

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 10 April 2001

Mr Speaker (The Hon. John Henry Murray) took the chair at 2.15 p.m.

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

ASSENT TO BILLS

Assent to the following bills reported:

Appropriation (Budget Variations) Bill
 Business Licences Repeal and Miscellaneous Amendments Bill
 Cattle Compensation Repeal Bill
 Trade Measurement Amendment Bill
 Workplace (Occupants Protection) Bill

STUDENT VIOLENCE

Ministerial Statement

Mr AQUILINA (Riverstone—Minister for Education and Training) [2.18 p.m.]: This morning I received details of a very disturbing incident at a New South Wales high school. At the outset I wish to congratulate the school principal for his swift and effective action. For reasons that will become clear, I do not intend to name the principal or the school concerned. His colleagues will be aware of his actions. I have spoken to him today to personally convey my appreciation. Last week three year 10 students at a New South Wales high school went to their principal, with disturbing information regarding another student. The student involved is male and aged almost 16. He has no history of violent or destructive behaviour at the school.

The three year 10 students handed in a diary they had obtained from that student. That diary contained graphic passages describing a massacre list, descriptions of suicide and plans to kill other students during a school assembly that was to take place the next day. In the student's words he intended carrying out, "a replica of the Colorado high school massacre". The diary also included a "hit" list of names of teachers and students at the school. In addition there were descriptions of the school hall and other buildings. After a brief reading of the diary, the principal of the school acted immediately. He took the student out of the classroom; and police were contacted, as were the student's family and a clinical psychologist. He is now undertaking counselling and will be working with a mental health unit. No clinical diagnosis is yet available.

This is an extremely serious issue. It is important that we not leap to conclusions about this student. It is not clear whether he would have carried out actions described in the diary, if given the chance. What is clear is that he is in need of assistance. That assistance is now being provided. This is because the school principal took the issue seriously and acted in the best interests of the students and the school. There is a message in this for every parent and student in New South Wales, that is, to make sure that depression or anger is not simply ignored, or considered a phase or part of growing up. If parents are concerned about a child's emotional health or a student is concerned about another student in the class, they should make sure they tell someone—the principal, a teacher or a counsellor.

Honourable members will recall the horrific incident at Columbine High School in the United States of America on 20 April 1999, almost exactly two years ago, when Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold shot and killed 12 students and a teacher. Harris and Klebold had previously written about their plans on an Internet web site 13 months before the attack. At the time that aspect was raised with the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, but it appears that insufficient action was taken. Local police made plans to search Harris's home but failed to do so. It cannot be suggested that the students in New South Wales would have gone to the lengths of the two American students two years ago. However, a major difference between the United States of America and Australia is that, in this case, the issue was taken seriously and dealt with appropriately by the school principal.

Mr O'DOHERTY (Hornsby) [2.20 p.m.]: It is difficult for this House to understand exactly what the Minister for Education and Training is trying to achieve. In New South Wales there are more than 2,220

schools, all of which now have been branded by the Minister for Education and Training as schools where there are serious concerns about the mental health of students and at which potential Columbine High School massacres could take place.

[Interruption]

The Minister was heard in silence. The Minister interjected, "Stephen, you know me better than that". I do know the Minister better than that, but I also know, or at least I assume, that the Leader of the House has said that we need a ministerial statement from every Minister this week just to take up the time allocated for questions. I am, frankly, surprised at the Minister for falling for that trick because I do not think this is an appropriate manner in which to approach a very serious subject. The Opposition and every member of this House shares the Minister's concern for those students in our society who are so disturbed or crying out for help to such an extent that they would have a diary of that nature—and, indeed, show it to other students.

I can reveal to the Minister that another member of this House told me about a similar incident—not this incident, but one that occurred in the other member's electorate last week. The Opposition did not go trumpeting that matter to the House or to the media; the Opposition took the responsible attitude that it was best for the professionals to deal with it locally. All the Minister has done is guarantee front-page treatment for that story. Those disturbed students are crying out for front-page treatment. They are looking for some level of attention from their community. The best way to deal with this matter would have been to deal with it quietly and locally.

The Minister has been the first to criticise whenever Opposition members have raised school security issues. I wonder why he now thinks it strange that we say that the boot is on the other foot. Having said that, we clearly state our view that all students in New South Wales schools who are suffering that kind of depression, that level of anxiety and that level of disturbance need the assistance of everybody in the school community. Like the Minister, we commend the principal, the staff and the parents in that case for taking the appropriate action.

There is an important message for all of us. There is an important message for parents and peers of students whose behaviour changes and who act in ways that may not even be as obvious as those the Minister has mentioned. Simple changes in behaviour—a student who suddenly becomes withdrawn or develops a depression—are important. Often only the student's friends notice. There is a message for all parents and friends of young people to ensure that there is a caring network of support around them so that when they are crying out for help we are there to put that help into place. We commend every effort of students, staff, parents, teachers, principals—and even the Government when it is fair dinkum about helping young people. But we find the Minister's political grandstanding quite distasteful.

PETITIONS

North Head Quarantine Station

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

Willoughby Paddocks Rezoning

Petition praying that the Legislative Assembly will advocate for the retention of all vacant land in the area historically known as the Willoughby Paddocks and its development as public parkland for the enjoyment of the community, received from **Mr Collins**.

State Taxes

Petition praying that the Carr Government establishes 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**.

Northside Storage Tunnel Gas Emissions

Petition praying for the installation of an acceptable system to address health risks associated with the discharge of sewage gases from the northside storage tunnel, received from **Mr Collins**.

Non-government Schools Funding

Petition 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 **Mr Richardson**.

Public High Schools General Operations Grants

Petition praying that the House increase the general operations grants to public high schools, received from **Mr Hartcher**.

Cardiff Railway Station Disabled Access

Petition expressing concern at the difficulties experienced by disabled and elderly patrons in accessing Cardiff railway station platform, and praying that Cardiff railway station be included on the Easy Access program and a lift or ramp installed, received from **Mr Hunter**.

Tumut Regional Roads Upgrade

Petition praying that regional roads in the Tumut area be upgraded and that a regional roads summit be conducted, received from **Ms Hodgkinson**.

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**.

Manly Lagoon Remediation

Petition praying that funds be made available to assist in the remediation of Manly Lagoon, received from **Mr Barr**.

Somersby Plateau Environmental Protection

Petition praying that the House support the protection of the environment on the Somersby Plateau, that no sandmining be permitted on the Somersby Plateau without the consent of Gosford City Council and that the proposed sandmine, to be located near the intersection of Peats Ridge Road and the F3, not be permitted to proceed, received from **Mr Hartcher**.

Charity Housie

Petition praying that clause 10 (1) of the Charity Housie Permit not be amended, thus maintaining the break between charity housie and other forms of lotteries and games of chance to 30 minutes, received from **Mr Greene**.

Bega Valley Shire Council

Petition praying that extension of the term of the administrator appointed to oversee the affairs of Bega Valley Shire Council be opposed, received from **Mr R. H. L. Smith**.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

HAWKESBURY-NEPEAN CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT TRUST

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: My question is directed to the Premier. Why has the Premier done a policy backflip and agreed to abolish the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust, the independent body whose job is to protect local communities and the environment from overdevelopment and environmental degradation? Why has the Premier failed to consult his Minister for the Environment who, in the past fortnight, expressed his confidence in the trust by allocating to it \$112,000 to be used on environmental education programs?

Mr CARR: The resignation of the ministry will be deferred for an hour at least, as we reel from this onslaught, this most unpredictable and surprising question. It is totally unpredictable.

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

Mrs Chikarovski: You entered into a contract a fortnight ago, Bob. Why didn't you tell Bob Debus?

Mr CARR: Don't worry, I have your Huskisson speech here. Doesn't it ring with clear decisive commitments! The Opposition says that it will target State tax reform, it will target cost to business, it will target workplace management, and it will target the interface between the public and private sectors. What policy precision! Yes, the Minister did announce that the work of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust would be integrated into the Department of Land and Water Conservation to free up money for on-ground works. I will spell out all the reasons that led the Minister to this decision.

Mrs Chikarovski: When did Bob Debus find out?

Mr CARR: Interjections are only an incitement for me to go into greater detail. The department has been providing the trust with an annual budget of \$3.588 million and also draws money from the Natural Heritage Trust, local councils and other sources.

Mr O'Doherty: And it spends it on the river.

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

Mr CARR: The honourable member for Hornsby said that it spends it on the river; we'll see whether that is the case. Therefore, its total budget reaches about \$4 million to \$5 million a year, amounting to \$28.7 million from 1993-94 until now. But in 1999-2000 the trust spent just under \$69,285 on grants for actual on-ground works; that is, out of a budget of some millions it spent \$69,000 on on-ground works.

Mrs Chikarovski: Point of order: The question I asked related to how much the Minister for the Environment knew about his allocation of \$105,000 for education to the trust. The Minister for the Environment did not even know that you were going to abolish it. What goes on in your Cabinet? Don't you talk to each other? The Premier does not talk to the Minister for the Environment; the Minister for the Environment does not talk to the Premier. When did you find out, Bob?

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

Mr CARR: Out of those millions the trust spent only \$69,000 on actual on-ground works. Many members of the local community may agree with me when I say I do not think that is value for money. The bulk of the trust income, about 60 per cent, in 1999-2000 was spent on salaries and wages. The chief executive officer was earning more than \$130,000 a year. The chair of the trust was receiving an allowance of \$30,000 a year, plus a car, out of this \$4 million budget.

Mr Tink: What is the world's greatest police commissioner getting, Bob?

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

Mr CARR: The police budget is \$1.6 billion a year, you see. This trust has the budget that I just described to the House.

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

Mr CARR: The chief executive officers earns \$130,000 a year. The bulk of the trust income, about 60 per cent, goes in wages and salaries. The chair gets \$30,000 a year, plus a car.

Mrs Chikarovski: You have read that.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting.

Mr Amery: Not much money is getting to the river bed.

Mr CARR: There is not much money actually getting through to the river. Ten of the other 19 trustees were also accepting annual sitting fees of \$5,897.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting.

Mr CARR: I should like to quote some figures from the 1999-2000 annual report of the trust.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Members on my left will remain silent.

Mr CARR: I rather suspect that Opposition members did not read the report before the Leader of the Opposition asked the question. An amount of \$78,654 was spent on rent, \$38,300 on cleaning, \$31,400 on postage, \$69,800 on meetings, \$37,000 on insurance and \$23,936 on publications. Compare those figures with what was actually spent on the old man river—\$69,200. They spent \$69,000 on meetings about the river, but only \$69,000 was actually allocated to the river—dollar for dollar. Is the Opposition saying that in view of those figures it is out of the question for the Government to reconfigure the bureaucratic structure designed to give advice and deliver programs on this? Is the Opposition saying that in view of these figures it would do nothing to get a more effective—

[Interruption]

In her policy document the Leader of the Opposition does not talk about doing anything. She just talks about targeting things—targeting problems—and that absolves her from the obligation of spelling out what she would actually do. Planning, meetings and publications are all very well, but with those plans and with the enlightenment produced by the publications and strategy meetings—and there is no shortage of those meetings—it is now appropriate to move on and focus on the matters I have described to the House.

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

Mr CARR: That will embrace no lesser commitment by the Government to managing the health of the Hawkesbury-Nepean river system but we ought to get a bit of saving in the structure that designs the strategies to do so.

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

Mr CARR: Not only is the Department of Land and Water Conservation continuing to do extensive work in the valley—it was the major player in some of the trust work on sediment and screen bank erosion along the river—Sydney Water also is working to improve water treatment plants in the area. The Sydney Catchment Authority is improving water management and quality in the valley. The Environment Protection Authority provides grants for local councils for stormwater management. The Department of Urban Affairs and Planning works on the local planning issues that may have an impact on the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley and New South Wales Agriculture is working with farmers to improve irrigation practices and sustainable farming methods.

A Hawkesbury-Nepean reference panel has been established as a joint venture of local councils, industry groups and the State Government. That panel will work to ensure that on-ground remediation activities are carried out in priority areas. The Hawkesbury-Nepean Forum has also been established to advise the Government on environmental flow rules for the river system. The Cocks River Catchment Management Committee, the Cocks Water Committee and the Wollondilly Catchment Management Committee are looking after their respective sections of the valley. Finally, I assure the House that on-ground activities, to which the trust is committed, will be honoured and all current trust staff will be allocated to relevant Department of Land and Water Conservation programs to enable their valuable work to continue.

SYDNEY FERRIES OPERATIONS

Mr MOSS: My question without notice is to the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads. What is the Government's response to the Waterways Authority investigation into the grounding of the Manly ferry *Collaroy* and the SuperCat *Susie O'Neill*?

Mr SCULLY: Honourable members will be aware that recently there have been several incidents involving Sydney ferries.

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

Mr SCULLY: Clearly, that is unacceptable to passengers. Although Sydney Ferries has had a good record in the past, its recent performance has been poor. I have been concerned to ensure that the operations of Sydney Ferries reflect the best standards of service. For this reason last month I established an independent inquiry to report on the operation of Sydney Ferries and its vessels. This review, which is to be completed by 31 May, is being conducted by Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the Waterways Authority. The review will consider a range of operational issues related to human resource management and marine engineering.

The Waterways Authority has now completed the individual reports into the most serious recent incidents, the groundings of the *Collaroy* on 26 February and the *Susie O'Neill* on 21 March. At my request those investigations were headed by Matt Taylor, who conducted the inquiry into the Sydney Harbour oil spill in 1999 that led to the successful prosecution of the master and owner of the *Laura D'Amato*. In relation to the *Collaroy* and the *Susie O'Neill* I can report that he has concluded that the groundings were unrelated and that the main cause in each case was human error. There are also some recommendations in respect of Sydney Ferries. State Transit has accepted those findings and has commenced implementation of the recommendations.

In the case of the *Collaroy*, the report finds that the master left the wheelhouse and the helmsman failed to steer a proper course to Manly Wharf, causing the vessel to run aground. Investigators found that the mechanical systems of the vessel played no part in the grounding. In the case of the *Susie O'Neill*, the vessel hit the Kirribilli shoreline as it was headed for Kirribilli Wharf. The investigators found that the ferry master failed to approach the wharf on a course and at a speed that would have avoided a grounding. While the master had 19 years experience, he had limited experience with SuperCats. Repairs to the *Collaroy* could cost up to \$2 million, but with insurance the liability of Sydney Ferries will be limited to approximately \$300,000. Repairs to the *Susie O'Neill* could cost up to \$130,000, with the liability of Sydney Ferries limited to \$50,000 after insurance.

The Waterways Authority has indicated that it will prosecute the master of the *Collaroy* as being the person with ultimate responsibility for the vessel. The Waterways Authority has further recommended disciplinary action by Sydney Ferries against the helmsman of the *Collaroy*. The Chief Executive of State Transit, John Stott, has accepted this recommendation and will commence disciplinary action against the master of the *Collaroy*. In relation to the *Susie O'Neill*, the Waterways Authority has recommended that Sydney Ferries take disciplinary action against the master of the vessel. Sydney Ferries advises that it is giving consideration to that recommendation. The Waterways Authority has also recommended several other steps as a result of these incidents.

In relation to the *Collaroy*, the Waterways Authority has recommended that Manly ferries should have at least two people in the wheelhouse at all times who are competent to operate the vessels' steering and machinery controls, that training for helmsmen be reviewed by Sydney Ferries and their competencies checked on a regular basis, and that Sydney Ferries review its passenger management and safety procedures in emergencies and keep them informed should such a situation arise. State Transit has advised that it has accepted all of those recommendations. Mr Stott, the Chief Executive of State Transit, advises that a memorandum has been issued to all outer harbourmasters regarding the requirement for two qualified people to be in the wheelhouse and that reviews of both training for helmsmen and passenger safety management have commenced.

In relation to the *Susie O'Neill*, the Waterways Authority has recommended that all masters commanding SuperCats receive refresher training, that Sydney Ferries review the delay periods programmed into the throttle controls of SuperCats and that manuals for the operation of the SuperCats be up to date and crews directed to familiarise themselves with their contents. State Transit has accepted all of those recommendations and is implementing them. I further advise the House about the Waterways Authority investigations into the collision of the RiverCat *Marjorie Jackson* with a wharf at Mort Bay on 23 March and the soaking of passengers on the *Mary MacKillop* on 28 March.

The incident involving the *Marjorie Jackson* occurred when an electrical switch failed, causing a steering failure. The switch has been replaced and the six other RiverCats have been checked, with no similar faults having been found. Following the *Mary MacKillop* incident, the Waterways Authority recommended to Sydney Ferries that windshields be replaced with a more sturdy material and that the foredecks should be closed

until the new windshields are fitted. Those recommendations are being implemented by Sydney Ferries. In addition, Sydney Ferries is investigating the installation of a buoy that measures the swell inside the harbour. The buoy can relay real-time information to Sydney Ferries control room about particular weather conditions. Those incidents have damaged the reputation of Sydney Ferries and undermined the confidence of passengers.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I place the honourable member for Wakehurst on two calls to order.

Mr SCULLY: It is important that lessons are learnt from those incidents to avoid their recurrence and to restore service standards. Mr Taylor, the Chief Executive of the Waterways Authority, has indicated to me that he will further explore issues raised in the investigations of those incidents in his comprehensive report on ferry operations, which is currently under way.

PAYROLL TAX RATE

Mr SOURIS: My question is directed to the Premier. Why has he failed to keep his promise made exactly six years ago to reduce payroll tax to 4 per cent, resulting in thousands of businesses in New South Wales being forced to pay up to 230 per cent more on payroll tax since he came to office? How many jobs have been lost as a result of his massive tax grabs?

Mr CARR: What a terrific question! Come in spinner! The issue of tax is in this morning's papers, so the Opposition's tactics committee says, "We will take them by surprise, we will ask them that question." By the way, let us make crystal clear the text of the commitment given by the Leader of the Opposition in her speech on 31 March at Huskisson. She said, "We will target State tax reform." Our Government never promised to reduce payroll tax to 4 per cent—never.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the National Party will resume his seat.

Mr CARR: I want to deal with this.

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

Mr CARR: I intend to deal with this.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will remain silent.

Mr CARR: What were the three commitments given by the Government on payroll tax? First, we made a commitment to cut the rate from 6.5 per cent to 6.4 per cent from 1 July 1999. That commitment was made in a media release on 2 March 1999 during the last New South Wales State election campaign.

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

Mr CARR: The Opposition should remember the last State election. I thought it would be indelibly stamped in the memories of the Leader of the Liberal Party and the Leader of the National Party.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will remain silent.

Mr CARR: What was the election commitment made by the Government before the 1999 State election?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting.

Mr CARR: In a media release on 2 March we made a commitment to cut to the rate from 6.7 per cent to 6.4 per cent. That was the policy of the Government.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting.

Mrs Chikarovski: Point of order: The Premier might like to pretend he has only been in office for two years. He has actually been in office for six long years. The commitments that he made six years ago are still valid today for the people of New South Wales. He cannot ignore the fact that he made those commitments. He continues to lie about it. He lied about Windsor Road. He is lying about payroll tax. What else is he going to lie about?

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

Mr CARR: The commitment the Government made before the last State election was to reduce payroll tax from 6.7 per cent to 6.4 per cent. Has that commitment been kept? Yes, payroll tax is now 6.2 per cent.

Mr Souris: A huge cut!

Mr CARR: It was 7 per cent under the Coalition Government.

Mr Souris: What about the 4 per cent?

Mr CARR: We never said we would cut payroll tax to 4 per cent. We simply never said that.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Lachlan has been called to order, the honourable member for Wakehurst has been placed on two calls to order, the honourable member for Hornsby has been called to order three times, the Leader of the National Party has been called to order twice, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has been called to order twice, the honourable member for Epping has been called to order twice, and the honourable member for Gosford has been called to order three times. Each of those members is now on three calls to order, and the Chair will pay close attention to their behaviour for the remainder of question time. I suggest that all members on both sides cease interjecting.

Mr CARR: Our first commitment was to cut the rate from 6.7 per cent to 6.4 per cent. That commitment was made before the last State election. The payroll tax rate is now 6.2 per cent, and will come down to 6 per cent from 1 July next year. What was the payroll tax rate under the Coalition Government? Under the Coalition Government the payroll tax rate was 7 per cent. Our other commitment on payroll tax was to provide concessions to employers of apprentices. I made that commitment in the Labour campaign launch on 14 March 1999. There was nothing in the speech about reducing payroll tax to 4 per cent. It simply was not there as one of our commitments.

The third commitment on payroll tax was to progressively cut the rate to 6 per cent by 1 July 2002. That commitment was made in the Budget Speech delivered on 23 May 2000. The Opposition has yet to produce a policy document, a media release or even a direct quote to support the totally bogus claim that we said we would bring payroll tax down to 4 per cent. If we made that policy commitment in the context of an election campaign do you not think it would have been made in a press release, a speech or a policy document?

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

Mr Stoner: Point of order: The question to the Premier was about a promise made in 1995, exactly six years ago. He has failed to address the question. He is talking about the 1999 election when the question referred to the 1995 election. On 9 April 1995 the *Daily Telegraph* reported that the Treasurer promised to reduce payroll tax to 4 per cent. I ask you to bring him back to the question.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Oxley is standing in for the honourable member for Coffs Harbour as National Party Whip. He need not follow the example set by the honourable member for Coffs Harbour in relation to the taking of points of order. I place him on three calls to order.

Mr CARR: As the Treasurer said in a letter sent to the editor of the *Australian Financial Review* this morning:

The "source" of the claim—

which is referred to in today's *Australian Financial Review*—

is a Sunday newspaper story from 1995 where I—

that is the Treasurer—

am not quoted directly.

Why would anyone in politics launch a major tax cut plan, costing \$2.1 billion a year, without a media conference, a policy document a media release or a direct quote?

They wouldn't. Your journalist should be less gullible.

Yours sincerely,
Michael Egan

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I place the honourable member for Davidson on two calls to order.

Mr CARR: Every commitment we made about payroll tax in either the 1995 or the 1999 election campaign has been kept.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I place the honourable member for Ballina on two calls to order.

Mr CARR: When the Coalition was in government not only did it fall at a rate of 7 per cent, but businesses with payrolls of \$550,000 a year or more paid it. Since then we have lifted the tax-free threshold to \$600,000, cut the rate to 6.2 per cent and provided tax concessions for the employers of apprentices. What have these changes been worth to employers? They have been worth, out of the budget each and every year, a total of half a billion dollars to employers. The State Chamber of Commerce has argued that we should bring it down to 5 per cent—

Mr O'Doherty: Yes.

Mr CARR: And the shadow Treasurer just endorsed that. He said, "Yes."

Mr O'Doherty: Yes, you should.

Mr CARR: His leader did not say that in her speech on the South Coast. This is very interesting. The shadow Treasurer is going red with embarrassment. He says, "Don't worry about what Kerry said." He says, "I'll make a commitment and we now stand for payroll tax of 5 per cent. That is now the policy." Talk about policy on the run! The *Daily Telegraph* will have to rewrite its pork barrel register because I can now give honourable members the figures on what that commitment, made in question time, would cost. It would cost \$700 million this year—that is half the police budget—to bring payroll tax down to 5 per cent. Here we have a considered policy commitment from the Chikarovski-led State Liberal Party. On the run, in question time, the shadow Treasurer says, "We would make payroll tax 5 per cent." That is fine, but he would have to find \$700 million each and every budget to deliver it. Why is he making that commitment when only two weekends ago his leader, giving her landmark mid-term report to the Liberal Party on the South Coast, refused to make it? Yet the shadow Treasurer makes it today.

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

Mr CARR: This is the first commitment on taxation that the Liberal Party has made: payroll tax will be reduced to 5 per cent at a cost of \$700 million in each and every budget. It is wonderful to get this policy commitment out of them at question time. It is incredible that it was not made by the leader in her considered mid-term policy address to the Liberals, but during question time. We respond as a Government that has kept of all its commitments made on payroll tax by asking the old and faithful question: Where is the money coming from? Good on you, Stephen!

SANELE NICKEL MURDER

Mr LYNCH: My question without notice is to the Minister for Police. What is the latest information regarding the murder of Sanele Nickel on 15 May 1999?

Mr WHELAN: Early one morning two years ago a senseless murder robbed a young western Sydney family of a loving husband and father of five. No-one has yet been charged with the murder of 35-year-old Mr Sanele Nickel, who was attacked on the front lawn of his home in May 1999. For the past two years his family has lived not only with the trauma of losing a loved one, but with heightened suffering because they do not know who was responsible for this terrible crime. Despite an exhaustive police inquiry spanning two years, detectives have not yet found the cowardly killers who murdered the father of five on the front lawn of his Taloma Place home.

Today I am pleased to make an announcement which, hopefully, will bring an end to this outstanding case and provide some long overdue peace to Mr Nickel's grieving family. From today a \$100,000 reward is posted for information that will lead police to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for the murder of 35-year-old Mr Nickel, who died on 15 May 1999 in tragic circumstances. At 4.45 a.m. that day he and his wife were woken by the sound of the car alarm. They went outside onto the front lawn to investigate. Mr Nickel noticed that the front passenger window of his car had been smashed and that his mobile phone had been stolen. Mr Nickel returned inside to get some warm clothes, then went outside again to join his wife, Fagassau, in search of the thief.

Shortly after his wife went indoors to get a jacket. Moments later she returned to find her husband staggering across the lawn towards her. He had been stabbed in the chest three times. Mr Nickel collapsed and was rushed to hospital, but, sadly, died from his injuries. Local police and homicide detectives began an immediate murder inquiry. Their efforts, involving crime scene and fingerprint specialists, listening devices and search warrants, have been extensive. However, I am advised that despite these exhaustive inquiries all hopeful leads dried up earlier this year. Investigating police then made an application for a reward in the hope that financial incentive would flush out new information.

News of the reward will no doubt be of some small comfort to Mrs Nickel, who, I am told, is in regular contact with the investigating police and with whom I spoke today to advise her of my intention. As with all rewards of this nature, payment in part or a whole is at the sole discretion of the Commissioner of Police. I am sure that honourable members on both sides of this House will appreciate the importance of this plea for public help. I urge anyone with information that may help police, no matter how seemingly small or insignificant, to come forward immediately. Information, which will be treated confidentially, may be given at any time of the day or night at any police station, to Liverpool detectives on 98251511 or Crime Stoppers on 1800333000.

HOSPITAL EMERGENCY SERVICES

Mrs SKINNER: My question is to the Minister for Health. Will he assure the communities of 11 metropolitan hospitals—including Manly, Mona Vale, Sydney, Sutherland, Concord, Fairfield, Bowral, Camden, Auburn and Mount Druitt—that he will not approve the closure or downgrading of their emergency departments, despite the recommendations in the leaked report I have in my hand?

Mr KNOWLES: If I understood the context of the question, I believe I can give that assurance. The document I have in my hand—a funny thing called the Menadue report, which is about 12 months old—identified a clear plan to go to a metropolitan services strategy led by clinicians, chaired by Professor Kerry Goulston, who is based at Royal North Shore Hospital, with a group of about 50 individuals with a number of small groups of about 550 clinicians taking part.

Mrs Skinner: Including your departmental people.

Mr KNOWLES: Including departmental people, area health services, nurses, academics, and people who have been begging for a policy document for ages. The clinicians has prepared a policy position, contrary to the scaremongering by the Opposition, which has no policies, absolutely no policies. There are absolutely no surprises, because page 32 of the Menadue report says, under the heading "Improved Planning and Decision Making for the Metropolitan Area", recommendations 25 through to 29, that a metropolitan planning taskforce made up of metropolitan area health services chief executive officers, relevant clinicians and senior department directors should be formed immediately to oversee and fast track decision-making about the role and distribution of health services across the whole of Sydney. Surprise! Surprise! That is what that group is doing. It is hardly new information.

