Office to question its decision, only to be told that the decision to suspend their licences would stand, despite offers by those people to provide documentation to prove that the fines in question had already been withdrawn. What irks me in all this is the attitude of the State Debt Recovery Office, which exercises no flexibility and whose behaviour I regard as bureaucracy operating at its purest level. The big losers in all of this are those who have lost their licences through no fault of their own. They are indeed victims of government department blunders. I am not making any excuse for those in transport who have failed to communicate with the State Debt Recovery Office. However, I feel the State Debt Recovery Office should have in train some system to assist innocent victims, rather than taking the attitude, "We will not assist as the mistake is not of our doing."

As I see it, when one government unit makes a mistake, it is not good enough for another government unit with an interest in the issue to ignore all representations made to it for correction, particularly when that unit is involved to the point where it actually cancels a licence. I am particularly concerned about this problem because people are unjustly losing their drivers' licences. There needs to be a speedy procedure to resolve this matter. I accept that these mistakes did not emanate from the State Debt Recovery Office. However, I feel that office should assist when matters of this nature are brought to its attention, rather than take the inflexible attitude that it currently takes, which in turn delays the process of innocent victims recovering their drivers' licences.

To speed up the process, obviously there needs to be put in place a system by which matters of this nature are dealt with by the State Debt Recovery Office. If this would require some sort of administration fee from the erring government body, then so be it. Again, my prime reason for raising this matter is to ensure minimisation of the stress and inconvenience caused to people whose licences are incorrectly cancelled. I trust the Attorney General, whose department is responsible for the State Debt Recovery Office, will seriously consider this problem.

### **CASINO COMMUNITY BENEFIT FUND**

**Mr OAKESHOTT** (Port Macquarie) [6.19 p.m.]: This evening I raise an issue that has been a matter of considerable debate in this House over the last six months, Star City Casino and in particular the Casino Community Benefit Fund. I refer specifically to the lack of funding that has been given to the Port Macquarie Neighbourhood Centre, an antigambling and problem gambling service in my local area. It has called for the Minister for Gaming and Racing to provide the money as quickly as possible. On 8 June the Minister issued a press release about the Casino Community Benefit Fund in which he announced that more than \$38 million from the fund has been allocated throughout New South Wales. In the example of the Port Macquarie Neighbourhood Centre, it was supposed to be up and running by 1 July, with an allocation of \$155,000. It was used as one of the eight examples in the media release. It was great news at the time. However, the Centre will probably have to close its doors, which have been open for about only six weeks.

The centre has been told time and again by the Department of Gaming and Racing that the cheque is in the mail, but it has not received the funding. This is disappointing in view of the debates that have taken place in this House about problem gambling. The situation deserves urgent attention by the department and the Minister. My office has undertaken a simple investigation in relation to the examples included in the Minister's press release of 8 June. I understand that three other groups listed have not received the funding stated. The amount of funding is significant—from \$150,000 to \$300,000. Included were Wesley Gambling Counselling Service and Odyssey House McGrath Foundation. All the services are good, community-based, practical and caring services that should be given the opportunity to deliver on what has been one of the most contentious issues to come out

of this House over the last six months. However, unfortunately, for some reason which has not been explained thoroughly by the department or the Minister, the services are being unfairly starved of their funding allocation. It seems that this is reflecting on the policy direction of the Government.

All sorts of funny things seem to be happening within the department at the moment. Too many rumours are flying around about the department generally and about the Casino Community Benefit Fund in particular. They raise questions that are left unanswered in the process of this so-called accountable Parliament. I call on the Minister in good faith to release the cheques for services such as the Port Macquarie Neighbourhood Centre, the Wesley Gambling Counselling Service at Penrith, and Odyssey House McGrath Foundation. I am sure that other services that were not included in the media release are being starved of their supposedly already allocated funding. The big announcement was made by the Government and the Minister more than two months ago. The services have an obligation to be up and running by now. It is extremely difficult for them to operate without any allocation, without having the money in their pocket from the Government. I urge the Minister, if he is genuine about problem gambling, to release the cheques as soon as possible.

### **WALLSEND ELECTORATE MAIN ROAD UPGRADE**

**Mr MILLS** (Wallsend) [6.24 p.m.]: Last Monday in my electorate I had great pleasure in removing a final barrier and opening the \$5 million upgrade of Main Road at Cardiff which included, in particular, the widening from two lanes to four lanes of a bridge under the great northern railway line. The old narrow roadway was something that all the local people had been bemoaning for 30 years. So it was a great pleasure and a great relief to have that work completed. Local people deserve a medal for their patience and forbearance over that time but, in particular, during construction. It was a gold medal day not just for Cardiff but also for the surrounding suburbs of Glendale, Edgeworth, Argenton, Wallsend, Warners Bay and Charlestown.