Mrs Skinner: Point of order—

Mr KNOWLES: Hardly a secret discovery.

Mrs Skinner: Point of order—

Mr KNOWLES: —because it was published on page 32 of the—

Mrs Skinner: Point of order—

Mr KNOWLES: —Menadue report, announced on 8 March last year.

Mrs Skinner: Point of order—

Mr KNOWLES: That report identified clearly a critical role for the planning of metropolitan services.

Mrs Skinner: Point of order—

Mr KNOWLES: Of course, because—

Mrs Skinner: Point of order: The question was not about the committee; it was about whether the Minister was going to accept the recommendations of the report written by the committee.

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

Mr KNOWLES: No services will be downgraded.

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

Mr KNOWLES: Indeed, services will be enhanced across the metropolitan region, because this document underpins a sensible policy formulation for the distribution of health services.

Dr Kernohan: What about Camden hospital?

Mr KNOWLES: We are rebuilding Camden hospital. Contrary to the views of the honourable member for Camden, I actually go out there occasionally and it is a terrific new hospital.

Dr Kernohan: With an emergency ward!

Mr KNOWLES: Of course, the emergency department remains—despite all of the Opposition's scaremongering. I draw the attention of the House to page 32 and to the very explicit recommendations of the Health Council report, which identify a sensible planning process, which is still under way, in accordance with the recommendations, and running to timetable.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I remind the honourable member for North Shore that she is on three calls to order.

Mr KNOWLES: I think that we as a community should place on record our great thanks to the 550 clinicians who are working on these specific recommendations, planning the better and enhanced delivery of health services, not only in metropolitan regions of Sydney but right throughout the State. At some stage the Opposition will have to produce a policy. It will have to either emulate this document or repudiate it.

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

Mr KNOWLES: The Opposition will have to go a long way beyond the three-line health policy that is presently on the web site of the honourable member for North Shore, which says, "We just want to put the care back into health care. "Don't we all!"

Mrs Skinner: Point of order—

Mr KNOWLES: Don't we all want to do that! Which part of this document will the Coalition say "No" to?

Mrs Skinner: Point of order—

Mr KNOWLES: Which one of these will you not implement?

Mrs Skinner: Point of order—

Mr KNOWLES: Will you tell Kerry Goulston he had better stop? Will you say to the 550 clinicians, "You are not welcome to participate" or will you continue to do the work we started a year ago?

Mrs Skinner: Point of Order: My question was about a report entitled "Emergency Department Service Planning". I am referring to comments such as, "To review the level of service at Sutherland Hospital". The Minister has the wrong report!

Mr KNOWLES: We are rebuilding Sutherland Hospital: we are rebuilding all of those facilities. Which one of these recommendations will you not implement?

BLACK SIGATOKA OUTBREAK

Mr NEWELL: My question without notice is to the Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation. What is the Government's response to the outbreak of black sigatoka in Queensland?

Mr AMERY: The Leader of the National Party has already been criticised for taking his question out of this morning's newspaper—though that is not as bad as the person sitting beside him, the Leader of the Opposition, who got her question from the honourable member for Hawkesbury five minutes before questions commenced today. What a beauty it was! Just for the record, they do not have to have questions, just a newspaper or anything that is handed to them just before question time. I thank the honourable member for Tweed for his very important question. I am able to confirm to the House that there has been an outbreak of the exotic banana disease, black sigatoka, detected in bananas from Tully in north Queensland. Although the disease has been found in Queensland on a small number of occasions in the past, it has never been found in New South Wales, and the local banana industry, understandably, would like to keep it that way. An incursion of black sigatoka into New South Wales would seriously impact on the production of New South Wales banana growers.

The disease is a fungus spread by spores. It ruins the leaves and causes fruit to ripen prematurely, reducing yields. It occurs in Papua New Guinea and on several islands in the Torres Strait. The New South Wales Government's primary concern is for the welfare of New South Wales banana growers. The Government will do everything it can to ensure that the disease is kept out of our State. The banana industry in New South Wales is valued at \$60 million at the farm gate, with a significant flow-on to local communities in support services and transport. There are approximately 1,000 banana plantations in New South Wales, employing about 3,000 people. The industry is extremely important to the communities of Ballina, Bellingen, Byron Bay, Coffs Harbour, Copmanhurst, Grafton, Greater Taree, Hastings, Lismore, Kempsey, Kyogle, Maclean, Nambucca, Pristine Waters, the Richmond Valley and the Tweed.

In order to protect the industry in these communities I have signed a proclamation under the Plant Diseases Act 1924 to prevent the importation into New South Wales of bananas from within 50 kilometres of the outbreak site in Queensland. The requirements of the proclamation will protect the banana industries in the local government areas of the communities I have mentioned. The proclamation is subject to the approval of the Governor, but it is expected that that approval will be obtained this week. The proclamation would prevent any potentially infected material, particularly leaf litter, from being brought into this State in banana boxes. In addition, the boxes themselves and any other materials that bananas have come into contact with will also be prevented from entering New South Wales.

The proclamation would prevent the movement of any farm machinery and equipment from the affected zone into the banana growing parts of the State, because this is also a potential way of spreading the disease. It would also require all packaging of bananas imported from Queensland to state clearly the localities in which the bananas were grown and packed. These protocols will ensure that disease-free bananas sourced from within the 50-kilometre zone come from a property that has been inspected and found disease-free and that no leaf material is found in the packaging. Strict import protocols are being devised to allow the importation of disease-free bananas from within the 50-kilometre zone. In addition, major supermarkets that import large numbers of bananas from Queensland have been informed of these protocols. Supermarket representatives have indicated that although they will be inconvenienced by these requirements they of course will comply.

Consultation with the banana industry committee is ongoing but the committee sees the Queensland outbreak as a potential threat to the livelihoods of growers in the banana industry. This is why the New South Wales Government takes the threat seriously and has acted accordingly. I am advised that the Queensland Department of Primary Industries has also acted promptly to ensure that the disease outbreak is contained. Queensland legislation requires all banana plants within 500 metres of the diseased plants to be destroyed and prohibits the removal of bananas from within a 50-kilometre radius of the outbreak site. The Queensland department has implemented the banana black sigatoka incursion management plan, which has been developed jointly by the Queensland industry and the Queensland Department of Primary Industries. Under this plan the diseased plants have already been destroyed and surveillance of other properties in the area is being undertaken to ensure that no further plants are infected.

Mr Souris: They were asking for an exclusion zone.

Mr AMERY: The Leader of the National Party could have asked a question on the matter if he wanted to.

Mr Souris: I was waiting for you to come on ABC radio.

Mr Anderson: It was not in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Mr AMERY: I have just been corrected by the honourable member for Londonderry. He indicated that the Leader of the National Party could not ask me a question because the matter was not reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Mrs Chikarovski: Point of order: The Minister is quite correct: It was not in the *Sydney Morning Herald*; it was on the ABC yesterday afternoon.

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

Mr AMERY: Queensland producers within the affected 50-kilometre area, to their credit—this is a very important point—have voluntarily agreed to a one-week moratorium on the movement of their bananas. Following that, the strictly controlled movement of disease-free bananas will be allowed by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries. New South Wales Agriculture regulatory staff will closely monitor the wholesale and retail produce markets in Sydney to ensure that the voluntary moratorium by Queensland growers and the conditions of the proposed proclamation are complied with. I commend the honourable member for Tweed, who has been working very closely with the banana industry on this and many other issues.

[Interruption]

Mr Speaker, don't call the honourable member for Wakehurst to order. He is living proof that you do not need a long neck to be a goose.

POKER MACHINE LEVY

Mr OAKESHOTT: My question is directed to the Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development. Now that the Minister's Labor counterparts in Victoria have decided to impose a \$4,000 levy on poker machines, and given that such an all-machine levy was a 1997 Labor Party conference motion, can the Minister tell the House when a similar all-of-poker-machine levy is to be introduced in New South Wales?

Mr FACE: As the honourable member for Port Macquarie would know, a variety of matters have been under review by the Government. At some period in the future we will know the result.

COUNTRY TOWN WATER AND SEWERAGE PROGRAM

Mr D. L. PAGE: My question is directed to the Minister for Land and Water Conservation. Does the Minister agree with the comments of his colleague, the Labor member for Bathurst, that the country town water and sewerage scheme "needs an extra \$70 million or \$80 million a year for environmental and public health reasons? If so, why has he agreed to spend just a miserly \$15 million a year extra on the scheme, disadvantaging rural families?

Mr AMERY: What a great question! I agree with the honourable member for Bathurst about the need for increased funding for the country town water and sewerage scheme. That is why we are spending not \$15 million a year but closer to \$65 million.

Mr D. L. Page: Point of order: The Minister is misleading the House. We are talking about an extra \$15 million. The honourable member for Bathurst is talking about an extra \$70 million to \$80 million.

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

Mr AMERY: In the last budget the Treasurer gave the department about \$52 million a year for the country town water and sewerage program. As I have said to many country communities, in effect we will be spending \$1 million a week on the country town water and sewerage program. This is important to give a decent sewerage scheme, to upgrade our sewerage treatment plants and to improve the quality of water being discharged into our river systems. It is also important for the reuse of water being taken up by many in the farming community. Because of the pressure on the scheme brought about not only because of the large number of applications coming forward but also because many of the applications in the last year came from big towns and inland cities that are undertaking a massive upgrade of their water and sewerage systems. Coffs Harbour, Tamworth and Mittagong—just to name three—are making a big draw on the program.

As I said to the House before, the previous Minister, Mr Yeadon, added all the small towns with populations of fewer than 1,000 to the scheme, making the point that small towns should not be cut out of the scheme. So more towns have come into the scheme. As a result of representations by Country Labor—particularly the honourable member for Bathurst, who was mentioned in the question—this year the allocation

of \$52 million was increased by another \$5 million. In addition, the Premier said in his mid-term report that he had allocated another \$15 million. This basically means that the department's budget, give or take a couple of hundred thousand dollars either way, will be about \$65 million for the next number of years. That will be sufficient for the department to meet the criteria. This is an ongoing program amounting to more than \$800 million. We are committed to its completion. I am pleased that because of the good work by Country Labor the allocation in last year's budget and the forward estimates have been substantially increased by \$15 million on top of the \$1 million a week that had already been allocated to the program.

Mr D. L. PAGE: I ask a supplementary question. Given that there is a \$65 million differential between what the honourable member for Bathurst is advocating and what the Minister is able to give, does the Minister now concede that the so-called Country Labor faction is an ineffective sham?

Mr AMERY: That is why the country vote is for Country Labor first and for daylight and the Liberal Party second—and the National Party is nowhere to be seen. The Leader of the National Party is responsible for his party's poll result crashing faster than the Australian dollar has ever crashed. His percentage rates are down 2 per cent or 3 per cent. In view of the figures that Country Labor is getting, he should stay out of the ballpark. His branch members are joining Country Labor branches every day, and the list is getting longer.

RACING INDUSTRY SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY

Ms SALIBA: My question without notice is to the Minister for Gaming and Racing. What is the Government's response to recent claims of sexual harassment in the New South Wales racing industry?

Mr FACE: Honourable members would be interested to hear that His Honour Barrie Thorley, a retired District Court judge, will conduct a detailed review of sexual harassment policies, procedures and practices in the New South Wales racing industry. Recently the media has reported allegations of sexual harassment and assault in the racing industry. The investigation will look at the treatment of sexual harassment across the three codes of racing: thoroughbred, harness and greyhound. Mr Thorley will conduct an independent review and report his findings directly to me. In the past five years the three codes of racing have gone to great lengths to improve the level and quality of participant training. The independent review will serve the valuable purpose of providing participants and officials with an opportunity to look at mechanisms for complaint handling in an area of high importance in the modern workplace. The three controlling bodies will provide his Honour with every co-operation and assistance.

The terms of reference for the review are, first, to evaluate existing policies, procedures and practices of the three New South Wales racing controlling bodies for responding to complaints of workplace sexual harassment in the racing industry; second, to evaluate existing requirements and opportunities for education and training in relation to workplace sexual harassment applicable to participants and officials in the racing industry; and, third, to make recommendations to the Minister arising out of the findings of the independent review with respect to, first, the policies, procedures and practices of the three racing controlling bodies for dealing with workplace sexual harassment; second, the education and training of New South Wales racing industry participants and officials in relation to workplace sexual harassment; and, third, any other changes required to the workplace environment in the racing industry in order to create an environment in which sexual harassment is not tolerated. I have asked his Honour to report to me as soon as possible. The actual conduct of the review and the means by which evidence is gathered will be matters for the discretion of his Honour.

Questions without notice concluded.

HONOURABLE MEMBER FOR OXLEY

Privilege

Mr STONER (Oxley) [3.30 p.m.]: Mr Speaker, I raise a matter of privilege under Standing Order 101. This arose during question time today when I sought to take a point of order in relation to a question being answered by the Premier. You gave me the call and I took a point of order under Standing Order 138, in relation to relevance, as was my right under Standing Order 104. You then ruled there was no point of order, which was somewhat predictable, even though my legitimate view was that the question that the Premier was attempting to answer was about a promise made in 1995 and he insisted on answering in relation to the 1999 election.

At that stage you ruled there was no point of order and placed me on three calls to order. That is what my point of privilege is about. I wish this House to debate precisely what was the disorder or misconduct on my

part in taking a legitimate point of order that warranted my being placed not on one call to order but on three calls to order. At that stage no other member objected to the point of order, but you placed me on three calls to order in any event. This had the effect of shutting me up for the rest of question time: I could not take another point of order, because I was fearful of being ejected from the Chamber, having been placed on three calls to order. Of course that had the effect of shutting me up.

Standing Order 288 refers to members being called to order more than three times. That standing order clearly states that a member ought to be placed on three separate calls. For one incident of supposed misconduct or disorder you cannot place me on three calls to order, even if it had been acceptable to call me to order; you should have placed me on one call, not three. I also contrast your ruling with the behaviour today of the Minister for Health, who on two separate occasions refused to resume his seat when the honourable member for North Shore sought to take a point of order, as required by Standing Order 105. He also refused to sit when the point of order was taken.

Mr Whelan: Point of order: It is becoming a practice for members to confuse the issue of privilege with that of dissent—not that I am encouraging the honourable member to move dissent. There is a great difference between what the honourable member is indicating and the text of what he is saying.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. I will address that matter.

Mr STONER: The Minister for Health, on two separate occasions, refused to take his seat when a point of order was called against him, as required by Standing Order 105. Mr Speaker, when you rose to your feet he also refused to take his seat. Therefore, on three occasions he breached the standing orders regarding order and conduct in the House. Was the Minister for Health called to order? No, not even once, let alone three times. But I was placed on three calls to order simply for taking a legitimate point of order. Today no member of the Government was placed on a call to order, despite numerous examples of conduct unbecoming. I have a notice of motion that reads:

That as a matter of privilege this House dissent from the ruling of Mr Speaker on 10 April 2001 that the member for Oxley be called to order for exercising his right under Standing Order 104 to raise a point of order.

I seek precedence for the motion.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Chair, in determining whether there is a prima facie case of breach of privilege, must decide whether the matter of which the honourable member for Oxley complains could fairly and reasonably be said to be capable of interfering with the performance of his duty as a member. He has addressed the House, so obviously the rulings of the Chair have not interfered with the performance of his duty. Therefore, he has not established a prima facie case of breach of privilege.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

TAFE Funding

Ms MEGARRITY (Menai) [3.38 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because it goes to the heart of concerns that I have for young people in my electorate, and in south-western Sydney generally, on how they can be trained to get a job. Yesterday's job advertisement figures show that the Howard Government is still seriously mismanaging the Australian economy. In two successive months there have been falling job advertisements. To make matters worse, the Federal Government is abrogating its responsibility for funding of TAFE New South Wales. I urge the House to give urgent consideration to my motion today.

Inner-city Police Station Closures

Ms MOORE (Bligh) [3.39 p.m.]: This motion is urgent because last night a meeting of 250 people at Redfern Town Hall—including the honourable member for Heffron representing the Government, the honourable member for Epping representing the Opposition, me as the Independent local member, police officers, members of the Police Association, South Sydney councillors, residents and business people—unanimously rejected the proposal to close inner-city police stations and amalgamate them into super commands known as super local area commands [LACs]. This followed similar resolutions at a meeting last December of more than 300 people in Kings Cross and a meeting in December of about 200 police officers and community members in Redfern, organised by the Police Association.

This motion is urgent because the meeting unanimously called on the Carr Government to ensure that the Police Service refocuses on the reform process recommended by the Wood royal commission; develops a recruitment program to properly resource local area commands; and supports and enhances community policing in local area commands. Urgent action is needed because the number of reports of serious crime is escalating. The crisis is focused on the known drug hot spots of Caroline Lane off Eveleigh Street, Springfield Mall at Kings Cross and the Oxford Street entertainment strip, particularly around Taylor Square.

This motion is urgent because the problem is spilling over into surrounding areas, and is seriously affecting the safety and amenity of local communities. With a Police Service budget of \$1.3 billion statewide, the House should consider as a matter of urgency why communities in both Chippendale and Kings Cross believe that they have to resort to private policing. It is urgent because residents and business operators are frustrated and angry at the inability of police to respond to complaints because all officers are already involved with other serious crimes. It is urgent because our badly stretched police commands are unable to act on all complaints, let alone undertake regular uniformed foot patrols to deter crime.

The motion is urgent because underresourcing is a serious, long-term problem, with commands in the city east region understaffed between 10 and 15 per cent. It is urgent because a high number of probationary officers lack experience in dealing with the complex policing problems of an area that was the target of the police royal commission. Those officers need the support and supervision of experienced officers. This is not a criticism of local police, who are strongly supported; it is a concern that we do not have enough officers to ensure safe local communities. Almost daily in this House the Premier says that he would agree with the commissioner's plan to close police stations only if it meant more police on the streets, reduced response times, improved conditions for police and satisfied local communities.

The Premier must realise that the commissioner's flawed plan will not work. To the contrary, mounting local, national and international evidence demonstrates that the creation of super LACs would not increase the number of police on the streets, it would reduce police response times and would distance police from local communities. The Olympic policing arrangements have been used as a model. Those arrangements required a ban on leave and training, increased overtime and court closures. Such restrictions are not sustainable and claims of achieving an increased number of police on the streets by that method are not credible.

The motion is urgent because American policing expert Professor James Fyfe has said that it is a high-risk plan. He has reported that amalgamations may save money but will lower community satisfaction; the trend in the United States is to make police more accessible through establishing local stations; community policing is effective and builds community relationships; and promises to transfer large numbers of officers from administration to street duty have been overly optimistic. The House should consider why our current policing system, with its focus on community policing, does work if it is properly resourced. The motion is urgent because the Government must instruct the Commissioner of Police to refocus on reform, as recommended by the Wood royal commission, and on improving staffing through active recruitment and strategies to keep the hardworking and conscientious police officers that we already have.

The motion is urgent because the community is increasingly concerned that the \$40 million spent on the Wood royal commission has not achieved the expected outcomes. Honourable members should consider why the senior management style of the Police Service appears to be becoming increasingly remote and secretive and that the Police Service is rigidly controlled from the top down. The commissioner's publicly stated distaste for accountability to various watchdogs only fuels these fears in the community. Extraordinary effort is being wasted on high-level internal disputes and the flawed plan to close inner-city police stations. It is important to consider this matter because we must reject the commissioner's flawed plan to close local police stations. We must ensure that the Police Service refocuses on the reform process, develops a recruitment program to properly resource local area commands and supports and enhances community policing in local area commands.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 49

Ms Allan	Mr Gibson	Mr Orkopoulos
Mr Amery	Mr Greene	Mr E. T. Page
Ms Andrews	Ms Harrison	Mr Price
Mr Aquilina	Mr Hickey	Dr Refshauge
Mr Ashton	Mr Iemma	Ms Saliba
Mr Bartlett	Mr Knowles	Mr W. D. Smith
Ms Beamer	Mrs Lo Po'	Mr Stewart
Mr Black	Mr Lynch	Mr Tripodi
Mr Brown	Mr Markham	Mr Watkins
Miss Burton	Mr Martin	Mr West
Mr Campbell	Mr McBride	Mr Whelan
Mr Carr	Mr McManus	Mr Woods
Mr Collier	Ms Megarrity	Mr Yeadon
Mr Crittenden	Mr Mills	
Mr Debus	Mr Moss	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Face	Mr Newell	Mr Anderson
Mr Gaudry	Ms Nori	Mr Thompson

Noes, 33

Mr Barr	Mr McGrane	Mr Souris
Mr Brogden	Mr Merton	Mr Tink
Mr Collins	Ms Moore	Mr Torbay
Mr Debnam	Mr O'Farrell	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr George	Mr Oakeshott	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Glachan	Mr D. L. Page	Mr Webb
Mr Hartcher	Mr Piccoli	Mr Windsor
Mr Hazzard	Mr Richardson	
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Rozzoli	
Mr Humpherson	Ms Seaton	<i>Tellers,</i>
Dr Kernohan	Mrs Skinner	Mr R. H. L. Smith
Mr Maguire	Mr Slack-Smith	Mr Stoner

Question resolved in the affirmative.

TAFE FUNDING**Urgent Motion**

Ms MEGARRITY (Menai) [3.52 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates the South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE for achieving a 13 per cent increase in enrolments in courses such as building and construction, computing and tourism and hospitality this year;
- (2) notes the release yesterday of the ANZ Bank survey of job advertisements for March showing a decline of 8 per cent in the number of vacant positions advertised;
- (3) notes that since 1992 the Federal Government has had responsibility for paying for enrolment growth in the vocational education and training system; and
- (4) condemns the Federal Minister for Training, Dr David Kemp, for his continuing failure to fund the rapid growth in TAFE around Australia resulting in more than 45,000 young Australians being turned away from training each year since he became Minister.

I was delighted to be informed this morning by my colleague the Minister for Education and Training that enrolments at my local TAFEs had dramatically increased this year. This time last year the South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE had enrolled 28,158 students. As of this week the institute has enrolled 32,222 students, which is an increase of more than 13 per cent. That compares with growth across TAFE New South Wales this year of about 6 per cent—itself a laudable achievement.

The South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE is recognised as the leading provider of vocational education and training in the region. It has six TAFE colleges—at Liverpool, Miller, Granville, Wetherill Park, Macquarie Fields and Campbelltown. Those colleges serve 804,000 residents—and growing—of south western Sydney, living in an area of 3,591 square kilometres. It offers courses as diverse as butchering and business studies, computing and childcare, biological sciences and building. The Institute has won a wide range of awards for excellence, including the 2000 Gold TAFE Quality Award, the Western Sydney Industry Award for Tourism, several gold medals at the 2000 National Workskills Competition, the Australian National Training Authority Training Provider of the Year Award, and the Premier's Public Sector Gold Award in 1999, to name just a few of its many achievements.

The South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE has also built an enviable record of industry partnerships. After all, TAFE exists to train people to meet industry needs. For example, the Institute has developed partnerships with Toyota Motor Corporation Australia for training in forklift and tow tractor equipment. TAFE now delivers courses nationwide using the latest Toyota equipment, including a course developed for diamond miners in Western Australia. The South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE also works with Castrol Australia and BP Australia developing courses in hydrocarbon chemical and oils, repairs, service and retail training. For BP service station assistants, the Institute even delivers the courses on site across metropolitan Sydney and throughout country New South Wales.

As south-western Sydney has the highest concentration of people from a non-English speaking background in New South Wales—a third of all residents of the region—TAFE has a major role in English language literacy. In partnership with Fairfield, Liverpool, Camden and Campbelltown councils, the Institute is training council staff in literacy skills on the job using the groundbreaking Workplace English Language Literacy [WELL] program. The other Institute that serves my constituents is the Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE. It too is growing at a rapid rate; this time last year it had 25,504 students enrolled. As of this week it has 27,214 students, an increase of 6.7 per cent.

I know staff and students at the Padstow College of TAFE, on the northern border of the Menai electorate and I am very impressed with the work of the Aeroskills Centre at the Padstow college. The Aeroskills Centre is a world-class facility for training in aircraft and maintenance engineering. Education and training services are provided to the aircraft industry both domestically and overseas. Qantas is a major stakeholder in the operation, and new training arrangements have been designed to meet its particular needs. These involve co-delivery of programs between Qantas and TAFE.

To accommodate the requirements of the general aviation sector and regionally based carriers such as Impulse, joint arrangements are also in place for co-delivery of programs with the Hunter Institute of Technology. The Padstow facility incorporates a state-of-the-art unit for manufacture and repair of structural componentry fabricated from advanced composite materials such as kevlar. This facility generates significant commercial revenue from both military and civil aviation clients, and part of the revenue is regularly used to bring teaching staff up to date with cutting-edge technological developments in this sphere. Honourable members may recall that when a number of Qantas aircraft in Sydney suffered hail damage a couple of years ago, Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE was able to provide a long-term loan of equipment vital to effect speedy and safe repairs.

The Padstow college also services practical training for undergraduate and graduate students in aeronautical engineering from the universities of New South Wales and Sydney on a commercial basis. Overseas provision involves both onshore operations at Padstow for full fee paying overseas students at advanced diploma level and also offshore delivery of trade-level training in Fiji, in partnership with the Fiji Institute of Technology as a commercial client. Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE recently won the Bankstown City Council Export Award for a service industry on the strength of these initiatives. All of these achievements in the TAFE colleges which serve my constituents add up to one clear result—jobs. For job opportunities to keep growing TAFE New South Wales needs to keep growing.

In 1992 State and Territory governments and the Commonwealth Government entered into a partnership to ensure that Australia's skills base would grow. That partnership resulted in the establishment of the Australian National Training Authority [ANTA] agreement, a compact in which the States provide world-class training and the Commonwealth provides funding to pay for growth. Under the last ANTA agreement signed by the former Federal Labor Government, the States and Territories received an increase of \$70 million a year in funding for their vocational education and training systems. This meant that students who wanted to study for a job could attend TAFE and expect to get into the course of their choice. However, when the Howard Government negotiated an ANTA agreement in 1998, it stopped growth funding completely.

In New South Wales alone that meant a cut in funding of \$138 million between 1998 and 2000. Instead Dr Kemp, the Federal training Minister imposed the ironically named policy—"growth through efficiencies." That is code for forcing the States to fire staff and close colleges to fund growth. Yet in the face of Commonwealth cuts New South Wales has managed to keep TAFE growing in the past three years, which is testimony to the leadership of the Minister for Education and Training. But the time has come for the new ANTA agreement to be negotiated. Last year a working party of bureaucrats from the Commonwealth, States and Territories predicted that TAFE could grow at about 5.7 per cent per year for the next three years. As I outlined earlier, the figures for the TAFE colleges which serve my constituents—13 per cent and 6.7 per cent respectively—reveal that even this was a conservative prediction. The same working group suggested that to fund that growth about \$150 million a year would be required.

Only last month one of the peak national industry bodies, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, recommended to the Commonwealth Government that vocational education and training needed an investment of \$130 million a year in the next three years. But when State and Territory Ministers confronted Dr Kemp three weeks ago in Canberra his offer was inadequate. The offer comprised moving \$90 million of existing capital funding into recurrent funding, or, in other words, robbing Peter to pay Paul; indexation of \$60 million, which the States are entitled to and will receive anyway; and the States footing the rest of the bill. His offer would have resulted in an increase for New South Wales of less than half of 1 per cent of the entire TAFE budget in the first year. He could not seriously expect TAFE New South Wales to keep growing at record rates.

State and Territory training Ministers, representing 85 per cent of the nation's TAFE system, declared no confidence in the Federal Minister, Dr Kemp, for once again refusing to properly fund the TAFE system. Ministers went to Canberra to resolve the funding crisis, but the Federal response was illogical and unfair. TAFE is the fastest-growing education network in Australia. More than one million young people study at TAFE every year to attain the skills they need to find jobs. TAFE is not about learning for the sake of learning: every TAFE course is carefully targeted at the needs of employers. In New South Wales alone an extra 30,000 students have enrolled at TAFE colleges since 1999, and the entire cost burden has fallen on the State Government.

A further 45,000 students nationwide are turned away each year because there is not enough money to fund extra places. Our students deserve better. The States and Territories are doing their part by increasing funding. The Federal Government, which holds the purse strings, refuses to help. Dr Kemp came to the table with an Australiawide offer of \$20 million this year and another \$5 million in the following years. That is an extra \$13 per student this year and only \$3 extra from 2002. It is not even enough for a packet of pens. The Federal Government knows the price of everything, but the value of nothing. Dr Kemp says that even the \$3 offer is generous, even excessive. He has told the nation's 1.5 million TAFE students to take it or leave it. Meanwhile, jobless rates continue to go up and Dr Kemp's funding for TAFE continues to go down. It is an absurd situation! The time has come for the Prime Minister to overrule his education spokesman and step in to resolve this crisis. Young Australians deserve better. We call on the Federal Government to deliver now.

Mr RICHARDSON (The Hills) [4.02 p.m.]: I lead for the Opposition. I move:

That the motion be amended by leaving out paragraph (4) with a view to inserting instead:

- (4) congratulates the Federal Government for offering \$135 million to additional recurrent funding for vocational training as part of a \$405 million commitment which requires only a \$75 million matching contribution by the States and Territories.

I was interested to hear the contribution of the honourable member for Menai. In particular I was delighted to hear that the South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE is doing so well. The list of its achievements tends to belie the thrust of the honourable member's motion, which is that TAFE has fallen on hard times, it is not adequately funded, it is short-changed in numerous ways by the Federal Government, and Dr Kemp's offer of additional funding is inadequate. The Federal Government has attempted to renegotiate the ANTA agreement with the States.

Less than one month ago South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory, all of which have non-Labor governments, agreed to the new ANTA agreement. They have given their commitment to invest in skills and innovation. But Labor States, particularly New South Wales, have allowed politics to take the place of policy; they are attempting to bash the Federal Government instead of providing vocational training opportunities for our young people. The Opposition finds that absolutely reprehensible. At a meeting on 16 March it was very clear that the Labor States, led by New South Wales, had no intention of signing an agreement or entering into constructive discussions. In fact, they came to spoil and to wreck.

The Commonwealth's offer to the States was very generous. It represented an additional recurrent funding element over and above that for the year 2001 of \$135 million. The proposed total Commonwealth expenditure over three years would be \$405 million. The Commonwealth is asking for a major commitment by the States and Territories of only \$75 million. The vast bulk of the money will come from the Federal Government. However, there is a requirement from the cash-rich States to provide some funding to present training opportunities for young people. It is not a bad offer. I would encourage the Minister for Training and Education and the Government to accept it and get on with the job of providing vocational training opportunities for young people.

I have lost count of the number of times we have debated the ANTA agreement in this place in the past 12 months, but it must be four or five times. Whenever the ANTA agreement is due to be renegotiated the Carr Government grandstands. It claims that it is inadequate, that the Federal Government is to blame, and it will not acknowledge that it is incumbent on this Government to provide some funding—just as it has been incumbent on this Government in the past to provide some productivity improvements as part of the agreement, which it has been reluctant to do. There is no question that New South Wales has been dragging the chain. But the latest estimates show that at the end of the last financial year 264,210 new apprentices were in training, which is an increase of 12.3 per cent on the year before.

The honourable member for Menai claims that there is inadequate funding and insufficient opportunities to train young people. Those figures totally belie what the honourable member for Menai says. The Federal Government believes, and the figures bear this out, that New South Wales has been underperforming the rest of Australia in this very important area. New South Wales is not enthusiastic about new apprenticeships and it is not enthusiastic about training kids to give them job opportunities. For the sake of a mere pittance—a few tens of millions of dollars—the Carr Labor Government is to be condemned for not signing the ANTA agreement and getting on with the job.

I note also that the motion refers to the release of an ANZ bank survey on job advertisements which shows a decline of 8 per cent in the number of vacant positions advertised. I am interested in this issue. This morning I heard a debate on ABC radio involving the Federal Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, Mr Tony Abbott. He pointed out that while the ANZ survey showed a decline in the number of advertised positions, there was in fact a 2 per cent increase in the number of jobs being advertised on the Internet. That suggested that there has been a shift in the traditional way in which jobs are being advertised and promoted. Of course, one would not expect the honourable member for Menai to have picked up on that point, or for her to be ahead of the game in any way.

The comments of Tony Abbott suggest that things are not nearly as tough as the honourable member for Menai would have us believe. There are jobs out there. The Federal Government has done a wonderful job of providing job opportunities and of reducing the level of unemployment from the pre-1996 level. I am sure it will continue to do that. The Federal Government would have more chance of doing that if the Carr Labor Government were to stop putting politics ahead of policy, get on with the job, cough up its share of the funding that is required under the ANTA agreement and provide these training opportunities for young people. In that way the Government would provide training opportunities in the South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE, in the Menai electorate.

I am sure the constituents of the honourable member for Menai would welcome a more constructive attitude and approach to this issue than that which she has exhibited today. She is part of the Government's problem. The Government is totally obstructionist over any issue that involves the Federal Government. The Government was willing to take the money from the GST and run, but it continues to condemn the GST at every opportunity. During the ANTA discussions the Minister for Education and Training attempted to blame the Federal Government for all of the TAFE cuts. Most of the discussions, therefore, were not fruitful in any sense; the meeting became a slanging match. However, the Minister was forced to admit that the State has reduced funding for TAFE in real terms.

One can understand why Dr Kemp has stuck to his guns and insisted that New South Wales and the other Labor States pull their weight in this important area. For those reasons I support the amendment, which asks the House to congratulate the Federal Government's approach to this important issue. I call on the Carr Labor Government to get on with the job, sign the ANTA agreement and make those opportunities available for young people.

Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [4.12 p.m.]: I support the motion and, of course, I oppose the nonsense amendment moved by the honourable member for The Hills. The motion stems from two objective factors: first,

the massive growth in south-western Sydney generally, but particularly in the number of students attending the South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE and, second, the lack of Federal Government preparedness to fund that growth. Those two factors have given rise to the motion. The attitude of the Federal Government replicates the bias that it has generally against south-west Sydney. One could talk about a whole range of issues in relation to that, but I will not deviate from the motion by going into them in any detail.

However, I mention the attitude of the Federal Government to Bankstown aerodrome, which is an example of the clear bias on the part of the current Federal Government against anything that smacks of south-west Sydney. That, in turn, reflects the fact that the Federal Government is the least egalitarian and most elitist Federal Government in this country since that of Stanley Bruce. Bias is an issue on the topic of growth, however, because growth affects different parts of Sydney at a different rate. It affects south-western Sydney particularly, so if there is a problem with the funding of growth in anything—in this instance growth in places at TAFE—it will impact far more severely on south-west Sydney than it will on other parts of Sydney.

In the Liverpool electorate there are two campuses of the South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE, one at Miller and one at Liverpool. The South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE is growing at the fastest rate of any institute in the State, that is, a rate of 13 per cent per annum. If the current growth rate is maintained, it could well exceed 17 per cent over the next three years. In relation to my electorate, the New South Wales Government has certainly, despite the protestations of the fanciful member for The Hills—

Mr Amery: Fanciful?

Mr LYNCH: I am sorry, the Minister interjects to ask whether the honourable member is fanciful. I should not say that the honourable member for The Hills is necessarily fanciful, but, to put it politely, his ideas are certainly fanciful. The New South Wales Government recognises the need to provide for that growing demand. More than \$5.5 million has been allocated for new and refurbished facilities at Liverpool TAFE and Miller TAFE over the past five years. The growth at those TAFE colleges has been significant. For example, an examination of the figures from 1996 to 2000 relating a number of training areas at the Liverpool college shows that there have been dramatic increases: community services, health and education, 113 per cent growth; computing, 174 per cent growth; science, technical and other categories, 779.5 per cent growth.

There has been massive development. The type of growth that is taking place, however, is particularly significant for south-western Sydney. As the Premier commented recently to the annual general meeting of the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, there is an opportunity in south-western Sydney to develop skills and jobs in the information technology [IT] sector. I do not think that that will solve all of our problems. I know that some of my parliamentary colleagues, including some in my own party, think that that will solve every conceivable problem in south-western Sydney in the years to come. That is a nonsense position, but it is certainly an important element in finding the solution to those problems.

The development of IT skills through the TAFE system is an important part of developing a strategy to deal with levels of unemployment in south-west Sydney. A lot of the work has been done by the State Government in TAFE, and in south-western Sydney particularly, in that field. A new flexible learning information centre is to be constructed at Liverpool TAFE over the next two years at a cost of \$8.85 million. It will provide additional facilities for IT, business administration and a number of other aspects of job creation in what some people would call the new economy. It is certainly untrue to say that the State is not pulling its weight in relation to that aspect. It is a real tragedy, however, that the Federal Government is totally unable to come to the party and make a similar contribution.

The debate is not assisted by what can almost be described as an archetypal performance from the honourable member for The Hills. His comments, for example, that we do not really know what is going on out there and that things are not quite as hard as people are trying to make out are on a par with the arrogance and pomposity of his comment that people in my part of Sydney aspire to live in The Hills. Once again his ideas are, to put it mildly, fanciful. He also made the claim, of course, that the Labor States were giving the Federal Government a hard time and that, therefore, they were playing politics when the non-Labor States were not. In fact the opposite is the reality. The non-Labor States are making life easy for the Federal Government because they are not standing up for their constituents or for their electorates—and they are playing politics. They, together with the honourable member for The Hills, ought to be condemned.

Mr O'DOHERTY (Hornsby) [4.17 p.m.]: What actually happened at the ANTA meeting? Let me deal with the fact which the honourable member for Liverpool is trying to dress up. At the ANTA meeting the Commonwealth Government offered additional money to the States to assist in the further growth of TAFE for

the next period of the annual agreement. South Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory gave in-principle agreement to the offer but the Labor States did not. New South Wales, Victoria and the other States decided they would try to hold out. In his contribution the honourable member for The Hills mentioned that this debate is not new; that we have had this debate several times in the last couple of years. Every time the ANTA agreement comes up for debate at the Ministerial Council of Training Ministers, the Minister for Education and Training normally comes down to the Chamber to entertain us with a rerun of the argument that took place around the table at the ministerial council meeting. Today the honourable member for Menai has taken the Minister's place.

Today the honourable member for Menai, reading exclusively from a speech prepared for her, no doubt, by the Minister's department, gave us the same argument as those that we have heard before. The Commonwealth's offer to the States, including Labor States, will result in an additional \$480 million in funding being available to support training places over the next three years. There is a commitment to growth in new apprenticeships and also a commitment to growth in innovation—delivering training packages that are relevant and real and that provide sustainable jobs because people have relevant flexible qualifications.

I state again that there is a commitment to new apprenticeships because, over the life of the Howard Government, Labor States, particularly New South Wales, have been slow compared with other States in Australia to implement new apprenticeship policies. New apprenticeships have been extremely popular in those States that have grabbed hold of the funding and have made it available in the marketplace. New South Wales has dragged the chain in providing new apprenticeship opportunities to people in New South Wales. At the recent meeting of the ANTA ministerial council, Labor States would not even acknowledge that they had a role in funding future growth in the system.

This is a historic debate; it goes back a long time and that precedes this Parliament and the previous Parliament. Over the years, there has been an acknowledgment by all parties and by governments of various political persuasions, all sorts of combinations of Federal and State governments, that growth within the training system would have to be funded by efficiencies made within the system. Once again, New South Wales has dragged the chain on those efficiency gains. I think, from memory, that the efficiency gain in Victoria was about 9 per cent, whereas New South Wales achieved just 3 per cent during the same period. Over that period all the States, New South Wales included, were signatories to the agreement.

On many occasions the Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. John Aquilina, signed ANTA agreements containing exactly the same provisions. The funding of growth by efficiencies was done away with in the last ANTA agreement. That is when David Kemp said, "We will have a new arrangement, but efficiency gains will still have to be made and the States will have to play their part in achieving better efficiencies in the system." We must ensure that we have a flexible and efficient training scheme. Not to do so would be to commit our training schemes to the previous century. We must keep moving forward and the States must play their part.

The States have agreed with each of these policy shifts as they have signed up for each of the ANTA agreements. The only place in which we end up with a disagreement is in the New South Wales Parliament or when Labor Ministers are seated at the ANTA table. However, they take the money. All the money which the honourable member for Liverpool said earlier in his contribution was being spent in his electorate comes from the Federal Government. He should not sneeze at that money because that is where it is coming from.

The New South Wales Government should sign the agreement, which will provide a total investment \$480 million by all governments over the next three years for training and new apprenticeships throughout the country. Of that amount \$405 million is Commonwealth funding and \$75 million alone will come from the States as their contribution from efficiency gains. That is a good deal in anyone's language. It is good for students who require training and it is good for jobs in south-west Sydney. Government members should support the amendment moved by the honourable member for The Hills.

Mr WEST (Campbelltown) [4.22 p.m.]: I support the motion. During my by-election campaign I had an opportunity to visit the Campbelltown College of TAFE, inspect its tremendous facilities and learn about the opportunities it offers my constituents. During that visit the Minister for Education and Training and the Minister for Public Works officially handed over a new \$6.8 million state-of-the-art graphics arts and design facility to the college, stage seven of the TAFE college. That is a demonstration of the commitment of the New South Wales Government to TAFE. The facilities are impressive: high-tech computer and graphic design laboratories, and special facilities for sculpture, painting, drawing, video production and design. During its construction the facility created 120 jobs. With its completion it offers the people of my electorate new and better job opportunities through training. Indeed, the Minister for Public Works and Services said:

Not only has the project been a boost for the local economy, but the new facility will provide students with the best learning opportunities possible.

The Campbelltown TAFE college, one of the largest TAFE colleges in the State, has some 8,000 students. I congratulate Ian Tilbury and his staff on the great work they do. Unlike the Opposition, I believe they are performing well. We have only to look at the recent Western Sydney Industry Award finalists. The South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE had finalists in two categories: tourism and hospitality. That is a sensational performance. This is not underperforming; this is world's best practice. The college offers courses in ceramics, graphic design, information technology, business services, welfare and child care studies, building, construction, engineering and transport.

Campbelltown TAFE college also has perhaps the best hospitality training facility in the State, with catering and food service training preparing students for this burgeoning industry. I encourage any members who at some time in the future might be in the Campbelltown area to call into the Macarthur restaurant, which is run by students as part of that training. Campbelltown TAFE college is growing at a record rate. Enrolments in the building and construction courses are up by 59 per cent and in tourism and hospitality courses by 19 per cent. Enrolments in customer service and sales-related courses have more than trebled. Enrolments in the business service course have increased 40 per cent. Traditional trade areas are still booming at Campbelltown TAFE, with an increase in enrolments of more than 15 per cent between 1996 and 2000. We are proud of our TAFE. One has only to read John Allsop's comments in the western Sydney supplement of the *Australian* to learn that TAFE is committed to jobs:

Our graduates are work-ready for careers in industry and we offer training wherever and however industry needs it in the workplace, at our colleges and increasingly on-line.

These courses are assisting the young people in Campbelltown about getting jobs and getting ahead. South-west Sydney is one of the largest manufacturing areas in New South Wales, with 14 per cent of the State's manufacturing output. That means that, for Campbelltown and the region, TAFE's role as the trainer of tradespeople will remain of great importance. TAFE gives local training for local tradespeople to build houses for the expanding Campbelltown region. The population in south-west Sydney is growing. There are now 48,000 more people in the area than in 1996 and another 41,000 people are expected to move into the area over the next five years.

Three-quarters of the TAFE student population are under the age of 40, and almost half are under 25 years of age. Education, training and being work-ready are of central importance to the people of Campbelltown. To support TAFE is to support jobs in our area. Where is that commitment from the Federal Government, which has failed to properly fund TAFE New South Wales and refuses to provide necessary funds for young people in my electorate? If the South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE keeps growing at its current rate, almost 54,000 students will enrol this year. According to estimates from the Australian National Training Authority, since Dr Kemp became training Minister more than 45,000 young Australians have been turned away from TAFE every year through lack of Federal funding.

Over the next three years 17,000 additional students from the region I represent may be denied training if the Howard Government fails to act now. The Howard Government is letting down Australian industry. It is refusing to pay for the development of skills that are vital to Australia, to New South Wales and to the Campbelltown region. The Campbelltown region is fast becoming one of Australia's specialist manufacturing information technology hubs. A lack of skilled people trained by TAFE to meet industry requirements will hurt that emerging industry. As local member I cannot stand by and let the Federal Government deny the training opportunities my constituents need and deserve. Dr Kemp has had the opportunity to deliver growth funds for my local TAFE. He has had an opportunity to ensure that local people had access to jobs. I call on him to support TAFE and to support local jobs around Australia.

Ms MEGARRITY (Menai) [4.27 p.m.], in reply: I thank those honourable members who contributed to the debate. I particularly thank the honourable member for Liverpool and the honourable member for Campbelltown. I was impressed by the knowledge of the honourable member for Campbelltown, who has been the representative of the Campbelltown area for only a short time. It shows what a quality representative he is. That appears to cover the contribution of Government members to this debate. What can I say about the contribution of Opposition members to this debate?

Mr Stoner: Be nice.

Ms MEGARRITY: I will be nice. They did their best to defend the indefensible. That is about as nice as I can be. I was astounded to hear the honourable member for The Hills say that I should be more constructive. The first thing I did when I moved the motion was to congratulate the South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE on its increase in enrolments and on the awards that it received. I also pointed out that Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE has a wonderful partnership with private industry. The honourable member said that I was not being

constructive. It is certainly constructive to care about jobs and the quality of education that this State can provide for TAFE students. The honourable member said that things are not really all that bad because we are managing to achieve the results referred to. But that is because the State has taken on the cost burden. That should not continue. It is nothing short of a miracle that there have been these achievements when the cost burden has been imposed on the State. It is also attributable to the initiative and the enterprise of the various TAFE colleges that have had to do more with less as growth has continued.

The most the honourable member for Hornsby had to offer to the debate was to accuse me of reading a prepared speech. I had warned the honourable member for Campbelltown, the newest member of this House, that Opposition members might try that on him but I have been here for two years and I did not think that they would try it on me. It shows how desperate they must be. When I spoke on the motion initially I said that it went to the heart of my concerns about young people in my electorate, and indeed in all our electorates, that is, getting training and getting a job. The honourable member for The Hills may well quote Tony Abbott to dispute jobs figures but the honourable member for The Hills and I agree that the ANZ Bank survey of job advertisements showed a decline of 8 per cent. Tony Abbott may use a bit of latitude to talk about the Internet but both sides of the House agree that there is a decline of 8 per cent in the number of positions advertised.

That is further evidence of the Howard Government's mismanagement of the Australian economy, especially in the light of the fact that there have been two successive months of decline in job advertisements—hardly an aberration. Some economists now claim that the national jobless rate could rise to 7.5 per cent by the end of this year. The best antidote to unemployment is training in real job skills which meet the needs of real employers. That is what TAFE New South Wales does best. I hope that both sides of the House agree on that point. TAFE gives people skills that they need to get a job. The South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE and the Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE, which I dealt with in great detail in my initial speech, both serve my electorate and are tremendously successful in what they do.

In case the Opposition needs reminding, the South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE is recognised as the leading provider of vocational education and training in the region. The South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE alone has had an increase in enrolments of 13 per cent this year, the highest rate of growth in the State. The bottom line is that young people are being given the opportunity by TAFE New South Wales to learn skills to make them ready for work. The urgency of the motion today stems from the fact that at the same time that John Howard and Peter Costello are undermining the economy, Dr Kemp is undermining TAFE. Young Australians who want training are being turned away from TAFE colleges around the nation because Dr Kemp refuses to pay for enrolment growth. This is the Commonwealth's traditional responsibility.

The honourable member for Hornsby was correct when he said that this was a longstanding debate. Indeed it is. It is traditional that the Commonwealth meets this responsibility. It is fair to say that the future job prospects of young people in south-western Sydney depend on Dr Kemp footing the bill for their training. Commonwealth funding runs out in a matter of weeks and the time for Dr Kemp to pay up is now. We debate this motion as a matter of urgency because the issue is coming up for further debate. It is long past time for the Commonwealth Government to resolve this matter, to give our TAFE colleges the funding they need to provide real skills for real people seeking real jobs. [*Time expired.*]

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 48

Ms Allan	Mrs Grusovin	Mr E. T. Page
Mr Amery	Ms Harrison	Mr Price
Ms Andrews	Mr Hickey	Dr Refshauge
Mr Ashton	Mr Iemma	Ms Saliba
Mr Bartlett	Mr Knowles	Mr W. D. Smith
Ms Beamer	Mrs Lo Po'	Mr Stewart
Mr Black	Mr Lynch	Mr Tripodi
Mr Brown	Mr Markham	Mr Watkins
Miss Burton	Mr Martin	Mr West
Mr Campbell	Mr McBride	Mr Whelan
Mr Collier	Mr McManus	Mr Woods
Mr Crittenden	Ms Megarritty	Mr Yeadon
Mr Debus	Mr Mills	
Mr Face	Mr Moss	
Mr Gaudry	Mr Newell	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gibson	Ms Nori	Mr Anderson
Mr Greene	Mr Orkopoulos	Mr Thompson

Noes, 29

Mr Armstrong
Mr Collins
Mr Debnam
Mr George
Mr Glachan
Mr Hartcher
Mr Hazzard
Ms Hodgkinson
Mr Humpherson
Dr Kernohan

Mr Maguire
Mr Merton
Mr Oakeshott
Mr O'Doherty
Mr O'Farrell
Mr D. L. Page
Mr Piccoli
Mr Richardson
Mr Rozzoli
Ms Seaton

Mrs Skinner
Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Souris
Mr Tink
Mr J. H. Turner
Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Webb
Tellers,
Mr R. H. L. Smith
Mr Stoner

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment negatived.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 47

Mr Amery
Ms Andrews
Mr Ashton
Mr Bartlett
Ms Beamer
Mr Black
Mr Brown
Miss Burton
Mr Campbell
Mr Collier
Mr Crittenden
Mr Debus
Mr Face
Mr Gaudry
Mr Gibson
Mr Greene

Mrs Grusovin
Ms Harrison
Mr Hickey
Mr Iemma
Mr Knowles
Mrs Lo Po'
Mr Lynch
Mr Markham
Mr Martin
Mr McBride
Mr McManus
Ms Megarrity
Mr Mills
Mr Moss
Mr Newell
Ms Nori

Mr Orkopoulos
Mr E. T. Page
Mr Price
Dr Refshauge
Ms Saliba
Mr W. D. Smith
Mr Stewart
Mr Tripodi
Mr Watkins
Mr West
Mr Whelan
Mr Woods
Mr Yeadon
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Mr Richardson
Mr Rozzoli
Ms Seaton

Mrs Skinner
Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Souris
Mr Tink
Mr J. H. Turner
Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Webb
Tellers,
Mr R. H. L. Smith
Mr Stoner

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Matter of Public Importance

Mr IEMMA (Lakemba—Minister for Public Works and Services, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship) [4.46 p.m.]: I am pleased to inform the House that today, as a result of the Government's strategic planning for a sustainable construction industry in the post-Olympic period, the outlook for the industry is very strong in the medium to long term. The Government's desire for a viable construction industry in the post-Olympic period is part of the reason why two weeks ago the Premier announced a \$1.5 billion injection into its capital works program. In turn that will generate some 6,000 jobs in the construction industry and will encourage strong economic growth across the State.

The list of projects announced by the Premier at Penrith included schools, hospitals and roads. The projects will result in a tremendous boost to jobs in the construction industry and is part of the Government's target of 200,000 jobs for this term. The level of construction industry activity and investment over the past two years was at a record level, and tested the industry's capabilities. However, as was seen with the Olympic projects that were finished on time and on budget, the industry came through and earned tremendous national and international credit for its achievements.

Today I bring honourable members up to date on the latest available forecast figures for activity in the construction industry from the National Institute of Economics and Industry Research. The institute has researched the levels of investment and activity in the construction industry up to 2009. Recently it released results of its study, which found that last year the level of activity peaked at a State record \$24.5 billion and represented 35 per cent of the national expenditure on construction. This year the institute has forecast that construction expenditure in New South Wales will drop to about \$20 billion. Whilst that is a drop from the record level, it is still higher than the previous record level prior to the Olympic boom. Notwithstanding the drop from \$24 billion to \$20 billion, the survey revealed that the industry will begin a long and steady path of recovery. It is expected that between 2002 and 2006 the construction industry activity will slowly begin to climb from \$20 billion to \$24.5 billion, the record level experienced last year.

Therefore the industry's contribution to jobs in this State is critical. At the moment the industry employs just over 8 per cent of the State's work force, which is about 255,000 people. That is the context in which the Government's overall capital works program of \$21.5 billion is designed. More important is the statement made by the Premier two weeks ago of an injection of \$1.5 billion to counteract the drop from \$24 billion last year to \$20 billion for this year and next year as identified by the institute. This will continue the process of job creation, especially in country and regional New South Wales and is part of the overall regional infrastructure plan announced by the Premier in Coffs Harbour.

In country and regional New South Wales 70 projects have been identified, with \$10 billion to be spent over the next few years in areas outside the major population centres of Newcastle, the Central Coast, Wollongong and the upper Blue Mountains. The major focus of that infrastructure plan is on basic services to ensure that communities, especially those outside major cities, are viable. I instance the \$100 million Coffs Harbour and Clarence Valley regional water supply scheme and the Coffs Harbour hospital project, which is reaching its work force peak of 450 jobs on site. Many of the subcontracts for earthworks, formwork, brickwork, glazing, plumbing and electrical have been let to local and regional businesses.

Work is also progressing on the Kempsey Correctional Centre, with registration for expressions of interest having closed. The estimated value is \$69.5 million for the correctional facility, to which a 12-year maintenance component will be added. At present the Minister and the Department of Corrective Services are working to finalise the details of the maintenance component, which will add significantly to the permanent store of jobs generated by this important project. Approximately 150 permanent jobs, 250 direct jobs and 500 indirect construction jobs will be created, together with the maintenance component.

Other projects announced as part of the infrastructure program include redevelopment facilities for the Dubbo senior campus and Dubbo South Public School, to the value of \$24 million. Also, \$4.6 million has been allocated for stage three of Dubbo Hospital, on top of the \$15 million allocated last year for stage one and stage two. This project has created approximately 200 jobs. The Government is using its accommodation policy to boost jobs and services in rural and regional New South Wales as part of its commitment to boost the construction industry in country areas. The decentralisation of the Department of Local Government to Nowra has created 60 additional jobs. This move will necessitate the investment of \$7 million to \$8 million in Nowra for the provision of purpose-built accommodation. An additional 150 jobs have been created with the relocation of the Police Traffic Infringement Processing Bureau to Maitland.