I am proud to be a member of this Carr Labor Government that delivered for local people to solve the worst traffic congestion problem in the Wallsend electorate—an ongoing problem which inconvenienced motorists, cost the community time and money and was a cause for frustration. I believe that we will now have better road safety and better traffic flow in the area. During the 1995 election campaign the Government made a commitment to solve this problem. Just before the 1999 election the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads, the Hon. Carl Scully, and I shared a shovel as we put dirt into the foundations that gave rise to that project. Local people were delighted that the Government delivered on its promise.

This project was fully funded by the State Government. A week before the opening a one-kilometre missing link of a four-lane carriage way on Lake Road—which is about a kilometre away—between Glendale and Wallsend was opened. Once again that demonstrates this Government's commitment to improving travel on roads in the north Lake Macquarie district and the western part of Newcastle. Motorists now have access to four lanes of road through Cardiff and between Glendale and Wallsend. A major part of the project was widening the railway bridge. Rail Services Australia put a lot of work into that project and did a great job. It looks terrific. The work was carried out by Civilake—the civil engineering arm of Lake Macquarie Council.

At a short ceremony at the site I expressed thanks to the workers who had done a terrific job on that project. There has been a lot of consultation with the local community about it. As a result we got a right turn lane into Taylor Street to provide access for residents and businesses along Main Road and alternative access to the south for local traffic. There are facilities for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users. There are signalised crossings at Glendale Drive, Lowry Street and Macquarie Road; a pedestrian refuge near Taylor Street; and access for cyclists incorporated into the parking lanes and even on the footpath under the bridge on one side for the safety of cyclists. Eastbound and westbound bus bays have been included near Taylor Street, with the stops recessed away from the travel lanes for safety and to ensure that buses that have stopped do not cause unnecessary delays.

There are others who deserve thanks. I acknowledge the persistence over many years of the Cardiff branch of the Australian Labor Party, which pursued me and other people in the area. I thank former councillors for ensuring council support for this project. I thank Minister Scully for making this money available. My colleague the Hon. Richard Face, the honourable member for Charlestown, persuaded Lake Macquarie-based members of Parliament, including the honourable member for Swansea and the honourable member for Lake Macquarie to devise a staged project of improvements for a number of badly clogged areas around Lake Macquarie. I thank them for their support. The Regional Manager of the Roads and Traffic Authority, Bob Sharpe, and his Manager, Corporate Relations, Kathie Wright, have been helpful and co-operative, together with

councillors from Lake Macquarie City Council. Inspector Ross Grace represented local police at the ceremony. I know that the police and firemen at the Cardiff fire station will appreciate the removal of congestion from this trouble spot.

### WOOLOOWARE HIGH SCHOOL TENNIS COURTS

**Mr KERR** (Cronulla) [6.29 p.m.]: I have brought this matter to the attention of the Minister for Education and Training and informed his office that I would be raising this matter tonight. I have no criticism of the Minister and, quite frankly, I am grateful for his assistance. The matter relates to an application for the construction of six tennis courts at Woollooware High School. The proposal, which was forwarded to the Minister by letter dated 2 June, is to have courts and associated buildings constructed at nil cost to Woollooware High School and the Department of Education and Training. It involves the establishment of structures that will maximise court usage for Woollooware High School and visiting schools, and create a quality facility for community use in the Sutherland shire, the Cronulla district in particular.

It was suggested that an advertisement be placed in the *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* and school newsletter seeking expressions of interest. The closing date for that was 7 June. Interest was shown and tenders were then to be called for ministerial approval. The courts will provide excellent facilities at nil cost to Woollooware High School, the students and their parents. It will be a community resource that will serve shire residents, providing much-needed facilities. I received a letter under the hand of the Parliamentary Secretary, Tony Stewart MP, dated 14 August, which stated:

Advice has been provided by the General Manager of Properties in the Department of Education and Training [DET] indicating that the proposal to establish a commercially operated tennis facility on the grounds of Woollooware High School has been assessed. It is noted that the proposal has the full support of the school community, given that the tennis court facilities will be available for use by the school in the local community. The establishment and running of the facilities will be at no cost to the DET or the school.