As well, the relocation of 50 administrative staff from the Police Firearms Registry to Murwillumbah has necessitated a new \$5.5 million building, again adding to the store of construction jobs required to meet the Carr Government's commitment. As a result of that project, 100 construction jobs will be created directly and indirectly. They are some examples of the way in which the Government is boosting regional jobs using construction and its accommodation policy. It is supporting the construction industry in this time of decreased industry activity. [*Time expired.*]

Mr ARMSTRONG (Lachlan) [4.56 p.m.]: Clearly, the Government is in fillip mode. Debate on the Government's performance in regional New South Wales would indicate that somebody has been told to find something to talk about that will not affect too many people in Sydney. The Government's record is not good on regional jobs and regional investment, or even maintaining the level of activity in rural New South Wales before the change of government in 1995.

I can say that with conviction, because during question time the Minister for Land and Water Conservation tried to defend the Government's performance on country water and sewerage schemes. When this Government came to office the budget for country water and sewerage for 1995-96 was \$85.6 million. The waiting list was six years for towns and villages to have upgraded water and sewerage systems, or for new systems to be built in towns in the Central West. The waiting list has now blown out to 10 years. That is because the Government abandoned the country water and sewerage drainage program and factored that component into the budget of the Department of Public Works and Services.

The figures enunciated by the Minister totalled only \$65 million. Where is the other \$20 million plus inflation to catch up on the figure allocated in 1995? The Minister for Public Works and Services has been sent in to try to defend the Government's record. I have asked the Minister for Public Works and Services several questions on notice about the average overrun between the cost estimates and the actual tender price on public works projects in New South Wales in the past two years. Between the actual tender price and the price assessed by the Government's quantity surveyors, there was an average overrun of not 2 per cent, 5 per cent, 7 per cent or 8 per cent, but in excess of 10 per cent. The department could not budget within 10 per cent!

With a \$100 million project, the Government did not know if it would cost \$90 million or \$110 million. Health, which also involves the Department of Public Works and Services, was worse. The differentiation between the cost estimated by the quantity surveyors and the actual tender price was just over 13 per cent. A number of projects have had to be rewritten up to three times. The Minister for Public Works and Services talked about hospitals. The architectural engineering specifications for West Wyalong hospital—which was planned under the previous Government and delivered under this Government's stewardship—were rewritten three times. The cost of planning blew out from approximately \$300,000 to \$600,000. The same thing happened with the multipurpose centres at Lake Cargelligo and Trundle, with the cost for those centres blowing out by 17 per cent. Clearly, the Government has a great deal to do before trumpeting about its expertise in the construction industry throughout New South Wales.

What is one of the most common complaints that we, as members of Parliament, receive? I am sure that I also speak for Country Labor members. I did not believe that I would find myself doing that, but they are getting badgered from door to door and on the phone about country roads. The Minister did not make one mention of funding for roads. He did not mention funding for bridges in the shire of Kyogle, where approximately 300 bridges are incapable of carrying their specified load. I mention that shire as one example.

I can understand why the Minister was told to not talk about roads. The Government has not been able to keep up with road maintenance programs, let alone develop further infrastructure. The Government has progressed, with the installation of airconditioning in schools, but it has not kept the promise it made in 1995 when it came to office to fully aircondition schools expeditiously. The program to install airconditioning in schools is progressing, but it is slower than the gestation period of an elephant. Every summer in many parts of this State students and staff are working in unsatisfactory circumstances. Some members may say that the schools were not airconditioned in the past. But in the past shops, cars and homes were not airconditioned. We now live in an airconditioned society. To expect students and staff to live in an airconditioned society but work in a non airconditioned environment is folly.

Another matter I would like to refer to is the delay in the First Home Owners Grant scheme. The Government told us with great gusto that the First Home Owners Grant scheme would make a difference for first home buyers. However, only 16 applications have been made in New South Wales and of those 16 applications only three have been approved. The management of that scheme has been totally inadequate. The

First Home Owners Grant of approximately \$14,000 to first home owners has turned out to be an embarrassment for the State Government, which is contracted to manage the scheme. Whilst I realise that figures can be distorted, Laura Tingle, a recognised journalist, wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 10 March:

Just as Victoria bore the brunt of the recession of the early 1990s, NSW now seems set to be the "basket case" of the current downturn.

Figures released by the Bureau of Statistics this week showed the NSW economy slumped a huge 3.6 per cent in the December quarter, putting the national contraction of 0.6 per cent in the shade.

The national figure was 0.6 per cent, but New South Wales slumped by 3.6 per cent. Laura Tingle, who used the term "basket case", continued:

By comparison, other States saw relatively small downturns ...

States such as Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania showed minuscule downturns. But the New South Wales economy, which the Government trumpeted about today, had a 3.6 per cent slump. The article continued:

But there is some evidence that the downturn in NSW has been wider than just the building industry. Retail trade, for example, has been flat for the past six months while the national trend has been six consecutive months of growth.

The Minister talked about jobs. The article stated:

The State's unemployment rate has risen from a low of 5.4 per cent in July to 6 per cent in January, compared with a rise in the national rate from 6.3 per cent to 6.7 per cent. NSW has—

wait for it—

lost 66,800 full-time jobs since July, while the figure is 73,300 jobs nationally.

Today the Minister should apologise on behalf of the Government to the people of New South Wales. He has tried to hide the real facts and figures. He does not have to read papers or look at statistics to know what is going on. He should get out and talk to people. He should go to the Royal Easter Show, where I have been working for the past three or four days, and ask people how things are going. They will soon tell him: business has stopped. Carpenters, electricians, plumbers are out there by the dozen. The Government talked about the slump, it knew it was going to happen, but what did it do about it? It did nothing. It has relied entirely on private enterprise to fill the gap. The Government has not initiated one major infrastructure project since the completion of the Olympic facilities. It is about time the Government stopped the rhetoric and started to put up some bricks and mortar, rather than rely on the mining industry and its kind to provide incentives in New South Wales. The Government must particularly initiate a major infrastructure program for roads in New South Wales. [*Time expired.*]

Mr W. D. SMITH (South Coast) [5.06 p.m.]: The level of building and construction activity in communities is always a measure of a society's progress and success, whatever form it may take. It has a psychological, as well as a physical, impact and stands as a crucial foundation for community confidence in future prosperity. I am pleased to say that this Government has shown particular insight over the past six years in directing attention to regional areas, recognising and encouraging growth potential. I congratulate the Government on having the wisdom to treat regional areas as essential to developing successful investment projects and encouraging long-term confidence in this State's economy.

Since 1999 I have witnessed extensive work in my electorate, which has been supported by forward-thinking State Government programs and the Government's willingness to actively work with individuals and groups in developing their ideas. We are also fortunate in this day and age to have at our fingertips the knowledge and skill to ensure that buildings and construction are comparable to the surrounding environment, both natural and human. In March 2000 the Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs launched the Shoalhaven Country Centres Growth strategy—a \$500,000 six-point action plan for industry development, agribusiness, investment attraction, tourism, small town development and the networking of business organisations. Since April 1999 the South Coast communities have seen the construction of the \$4.2 million Callala Bay Public School and the completion of the Bomaderry TAFE college \$5.5 million redevelopment project.

Recently tenders were called for the construction of the \$28 million stage two redevelopment project at Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital, and more than \$7 million is being spent on road works on the Princes

Highway between Ulladulla and Nowra. They are examples of the bricks and mortar projects and roadworks being undertaken by the Government, which the honourable member for Lachlan referred to. In January, Nowra was announced as the new headquarters for the hi-tech company EWST Australia. This was made possible because of assistance from this Government, with close consultation with State and regional development. This company, which develops highly sophisticated military simulation equipment, will bring 10 new local jobs to Nowra.

In general, South Coast schools have been allocated more than \$1 million in capital works funding since April 1999. Main Road 92 is set for construction work in the not too distant future. The road between Nowra and Nerriga, forming an east-west link between Canberra and Nowra, will receive an allocation of \$34 million from the State Government. The Minister referred to the relocation of the Department of Local Government to Nowra, which will mean about 60 more pay packets for the South Coast economy and private investment in facilities of between \$7 and \$8 million to accommodate the extra workers. The construction of extra facilities will result in 50 new jobs for construction workers. All over the South Coast there are signs of a steady growth in commercial and private construction ventures, most noticeably in the Nowra and Ulladulla central business districts, where business operators are moving into and renovating vacant premises for new and/or upgraded ventures.

The Nowra Now program, which has been supported by the Department of State and Regional Development, is progressing exceptionally well. Participants are working on several projects for the improvement of Nowra and the central business district. The forthcoming Riverfest festival is a good example of the Nowra Now program. Public housing has received a major boost in the past 12 months with the construction of new units and the purchase of houses and major works projects planned for the redevelopment of some existing public housing sites. All these projects amount to hundreds of jobs for local people. I am pleased that in most cases we have been able to utilise the expertise of local companies and local people.

We are extremely fortunate to have a government that is concerned about conditions in rural and regional communities and which is, at the same time, conscious of the need to foster careful and appropriate development. The State Government has built a highly regarded reputation on an international level with the success of the Sydney Olympic Games. Tens of millions of dollars in contracts came to the South Coast region, with at least seven companies providing steel, glass, pipe and carpet product for the Games. The new infrastructure initiatives mean better facilities and more jobs for the South Coast electorate. I commend the Minister for Public Works and Services for his excellent work.

Mr IEMMA (Lakemba—Minister for Public Works and Services, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship) [5.11 p.m.], in reply: The honourable member for Lachlan stated that the building industry in New South Wales had lost 66,000 jobs between January and July. However, he neglected to mention that the loss was overwhelmingly in the residential building sector of the construction industry, which resulted in the Commonwealth Government making the first of its four celebrated backflips in the past few months: an additional cash grant for home purchasers following the Housing Industry Association and the Master Builders Association beating a path to the door of the Prime Minister and other Ministers begging for some sort of action to halt the collapse of the residential building sector. New South Wales, like every other State, as a result of—

Mr Armstrong: Point of order: Firstly, I recognise that the Minister has acknowledged the loss of 66,000—

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lynch): What is your point of order?

Mr Armstrong: My point of order is that in recognising that, the Minister is not acknowledging the fact that the State has a responsibility to protect those people, irrespective of what other governments may do, one way or the other.

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

Mr IEMMA: They beat a path to the Prime Minister's door as a result of a collapse in the residential building sector of the construction industry, which—as they and a prominent member of the Reserve Bank acknowledged recently—was caused by the GST. The honourable member for Lachlan is right: the Government has a responsibility to act in those circumstances. That is why a couple of weeks ago at Penrith the Premier announced an additional \$1.5 billion in capital works funding to boost investment and activity in the construction industry, especially in areas outside of the major cities. It was the Government's commitment to job creation in rural and regional New South Wales, especially in the construction industry through its capital works program, that led to its announcement and the \$21.5 billion.

The honourable member for Lachlan is quite correct: in light of the GST-induced collapse of the residential home building sector of the construction industry, and in light of the figures released by the National Institute of Industry and Economic Research about the future of the construction industry, the Government has put together an infrastructure plan that is concentrated in regional New South Wales. For the benefit of the honourable member for Lachlan the figures are: 70 projects at a cost of \$10 billion, together with an additional \$1.5 billion in areas like health, roads, water and sewerage, which I will mention later, and other related infrastructure projects that will do exactly as the honourable member for Lachlan has requested—fill the gap in overall construction industry investment and boost a sector that has collapsed as a result of the GST. The program announced in Coffs Harbour—

Mr Armstrong: Point of order: The Minister has a responsibility to inform the House correctly. There has not been a housing slump in recent times. In the last two weeks auction prices in New South Wales have hit an all-time record high—not through the good work of the Government but because of the buoyant Federal economy.

Mr IEMMA: Not so long ago I visited a place called Captains Flat, which is one of the small country towns that have benefited from the Minister for Agriculture's Country Town and Water Improvement program, which would never have made the list had it not been expanded since the Government came to office in 1995.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BULLI DISTRICT HOSPITAL

Mr CAMPBELL (Keira) [5.15 p.m.]: Bulli District Hospital began life more than 100 years ago as a community cottage hospital. It serves the northern suburbs of Wollongong—suburbs such as Corrimal, Woonona, Bulli, Thirroul, Austinmer, Coledale and Wombarra. The hospital has adapted its role over time. It began with a great deal of community support and public subscription, particularly from the mining industry. It has served its community very well in its changing role from a cottage hospital to a district hospital. Some great characters have been associated with Bulli District Hospital. Syd Atkins, who was chairman of the board for a considerable time when it was a stand-alone hospital, is a real character and is surrounded by folklore. Gordon Ryan was the chief radiographer and his wife, Lorna, was a nursing sister. The hospital has a great association with its community. The 1999 annual report of the Illawarra Area Health Service states:

The executive and staff recognise the untiring support provided to Bulli District Hospital by the Friends of Bulli Hospital, the Bulli and Corrimal Branches of the United Hospitals Auxiliaries, and local service clubs. Their fundraising enabled the hospital to purchase much-needed equipment for patient care and safety. The annual Hospital Fete co-ordinated by the auxiliaries brought the community together in support of Bulli hospital.

There was a great furore in the community when the Greiner and Fahey governments proposed the closure of Bulli hospital. They succeeded in closing Kiama hospital, but the community support prevented the closure of Bulli hospital. Consequently, the hospital became part of the area health service and now has a role in the northern suburbs of Wollongong to provide medical, surgical and emergency department services. The hospital also provides a specialist role in ear, nose and throat surgery, ophthalmic surgery, and palliative care in-patient services, which is about to be transferred to a new facility in the Port Kembla hospital, a hospital that is well supported by the community. It is in the context of a changing role for Bulli hospital that last year I wrote to the area health service as it was preparing the Area Health Plan 2000. I pointed out that it was important to reinforce the role of Bulli hospital. I wrote:

It is important to reinforce the role and function of Bulli Hospital as an integral component of the area's health infrastructure.

I did that because there was a sense of frustration in the community that, by one means or another, services and facilities at Bulli hospital were being run down. Just after I wrote that letter in August last year I was delighted to have the opportunity to take the Minister for Health, who I note is in the Chamber this evening, on an inspection of the hospital. We looked at some of the facilities and also talked about some of the health needs. I was grateful for the Minister's understanding of my view that the area health service needed to reinforce and define the ongoing function of Bulli hospital. That suggestion has been picked up by the area health service. The chief executive officer, Dr Tony Sherbon, has listened to—

Mr George: How are his twins?

Mr CAMPBELL: In response to that interjection, I think Dr Sherbon's twins are doing extremely well. Dr Sherbon, the chief executive officer of the area health service in that part of the State, has paid close attention, as has the Minister. It is in the context of wanting to ensure a longer-term role for Bulli hospital that I mention this matter. The new plan envisages that it might be possible to focus the area health service's orthopaedic services at Bulli hospital, with some renovation of the hospital and some careful planning with the division of orthopaedic practice. I look forward to working with the Minister and the area health service in respect of that issue.

Mr KNOWLES (Macquarie Fields—Minister for Health) [5.20 p.m.]: The honourable member for Keira should be commended for his ongoing efforts in advocating for the future of Bulli hospital. I place on record the fact that when I visited the hospital with him last year he carried with him a whole range of support from community groups. He particularly mentioned the United Hospitals Auxiliary, a tremendous group that does great work and has done so for many years. One opportunity that is related to planning health services for the future is that older hospitals which have been traditionally under threat, particularly from conservative governments, become rejuvenated and find a real niche in their future service delivery. On any account Bulli hospital is one of those great little hospitals that is doing so much to add value to health services in the Illawarra region.

That is very much due to the terrific staff who work in the hospital. In recent months the hospital has achieved maximum day surgery rates in cataract extraction, and a 100 per cent result for day of surgery admission for overnight surgical patients. If only all the other hospitals could achieve such results, the quality and throughput of service would be so much better. The hospital is cost-effective and is carving out a niche in knocking down waiting lists, particularly for ear, nose and throat procedures, ophthalmology and general surgery.

It is important to have smaller hospitals undertake that type of work to allow the bigger hospitals to do the heavy duty tertiary and quaternary work that those hospitals are designed to provide. By the way, we are rebuilding Wollongong Hospital. Bulli hospital has a very secure future under this Government as a result of integrated networking with all the health services because of the good planning of the area health services, the clinical staff and the advocacy of people such as the honourable member for Keira, who should be congratulated on ensuring that Bulli hospital maintains an important role in the fabric of health services in the Illawarra.

KELLYVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

Mr RICHARDSON (The Hills) [5.22 p.m.]: I refer to concerns about the proposed new high school to be built at York Road, Kellyville, which is supposed to be open in time for the 2003 school year. Mr Alistair Yates, President of the Kellyville Public School council—a teacher and a vocal proponent of the new high school—attended a public planning meeting for the new school on 20 March at which Department of Education and Training architects and representatives of the properties branch made presentations. During the course of the meeting reference was made to the community consultation on the school that had allegedly taken place late last year. Mr Yates has said that, to his knowledge, no member of the Kellyville community was involved in that process.

I suspect that he is correct in his assertion. Certainly I, as the local member, have never been invited to a planning meeting or consultation on the school, including the latest one described by Mr Yates. That is totally reprehensible—and, I might add, uncharacteristic of the Minister, who is willing to involve local members in constructive discussions about schools in their electorates. On this occasion, however, I cannot help but feel that if I were a member of the Government rather than a member of the Opposition the invitation might have been forthcoming. Of late there is an alarming tendency—most recently in regard to the Windsor Road issue, for which the Minister for Roads was roundly criticised by my community—not to involve local members if they are of the wrong political persuasion, that is, non-Labor.

This is clearly contrary to the notion of representative democracy within a Westminster parliamentary system. My constituents, and the constituents of the honourable member for Blacktown, have as much right to be consulted as anyone else. Excluding members of the local community from the planning process invites problems and dissent when none need exist. I understand that one of the decisions made at the 20 March meeting was to build a smaller gymnasium of 400 square metres rather than the larger 600 square metre building, in the face of community opposition. Even the larger gymnasium will not hold the projected 1,000 or more students of the school; the smaller gymnasium will clearly be inadequate.

It took 27 years and a massive effort on the part of parents for Baulkham Hills High School to get an assembly hall. Why has the department not learned from its mistakes? Why does it not build for the future? It is

as inevitable as night following day that in seven or 10 years a campaign will be launched to build a bigger hall. The seeds of that campaign were sown at a series of meetings from which the local member and the public—that is, the local community—were excluded. I cannot help but feel that perhaps one of the reasons I was not invited was that I might have disagreed with the bureaucrats' lack of vision and spoken strongly in favour of the bigger hall. I have to tell the Government that that will not silence me.

If we are going to do the job, let us do it properly. Let us not replicate the mistakes of the past. Retrofitting a 600 square metre hall onto a 400 square metre hall would be hugely expensive and might even be technically impossible. One of the greatest impediments to building or modifying the school may be the Government's own threatened species legislation. More than 60 per cent of the seven-hectare school site—acquired before the Act was proclaimed in 1995—is covered with shale-sandstone transition forest and Sydney turpentine-ironbark forest, which are classified as endangered ecological communities.

It will be interesting to see how the Government handles this issue, and whether it falls foul of its own legislation. Late last year it called in consultants to assess whether it was possible to locate the school on the site without destroying the trees. Perhaps the reason it has opted for a smaller gymnasium is that it cannot build a bigger one without contravening the threatened species legislation. I do not know the answers, but I would certainly have a better idea if I had been invited to the community consultation meetings and had been involved in planning the school from the outset. I hope that the Minister takes away two messages tonight. The first is that real consultation involving members of Parliament and the community is important. One does not just go through the motions, which has, unfortunately, been a hallmark of this Government during the past six years.

The second message is that it would be highly desirable if the school were built to a standard, that is, building for the future, and not simply to a price. The rate of population growth in the Kellyville area—honourable members will be aware that my electorate has the highest population of any electorate in the State—mandates that the school be built. We are grateful for the Government's commitment, but we would like to see the job done properly. It is ridiculous to think that there would be a substantial commitment of \$13 million to build a new high school in the Kellyville area and that the job will not be done properly. It will create problems in the future—problems for the students and problems for the State budget—because it will be necessary at some time in the future to retrofit the full-size school hall.

Ms NORI (Port Jackson—Minister for Small Business, and Minister for Tourism) [5.27 p.m.]: I will certainly draw this matter to the attention of the Minister. However, I would be truly amazed if there had not been a public consultation process for a new school—a brand new high school costing \$13 million, a very large commitment to public education by the Government in the electorate of The Hills and serving the best interests of young people needing access to a State high school. It is not my experience in my area or, as far as I can tell, any other member's area. I will draw the matter to the Minister's attention. I am sure that when the kids are going into their brand new building they will all be delighted that a State Labor Government provided the high school.

BLACKTOWN ELECTORATE ARTS PROMOTION

Mr GIBSON (Blacktown) [5.28 p.m.]: Tonight I speak about an attitudinal change in my electorate of Blacktown, an area that I am very proud to represent. Until a few years ago the main thrust of the Blacktown community, particularly Blacktown City Council, was to make sure that there was a football field on every corner and to provide other sporting facilities. The council should be commended for what it has done in this regard. Previously the arts did not have a high priority, but over the last two years there has been a tremendous change. Today sport and the arts are well balanced. Earlier this year Blacktown received a grant from the State Government of \$120,000 for a multipurpose arts centre. The Anglican Church at Blacktown was refurbished for the purpose.

The Government is committed to increasing arts funding for western Sydney. Next year a total of about \$1.5 million will be allocated to projects across the south-western Sydney region. I note that that is an increase of some \$150,000. We want to create in Blacktown a multicultural audience for the arts. Blacktown is culturally diverse: more than 31 per cent of the population were born overseas and 24 per cent speak a language other than English at home. A good friend of mine, Father Arthur Bridge, the Catholic priest of Blacktown, runs *Ars Musica Australis*, a community-based arts advocacy organisation dedicated to the development of the wealth of youthful musical talent that exists in western Sydney through the performing arts. The objects of *Ars Musica Australis* are:

to challenge the notion that there is no artistic talent outside of the established cultural centre of Sydney

to cultivate musical talent and to encourage young musicians, singers and composers to excel in their chosen field of music

to provide for every young Australian the opportunity to be involved in the performing arts through participation, education and scholarship.

At the moment Father Bridge is trying to put pressure on the Government to get extra funding for a young fellow by the name of Matthew Hindson. Matthew wants to write a symphony and funding would greatly assist him. Matthew is one of Australia's most successful young composers. He studied composition at the University of Sydney and the University of Melbourne with composers including Peter Sculthorpe—a fellow whom I know fairly well—Eric Gross, Brenton Broadstock and Ross Edwards. Matthew's works have been extensively performed by many Australian ensembles and orchestras around the country and around the world, including throughout Asia, Europe and North America.

Matthew's music often displays the influence of popular music styles within a classical music context. He is currently working as a freelance composer and is the Director of Composition at the MLC School, Burwood. In 1999 he was attached to the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. An increase in funding would allow people such as Matthew to benefit greatly. Father Arthur Bridge has done a tremendous job in helping to change the thinking of the people of Blacktown and of Blacktown council. Previously more thought was given to sports than to the arts but that has changed. Support for the arts from the people of Blacktown is very encouraging. Ars Musica Australis needs support and funding. The State Government has provided funding in the past. I hope that further funding will be provided to assist Matthew Hindson to compose his symphony, to put Blacktown on the map and allow the arts in the Blacktown area to excel, as they should have a long time ago. [*Time expired.*]

Ms NORI (Port Jackson—Minister for Small Business, and Minister for Tourism) [5.33 p.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Blacktown on his interest in culture and the arts in Blacktown—not bad for a former first grade rugby league player. I am glad that Peter Sculthorpe is a personal friend of the honourable member. I once had to sing one of his songs in the combined high schools concert. It is about time we recognised that the arts are not the province of a handful of the elite or lucky people who were brought up in households in which the arts were valued. If the arts are to be truly democratic and participated in by the community we have to ensure that places such as Blacktown have the facilities and government support to encourage them.

The Joan Sutherland Centre for the Performing Arts was opened in Penrith some years ago by a former Labor Government. The University of Western Sydney exists thanks to a State Labor Government back in the 1980s. These things are not just symbols; it is important for the young people of a particular area to know that programs and facilities exist and there are things to aim for and aspire to. We have only to look at the success of Symphony in the Park and Opera in the Park to understand that all Australians like to enjoy and participate in culture and the arts.

COUNTRY SHOWS

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [5.35 p.m.]: Tonight I make the House aware that shows throughout regional and rural New South Wales are struggling. In this House today two notices of motion were given congratulating the Royal Agricultural Society on the wonderful show that is currently being held in Sydney. Regional and country shows are really struggling. Binnaway, a 350-strong community on the central western slopes near Coonabarabran, had its show as one of the few reliable fixtures on the local calendar. It was due to be held on 24 March but had to be cancelled. The President, John Finlayson, was quoted as saying that it was a crying shame that an event which attracted almost double the town's population had to be axed.

Many country people are just too busy trying to make ends meet to dedicate the hours necessary to run shows. The death of any country show is symptomatic of a malaise that has hit many rural centres. The Australian Council of Agricultural Societies has identified 50 more shows around the nation that are at risk of going the way of Binnaway's. I note that last night the Federal Government, through the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss, announced that about \$2 million would be provided to help out country shows. New South Wales boasts 202 fixtures from Mungindi near the Queensland border to Bega in the south. To the individual rural communities the annual show means so much more than an annual cash injection.

The annual show provides a focal point for many of the far-flung communities in rural and regional New South Wales. It is their window of local achievement—from livestock to sewing, preserving of jam and

cake making. I am concerned about the decline in shows. It is becoming difficult even to attract girls to enter the showgirl competitions. The National Party was honoured last Thursday to have New South Wales showgirls visit Parliament House. I was pleased that Kate Woodward, representing the Dorrigo show society, won that competition. I have received a letter from Mr John Gibson, President of Group One, North Coast National Agricultural and Industrial Society Inc., which represents shows from the Tweed through to Grafton. The letter stated:

The ever increasing burdens of Insurance and maintenance of buildings has over the past few years placed many restraints on our shows, as repairs and the general maintenance of these grounds take a large majority of the Society's profits and the remainder disappears in Insurances, Rates, Water, Power. This in turn restricts the promotion of special events at most of the shows' annual presentations. Special entertainment is required to enable us to attract larger crowds.

I know of no other organisations that are supported by such a large number of voluntary workers—

and this is the International Year of Volunteers—

and without their input these shows would not be able to function.

I am pleased that the Minister for Agriculture is in the Chamber. I am obliged to mention other community problems in rural areas. Management committees have expressed concerns regarding their inability to raise sufficient funds to maintain facilities, such as public halls, in rural communities. As with showgrounds, community facilities need support. Numerous halls in country areas are in a deplorable state and community representatives are at a loss to know where to go for assistance to improve community amenities.

Communities raise funds and ask for help by way of volunteer labour, et cetera. However, there is only so much they can do. In close-knit communities, halls are gathering places. If no hall or showground is available, people have nowhere to meet to talk about community matters. The area assistance schemes help with the provision and maintenance of halls and showgrounds in rural areas, but the problem is getting greater by the day. I ask the Minister for his support in addressing this problem in country areas.

Mr AMERY (Mount Druitt—Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation) [5.40 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Lismore for his strong support of country shows and the system behind them. His comments would be supported by all members of this House who recognise the valuable contributions of country shows to local economies and, as the Minister for Tourism reminds me, to tourism in country areas. A town putting on a show attracts people from the region to exhibit their livestock. It also attracts visitors who inject tourist dollars into the town. The honourable member for Lismore referred to volunteers. We all talk about how much money governments, local councils, et cetera, put into showgrounds and local show societies. As the Minister responsible for the portfolios of Agriculture, and Land and Water Conservation, it is not uncommon for me to present awards to people for 30 or 40 years service to Crown land trusts, showgrounds, and the like. The executive members of show societies have given many decades of service to shows.

The comments of the honourable member for Lismore about the future of shows highlight the concerns of New South Wales Agriculture and the Royal Agricultural Society, which is now looking into the future of shows. The changes in the economics of one region, the competing dollar, and so on, have had some effect on many show societies and showgrounds. Because of the portfolios for which I am responsible I have the pleasure of opening many shows as I travel around the State. Recently I was at Tumbarumba, and last year I was at Coonabarabran, Carcoar and Blacktown. Soon I will open the Hawkesbury show. I assure the honourable member for Lismore that the Government will respond in more detail when time allows and will certainly react to his call for more assistance to be given to future shows.

ST GEORGE DISTRICT CRICKET CLUB

Mr GREENE (Georges River) [5.42 p.m.]: On Sunday 1 April the St George District Cricket Club again annexed the Sydney first-grade cricket premiership, the thirteenth time that the club has won that competition. That is almost twice as many times as any other club has won the Sydney first-grade competition. I congratulate the captain, Paul Ryan, and the players who represented St George throughout the season on their success in again bringing the trophy back to Hurstville Oval. As captain, Paul Ryan has done a magnificent job with his team; he has led by example. I congratulate Paul on his leadership, on his individual contribution with the bat and on his performance on one occasion as wicket-keeper.

I acknowledge the contributions of several local junior members of that side. Brett Van Deinsen starred in the final with a score of 172. Undoubtedly, he was the backbone of the side that played Eastern Suburbs and

accumulated 187 runs on the first day. Brett's innings of 172 was a magnificent contribution in front of State selectors, reminding them of his tremendous potential. Brett started as a St George junior before moving to the Camden district, and he has now come back to St George. I congratulate him on his efforts.

Graham Rummans and Chad Porter came to St George from Kingsgrove United. Their participation in the side undoubtedly led to its success. They are both very talented batsmen and I congratulate them on their performances. Two local juniors, Nathan Catolano and Peter Wooden, came through the Lugarno Sports Club. As an opening batsman Nathan has had great success. Peter, with his left-arm orthodox spin bowling, has been very effective, especially in the final series. Peter is certainly an outstanding player and currently is working with one of the club's sponsors, Peter Lonham and Associates. I thank that firm for giving this young man a job in the local area.

James Turner, who played with my club, the Illawarra Catholic Club, had another great year as opening bowler for St George. He took many wickets, as did Jon Shaw from the Ramsgate RSL Club. They put on a great innings for St George in the semifinal and the final. Undoubtedly their partnership for the last wicket got us home in both games. I congratulate them on their performance. This year five first-grade players represented New South Wales or played at a higher level. Brett Van Deinsen, Graham Rummans and Stuart McGill, who made his debut with the club this year, took four wickets in the final. Along with Peter Wooden he bowled us home against Manly in the semifinal at Hurstville Oval. Stuart played for Australia again this year.

Scott Thompson, whose performances with both bat and ball were outstanding, took in excess of 50 wickets. He also scored a couple of centuries and more than 500 runs in the season. I congratulate Scott on his performance. Young Nathan Pilon, the wicket-keeper, made his debut for New South Wales this year. In partnership with Brett Van Deinsen, he scored 32 in the crucial stage of the final that got us beyond the Eastern Suburbs total. Nathan came from Dubbo to St George and has gone on to represent the State. I acknowledge also the contribution of Brendan Hill. Brendan played in all first-grade games, but unfortunately had to stand down to twelfth man in the final. His contribution should not be forgotten and I congratulate him on his role.

St George District Cricket Club is fortunate to have a strong administration. The chief executive officer, John Jobson, binds the club together. I acknowledge the leadership of its president, and former Australian player, Murray Bennett. I thank the background workers, including Arthur Osborne and Jack Stanton, who served in the canteen and supported the team. I thank the patrons, Brian Booth and Warren Saunders. I thank Leo Rasmussen, who is there every week supporting the club. The executives and supporters get a great kick out of the performance of the side. Finally, I note the contribution of Wizard Home Loans. I am sure that Mark Bouris is pleased that he supported the club financially. It is great that we have won the competition in the year of Don Bradman, who played with the St George club for seven years. [*Time expired.*]

CABRAMURRA PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [5.47 p.m.]: One of the most pleasant duties of members of Parliament is to visit schools in their electorates. On Monday my wife and I visited Cabramurra Public School.

Ms Nori: That's a long way from home.

Mr MAGUIRE: It is a long way from home. It takes three hours and 15 minutes to motor the distance from Wagga Wagga to Cabramurra, which is on top of the Snowy Mountains and the highest town in Australia. We were met by the principal, David O'Rourke, and his wife, Margaret, who also teaches at the school. This was the first opportunity I have had to visit Cabramurra Public School, which has 12 students. The school is looking forward to the addition of another two students next year, who will attend during the winter. Cabramurra is a Snowy Mountains town with a long and proud history. The 100 residents of Cabramurra are all employed within the Snowy Mountains scheme.

Honourable members might be interested to learn that the school has classes from kindergarten to year 4; it does not have year 5 or year 6 students. I presented the School Captain, Alison, who is in year 4, with a flag and a book of Parliament. I had great pleasure in joining the schoolchildren in raising the flag. The principal, his wife, students, several members of the community and even the cleaner, Rose, joined my wife and I at the local cafe for lunch and, to use the terminology of a younger person, it was just the best day. I thank the students for making the day so enjoyable.

Small schools such as Cabramurra Public School face many problems, mainly because of their isolation. The school needs to access other schools for communication and interaction. Because of that,

Cabramurra school has identified the need for a bus. The community is supportive of the school and even in this town of only 100 people it has raised \$13,000. The school has been told it will receive ongoing funding from the Snowy Mountains Authority, which will contribute about \$2,000 a year to help maintain a bus. As well, the students will contribute each time they go on an excursion. However, they need the balance of \$23,000 to finance the bus. This will enable the students of Cabramurra Public School to interact with other smaller schools at Milbrulong, Humula or even Tarcutta. It may even be possible for them to visit Parliament or other places which, without a bus, would be inaccessible to them because of their isolation.

Another problem is the link with new communications technology. The school is well equipped with computers and has a wonderful library resource. However, it needs better Internet and email links because the existing facility is unreliable and is often affected by the inclement weather which regularly affects this highest town in Australia. The school would appreciate a microwave link. It is important that the school be supplied with such a link, especially as the town becomes even more isolated in winter when road closures prevent people from entering or leaving the town. I have asked the principal, the parents and citizens association and parents to write to me and I will be happy to take up these matters with the Minister. I ask the Minister to give consideration to these matters so that by the time he receives the correspondence, he will be able to advise us on ways to find the balance of the funds needed for the provision of a bus. At present the school has to rely on private motor vehicles and a bus would be preferable. I also ask that a microwave link be provided to the school to enable it to have better communication.

NRMA LTD

Mr E. T. PAGE (Coogee) [5.52 p.m.]: In recent weeks the NRMA boardroom conflict has received widespread media attention. The Australian Securities and Investments Commission [ASIC] has also seen fit to commence an investigation into issues concerning market disclosure and corporate governance. People are concerned with the effect all this will have on the newly floated insurance company, in which many of us have shares because we were previously members of the NRMA. However, members of the NRMA Road Service should be more concerned about their association's future following the demutualisation of NRMA Insurance. Although Nick Whitlam resigned as chairman of NRMA Insurance Group Ltd [NIGL] on April Fools' Day, he remains the president of NRMA Ltd, the mutually owned road service. When he resigned from NIGL Whitlam's press release stated:

My focus now, as President of the NRMA, will be on helping ensure the Association fulfils its goal of being the world's best motoring organization. Our legendary road service is at the heart of the Association's immediate and long term future.

However, members can be justifiably concerned about the fate of their association while Whitlam remains its president. Members should not forget that Whitlam was the principal architect of last year's demutualisation. That process has resulted in the emasculation of the association from a company controlling the country's largest general insurer to a mere breakdown service with an uncertain financial future. At last year's annual general meeting, it was announced that the association had suffered a \$20 million loss, which would obviously be unsustainable in the long term, given that its ties with the insurance company had been completely severed. However, most members are still unaware that valuable NRMA trademarks and logos were permanently assigned by the association to the insurance company for a mere \$40 million.

In addition, all services previously provided free of charge by the insurance company to the association are now provided at cost plus 5 per cent. Those include services relating to human resources, finance and banking, accounting, research and development and investment services. In addition, the business relationship agreements that were entered into have imposed permanent restrictions on the scope of the association's business activities. The association can never start a new insurance or finance company. Already, the association is beginning to feel the financial pinch. For the first time ever, members must now pay for their NRMA accommodation directories. That is a roundabout way of increasing their road service fees, which they were promised would not happen prior to 30 June 2001. One wonders what will happen to road service fees in the future, especially now that there is no longer any obligation on the insurance company to provide financial assistance to the association. It should come as no surprise that the road patrolmen are already in serious dispute with NRMA management in the Industrial Court over cost-cutting measures.

All this was recommended to members by Whitlam and his Members First board faction, as directors of the association, when these same people were also directors of the insurance company. Although it was said that the demutualisation proposal was developed at arm's length, the truth is that Whitlam and his entourage were in a position of conflict, and preferred the interests of the insurance company over the interests of the association. Having betrayed the interests of association members, these people are now profiting from their actions by

receiving outrageous payouts for resigning from the insurance group. Whitlam and his cronies are insisting on the maximum possible payout of three years director's fees, despite having only served as directors of NIGL for six months. This compares to an average retrenchment package of three weeks for every year of service to a maximum of six months total payout for most people in the work force.

People should also remember that in the two years leading up to the demutualisation, Whitlam organised to receive over \$1 million in director's fees, compared with \$80,000 per year total fees paid to the previous president, Don Mackay. All that happened at a time when ASIC is conducting an investigation into allegations of serious wrongdoing and unlawful activity by Whitlam and his Members First faction. In contrast, pro-mutual director, Richard Talbot, who had served members for 10 years and was forced to resign by Whitlam and his Members First faction late last year, received no retirement benefits. Instead, his legal costs of more than \$500,000 for representing the views of members opposed to the demutualisation remain unpaid nearly 11 months after the court ordered their payment. I call upon ASIC to protect the assets of the members from being plundered by the very people who are responsible for reducing the association to a shadow of its former status as the world's greatest motoring organisation. Now that Whitlam is concentrating on the NRMA, all one can say is "God save the road service!"

KANGAROO INDUSTRY

Mr SLACK-SMITH (Barwon) [5.57 p.m.]: Since the introduction of European farming and grazing techniques and with increased access to water supplies, kangaroo numbers in Australia have multiplied dramatically. At least 50 million of the four most common kangaroo species are now estimated to be in the Australian wild. As a result, sustainable harvesting of kangaroos is essential to protect the environment and to reduce the impact of kangaroo populations on commercial farming and grazing enterprises. Fortunately, every State in Australia has managed to establish effective culling programs, and Australia is beginning to benefit from the increasing popularity of kangaroo products domestically and overseas. The kangaroo industry in New South Wales is one of the best performing rural industries, growing at an average annual rate of 8.2 per cent over the last decade. Nationally the kangaroo industry employs more than 4,000 people and earns \$200 million per annum in export earnings. Its growth is forecast to continue over the next five years.

Without doubt, on a State-by-State basis the kangaroo industry has had the best performance in growth, earnings and job creation. Its success is partly attributable to strict industry regulation. In New South Wales the number of kangaroo meat processors is capped at 12 and sustainable quotas for kangaroo carcasses are set, depending on the season and breeding patterns. It is not currently permissible for kangaroos in New South Wales to be killed for their skins only. Caps on the number of kangaroo meat processing plants in Western Australia were abolished in the mid-1980s. Since then, processor licences have increased to more than 30. Yet the number of kangaroos taken in that State has not increased, leaving a proliferation of small enterprises with insufficient throughput to enable adequate profits to justify reinvestment in their industry.

On the other hand, in New South Wales interest in the industry's potential has increased and reinvestment in the industry is growing. In the next five years New South Wales could take a further 500,000 kangaroos, creating 120 to 140 new jobs in the processing sector alone. For this reason, the cap on the number of kangaroo meat processors in New South Wales must remain intact. The issue of skin-only takes should be revisited. Allowing skin-only takes in New South Wales would help farmers recoup some of the money they lost controlling kangaroos in the tag and lie program and prevent businesses moving across the border to Queensland. In my electorate of Barwon, world-renown whipmaker John McMaster is considering moving his business to Queensland because of his difficulty in sourcing kangaroo skins in New South Wales.

Such a move would be a significant loss to New South Wales and to his home town of Warialda, which is in my electorate. With a few changes the kangaroo industry in New South Wales can maintain positive growth and expansion and take advantage of the endless export potential. Currently, 21 countries import kangaroo meat. Kangaroo meat is increasing in popularity in the United States of America and in many parts of Asia and is an extremely popular meat in Belgium, Germany and Holland. Forecasts indicate that the demand for kangaroo meat in Europe could increase by 20 per cent because of the diseases in cattle, pigs and sheep, such as foot and mouth disease and mad cow disease. Kangaroo meat is scientifically proven to be very healthy. It carries one-third the pathogen risks of sheep and cattle and is also considered low in fat.

Some negative points need to be addressed. Pastoralists believe that kangaroos cause significant economic damage to their enterprises, due to extensive loss in grasses. However, research tends to prove that in normal seasons the presence of kangaroos does little to impact on the overall health of pastures. However, when

it turns dry—and we may have had our last rain for three years in the west of New South Wales—kangaroos have a dramatic impact on pastures. For that reason pastoralists are calling for skin-only takes to be legalised in New South Wales. The Kangaroo Industry Association believes the yearly quota must be considered the maximum sustainable quota and not a target to be always fulfilled. Having said that, I point out that quotas are usually fulfilled, unless extremely wet conditions such as occurred last year interfere with culling programs.

Overall, the kangaroo industry seems to be very healthy. It is a vital industry for many parts of my electorate of Barwon, the electorate of my learned colleague the honourable member for Murray-Darling and many other places in western New South Wales. The kangaroo industry provides the major source of employment in some communities. I encourage the expansion of the industry, which would benefit people in my electorate and the Murray-Darling electorate. In New South Wales we must keep intact regulations for meat processing plants, expand the yearly quota to reflect the three good seasons in western New South Wales and introduce skin-only takes to replace the current tag and lie program.

T AND I ENGINES PTY LTD

Mr ORKOPOULOS (Swansea) [6.02 p.m.]: I raise the issue of Michael Weekes and Karen Mitchell, trading as Atlas Batteries, Pacific Highway, Belmont, in my electorate, and T and I Engines, Silverwater Road, Silverwater. My concerns about the conduct of T and I Engines are twofold: first, its appallingly inadequate response to rectify a clearly dodgy engine which was bought by Atlas Batteries and, second, the artificial means by which T and I Engines and associated companies have evaded their legal responsibilities to Atlas Batteries and, I am advised, to many other customers. In my view, its actions amount to deceptive conduct. Atlas Batteries is a family business. It is a classic small business that fundamentally depends on its truck to conduct business. Without a reliable truck it cannot trade.

In October 2000, Atlas Batteries purchased a reconditioned motor from T and I Engines for \$4,454, a significant capital outlay for a small business. T and I Engines took five weeks to deliver the engine, which arrived on 2 November 2000 and was fitted by a local mechanical engineering firm. When Mr Weekes picked up the truck on 18 January he found that the engine was underpowered and made severe knocking noises. He took me for a trip around the block in his truck, but I asked him to switch off the engine because I thought it was going to blow up. Checking the radiator, Mr Weekes found oil and water mixed together. Without detailing the significant frustration and loss of income for Atlas Batteries, I am of the view that the actions of T and I Engines during this period and since the matter was referred to the Fair Trading Tribunal have been nothing short of reprehensible and shonky.

Although T and I Engines began winding up the company in February 2001, it accepted an order and cheque from Atlas Batteries. As T and I Engines is in liquidation, the Fair Trading Tribunal has no jurisdiction. T and I Engines may be in liquidation, but T and I Engines and Parts Pty Ltd also trades on the same site. Further, T and I Engines has continued to advertise its services in the April edition of that wonderful trucking magazine *Deals on Wheels*—a riveting read. How can a company in liquidation continue to accept trade orders and commit itself to a warranty on the engines it sells? The answer may lie in the fact that T and I Engines and T and I Engines and Parts Pty Ltd are fronts for Norwood Falls Pty Ltd, the directors of which are Hannelore Hilda Totzke of St Ives, Jason Marcel Booy of Avalon, and Christina Dorothea Storek of St Ives. I am advised that they applied to go into liquidation in February 1996. That is about three weeks after T and I Engines and T and I Engines and Parts were registered as companies. A letter from my constituents states:

Upon examination of the ASIC report of T and I Engines Pty Ltd, they had applied to go into liquidation in February 2000, subsequently withdrawing this application in June 2000. We sent initial payment on 19 September 2000, final payment on 26 October 2000 for our engine, and T and I Engines were listed for winding up orders on 7 November 2000. We strongly believe Mr Leopold Booy along with his counterparts were well aware on 26 October 2000, being only 13 days or 9 working days inclusive prior to the application being listed with ASIC, that T and I Engines was going into liquidation. Why did T and I Engines accept the order? Did it try to maintain a warranty? In my view, its actions lead to the argument of deceptive conduct.

The letter continues:

If this is the case Mr Booy along with his counterparts would not have been able to honour the written warranty that they supplied with my engine. This also raises the question of any other consumer who purchased an engine. Who is the warranty covered by?

My constituents also state:

We believe that the directors of this company are carrying on deceptively towards us and the average consumer. All we knew as consumers when we were purchasing the engine was of T and I Engines and therefore we have been misled by them and treated unfairly as consumers ...

I have asked the relevant Minister to investigate this matter. Unfortunately, because the company is in liquidation the Fair Trading Tribunal has no jurisdiction. I have forwarded my concerns to the relevant Federal Minister for investigation. This company and its directors should be investigated.

Ms NORI (Port Jackson—Minister for Small Business, and Minister for Tourism) [6.07 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Swansea for drawing the attention of the House to the plight of Atlas Batteries, a small company that, it would seem, was dealt with very harshly by T and I Engines when it attempted to purchase a new battery for its vehicle. The honourable member for Swansea quite rightly identified that expenditure of close to \$500 would be a significant outlay for a small business, not to mention all the mucking around.

One would hope, as this case has been taken to the Fair Trading Tribunal, that there will be a satisfactory outcome. However, I undertake to draw the attention of the Minister for Fair Trading to the circumstances of this case. I point out to the honourable member and the House that, in certain circumstances, in cases that involve a small business, such as this, my department or a client manager from the Department of State and Regional Development may become involved in negotiating a satisfactory settlement. It is not their bread and butter, but it is something with which we can assist small business.

SOMERSBY SANDMINING PROPOSAL

Mr HARTCHER (Gosford) [6.09 p.m.]: I wish to draw to the attention of the House the battle between the people of the Central Coast and a proposal by Vulcan Materials for a sandmining operation at Somersby. I join thousands of concerned residents all around the Central Coast to state my concerns about this proposal. Over the past few weeks I have progressively presented to Parliament a petition with a total of more than 6,000 signatures. The petition clearly voices the wishes of the Somersby community and the people of the Central Coast that the Carr Government not allow the sandmining operation to proceed. The Somersby Residents Steering Committee, which has been established to fight this proposal, is to be commended for its work and its co-ordinated efforts.

The committee includes James Laing Peach, Lyn Daniel, Phil Tate, Evelyn and David Greening, Vicki and Terry Lamb, Genny Scott, Chris Warren and Russell and Amanda Cox. Together these residents have made a significant inroad into winning the fight to preserve the Somersby environment and water and their children's health. The local media have also risen to the cause and helped to spread the concerns of the local community to others on the Central Coast. On 21 March the *Central Coast Express Advocate* reported that a petition of 6,000 signatures had been presented to me by the residents action steering committee. The Advocate stated that the committee would now seek a meeting with the Minister for Education and Training to discuss its concerns about the proposal and how such a development would affect Somersby school.

I trust that the Minister grants this committee an audience and is sympathetic to its cause. Vulcan Materials, the developers, propose to remove nine million tonnes of sand over a period of 20 years from 35 hectares of land in Somersby. The land in question is only 150 metres away from Somersby Public School. Such an operation will adversely affect students at the school because of the massive amount of fine silica particles released into the air from the constant sandmining. Imagine children, who once enjoyed the clean crisp air that currently surrounds Somersby, now breathing in fine particles of dust every day for hours at a time. Imagine the cases of asthma and silicosis that would inevitably occur among the students. Imagine the breach of occupational health and safety regulations that would occur from simply walking into the school grounds.

Noise pollution is an inevitable part of any large mining operation. Such a massive operation will result in up to 300 truck movements every day, one movement every few minutes, and one grinding gear change every other minute. There is also the accompanying excavation machinery, bulldozers, water trucks, water pumps—the list goes on and on. The resulting dust and noise pollution will present intolerable health risks to the Somersby community. A second serious consequence of the sandmining proposal will be the degradation of the artesian water system. Somersby residents rely on the bore wells for their water supply. The water from the Peats Ridge bores is so pure that it is sold around the world. However, developers propose to make significant use of underground water reserves via bores to wash the sand. This will deplete the level of the watertable considerably.

As the Somersby Residents Steering Committee pointed out to me, not only will the purity of the water be contaminated, adversely affecting what is at the moment a prosperous water bottling business, but residents will be forced to bore their wells deeper into the ground to access any water. Some 6,000 signatures from

residents all around the Central Coast have sent a resounding message to the Parliament that they do not want this proposal to go ahead. Some 6,000 concerned residents have emphatically stated that if this proposal succeeds it will negatively impact on the environment and the artesian water system of Somersby plateau; it will be against the wishes of local residents, who pay rates to their local Council, not to the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning; and it will be an unsightly blotch on the landscape near the intersection of Peats Ridge Road and the F3.

I commend the people of Somersby for their efforts to stand firm against the often overwhelming force of development. I commend the Somersby Residents Steering Committee for working together and bringing the community together to ensure that their voice is not only heard but also obeyed. There are numerous other concerns as to the unsightliness of the proposed quarry and its environmental impact on endangered fauna in the area. The 6,000 residents represent the many thousands of people on the Central Coast who are determined to see that the Central Coast area is not degraded by a development of this nature. I sincerely hope that this proposal is firmly vetoed by the Carr Government, that any attempt to proceed with a development of this nature is rejected by the Government and that the Government stands with the people of the Central Coast to reject this inappropriate form of development.

Mr BRIAN LOCKE AND MACQUARIE BANK

Mr WINDSOR (Tamworth) [6.14 p.m.]: Five years ago Mr Brian Locke from Canowindra went to the Macquarie Bank to have it act as adviser to his company, Agricultural Equity, for an agricultural infrastructure project. The project, based in the Riverina, would have resulted in substantial agricultural development for the region. It was designed by Mr Locke to be tax effective for its investors. The project was to cost about \$70 million. Mr Locke, who has worked extensively in the beef industry in Australia and overseas, insisted that Macquarie Bank sign a confidentiality agreement. Bank executive Mr Peter Annand, the Director of Corporate Finance, agreed and signed. Mr Locke wanted the agreement so that he could protect his idea, his plan. Macquarie Bank appears to have been keen to get involved with Mr Locke; so keen, that Mr Annand signed three confidentiality agreements.

A key condition of the confidentiality agreements was that Macquarie Bank was not to disclose Mr Locke's plan to any third party without the prior approval of Mr Locke. Working with what he believed was a well-established and trustworthy bank, Mr Locke thought his business idea was safe. It appears that Mr Locke may have been wrong. He maintains that internal Macquarie Bank documents clearly show that almost from the day Mr Locke walked into Macquarie Bank, it started planning to take over his proposal and develop it. But why? Mr Locke maintains that internal Macquarie Bank documents reveal that the bank would make \$8 million from Mr Locke's proposal. Mr Locke further maintains that Macquarie Bank drew up a list of the top 200 wealthy individuals in Australia to whom it would market this investment plan. The list included some very well-known names and, in Mr Locke's opinion, shows just how seriously Macquarie Bank was treating his proposal.

Mr Locke believes that Macquarie Bank then cross-referenced a second list with another internal Macquarie Bank document showing just how well the top people in Macquarie Bank knew each of the individuals on the rich list. Eventually, Macquarie Bank told Mr Locke that it wanted him out of the deal, his deal. Macquarie Bank offered him \$25,000 to quit and go away quietly. Remember that Macquarie Bank stood to make \$8 million on the project. Mr Locke believed that Macquarie Bank was acting in contravention of their signed confidentiality agreements in pursuing the proposal without him and he therefore began proceedings against Macquarie Bank for breach of confidence. That was five years ago. What has happened since then is one of the reasons I raise this matter today.

Whether Mr Locke is right or wrong is not for me to say, however more than 30 court appearances, all procedural, have cost Mr Locke thousands and thousands of dollars, yet there has been no determining hearing. Mr Locke believes that this case is a total abuse of the legal system. Even the court has questioned the legal tactics. Just several weeks ago, at yet another procedural hearing, the court described the latest Macquarie Bank legal tactic as an abuse of process. The bank is using a tactic called security for costs to stop Mr Locke from getting his day in court. Security for costs is used to stop vexatious litigation, but that is not the case with Mr Locke. Mr Locke is not after sympathy, just his day in court, sooner rather than later, to put his case and seek justice for what he believes are the reprehensible and unethical tactics of Macquarie Bank. Mr Locke has already paid \$80,000 into court as security for costs.

Now Macquarie Bank is after another \$270,000, a total of \$350,000 for a case in which Mr Locke has not borrowed one cent from this bank. He owes the bank nothing. How many other times has this practice been used, not just by Macquarie Bank but by other large organisations that are sued by small litigants, where the

cases never get to court because the little person runs out of money before he can get into court. I call on the Attorney General to bring before this place legislation that protects the right of an individual to have his or her day in court and not be given the run-around by those who want to misuse the system. This is not about money, it is about an individual having the opportunity to present his or her case before the court in a timely manner.

Private members' statements noted.

BILLS RETURNED

The following bills were returned from the Legislative Council without amendment:

Chiropractors Bill
Osteopaths Bill

[Mr Deputy-Speaker left the chair at 6.20 p.m. The House resumed at 7.30 p.m.]

AGRICULTURAL TENANCIES AMENDMENT BILL

In Committee

Consideration of the Legislative Council's amendments.

Schedule of amendments referred to in message of 4 April

- No. 1 Page 3, Schedule 1 [2], line 10. Insert "to the principles of ecologically sustainable development (as described by section 6 (2) of the *Protection of the Environment Administration Act 1991*) insofar as they are capable of applying to those farming practices and" after "farming practices".
- No. 2 Page 4, Schedule 1 [4]. Insert after line 4:
- sustainable agricultural production* is agricultural production that complies with the following criteria:
- (a) responsiveness to consumer needs for food and fibre products that are healthy and of high quality,
 - (b) the taking into account of the cost of production, including environmental costs, and pricing that reflects those costs,
 - (c) the protection and restoration of the natural resource base on which agriculture depends,
 - (d) the prevention of adverse on-site and off-site impacts on the environment and any sector of the community,
 - (e) be flexible in order to accommodate regional differences and changing economic, environmental and social circumstances such as drought or terms of trade,
 - (f) financial viability.