It is pleasing to advise that an approval, in principle, has been granted to the Woollooware High School tennis court proposal subject to tenders being called for the establishment and operation of six synthetic tennis courts with appropriate flood lighting and amenities. The establishment and operation of the tennis courts and supporting amenities will need to be formalised by way of licence agreement and a term lease will need to be entered into with the successful tenderer. The Crown Solicitor's Office will prepare these agreements on behalf of the DET.

The Properties School Service Unit, Sydney South, will co-ordinate the tender process in consultation with the school community.

I have not heard anything further in relation to this application. Therefore, I ask for a progress report on the matter, which is of some urgency given the desirable nature of the proposal. I believe that the best way to maintain the enthusiasm of those involved is for people to be in constant communication. Therefore, I bring this matter to the attention of the Minister and make no criticism of him. In fact, I am greatly appreciative of the positive response that I have received to this proposal. However, I ask that it be dealt with expeditiously.

### HAWKESBURY ELECTORATE WATER ALLOCATION

**Mr ROZZOLI** (Hawkesbury) [6.34 p.m.]: The Government may well be basking in the glory of the Olympic Games but I can assure honourable members that people in the community are hurting very severely. It is with great regret that I have to place before the House the plight of Hawkesbury fruit and vegetable growers, who provide an enormous amount of produce for the city of Sydney. The Hawkesbury Basin is one of the most productive agricultural areas in Australia and contains some of the most valuable and productive agricultural soils in Australia.

The problem is that under the water reform legislation fruit and vegetable growers have been given an allocation of water usage of 7.5 megalitres per hectare. This contrasts, very curiously, with turf growers at 11 megalitres per hectare and nurseries at 20 megalitres per hectare. Some time ago the Department of Agriculture spent a lot of time and effort producing a document on sustainable agriculture, particularly sustainable agriculture in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Basin. This decision by the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Water to limit the capacity of fruit and vegetable growers to irrigate 7.5 megalitres per hectare flies directly in the face of any logic that might apply to the allocation of water in the Hawkesbury-Nepean. Not only does it fly in the face of logic, it also flies in the face of any scientific rigour, because the local people have been unable to find out any basis on which the allocation has been made. We have had seven, eight or nine meetings—I have lost count now—with the department to discuss water allocation, and despite raising the same questions at every meeting we have yet to receive any definitive replies.



In the original draft allocation there was no mention of turf in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Basin, despite the fact that is an industry worth more than \$60 million a year. So, the fruit and vegetable growers went to bat on behalf of the turf growers to get them a specific allocation. That was warranted because of the value of the industry to the district. Much to their surprise and perturbation they found that the turf growers were given an allocation of 11 megalitres per hectare while they were left stranded on 7.5 megalitres per hectare. In an area like Hawkesbury, 7.5 megalitres per hectare is simply insufficient to sustain the level of agriculture necessary to produce the crops Hawkesbury has traditionally produced. The soil of the Hawkesbury is very porous; it is a sandy, alluvial soil and the water drains through very quickly. In hot weather it needs to be irrigated regularly if the present level of agriculture production is to be sustained.

The curious thing is that the Government is promoting sustainable agriculture but is saying to the fruit and vegetable growers that it will give them 7.5 megalitres per hectare and if they fail to produce enough to sustain their farms, that is too bad. I suggest to the Minister that the allocation be raised at least in line with the turf growers' allocation, that is 11 megalitres per hectare. Then, if on an evaluation over the next few years that is found to be a generous allocation—and I would be very surprised if it is—the allocation can be modified. But it seems absolutely contrary to logic for the allocation to be kept low to the extent that it threatens the viability of agriculture in the Hawkesbury. So, I make a very fervent plea on behalf of the fruit and vegetable growers and on behalf of the people of Sydney—who rely on that produce—that the Government do something sensible in regard to the water allocations for the Hawkesbury, and at least allow us 11 megalitres per hectare.

There is no shortage of water in the Hawkesbury-Nepean system for irrigation. That is why this decision is surprising. It is not as though it is a western river with a limited amount of water to be allocated. Eleven megalitres per hectare could be allocated without any danger to the water supply in the Hawkesbury-Nepean River.

**Private members' statements noted.**

#### **SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion by Mr Whelan agreed to:**

That the House at its rising today do adjourn until Tuesday 31 October 2000 at 2.15 p.m.

**House adjourned at 6.41 p.m.**

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