These features of sustainable agriculture should be considered as a package, and no single feature should predominate over the others.

Mr WATKINS (Ryde—Minister for Fair Trading, Minister for Corrective Services, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) [7.31 p.m.]: I move:

That the Legislative Council's amendments be agreed to.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 48

Mr Amery	Mrs Grusovin	Mr Price
Ms Andrews	Mr Greene	Dr Refshauge
Mr Aquilina	Ms Harrison	Ms Saliba
Mr Ashton	Mr Hickey	Mr Scully
Mr Barr	Mr Iemma	Mr W. D. Smith
Mr Bartlett	Mrs Lo Po'	Mr Stewart
Ms Beamer	Mr McBride	Mr Tripodi
Mr Black	Mr McManus	Mr Watkins
Mr Brown	Mr Markham	Mr West
Miss Burton	Mr Martin	Mr Whelan
Mr Campbell	Ms Megarrity	Mr Woods
Mr Collier	Mr Mills	Mr Yeadon
Mr Crittenden	Ms Moore	
Mr Debus	Mr Moss	
Mr Face	Mr Newell	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gaudry	Ms Nori	Mr Anderson
Mr Gibson	Mr Orkopoulos	Mr Thompson

Noes, 32

Mr Armstrong	Mr McGrane	Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Brogden	Mr Merton	Mr Souris
Mrs Chikarovski	Mr Maguire	Mr Tink
Mr Collins	Mr O'Doherty	Mr Torbay
Mr Debnam	Mr Oakeshott	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr George	Mr D. L. Page	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Glachan	Mr Piccoli	Mr Webb
Mr Hazzard	Mr Richardson	Mr Windsor
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Rozzoli	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Humpherson	Ms Seaton	Mr R. H. L. Smith
Dr Kernohan	Mrs Skinner	Mr Stoner

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Legislative Council's amendments agreed to.

Resolution reported from Committee and report adopted.

Message sent to the Legislative Council advising it of the resolution.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Bill: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr Watkins agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow the introduction and progress up to and including the Minister's second reading speech on the Consumer Credit (New South Wales) Amendment (Pay Day Lenders) Bill, notice of which was given this day for tomorrow.

CONSUMER CREDIT (NEW SOUTH WALES) AMENDMENT (PAY DAY LENDERS) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr WATKINS (Ryde—Minister for Fair Trading, Minister for Corrective Services, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) [7.47 p.m.]: I move:

That this will be now read a second time.

I am very pleased to introduce important legislation into this House that will put a stop to payday lenders charging interest rates of up to 1,300 per cent on short-term loans in New South Wales. Payday lenders' practices are arguably the shonkiest in New South Wales. Until now these rip-off merchants have taken advantage of a loophole in the Consumer Credit Code that has allowed them to proliferate in the poorer suburbs across the country and to exploit those who are desperate for cash.

Consumer groups, financial counsellors and many of my colleagues have expressed concern about the effects that payday lenders' activities are having in their communities. Just this evening the honourable member for Rockdale, who has an extensive background in banking and finance, said that he was aghast at the outrageous and usurious practices of payday lenders. I have heard other members describe them as financial parasites, leeches and vermin. Almost no language has been too harsh. The operations of payday lenders have rightly touched a nerve in the Australian community. This bill not only applies the same rules to them that other credit providers abide by but also caps the costs to consumers at a rate far below the usurious rates currently charged by payday lenders.

I should make it very clear at this point that the bill is a State initiative that was championed by the Labor States at the Ministerial Council on Consumer Affairs [MCCA] last year. That is why I was more than

surprised to see the Commonwealth Minister for Financial Services and Regulation, Joe Hockey, trying to claim credit for it last week. Obviously, he is desperate to score some points for the ailing Howard Government. But grandstanding in the press, saying that he urged ministerial members last November to act on this issue, is a bit rich even by his standards.

The facts are very different. The only thing I am aware of Mr Hockey doing is vociferously defending the banks at last year's ministerial meeting and responding to a letter last November written by the former Queensland fair trading Minister, the Hon. Judy Spence. Mr Hockey has never expressed an interest in this matter; he never even issued a public statement on this issue before last week. After last week's strange effort I wrote to Mr Hockey expressing my surprise at his new-found so-called concern for consumers. I wrote:

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you concerning your recent comments in relation to the regulation of pay day lending.

It was with some bemusement that I noted your suggestion that you have been urging States to take prompt action on this matter.

As you are aware, the States and Territories were the initiators of the proposal to do with the undesirable practices of pay day lenders and the matter has been progressing rapidly through the Ministerial Council on Consumer Affairs, of which you are a member. Indeed, the letter you wrote in November supposedly "urging action" was simply a response to advice provided on the issue by the former Queensland Minister for Fair Trading, the Hon J Spence, MLA. Furthermore, while your correspondence indicated that you have received advice from the Commonwealth Consumer Affairs Advisory Council on pay day lending, you have not seen fit to share the Council's findings with the Ministerial Council.

The Commonwealth Government has done nothing to address the problems arising from pay day lending. Moreover, it has done nothing with its banking powers to help the low income consumers who have been forced to deal with these loan sharks. Despite repeated calls from the States and Territories, you have done nothing to counter the actions taken by banks and other mainstream lenders to force the socially disadvantaged out of their branches.

If you had really wanted to do anything to counter the damage caused by pay day lenders, you would have ensured that their financial needs were met by the institutions for which you have direct responsibility.

As you are aware, the New South Wales Government and the other States and Territories are acting swiftly to regulate pay day lending. The only action you will have ever taken on this issue is one acknowledgement letter and a press release. The record speaks for itself.

Yours sincerely,

John Watkins MP
Minister for Fair Trading

I look forward to Mr Hockey's response to that letter. If Mr Hockey is so concerned about the plight of families preyed upon by payday lenders, why has he continually opposed repeated calls by the States and Territories to force the banks to be more socially responsible? As recently as two weeks ago Mr Hockey opposed the sensible Federal Labor policy to implement a charter of social responsibility for banks. I cannot believe that he is so out of touch. Ordinary Australians—ordinary New South Wales families—want financial services providers, especially banks, to seriously lift their game. It is a bit rich to have Joe Hockey say that he is opposed to a charter of social responsibility and try to pretend he now has social conscience. The people of Australia will vote with their feet later this year to show what they think of John Howard's more-of-the-same banking policy.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills): Order! The honourable member for Port Macquarie will cease interjecting. He will have an opportunity to contribute to the debate at the appropriate time.

Mr WATKINS: I mentioned previously that the Ministerial Council on Consumer Affairs had endorsed the proposal to bring payday lenders under the code. Later this year there will be an amendment to the uniform Consumer Credit Code enacted by the Queensland Parliament which will apply in New South Wales as provided by the Credit Laws Agreement. However, until that time, and in view of the urgent need to stop the proliferation of these lending practices in this State, this bill will apply the Consumer Credit Code to payday lenders in New South Wales from the time it is passed. The bill achieves this by applying the code if credit is provided for a period of less than 62 days and the fee is greater than 5 per cent of the loan or the interest rate is greater than 24 per cent.

The bill specifically excludes those products which the original code intended to exempt, such as authorised overdrawn cheques and the like. Once the bill is passed, all of the code's protections will then be available to consumers of payday loans. The code's protections include pre-contractual disclosure of all costs and terms and conditions of the loan, which is a basic protection currently unavailable to payday loan borrowers.

All they get now is a form to sign to authorise direct debits from their accounts. Other relevant protections include a requirement that a copy of the contract be provided, as well as restrictions on repossession and enforcement.

Payday customers currently get little or no documentation and securities are taken, commonly over cars, for loans amounting to a fraction of the value of the car. Those securities may be seized and sold if the consumer is one day late in making a repayment. This practice will be illegal when payday lenders come under the code. The bill provides a very important cap on what those lenders can charge. Honourable members would be aware of the exorbitant charges levied by these lenders in view of the considerable unfavourable press coverage they have received. It is not uncommon for the charge for payday credit to be in the order of 1,000 per cent if it is calculated as an annual percentage rate.

The problem the bill will overcome is the claim by payday lenders that they do not charge interest. In short, the true cost of the loan is currently disguised. Unsuspecting customers often do not realise the extent to which they are being slugged as they are charged a flat fee. That means that even though they might be able to get credit elsewhere they cannot compare the costs, as reputable lenders disclose their costs as an annual percentage rate. That is why this bill will require payday lenders to express the cost of credit as an annual percentage rate. Consumers will then be able to clearly see what they are getting into.

Moreover, the maximum interest rate which is applied to credit in New South Wales can then be applied. That rate is currently prescribed at 48 per cent, which is the same as in the other jurisdictions which impose a cap—Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory. Since there are currently no meaningful contracts and payday lenders are not subject to current regulation, these lenders have been charging whatever fee they think they can get away with for, say, late payment or to get back a repossessed car or goods. The Government believes that the intention of the maximum prescribed rate would be subverted if it was applied only to the annual percentage rate that they will be required to disclose.

Therefore, the bill requires all their charges to be included in the calculation of the maximum interest rate. This will be the case for credit which is to be provided for up to 62 days or for prescribed contracts. This step has been taken so that disreputable lenders cannot escape the cap by disclosing a rate well below the maximum and then inflating their fees to maintain their excessive profits. I thank officers from the Department of Fair Trading and my ministerial staff, especially Emma Ashton, for the bill proceeding to this point. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Stoner.

COMPANION ANIMALS AMENDMENT BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr WOODS (Clarence—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs) [7.57 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Companion Animals Act 1998 was introduced by this Government as part of its review agenda for animal welfare legislation in New South Wales. The Act provides a sound framework for the management of companion animals in the new millennium and reflects current community values and expectations about animal management and welfare. The Companion Animals Act has been fully operational since 1 July 1999. The aim of the current amendments are twofold: first, to impose stronger penalties on the owner of an already declared dangerous dog which attacks a person as a result of the owner's failure to comply with their obligations; and, second, to address a number of practical enforcement issues that have arisen since the commencement of the Act.

Already there are higher penalties for a number of offences when a dog has been declared dangerous. The current penalties for a dog which has been declared dangerous and which attacks again are already 10 times higher than for other dogs. For a dog to be declared dangerous under the Companion Animals Act it must have, without provocation, attacked or killed a person or animal, or repeatedly threatened to attack; this is provided in

section 33 of the Act. Once declared dangerous there are a number of specific control requirements imposed on the owner of the dog under section 51 of the Act. These include de-sexing the dog, ensuring that the dog is always on a lead and muzzled when away from the property where it is usually kept; displaying a dangerous dog warning sign on the property and keeping the dog in a child-proof enclosure.

Failure to comply with these requirements is currently an offence with a maximum penalty of 50 penalty units and may also result in the seizure of the dog by a council officer under section 52 of the Act. I must emphasise that the majority of dog owners are responsible and loving carers. In the vast majority of instances, dogs are valued and loved family members. These well socialised dogs, far from being a danger, provide a number of benefits to our community.

However, there are a small number of cases where the owners of dangerous dogs do not take the necessary precautions to protect the public. Although the number of dog attacks each year are very small and dogs rarely attack without provocation, dog attacks do occur and these attacks can be serious, or even fatal. The bill will create an additional offence whereby the owner of a dangerous dog will be guilty if an attack on a person is the result of the owner's failure to comply with the requirements under section 51 that I mentioned earlier, such as keeping the dog in a childproof enclosure. This new offence carries a maximum penalty of 200 penalty units or imprisonment for two years, or both. It also provides for the owner to be automatically and permanently disqualified from owning a dog.

This penalty ensures consistency with other relevant legislation as advised by the Attorney General. Under the Crimes Act 1900 it is an offence under section 35A if a dog is used to maliciously inflict grievous bodily harm, or actual bodily harm, on a person. The maximum penalties are seven years or five years imprisonment respectively. A person convicted of either of these two provisions is also permanently disqualified from owning a dog under section 23 of the Act. In addition, the bill provides for more effective enforcement of the existing dangerous dog and restricted breed control requirements. Currently, under section 25 of the Companion Animals Regulation 1999, dogs which are declared dangerous must be lifetime registered within seven days of being declared dangerous.

However, the penalty for failure to comply is simply a fine. The bill provides for the requirement to lifetime register to be treated in the same way as the other control requirements imposed on dangerous dogs and restricted breeds. Thus, failure to comply will result in a much higher penalty and/or the dog being seized by an authorised council officer. The bill therefore includes lifetime registration as a requirement for dangerous dogs in section 51 and for restricted breeds in section 56. Section 25 of the regulation will also be amended accordingly. The registration requirement applies seven days after a dangerous dog declaration—regardless of the dog's age—and at six months of age for restricted breeds.

The bill also includes a number of minor amendments which are intended to improve the effectiveness of the existing legislation for councils in light of experience since the implementation of the Act. These amendments are intended to assist councils in obtaining compliance with the requirements of the Act, are consistent with responsible ownership and remedy a number of shortcomings in the present arrangement. Advice has been sought from the Companion Animals Advisory Board and other key stakeholders on problems with the legislation so that appropriate and considered amendments can be made. Only non-controversial and pressing amendments have been included at this time.

At the moment an owner can only ever be fined once for owning an unregistered animal. Once fined, there is no incentive at all to register the animal. This was not the intention when the Companion Animals Bill was drafted and the effect was only discovered after the Act had commenced. Given that the penalty for "animal not registered" is \$110 versus the cost of registering an entire animal at \$100, many councils have reported that irresponsible animal owners have little incentive to lifetime register their animals. To address this situation, the bill creates two new offences that cover unregistered animals which are legally required to be registered. The first offence will allow the owner of an unregistered animal, which is legally required to be registered, to be fined if the animal is found in a place other than the place where it is ordinarily kept.

A second new offence of "failure to comply with notice to register within 28 days" is also created. This will cover the circumstance where council has sent owners a notice reminding them that their animal is overdue for lifetime registration. If the owners ignore that notice and fail to lifetime register their animal within 28 days of the date of the notice, the owners will be guilty of an offence, unless the animal is otherwise exempt under the provisions of the Companion Animals Act. An example of a dog which is exempt from registration would be a dog used for the primary purpose of working stock—section 3 of the Act. A new offence may occur, and an additional penalty imposed, every six months until the dog is registered.

For both these new offences the maximum penalty is two penalty units, which is presently \$220. The penalty has been set at a level which is not unduly harsh as they are both offences which can be repeated. This provides a greater incentive for animal owners already caught once to lifetime register their animals for the future. Once registered it is then possible to identify the owners when animals are involved in other breaches such as straying or attacking. This encourages responsible ownership, which is more consistent with the Companion Animals Act. The bill also extends section 11 of the Act so that it applies to identified-only animals as well as those which are lifetime registered.

Currently, only owners of animals which are microchipped and lifetime registered are required to update their records on the register when there are any changes of ownership or address. This has caused problems, particularly with breeders and pet shops not properly completing forms with respect to changes of ownership. To maintain the integrity of information contained on the New South Wales Companion Animals Register, this bill will ensure that all changes of ownership and address must be notified. The bill also introduces measures which will regulate all situations where dogs and cats are microchipped in New South Wales. Currently, in situations where animals are not required to be registered under the Companion Animals Act but the owners voluntarily choose to microchip their animals, there is no regulation of the microchipping processes used.

This includes cats which were owned before 1 July 1999, working dogs, and dogs still on the old annual registration system. At the moment anyone can insert the microchip, any microchip can be used and the animal need not be listed on the New South Wales Companion Animals Register. This situation has caused problems with at least one supplier providing microchips which do not comply with the international standard. This supplier has been encouraging veterinarians and other unregulated and possibly untrained persons to use non International Standards Organisation [ISO] microchips on certain categories of animals. Untrained and unqualified persons inserting microchips creates potential health and welfare risks for animals.

The use of non-ISO microchips also has the potential to compromise the integrity of the register itself, since the non-ISO microchips are not guaranteed to have unique numbers. The bill extends the regulation of microchipping to cover not only animals required to be microchipped under the Act, but also animals whose owners have chosen to have them chipped voluntarily. Now, all people doing microchipping in New South Wales will be covered by the Act and will have to follow the director-general's guidelines. If not authorised to microchip under the Companion Animals Act they may be fined; or if they are authorised under the Act but breach the Act, regulations or guidelines they may have their authorisation withdrawn.

This measure will provide responsible pet owners with greater protection against untrained microchippers and non-complying microchips, and will ensure that all owners can be confident that by microchipping they are listing their pet on the New South Wales Companion Animals Register. At the moment under the Act it is a defence for an animal owner to say that someone else, such as a professional dog walker or boarding kennel, was in charge of the animal at the time that an offence occurred. However, there is no corresponding offence provision for that person. The bill provides that the person in charge of the animal may, for certain minor offences only, be guilty of the offence in lieu of the owner. This situation will only occur when the owner is not present, and has left the dog or cat in the charge of another person who is aged 16 or older.

These offences include "dog not under effective control in a public place" and "failure to remove dog faeces", and range from \$55 to \$220 in penalty notices for normal dogs and cats. There are higher penalties for dangerous dogs and restricted breeds, but it should be noted that these dogs must never be left in the sole charge of anyone under the age of 18—this is already a requirement of the Act. The bill also addresses some operational difficulties encountered with the confidentiality and misuse of information provisions of the Act, as well as bringing the legislation into line with the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998. The Government takes its responsibilities very seriously with respect to protecting the privacy of animal owners.

The Companion Animals Regulation was amended in July 2000 to address some of these issues. It is now proposed to amend section 89 of the Act to make a single, comprehensive provision in the principal legislation to address privacy issues, as well as other issues to do with the integrity of information collected under the Act. This section will draw together sections 29 to 31 of the regulation with the existing privacy and confidentiality provisions of the Act. Currently, section 89 only covers information acquired in the exercise of functions under the Act; it does not adequately cover information obtained unlawfully. It also covers unlawful disclosures of information, but not the unlawful use of information.

The current penalty for the offence is inadequate given the community's concern to protect personal information. The Act will be amended to cover the misuse of confidential information, whether lawfully or

unlawfully obtained. It will also cover not only information from the New South Wales Companions Animals Register, but other confidential information that may be obtained under the Act. In conclusion, these measures will strengthen the protection of privacy of animal owners and ensure that personal information collected about animal owners under the Act is not unlawfully used or disclosed to third parties. The maximum penalty will be increased from 10 penalty units to 25 penalty units for confidential information, or 100 penalty units for suppressed records. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr George.

PARRAMATTA PARK TRUST BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 4 April.

Ms SEATON (Southern Highlands) [8.11 p.m.]: In speaking in debate on the Parramatta Park Trust Bill I indicate to the Minister for the Environment that the Opposition will not oppose this bill, which seeks to dramatically change the way in which Parramatta Park is managed. Parramatta Park, which is currently the property of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, comes under the classification of regional park. This legislation seeks to create a new, independent statutory entity under a trust, and will make Parramatta Park equivalent to some of the other great parks and areas in New South Wales, including Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust, the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust, and Bicentennial Park Trust.

I know that all honourable members would agree that those parks have a special place in our history and in our spiritual lives. Parramatta Park, on any criteria, is equal to that task in that it is equivalent in stature and status to those parks to which I referred earlier. The bill will also make radical changes to the funding and structure of the park and its management. I understand that it will have to make its own funding bid to Treasury, based on a plan of management which it will have to devise. That management plan will be devised with the help of seven appointed trustees, whose positions will be created by this legislation. A director will be in charge of administration.

This bill will also give powers to certain authorised officers in the new trust who would have similar powers to those currently held by National Parks and Wildlife Service officers. Until 1997 Parramatta Park was a Crown trust run by Parramatta council and I understand that it had a budget of approximately \$400,000 a year. When the Carr Government created a new category of national park called regional parks Parramatta Park and six other parks were added to that new category. They included Berowra Valley, Leacock, Penrith Lakes, Rouse Hill, Western Sydney and William Howe parks.

Since Parramatta Park has become a regional park it has vied with those six other parks for funding. I note from the annual report of the National Parks and Wildlife Service that that funding is \$1.57 million per annum. I think it is fair to say that Parramatta Park has probably not had the resourcing that it has needed. When we take into account its important heritage and cultural values and its Aboriginal heritage values we realise that it must have struggled to meet all its obligations and do all the things that it needed to do to meet future challenges. The park has an interesting background in that it faced a number of challenges in the past.

Under a lease arrangement Parramatta Leagues Club constructed a car park on land that is now to be part of the trust lands. A lease of \$270,000 per annum was negotiated by the trust with Parramatta Leagues Club for the use of that land. That money was to be directed to continue improvements in Parramatta Regional Park. I seek the Minister's assurance that that lease revenue will remain with the new trust. I also understand that Parramatta council made a financial contribution of around \$50,000 a year. Parramatta Park, one of our most important cultural and conservation icons, has a significant European heritage—something to which the Minister referred in his speech. That includes Government House, one of the first farms in New South Wales and an important botanic collection.

Parramatta Park and Parramatta River are sites of immense importance to Aboriginal people, having been the home of the Burramatta clan of the Darug people. The significant European heritage of Parramatta Park puts it in the same category as some of our other important European heritage buildings. That includes old Government House in Sydney, the Macquarie Street precinct and all the historic buildings in Camden associated with the Macarthur family. In the last month the honourable member for Port Macquarie has been keen to advise this House about the recent discovery of the foundations of old Government House in Port Macquarie—something about which people in Port Macquarie are proud and something which adds significantly to the cultural heritage of Port Macquarie.

In addition to those heritage buildings, the botanical collection, and the importance of the site to Aboriginal people, the park has high conservation requirements. Because of the location of Parramatta Park in one of Sydney's most significant areas of western Sydney—a vibrant and growing area and one which has an enormous amount to offer—there have always been strong pressures on that park. As late as a year or so ago there were still strong pressures on that park. The new trust will have to be extremely strong and extremely well prepared to meet whatever challenges it is faced with in the future. In 1998 Richard Macey wrote an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in connection with the development of the car park in Parramatta Park under the lease arrangement. He summarised succinctly some of the pressures that have been placed on Parramatta Park. He described the park as "shrinking" and said, "In 1857 the park covered 99.6 hectares. Today it covers about 86.6 hectares."

In 1913 Parramatta High School was added to the park precinct. In 1923 and 1965, public roads and the railway shaved off a further 1.8 hectares. In 1860 the railway was constructed. In 1952 a war memorial was constructed by the Returned Services Leagues Club. In 1967 the old Government House area was dedicated. In the 1950s a nine-hole private golf club and a swimming pool were built. In 1981 the Parramatta stadium occupied eight hectares of the park. In September 1998 the parking area, to which I have already referred, excised 1.7 hectares. The area has always been under pressure from the implementation of projects and the addition of buildings. Although these buildings are of great significance to the people of the Parramatta area, they are also examples of the pressure that has been applied to the park.

The former Minister for the Environment, the honourable member for Wentworthville, speaking about the objectives of the Government in setting up regional parks, said that the seven regional parks would protect nature in the city, help protect plant and animal species, establish green corridors through which wildlife could safely move, help regenerate the bush and preserve the city's recreational and educational bushland. When one looks at what has happened to Parramatta Park in the past two or three years, it is difficult to understand how those objectives have been met by classifying the park as a regional park. In particular, I point to the Government's recent plans to implement the Chatswood to Parramatta rail link proposal, which included an above-ground extension through the park to Westmead.

The impact of such a proposal would have been the excision of as much as a further 900 square metres from the park, the removal of the original stone gate pillars, the rerouting of traffic past Old Government House and the disturbance of the historic stables, the bathhouse site and the observatory, which was built in 1822. In addition, some heritage trees, which apparently were traditional markers for the observatory, would have been disturbed or destroyed. The plan proposed by the Carr Government and the Minister would have radically impacted on the precious Parramatta Park. It is a tribute to Tom Uren, chairman of the trust, and a number of others that pressure was brought to bear on the Government. The plan was the subject of a great deal of community debate and media attention. I am pleased that the Carr Government responded properly to that pressure with an alternative scheme which involves a rail corridor with tunnelling under Park Parade, so that the integrity of the park will not be further damaged.

A number of arguments have been put forward in support of this legislation. In particular, the trust chairman, Tom Uren, argued that the legislation acknowledges more appropriately the unique cultural and historic values of the area. One could also argue that the removal of Parramatta Park from management by the National Parks and Wildlife Service allows the service to focus on conservation-based work. That is presently part of a lively debate in the conservation community. With the National Parks and Wildlife Service receiving limited funding, it is important to identify the best uses for that funding. It would be inappropriate for the service to focus on European and built items when there is a great deal to be achieved in natural areas from controlling feral animals, developing species recovery programs and managing the National Park Estate.

I can understand the benefits in setting up Parramatta Park as a stand-alone entity. Principally, the trust will be allowed to fundraise in the private sector and to develop sponsorships. It will be able to pursue new event-based ideas that it considers are relevant to the community and to the appropriate custodianship of the park. In that respect, the trust is similar to the Royal Botanic Gardens and Domain Trust, which has a lively relationship with the commercial sector in the hosting of events and in providing the venue for important cultural activities in the city. The Royal Botanic Gardens generates recurrent revenue of approximately \$15 million and sponsorship fees, according to its annual report, of approximately \$5 million.

I ask the Minister to address concerns which have been expressed about this legislation. It has been claimed that the bill is an easy way to get Parramatta Park off the National Parks and Wildlife Service list of financial obligations and to try to access Federal funding, if available, from time to time. Concerns have also

been expressed as to whether the new entity will provide the land with the same boundary protection as the National Parks and Wildlife Act. I ask the Minister to guarantee that the trust will not be persuaded to relinquish slices of the park in the future for urban planning and infrastructure purposes. Will park values be compromised by the need to attract new events and other park users to gain revenue?

That is an important issue as the trust is required to develop a plan of management and to clearly consider its aims, objectives and obligations in protecting the values of the park. If the trust is dependent on external revenue and sponsorship, we must ensure that permanent buildings will not be placed in the park or compromises made which result in slices of land being given up in return for revenue. We must ensure that the plan of management properly reflects the values of the park and protect it adequately. I also ask the Minister to inform the House about his expectations of the level of the budget of the trust. In the past a budget of \$1.57 million has been shared between the seven regional parks. I suspect that the trust will want a great deal more than one-seventh of that amount. I also seek an assurance from the Minister that the regional park budget will not diminish as a result of Parramatta Park being moved into a new structure and that the application to Treasury will be honoured.

The trust must have an adequate level of support from the State Government so that it will not be entirely dependent on sponsorship and other revenues. It is important that the State Government acknowledges some degree of ongoing financial obligation to the trust. The Opposition supported recent changes to the Royal Botanic Gardens Trust and Zoo Board legislation, which added financial acumen to their boards to improve operations and financial stability. This legislation does not include a requirement that such expertise be reflected in the make-up of the trust. Yet if the trust is to attract revenue, manage events and operate in a commercial environment, at least one trust member should have financial expertise.

Some of the concerns I have mentioned have been raised with me by various groups, including the National Parks Association, the Nature Conservation Council and the Colong Foundation. I look forward to the Minister's response to the matters I have raised. I have discussed this legislation with Tom Uren, the Parramatta Park Trust chairman and with representatives of the Friends of Parramatta Park, many of whom are also members of the Parramatta Uniting Church community. They have all indicated strong support for the legislation. On that basis the Opposition will not oppose the bill. However, I look forward to the guarantees and assurances from the Minister about the points of concern I have raised.

Ms HARRISON (Parramatta) [8.28 p.m.]: It is with a great deal of pleasure that I support the legislation, which has been a long time coming. For many decades, not only a few years, Parramatta Park has been undervalued. I congratulate this Minister and the former Minister for the Environment, the honourable member for Wentworthville, for the groundwork they undertook to bring the bill to fruition. The legislation is probably the best way to go to ensure the future of Parramatta Park. Individual legislation has certainly provided benefits to other parks that have been made stand-alone entities, particularly financial benefits.

The Parramatta Park Trust will have control of its own finances. That is an important symbolic acceptance of the importance of the park. Although the National Parks and Wildlife Service has done a good job with Parramatta Park it is time to move on. I am delighted with the legislation, which will promote the park as a more attractive proposition for potential sponsors. The park will be in a better position to attract funding from external grant agencies because it will be able to liaise and negotiate on its own behalf rather than as part of a regional parks network.

The legislation will facilitate the adoption of an expanded commercial focus for the trust, which will increase its capacity to generate revenue to fund park conservation programs. It will also encourage the trust to explore a new range of event opportunities, which will further open the park to western Sydney communities. I thank Tom Uren, the chairman of the trust, for his good work and Alan Overton, who has always been available to talk to me about various issues. He has been a strong and vocal supporter of the park. I also thank Jillian Comber for managing the park so brilliantly in the past few years. We have certainly had some tricky issues to deal with. She has been a good sounding board and has given good advice. She has always been a consummate professional. Indeed, I have never dealt with a more professional public servant.

I moved to Parramatta in the mid 1980s. I have always been a runner and my son is now a cyclist. We go to the park most mornings, so I have been able to see at first hand the changes in the park. In the past few years the changes have been dramatic compared to those made in the previous decade. Sometimes it is the big projects like the massive tree plantings, the regeneration of the banks of the creeks, the mowing and other aesthetic work, but it is also the work on the historic houses, and the provision of barbecues, chairs and tables.

In the past few years a number of barbecues have been installed. They are extremely well utilised, and people wait in line to use them. Between 500 and 1,000 people use Parramatta Park daily to walk their dogs, to cycle or to rollerblade.

The park attracts one million visitors a year, and that does not include those who use the park when it is the venue for specific functions. On those occasions the number of visitors to the park is vastly increased. Every Friday and Sunday night between 80 and 100 people play soccer in Parramatta Park. The game has had to be split into two, with 20 people in each side. Parramatta Park is enormously important to the people of Parramatta. The honourable member for Southern Highlands referred to diverse developments in the park such as Parramatta pool, Parramatta Stadium and the golf course. I do not believe that open space should be left simply as open space. Recreation encompasses many forms of activity. The golf course, the swimming pool and Parramatta Stadium are important recreation assets for the people of western Sydney.

Parramatta Park is a hidden and undervalued treasure. It is unusual to have 85 hectares of open space right at the doorstep of a major business centre. The park is of historical significance. It is on the Register of the National Estate, the State Heritage Register and the Register of the National Trust. Its history is extraordinary. The history and fabric of the park demonstrate the process of colonisation from first exploration and occupation, land clearing, building, agricultural town planning and landscape planning on a grand scale. The parklands, including topography, landscape elements and archaeological resources, were the focus for the cradle of European settlement in Australia. The park was the site of Australia's first successful agriculture and grape growing. It was also a major site of convict activity and labour, and retains the physical evidence of such processes and events.

The park is one of Sydney's most important and earliest dedicated areas of open space. It provides a major regional open space in the demographic centre of Sydney. It hosts a number of large events, including Australia Day functions and national day celebrations for the many ethnic communities in the area. The Thai festival in the park is very important. The park is home to many cycling events, including the Roads and Traffic Authority Big Ride, which ends in Parramatta Park. It is also home to many fun runs. Parramatta Park is incredibly important and significant to western Sydney. I am sure that in the next budget the Minister will fund it adequately to ensure that the transition to the new system will be as smooth as possible.

The park contains some of the most significant remnant vegetation in western Sydney, including approximately 10 hectares of rare remnant indigenous vegetation that provides much-needed habitat for native wildlife and more than 120 different bird species. The bird species are particularly beautiful first thing in the morning. A few years ago only one or two groups of Tai Chi could be seen in the park, but now Tai Chi groups are all over the park in the early morning. When the mist is rising it is a spectacular sight, and one that too few people are aware of.

Mr George: Are you up there early?

Ms HARRISON: Yes, I am up there early. I am there at 5.30 a.m. or six o'clock. It is amazing who you run into at that time of the morning. The lucky ones are those who know what the park is like as the sun comes up. Before Parramatta Park was known by that name and settled by Europeans it was important land to the Darug Aboriginal people. The park and the river running through it were the core of the territory of the Burramatta clan of the Darug. They hunted, fished and met with other groups on the land. Evidence of that indigenous connection exists within the park today, and it is important that those cultural links survive for future generations of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Governor Phillip derived the name of the settlement at Parramatta from the local Aboriginal people. The original name of Burramatta was preferred over Rose Hill, the name Phillip had originally given the settlement. In 1791 Phillip changed the name to Parramatta.

The landscape now comprising the park was one of the earliest sites of first contact between the European settlers and the Aboriginal people. The Darug community maintains its strong ties with the park to this day. Ongoing liaison regarding the management of the park is undertaken with the relevant local Aboriginal groups. The legislation is important, as it acknowledges not only the depth of European history in the park but also its considerable and significant Aboriginal history. The legislative framework proposed in the bill will support programs that can preserve and promote that Aboriginal history. Both the historic value of the park and its strong Aboriginal cultural links need to be reviewed, celebrated and enjoyed.

The bill opens up the possibility of working closely with Aboriginal interests to achieve that goal, which is enhanced by a park management structure that is able to operate on a more intimate and local scale,

while acknowledging the broader cultural significance of the park. As such, the bill brings forward the necessary administrative framework to conserve, manage and promote the values of the park with respect to Aboriginal cultural heritage. That is a practical contribution towards reconciliation that we can all support. I ask the Minister to facilitate, if possible, the representation of Parramatta Football Club on the new trust. The Parramatta people love their football as much as they love the park.

I hope that the continuing involvement of the Parramatta Football Club will be possible. I also plead for the separation at some stage of the cycleway from the roadway. I realise that will take significant capital investment. I know from experience that the roadway is often quite dangerous. The rollerbladers always take up too much room. When cars are allowed in the park later in the day it is also quite dangerous. On the one hand it is wonderful that so many people use the park, but on the other hand their presence creates safety management problems. It is a good dilemma to face, but one that will have to be sorted out. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr YEADON (Granville—Minister for Information Technology, Minister for Energy, Minister for Forestry, and Minister for Western Sydney) [8.40 p.m.]: I am pleased to speak in support of this bill. I can only agree with the honourable member for Parramatta that historically Parramatta Park has been one of the most undervalued and unrecognised resources, not only in western Sydney but in the entire city of Sydney and State of New South Wales. Parramatta Park is a vital community resource, particularly for the people of western Sydney. It is also a unique natural heritage space in the middle of urban Parramatta. It is unusual to find such a natural space in any large city the size of Parramatta, which is, after all, our second largest central business district.

The park contains regenerating Cumberland Plain woodland vegetation and historic plantings dating back to the early 1800s. Honourable members will be aware that Cumberland Plain woodland is a scarce commodity. The vegetation in the park provides habitat for more than 120 bird species. For all of those reasons the natural heritage of Parramatta Park is significant and should be actively conserved. The Government's Greening of Sydney policy, which was released in January 1995, identified the need to protect existing urban bushland and to create parks and reserves for the people of Sydney. Parramatta Park is a site of national significance. It is listed in the Register of the National Estate, the State Heritage Register and the Register of the National Trust.

The park contains two of the oldest buildings in Australia. One is Old Government House, which dates back to 1799 and includes archaeological remains of Governor Phillip's 1788 Government House. The other is Salter's Cottage, which was built between 1798 and 1800. This cottage is believed to be the farmhouse that was converted to a dairy by Governor Macquarie in 1815. Parramatta Park is, therefore, the site of one of the earliest European settlements in Australia. The bill acknowledges the historic significance of the park by making specific provisions to ensure the protection and conservation of the historic landscape.

The bill not only acknowledges the genuine heritage value of the park, it also builds in a capacity for the trust to preserve those values for current and future generations. One of the more important aspects of the bill is its creation of an administrative arrangement that will be better able to focus on the protection and the promotion of the values that are unique to Parramatta Park. A similar arrangement was provided for its sister parks, such as Centennial Park and the Domain. The bill acknowledges the importance of the park for all the citizens of Sydney and is an indication that citizens other than those in the east area of town can play an active part in preserving and managing their environment.

As we heard from the honourable member for Parramatta, Parramatta Park is widely used and revered by the people of western Sydney and the Parramatta region. Many of my constituents in the electorate of Granville are also regular visitors to Parramatta Park and enjoy its outstanding recreational and aesthetic qualities. The park's historical significance is important for national and international visitors as well as for the people of Parramatta and western Sydney. The beneficiaries are also likely to span many different economic sectors.

The trust will have the opportunity to liaise with external grant agencies and attract more funding for its conservation programs. The nub of the bill is its provision to the trust of the ability to seek sponsorship. The more money we can attract to the park to ensure its preservation and enhanced recreation facilities, the better off we will all be. Many individuals and organisations will be able to find a more meaningful and direct relationship with Parramatta Park. That will foster commitment to resourcing the conservation of this wonderful bushland and open space. The bill is a valuable contribution to the protection and promotion of an important site. I am pleased to support it.

Mr MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [8.44 p.m.]: I am pleased to speak in support of the Parramatta Park Trust Bill. Previous speakers have referred to the park's historical significance and to the sense of tradition that one experiences when one enters Parramatta Park. I recall that as a young lad, which was not so long ago, notwithstanding what the Minister might think, I would spend most of the school holidays in Parramatta Park. At that time it was considered unique. It is probably even more unusual today, given its location in the middle of the Parramatta central business district. Despite the many buildings, office blocks and structures that have been erected over the years, the one monument that has stood the test of time is Parramatta Park.

It is a credit to governments of all political persuasions that the park's grounds have basically remained intact. One would find it difficult to find words to describe the emotional reaction of most Australians to Old Government House. That building is also unique. It has been preserved well, although there were changes to the early structure of the building. Those changes form part of the building's original integrity and the patina that exists today. I am pleased to note that part of that building has been put to a fairly worthwhile commercial use and generates some income. Included is the botanic collection, as well as the very many Aboriginal heritage items belonging to the Burramatta clan of the Darug people. It is an area that symbolises the beginning of European settlement, as it were.

The park is situated beside the Parramatta River and is a central part of the Parramatta landscape. Previous speakers failed to mention the fact that some years ago, possibly in the early 1960s, but certainly in the 1950s, part of Parramatta Park was used as a motor racing track. Jack Brabham started his early motor racing career in Parramatta Park. He went on to become a world champion driver and to design motor racing vehicles. To motor racing enthusiasts Parramatta Park is hallowed ground. I also recall that on occasions when I played cricket on one of the many cricket pitches located in Parramatta Park I would look across the park at the bends that the drivers had to negotiate. In those days the cars had fairly primitive brakes; they were practically non-existent bearing in mind the potential speeds of the cars. Fortunately there were not too many accidents.

The legislation continues the history of Parramatta Park. It removes its status as a regional park and creates a new independent entity under a trust, which is similar to the Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust, the Royal Botanic Gardens Trust and Bicentennial Park Trust in respect of funding and structure. The trust will have to stand on its own feet, as it were, and make application to Treasury for funding based on a new management plan involving seven appointed trustees. The trust will have a director and certain authorised officers will be given powers similar to those enjoyed by National Parks and Wildlife Service officers. There has been an emphasis on Parramatta Park's heritage, but there have been times when heritage, unfortunately, was taken for granted. As I said earlier, it represents the beginning, although I concede that Elizabeth Farm shares a similar reputation.

The size of the land involved in a city the size of Parramatta is unusual to say the least. The area will be changed from a regional park to make the park virtually stand on its own. The trust will be given certain powers, initiatives and incentives to raise money. It will have power to grant leases over parts of the lands for up to 20 years, and, over lands that are currently subject to long-term leases, for up to 50 years. The Minister is to consult the Treasurer before giving his approval for the grant of a lease or licence over such part of the trust lands.

As unique and historic as the park might be, the bill requires the trust to maintain an Internet site—although the feeling one gets when walking through Old Government House is far removed from the Internet. Old Government House is a major tourist attraction for Parramatta. Many people who have moved into the Parramatta area have toured Old Government House. People are invited to candlelit tours that are held on some evenings. The honourable member for Parramatta is nodding. No doubt she has toured that old house by candlelight. Many times I have thought about embarking on the tour but usually some other activity conflicts.

Ms Harrison: You are afraid of ghosts.

Mr MERTON: That is right. Old houses, like Old Government House, have an unusual and fascinating attraction at night. Some years ago I went through Elizabeth Farm House at night. The place comes alive because it is so quiet and one can imagine what happened there over almost a couple of hundred years. The Opposition does not oppose the bill. We hope it will ensure the long-term protection and security of Parramatta Park as a separate entity that is not challenged and does not lose its integrity. It should remain intact because in 2001 we should preserve the past, restore the past and, most importantly, conserve the past. I hope this bill will preserve the park for the residents of Parramatta today and for countless generations of Australians to come.

Mr DEBUS (Blue Mountains—Attorney General, Minister for the Environment, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Arts) [8.54 p.m.], in reply: I thank colleagues

who have contributed to the debate: the honourable member for Parramatta; the honourable member for Granville, who is also the Minister for Western Sydney; the honourable member for Southern Highlands; and the honourable member for Baulkham Hills. Several matters were raised by the honourable member for Southern Highlands, who led for the Opposition, and I will briefly respond to them. It is a provision of the bill that the boundaries of the park can be changed only by an Act of Parliament, and that trust lands can be disposed of only by an Act of Parliament. That is the same level of protection as exists for a national park, and that will remain under this bill.

The lease revenue that presently flows to the park from the swimming pool and similar facilities will continue to flow to the trust, and I can indicate in a general way that it is reasonable to expect that the budget of the park trust will increase in the new financial year, although, self-evidently, I am unable to discuss aspect of the park's future in any detail. As has been suggested at several stages during debate on the bill, the new trust will be more effective because of its new structure in the attraction of funds, both public and private, for the support of the park.

In response to some other remarks of the honourable member for Southern Highlands I am especially happy to recognise the role that Tom Uren, the present chairman of the trust in its existing form, has had in the protection of the park and the raising of its profile in the community. I am happy indeed to recognise his role in the protection of the park in the context of debate surrounding the planning of new installations for the Parramatta to Chatswood rail link—although I would add for the benefit of the honourable member that the office of the Minister for Transport and my own office were also crucial in the negotiations that effectively ensured that the installations for the railway would not interfere with the heritage values of Parramatta Park. I acknowledge also the role of park staff and staff from the office of the Minister for Transport and my office in that exceedingly important exercise.

The honourable member for Southern Highlands referred to the make-up of the new trust. The bill does not provide for the appointment of representatives of community organisations and trustees, for the very good reason that representatives of community organisations can limit the effectiveness of a trust in meeting its objectives and functions. Representatives appointed on those criteria are, by their nature, people who have a strong affiliation with the beliefs and objectives of the organisations they represent and they can, in consequence, at some level or other, face a conflict of interest in conducting the business of the trust.

Nominations based on affiliation to organisations can also tend to entrench differences between people and between interests in an institution such as the park, rather than encourage co-operation between the trustees. There is a difficulty with appointing representatives of community organisations in the sense that if the person appointed ceases to be a member of the organisation, that person nevertheless remains as a trustee and the organisation then becomes unrepresented. Conversely, if the organisation were to hold a trusteeship, it could decide to change its representative any number of times during the term of the trusteeship, and that could imperil the continuity of trust business. If one embarks on a process of inclusiveness it is hard to know where to end it. An unworkable number of trustees may be appointed in an attempt to demonstrate at a superficial level that one is behaving equitably towards interested community organisations.

For instance, it may be appropriate to appoint a representative from Parramatta City Council. But is it then appropriate to appoint representatives from Holroyd, Fairfield and Auburn councils as well? It is far better to look at the strengths needed for the trust to operate effectively, and to seek experts who possess those strengths rather than trying to identify organisations that might be represented on the trust. It is much more effective and a much surer way of choosing a balanced trust with appropriate, professional credentials, if the skills and knowledge needed are identified and matched with the objects and functions of the trust.

Of course, a skills-based trust does not preclude organisations from nominating members, but the appointments will be made on the basis of the skills and knowledge of the nominees, not on their affiliation for its own sake. I, of course, will ensure that the new trustees have business and marketing skills along with the crucially important heritage, cultural and environmental knowledge that is needed in a trust of this nature.

It is appropriate that I should again emphasise the quite extraordinary heritage values of Parramatta Park, which suggest to me that we should quite properly regard Parramatta Park as the cradle of our nation. Within months of the arrival of the First Fleet, a farm had been established at Parramatta. Farming at Port Jackson proved unsuccessful, because the soil there, in the area around which we now stand, was not fertile. So the farm at Parramatta—in the area now known as Parramatta Park, then called Dodd's Farm—was the earliest breadbasket of the colony of New South Wales. Its successful crops staved off starvation for the earliest European settlers of this colony. From that farm Australia's agriculture began. Seed stock from Dodd's Farm was used to establish James Ruse, and the Macarthurs at Elizabeth Farm.

The Australian method of contour ploughing was developed in what is called The Crescent behind Government House. One can still see evidence of the earliest beginnings of our nation in the original agricultural furrows in the remnants of Dodd's Farm. The Minister for Western Sydney pointed out that two of Australia's oldest buildings, Salter's Cottage and Old Government House, are in the park precinct. George Caley, a botanist who spent some time walking about my electorate before any Europeans lived in it, established a botanical nursery in Parramatta Park, and, in 1800 a botanical garden. Plants from that nursery were used to establish Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens, just down from Parliament House.

The first oak trees brought into Australia—and this is possibly a less admirable aspect of the park's history—were planted in the government domain. Almost all of the really old oak trees in Australia were propagated from those trees. The first grape vines—a much more amenable crop—were brought into Australia by Governor Phillip in 1788. He picked them up in Rio de Janeiro and the cape colony on the Cape of Good Hope on his voyage here. The vines were planted in The Crescent. One of the earliest settlers, Gregory Blaxland, who also walked across my electorate in 1815, was the first to make wine from those vines and to export wine to Europe. One could go on, but the point is, as all honourable members who have spoken have agreed, that what we are doing tonight makes one pleased to be in this business. We are ensuring the future of one of the most significant pieces of land in this State. It is a very great pleasure for me to commend the bill to the House.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time and passed through remaining stages.

CRIMES AMENDMENT (COMPUTER OFFENCES) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 4 April.

Mr HARTCHER (Gosford) [9.05 p.m.]: The Coalition does not oppose the Crimes Amendment (Computer Offences) Bill. This bill follows model legislation announced by the Federal Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator the Hon. Christopher Ellison, earlier this year. When the Model Criminal Code Report was released, upon which this legislation is based, Senator Ellison said that what was required were new offences and penalties to help authorities deter and punish computer crime. He said:

These new offences address a number of shortcomings in existing offences. They recognise the fact that the criminal law must continue to evolve if it is to adequately address new developments in technology. Many computer offences, although only 10 years old, are already outdated ...

New computer offences recommended in the Model Criminal Code paper specifically target 'denial of service attack' under the 'unauthorised impairment of electronic communication' offence ...

The report also includes a modern sabotage offence ...

The report also proposes offences which focus on those who possess or trade in programs and technology designed to hack into other people's computer systems ...

The proposed offences dove-tail with the terminology of recently enacted electronic transactions legislation ...

Whilst the Coalition is supportive of the legislation, some matters need to be drawn to the attention of the House. For computer crimes, or offences with computers under the Crimes Act, there needs to be effective legislation to deal with Internet child pornography. That is a serious matter that must be addressed, and it needs to be addressed on a national level. The ongoing role of service providers who are subject to law, even if computer systems are not themselves subject to law, needs to be assessed. The scourge of child pornography needs to be controlled and brought to an end.

The law needs to be examined in a further area if computer offences are to be taken into account. I refer to cyber stalking, which is an offence in a number of jurisdictions of the United States of America, whereby people use the Internet to anonymously harass or intimidate other people through email messages, photographs or blackmail. To some extent this may be covered by existing criminal law, but there still needs to be an effective provision in relation to using a computer for those purposes to bring the new offence of cyber stalking under control.

One of the blessings of new technology is that it allows us to be more flexible in our communications and lifestyle. However, all those advantages carry with them the corollary that criminals can misuse them.

Criminals can misuse other aspects of society to stalk innocent people, and they can similarly misuse the computer system. The legislation uses the terminology of the Electronic Transactions Act, as expressed by the Federal Minister's statement, because, of course, this legislation follows the Model Criminal Code. Yet that Act, although passed by the Parliament, has not been proclaimed.

I do not know when that is to be proclaimed but it will provide a whole range of computer law in relation to commercial and legal transactions. It will provide for electronic signatures and for commercial or legal transactions to be validated when they are forwarded by the email system and are designed to have a legal effect. However, for whatever reason—and I do not speculate on that—this legislation is yet to be proclaimed. It would be of interest to everyone to learn when the State Government intends to proclaim it.

A significant aspect is the enforcement of the criminal law. It is all very well for Parliament to pass laws—indeed it is important that members of Parliament congratulate themselves on how the law is keeping pace with technology—but an adequate system of enforcement is needed to ensure that laws not only look good but are effective in achieving their objectives. Considerable concern has been expressed about the insufficient allocation of resources to ensure that future offences are enforced. The number of people using computers has considerably increased in recent years, and more and more people in Australia are now connected to the Internet. I am told that approximately three million Australians are regular users of the Internet. Indeed, figures released by the Minister in April of last year suggested that more than 3.2 million Australian households have access to the Internet, and it was estimated that worldwide 900 million would be using the Internet by the end of the year 2000. An article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* as recently as last December stated:

Australian police have turned to corporate sponsorship to meet shortages in funding needed to train law enforcement officers in fighting escalating cyber crime ...

The article referred to a recent conference of State and Federal representatives, and continued:

Two years ago almost the entire Federal Police Computer Fraud Detection Unit jumped ship to the accountancy firm, reputedly after being frustrated by inadequate funding to keep pace with the cyber-criminals. It was a similar story several months later when eight of eleven staff left Victoria's Computer Crime Squad, the first, and at one time most highly regarded, Australian computer crime unit.

That exodus apparently followed a decision that investigating computer crime was not considered a core competency of the police force.

The Commissioner of Police recently remarked that corporations should use their own personnel to investigate matters that are of concern to the corporations and that this was not a core activity for New South Wales police. I do not know whether that is the policy of the New South Wales Police Service but it reflects an attitude that information technology is outside the core business of police. Governments must be prepared to put in the necessary resources to enforce the law and to maintain the integrity of the legal system. That cannot be achieved without the proper allocation of resources.

I record that as a concern. I urge the Government to be conscious of that and to advise the House—if not now, then at some later stage—of the resources it is putting into maintaining dedicated police to the ever-escalating use of computers and, consequently, the ever-escalating misuse of computers by certain sections of our community. It is not good enough to merely issue press releases, make statements in Parliament, impose penalties, and pass legislation. Resources must be allocated. Last August the *Australian* quoted the Attorney General as follows:

NSW's tough new computer crime penalties, under which virus spreaders face up to 10 years' jail, will be ineffectual without uniform state and federal legislation ...

While initial detection in NSW will be left to the Commercial Crime Agency of NSW Police, partnerships were being sought in private enterprise to help monitor and investigate computer crime.

The Coalition has no objection to new methods being used to combat computer crime. Partnerships with business could well be an effective way of combating computer crime. However, it is important that the Government and the police acknowledge that the Government must have the primary role in fighting any crime. The Government must allocate the resources and ensure that police are trained, are equipped and are dedicated to the detection, investigation and prosecution of criminal offences. I make that plea and urge the Government to take it into account in ensuring that the laws are enforced. I would hope that in the next couple of years the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research will introduce a new heading for criminal offences to monitor the number of computer criminal offences that are detected, and the number that are investigated and prosecuted. However, unless there are resources, the law will simply be a dead letter.

Information technology continues to grow and to have an ever-increasing importance in our society. It needs to be harnessed to the benefit of society and not allowed to be used by those who would seek to misuse it. The areas to which I have alluded, such as cyberstalking and child pornography on the Internet, need to be addressed, but I accept that, for there to be effective restraint of these practices, they must be addressed nationally; they cannot be addressed by one State alone. Another matter that needs to be resolved is Internet gambling. The Federal Government has taken the lead on this and has sought the assistance of the States in bringing Internet gambling under control, not simply for revenue purposes but to ensure that people under the age of 18 do not have access to gambling. It also seeks to ensure that gambling is properly regulated to protect those who are unable to manage their own affairs successfully and who, by their misuse of gambling, reduce themselves and their families to a sorry state.

Mr BROWN (Kiama) [9.18 p.m.]: I support the bill and I am pleased to note that the Opposition does not oppose it. However, after hearing the concerns of the honourable member for Gosford, it appears that the Opposition has an attitude of doom and gloom regarding the bill. It would be irresponsible of this State and the Minister not to bring in such legislation. The Government consulted other States and the Commonwealth, and noted that both the Commonwealth and the New South Wales police services have specialists looking at what the honourable member for Gosford describes as cyber crime. This bill has gone through a long and consultative process. Much of it directly reflects the report of the model criminal code officers committee of the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General.

The committee wrote a report dealing primarily with the area of the law that criminalises damage to property, breach of security of computer systems and harm to computer systems. An interesting point about this new wave of law being introduced into Parliament is that because of the intangible nature of computer technology, legislation is required for special offences. No longer does the old offence of break, enter and steal appropriately cover the new wave of criminal offences, referred to by the honourable member for Gosford as cybercrime. The committee also attempted to rationalise offences. It strongly believed that if a general offence can be used it should be used, and a specific offence should be used only when necessary.

Besides having strong consultative processes with other jurisdictions in this great nation of ours, the committee also looked at a United Kingdom Act of Parliament that was passed in 1990, the Computer Misuse Act. This Act was partly based on the United Kingdom Law Commission's report on computer misuse, which was commissioned in 1989. It provides a useful comparison with the Australian legislation. The Law Commission in the United Kingdom distinguished three areas of potential legislative action. The first area was the protection of computerised data and programs from unauthorised access. Section 1 (1) (a) of the British Act makes it a summary offence punishable by six months imprisonment to cause a computer to perform any function with intent to secure unauthorised access to a new program or data held in any computer.

The second area was the prevention of crime consequential on unauthorised access. Section 2 (1) provides that the basic offence of unauthorised access is aggravated when an offender obtains unauthorised access with intent to commit or facilitate the commission of an offence punishable by five or more years imprisonment. This offence carries a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment. The third area for potential legislation was protection of data and programs from corruption, whether by hackers or by persons who put virus-infected disks or worms into circulation. These provisions are predominantly dealt with in section 3 of the United Kingdom legislation. A person who causes an unauthorised modification of the contents of any computer is guilty of an offence punishable by five years imprisonment.

The offences being debated in the House tonight are broadly equivalent to those in the United Kingdom Computer Misuse Act 1990. However, they are considerably more extensive in coverage and application. The Attorney General gave a summary of the offences in his second reading speech earlier today and alluded to a number of sections. Unlike the United Kingdom legislation, which has three general categories, our legislation is broken down into at least six new sections. Firstly, section 308C relates to unauthorised access, modification or impairment to commit a serious offence. This preparatory offence applies to individuals who engage in unauthorised misuse of computer data with the object of committing another offence.

Secondly, section 308D deals with the unauthorised modification of data to cause impairment. This offence prohibits unauthorised alteration or erasure of computer data. Thirdly, section 308E provides for the unauthorised impairment of electronic communications. The prohibition is aimed at denial of service attacks. Fourthly, section 308F relates to the possession of data with intent to commit a computer offence. This preparatory offence is akin to the more familiar offences of going equipped for stealing or possession of an offensive weapon. Fifthly, section 308G relates to the supply of data with intent to commit a computer offence. This is another offence aimed at those who devise or traffic in programs which enable damage or unauthorised access to computer networks.

Also, a summary offence under section 308H relates to the unauthorised access to restricted data. Similarly, a summary offence is legislated for in section 308I, which relates to unauthorised impairment of data held in a computer disk, credit card, et cetera. As a younger member of Parliament, many of my school friends in the Illawarra area work in computer companies as software engineers. In previous generations people in the Illawarra became teachers or followed other professions. In my grandfather's generation they were primarily coalminers or worked in the Illawarra steelworks. This bill is apt and shows that the Parliament is moving forward and is responsive to changes affecting our society.

The work force generally is moving into the information technology area, which provides employment for semi-professionals—although they are paid particularly well. Major information technology companies are moving to the Illawarra. Those companies, such as Nortel, employ many students from public schools and working families. Information technology is definitely the way of the future. With the introduction of any new system of business there are always those who will commit crimes and defraud people out of their hard-earned money. They will try to twist the rules to suit themselves to the dissatisfaction and abuse of the general society. I am pleased to speak in favour of this bill. I commend the bill and the Minister for bringing it before the House.

Mr DEBUS (Blue Mountains—Attorney General, Minister for the Environment, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Arts) [9.27 p.m.], in reply: I thank the honourable member for Gosford and the honourable member for Kiama for their contributions to the debate today. By way of preliminary comment, I acknowledge, as the honourable member for Gosford said, the need for legislation against child pornography on the Internet. The Internet is primarily the responsibility of the Commonwealth and that is the appropriate Parliament to deal with Internet pornography as a specific offence. It is also my understanding that child pornography in any manifestation, supply or manufacture, creates a criminal offence. The offence exists wherever that material is published. Nevertheless, the Government acknowledges the honourable member's comments and is supportive of the present attention that police pay to this particularly heinous form of pornography.

The honourable member for Gosford also raised the issue of cyberstalking, which was considered in the Model Criminal Code Officers Committee [MCCOC] report. The attitude there taken was that the use of computers to intimidate a person should not be distinguished as a separate form of intimidation. The matter was dealt with in an amendment to the Commonwealth Crimes Act last year, which created an offence of stalking. New South Wales is reviewing the criminal law in relation to stalking, with the intention of ensuring that stalking laws are adequate. In the meantime apprehended violence orders are available specifically to deal with various forms of stalking, including cyber stalking. The matter was reasonably raised by the honourable member and it is appropriate that the Government should keep it under review. I was pleased to note in this morning's edition of the *Australian* newspaper that the Queensland Government will examine changes to criminal law in New South Wales to clamp down on computer virus writers and hackers. I note that the report states that Queensland already has some computer offences on its books, as does New South Wales.

The updated laws we have debated this evening are adaptations that keep up with the realities of modern daily computer offences, not the more than 10-year-old offences that are on the books. It is obvious that the digital world changes very rapidly and it is necessary to continue to alter the law to keep pace with those changes. Although 10 years is not a long time, it is time for a change in the laws against offences committed using computers. Since I introduced the legislation I have been asked about the impact of the proposal on the misuse of data by an otherwise unauthorised person. I point out that the criminal offences will cover circumstances in which a person who has authority to gain access to data, but uses the data in a manner not authorised as part of his or her duties, may face a criminal charge.

I note also that the article in today's *Australian* cites a claim that the police will require highly developed information technology skills to investigate and prosecute offences. This matter was raised by the honourable member for Gosford. Although there is no doubt that increased computer skills for police officers is laudable—and the information I have from the office of the Minister for Police is that training for police in this area has been increased and that the resourcing of police to fight computer crime is being given priority in a number of respects—a police officer does not have to be computer literate to apply the Crimes Act to specific offences. Training and the provision of new information technology resources and arrangements with outside experts to assist the police will bring benefits, but ultimately the fundamental purpose of the investigating and prosecuting authorities is to make up the elements of an offence.

For that purpose police officers rely on intelligence gathering. It is not a question of the computer literacy of the average police officer, but his or her capacity to gather intelligence. In many circumstances police

investigate and prosecute very complex criminal offences, such as those involving intricate arrangements in the context of drug crimes. It is basically the investigating skills of police that allow them to do such things. I do not for a moment suggest that it is not important for police training and resourcing to be continually upgraded. The report in today's newspaper also raised maximum penalties. The bill makes it quite clear that larger maximum penalties will apply to the unauthorised modification of data intended to cause impairment. In essence that is an offence of sabotage. Similarly, large penalties apply to the unauthorised impairment of communication to or from a computer.

They are potentially serious offences, and the Model Criminal Code Officers Committee recognises that seriousness in its detailed report. One moment's reflection will remind us that billions of dollars worth of damage can be caused by a computer virus that is successfully introduced into the computer system of a whole nation. It is naturally a matter of the circumstances of the case and the facts before a court as to what penalties will apply, but there is no doubt at all that it is appropriate to have quite substantial maximum penalties as part of the offences we are speaking about. Unfortunately, that is part of our entry into the twenty-first century. I am glad to have had the opportunity to clarify some of these matters. I commend the bill to the House.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time and passed through remaining stages.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AMENDMENT (LEAVE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 28 March.

Mr HARTCHER (Gosford) [9.37 p.m.]: The Coalition does not oppose the bill, which will provide for unpaid leave for victims of serious crime to attend New South Wales court proceedings arising from the relevant crime. The legislation is set out in the Minister's second reading speech. I foreshadow that the Coalition will consider moving an amendment in the Legislative Council to page 3, schedule 1, lines 6 to 8 to omit those words and insert instead the following words:

Section 72AA Employees to whom Part applies

- (1) This Part applies to all employees, including part-time employees or regular casual employees, but it does not apply to other casual or seasonal employees.
- (2) For the purpose of this Part regular casual employee is the casual employee who works for the employer on a regular and systematic basis, and who has a reasonable expectation of ongoing employment on that basis.

The Coalition will consider that amendment and, if appropriate, speak to it in the Legislative Council. It is significant that the Government does not believe in workplace agreements, be they individual contracts or collective agreements, but instead believes that the appropriate system to regulate the workplace is through the award system. The Industrial Relations Act 1996 enshrines the awards system and seeks to establish it as the policy for industrial relations in this State. The award system, which is supposed to be all embracing and cover matters such as pay, conditions, leave, maternity leave, annual holidays, days off and all the attributes that flow from an organised representative body like a trade union sitting down with another body like an employer's group, is shown time and again to be inadequate. The Government admits that it is inadequate because the Government has to introduce overriding legislation to deal with things such as maternity leave or leave for victims of crime when they are not covered through the award system.

The award system has been shown to be a hollow sham. It does not provide for employees in the way that the Labor Council and the Australian Labor Party pretend it does. It simply provides a cosy living to many union officials who engage in their charades and seek to run an industrial relations club. If it were effective, why would we need legislation such as this? Why would such legislation come before Parliament if the awards were looking after the workers? Why would we need legislation relating to maternity leave, or paternity leave? We would not be invited to pass overriding legislation if the Labor Council, which claims to represent those employed in this State, was effective in doing its job and developing awards to regulate workplace relations.

The Labor Council represents one in four workers in this State, a steadily diminishing number. It represents only 19 per cent of people in private employment. Less than one in five persons in private employment is a member of a trade union. It would cease to exist if it were not for the public sector and the way

this Government in particular signs agreements with unions to try to enforce a virtual de facto system of closed shop. The objective is to get as many as possible of those on the public payroll into trade unions by facilitating payroll deductions and offering inducements to workers—such as time off for officials to attend union meetings and union courses, and allowing union meetings to be held on the premises. Even at a public level the number of people who would seek to join a trade union would be significantly decreased.

Legislation such as this is an indictment of the failure of the Labor Council and of the trade union movement to achieve any benefits for their members through awards. It is little wonder that trade union membership continues to decline, because people simply are not getting value for money. It has nothing to do with ideology. It is not as though people say, "I do not like trade unions; they are an evil." Trade unionism is a matter of choice. If people want to join trade unions they can. Those who do not want to join trade unions should not have to do so. It is an option that should be available to workers, but an option that has to be sold on its merits. It is an option that has to offer value for money. People have to decide they wish to join a union because it will benefit, knowing that the \$250 or \$300 in union dues will be money well spent.

It is clearly not money well spent when the Government has to regularly introduce industrial relations legislation to cure a failure of the Labor Council to negotiate conditions in awards which will benefit their employees. This legislation stands not as a success for the Labor Council or the Labor movement, but as an acknowledgement of failure. Another example of the failure of the Labor Council to make any meaningful representation on behalf of its own workers is the fact that last Thursday it had to bring the Labor Council to the Parliament House Theatre in an attempt to encourage members of the Australian Labor Party caucus to reject the Government's new proposals for WorkCover reform.

What a sorry sight that was. It is extraordinary that the Labor Council is so inept at protecting the interests of injured workers in this State that it has been unable to come to some arrangement with the political party that claims to represent that section of the work force that is unionised—a political party that claims it represents one in four workers in this State, because only one in four workers is a member of a trade union. Fewer than one in four workers is affiliated with the Australian Labor Party. The Police Association, the Public Service Association and the Teachers Federation are three of the biggest unions in the State, but two of the biggest unions in the State are not affiliated with the Labor Party. The Minister for Police has indicated that he would like to go home, but this is an important point. The legislation that his Government has introduced is a failure. It is a failure on the part of the Labor movement because that movement cannot acknowledge—

Mr Whelan: You are not opposing it.

Mr HARTCHER: We are not supporting it, but we are not opposing it. There is a difference and the Minister, more than most Ministers in this House, is well aware of the difference. As I said, this bill is an acknowledgment of failure. I will not labour the point but I note that trade union membership continues to decline; that the latest figures, even those released by the ACTU president—I cannot recall her name; that is how insignificant that office has become—show a continuing decline in membership. Although most trade unions at the present time do not offer value for money, there are some exceptions. They try to make up with political clout that which they have failed to achieve at an industrial level. The Coalition does not oppose this legislation but makes the point that the Labor Council continues to fail its constituents, the one in four workers in this State who take out union membership.

Miss BURTON (Kogarah) [9.45 p.m.]: I propose to move amendments to this bill. I have given copies of my amendments to the Clerk. The amendments relate to new section 72AB, which defines the victim of crime as a person who suffers harm as a direct result of an act committed during the course of an alleged violent crime, a parent or guardian of a child who suffers such harm, or a member of the immediate family of a person who dies as a direct result of an alleged violent crime. I foreshadow that I will move amendments at the Committee stage to include grandparent, step-grandparent, grandchild and step-grandchild in the definitions contained in new section 72AB.

The object of the bill is to give employees who are victims of violent crime an entitlement to unpaid leave to attend court proceedings in connection with the offence concerned. I am pleased to speak in support of the bill. I congratulate the Premier and the Minister for Industrial Relations for undertaking to further support victims of serious crime through the protection of their jobs and livelihood at such a terrible time in their lives. Thankfully most people in our community can only imagine what it must be like to be a victim of a violent crime. The physical and mental anguish endured by those who have been the victims of a violent crime is obviously traumatic enough.

If a suspect is caught and tried, the victim may have to re-live the whole event as the trial proceeds. It would clearly be a further aggravation of the tragedy if the victim was under any threat in the workplace because of the time needed to attend court proceedings. It is hoped that these provisions will not be necessary, as I am sure that the vast majority of employers would be sensitive to the needs of an employee in attending relevant court proceedings, either as a witness or as an observer of the cause of justice. However, with the commencement of these reforms victims of violent crime will be secure in the knowledge that they will not lose their job if they take time to attend court. I would also like to express my support for the extension of the right to victims leave, not merely to the immediate victim of the crime but also to the parent or guardian of a child victim, and to members of the immediate family where the victim has died as a result of the crime.

When a victim of a violent crime is under the age of 18 years it is clearly essential for the parents or guardians of the child to be present with the child during the court proceedings. Courts can be intimidating places at the best of times for anyone not familiar with the culture and procedures of the courtroom. A criminal trial can be terrifying, particularly for a child victim. Parents and guardians must be able to take leave to be with their children in such circumstances. Further, it is clear that when someone has died as a result of a crime the immediate family members may need or wish to attend court, either as witnesses or as a necessary part of the healing process and coming to terms with the death. In those circumstances family members must also be able to take leave to attend court without any fear for their job security.

I have foreshadowed amendments to allow grandparents and grandchildren to come within the scope of the provisions of the bill in certain circumstances. The bill is an outstanding example of the Government's commitment to helping the people of New South Wales, particularly victims of violent crime. That was shown in the pre-trial disclosure bill that was recently passed by the House. I deplore the action of the honourable member for Gosford in using the debate on this important issue in the way that he has. Members of the Homicide Victims Support Group spend much of their time—the few who run the organisation spend all of their time—helping families of victims of violent crime to cope with tragedy. For the honourable member for Gosford to waffle on and filibuster and have a kick at the trade union movement during debate on this bill is an absolute disgrace. Such displays are a reason he is a member of the Opposition. I hope he stays on the Opposition side of the Chamber. God help the people of New South Wales if he does not.

Mr NEWELL (Tweed) [9.52 p.m.]: I support the Industrial Relations Amendment (Leave for Victims of Crime) Bill. The bill provides support and protection to working men and women in New South Wales, and it is an important step in further assisting victims of serious crime. As has been noted, being the victim of a violent crime is extremely traumatic. Going through court procedures and trial processes and reliving the crime can also be very distressing for victims and their families. Under the reforms in the bill, employees in New South Wales will be able to attend court proceedings without the added stress of worrying about losing their jobs. Employees who are victims of violent crime will now have a clear entitlement to take leave to attend relevant court proceedings. Of course, I agree that most employers would never deny employees time to attend court if they have been the victims of a violent crime, nor would they dismiss their employees for doing so. Nevertheless, this bill now provides protection for employees who return to work after taking unpaid leave to attend court proceedings.

The bill provides that an employee returning to work after a period of victim's leave is entitled to be employed in the position held by the employee immediately before proceeding on leave. Where the employee's position no longer exists but other positions for which the employee is qualified and capable of performing are available, the employee is entitled to be employed in a position comparable in status and pay to the employee's former position. Employees will be able to make unfair dismissal applications under the Industrial Relations Act for actual or threatened dismissal because of taking victim's leave, subject of course to the terms of the Industrial Relations Act. While each case would obviously need to be decided by the New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission in accordance with the Industrial Relations Act, successful outcomes from such cases can include employees being reinstated or re-employed with back pay. If the commission finds in favour of an employee but does not order reinstatement or re-employment it can make orders for the employer to pay compensation to the employee.

Those who take victims' leave might also make a claim that they have been victimised because they took leave to which they were entitled under this legislation. The victimisation provisions of the Industrial Relations Act state that an employer must not victimise an employee because the employee claims a benefit to which the employee is entitled under industrial relations legislation. If an employer does that, the commission can again order the reinstatement or re-employment of an employee and also order payment of remuneration forgone. I support the Government amendments to the bill to be moved in Committee by my colleague the honourable member for Kogarah. I acknowledge her support for the bill and the work that she has done to bring forward the amendments.

The amendments recognise that access to victims' leave should be fairly extended to grandparents and grandchildren in certain circumstances. No-one could question the often vital role that grandparents and grandchildren play in the care of family members, and it is appropriate that they should also be able to access victims' leave. It is important for the grieving process that victims of violent crime are supported by family members when attending court and in the process of getting over the trauma so that they can move on with their lives. This bill is about assisting in that process.

I too take exception to the contribution of the honourable member for Gosford. It was nothing less than gratuitous for him to base his contribution on having a good sling at the union movement for what he considers it has not done. This bill is a tribute to the work done by the union movement to assist employees. That is obviously why the honourable member for Gosford has taken exception to it and tried to detract from the provisions of the bill. Whilst the Opposition supports the bill, it is regrettable that the honourable member went to the lengths that he did. Nevertheless, I am delighted to have had the opportunity to support the bill.

Mr COLLIER (Miranda) [9.57 p.m.]: The trauma of serious crime for victims and their families does not cease with the apprehension of the alleged offender. The trauma goes on: the effects are felt for months, years and, not infrequently, for the rest of the victim's life. One of the most traumatic times for victims and their families occurs during court proceedings—from the committal right through to trial, sentencing and even in some cases appeals to the Court of Criminal Appeal. The victims give evidence and their families hear the details of the crime perpetrated on the family's loved one, revisiting that crime as the evidence unfolds before the magistrate or the judge and the jury. As a barrister who appeared in criminal trials I saw this all too often in court: the pain in the eyes of the parents and grandparents as they listened and watched their child or grandchild giving evidence or being cross-examined about the serious offence allegedly committed upon them.

I remember clearly the anguish of a mother listening to a Supreme Court judge find a young man not guilty of murdering her daughter by reason of insanity. I was involved as a lawyer with that matter at an early stage and the day after the murder visited the house in which it occurred. If there is one thing that I will remember from all my days as a barrister practising criminal law it is the scene in that house. I went through from room to room and saw the sheer brutality and violence with which that innocent young woman died. The violence and brutality were apparent everywhere throughout the house. I remember thinking to myself as I went through that house and saw the bloodstains, the knives and the writing on the wall in her blood that nobody—nobody—deserves to die like this. The fact that both the Crown and the defence psychiatrists confirmed the young man's insanity could not be even cold comfort to that young woman's mother, who sat listening in the public gallery of the Supreme Court.

The Carr Government has been active in legislating to help the victims of crime. The Victims Rights Act provides for victims impact statements, and the Government has established a Victims of Crime Bureau to help victims of crime. On 21 December last year the Premier announced that legislation would be introduced in this session of Parliament to allow victims of serious crime to attend court without fear of losing their jobs. This bill gives effect to the Premier's announcement and is the next logical step in supporting victims of crime and their families. The bill entitles an employee who is a victim of crime to unpaid leave in connection with court proceedings which relate to violent crime.

The bill entitles the victim to leave to travel to court in some cases, and leave to attend court when proceedings are listed for part of the day. It is important to note that the definition of victims of crime extends beyond the person who has suffered harm as a direct result of a criminal act. It extends to the parents and guardians of children under 18 years who have suffered harm and to members of the immediate family of a person who dies as a result of a criminal act. The amendments proposed by the honourable member for Kogarah to extend the definition to include the grandparents of victims of crime are most desirable. They will add weight to the bill. Grandparents are often in the back of a court listening to the evidence unfold. They sit with their son or daughter listening to what happened to their grandchild.

The victim's entitlement applies to all stages of court proceedings in serious criminal matters from the committal, through the trial to the proceedings before the Court of Criminal Appeal, if applicable. The legislation could possibly apply to pre-trial conferences, which are important in the prosecution of serious criminal offences involving violence. The legislation includes victims of violent crimes committed both before and after the commencement of the Act, victims in cases in which the prosecution has already commenced and victims in cases in which proceedings have not yet commenced. That is important because support will be provided to victims and their families who are already involved in court proceedings. The bill does much to support victims of crime. It is important that victims of crime and their families are not disadvantaged. It is

important that they are not distracted by the thought of losing their jobs if they take time off to listen to the evidence. That is part of dealing with the crime and its effect; it is part of the closure. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Gibson.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Private Members' Statements: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Special Adjournment

Motion by Mr Whelan agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit:

- (1) 11 members to make private members' statements forthwith; and
- (2) the House at its rising this day to adjourn until Wednesday 11 April 2001 at 10.00 a.m.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WORKCOVER INSURANCE PREMIUMS AND JON HARRIS

Mr O'DOHERTY (Hornsby) [10.07 p.m.]: Jon Harris, an industrial draftsman, has a dispute with WorkCover about the premiums he is charged and the way in which they are calculated. For 20 years he has paid a WorkCover premium of between \$157 and \$170. Late last year he was advised of a increase in his WorkCover premium to \$3,000, a considerable increase. Jon Harris has been self-employed since 1981 as a mechanical design draftsman. He helps companies that are having problems with their mechanical equipment by designing solutions. Those solutions are then engineered and fitted into the factories. He supervises the design of the machinery and makes sure that it is working properly. He then moves on to his next assignment. Jon Harris has been successful at what he has done consistently for 20 years, and has paid fairly low workers compensation premiums. When advised by WorkCover of the increase to \$3,000 he naturally queried why that was so. WorkCover advised him that his classification had been changed to that of heavy engineering. An interesting fact came to light: it turned out that he was previously classified under financial institutions.

On 2 November last his classification was changed from Financial Institutions Rate 666 to Engineering A, Heavy Rate 760. He has never worked in the financial services industry, so one wonders why he was ever classified in that category. His work is more akin to that of an architect. He is a mechanical draftsman: he designs changes to plant and equipment and draws up the designs, usually at his client's premises but sometimes at his own. An architect may visit a building site to inspect work from time to time, or may visit a site with a client to talk about the client's needs. Mr Harris does with machinery what architects do with houses or buildings. His work is not inherently dangerous. The most dangerous thing he touches is a sharp pencil.

Nonetheless, WorkCover has reclassified him to the heavy engineering category with a premium of \$3,000 per annum. That will make a substantial impact on his business. He took up this matter with WorkCover, which advised him that the category may have been changed by GIO Australia, the company providing the WorkCover contract. However, there had been no substantial explanation for his classification under financial institutions in the first place, or why he has now been classified under heavy engineering. On the basis of the description of the work that he provided to WorkCover, one would have to be either incompetent or malevolent to say that his work is heavy engineering. It simply is not. I strongly urge the Minister for Industrial Relations to take charge of this matter and intervene so that my constituent can go back to receiving a reasonable rate from WorkCover for the work that he does, which is designing. My constituent wrote to the Ombudsman. It is clear from the response that the Ombudsman's office expects that WorkCover has thought out this problem. The letter from the Ombudsman's office stated:

Ms Benton indicated that GIO's decision to classify you as Heavy Engineering might have been based on your description of your services, which included supervising tradesmen such as boilermakers on engineering projects.

That is a misreading of his workplace, and documents are available to the Minister if he chooses to get them from WorkCover. The letter continued:

WorkCover will notify you when they make a decision in relation to your change of classification.

Mr Harris has been corresponding with WorkCover since November last year, when it first advised him of the change, and more substantially since January this year. It is now April and there has been no answer. This man has to pay the premium or be put out of business. I request the Minister for Industrial Relations take urgent control of this matter.

STOCKTON BIGHT CONSERVATION ZONE

Mr BARTLETT (Port Stephens) [10.11 p.m.]: Since 1995 the Carr Labor Government has included 1.4 million hectares of land into national parks. Recently in the Port Stephens electorate the Stockton Bight Conservation Zone was established. Many people worked on that establishment of that zone for some time. In November 1984 the Tomaree National Park was declared. At that time many who were trying to protect the grandeur of Port Stephens for future generations wanted Stockton Bight included in that declaration. For 20 years we have been trying to have Stockton Bight declared a conservation zone.

Tomaree National Park was established after urban settlement had occurred. Thus the coastal park jumped the settlements of Fingal Bay, Boat Harbour and Fisherman's Bay, which had already undergone residential development. In the 1980s we had hoped that the declaration would also jump Anna Bay and that Stockton Bight would be included. Stockton Bight looks like one parcel of land, but it is subject to a variety of existing uses including bombing and mortar ranges, professional fishing rights, rifle ranges and a huge number of recreational and tourist activities. It was not under the control of any one State or Commonwealth department. As many as six had a say and often they could not agree on a set position. Unexploded ordinance was an issue that was dealt with in the late 1980s by the use of laser technology to find the UXBs at the Anna Bay end of the dunes.

In 1995 the Worimi land claim finally galvanised the bureaucracy to start finding genuine solutions to the problem of Stockton Bight. Before then it has been almost impossible to find a way through the bureaucratic maze. Since being elected to Parliament two years ago in place of the Hon. Bob Martin, I have attended more than 30 meetings and made hundreds of telephone calls steering through the problems that have been raised. The result is the Stockton Bight Conservation Zone, which consists of some 4,000 hectares. Recently, a further 660 hectares were added to the Mount Karuah National Park in the Port Stephens area. Only half of the 4,000 hectares has been declared as a national park, to take account of the many existing uses, such as walking the dog and recreational four-wheel drive activities, which were seriously curtailed by the National Parks and Wildlife Act. Therefore, the zone comprises approximately 2,000 hectares of national park, about 1,500 hectares of State recreational areas and about 800 hectares of regional park that is being used for sandmining at the southern end of the bight.

For an enormous number of people the declaration of the zone was regarded as a real gain for the environment following 20 years of hard work. People from the Worimi Land Council and the Port Stephens environmental community were delighted with the announcement. I refer to Alec Russell, Iris Russell and Les Russell, elders of the Worimi Land Council, who were thrilled to be part of the function on the day of the declaration. Len Anderson, CEO of the Worimi Land Council, has done an enormous amount of work to bring the scheme together. I mention also Geoff and Betty Bartlett; George D'aran, an old friend of 20 years who worked on making the environment of Port Stephens what it is today; Stuart Upton; Jack and Doreen Galloway; Ian Betts and Ray Wilkinson, a well-known local of Anna Bay; Daniel Veldman; Bob and Marg Martin, who worked on the project when Bob was in Parliament; Bill Michel; Jim Foster; Fran Corner and Gillian Stuart.

Those people attended the declaration to support the achievement. Also present was John Derry, the principal of Anna Bay Public School. The strip of protected coastline stretching from the Myall, up through the Yacaaba Headland, across to the Tomaree Headland, south along the headland towards Anna Bay to the Tomaree National Park, down the whole of Stockton Bight, jumping the Kooragang wetlands and moving across into the Lake Macquarie area is probably unique in Australia.

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.15 p.m.]: On behalf of the Government, I join with the honourable member in celebrating the declaration of the Stockton Bight Conservation Zone. It is the culmination of 20 years of team effort for the people of Port Stephens. More than 4,000 hectares have been declared. Half of the conservation zone will be for recreational use and will be conserved under the National

Parks and Wildlife Act. The honourable member for Port Stephens has been diligent in working towards achieving the declaration. I commend him for his diligence and I congratulate the Worimi Land Council, local teachers, community members and all those involved in bringing this project to fruition. The result is there for all to enjoy. Stockton Bight is a pristine environment which is probably second to none. The Port Stephens area has the best coastal land in New South Wales and can only be described as God's land. The honourable member for Port Stephens has a great electorate.

ROYAL EASTER SHOW

Mr SLACK-SMITH (Barwon) [10.16 p.m.]: Earlier today the honourable member for Lachlan and the honourable member for Monaro congratulated the Royal Agricultural Society on this year's magnificent Royal Easter Show. Arthur Bragg is to be commended for organising a truly successful show. The facilities at Homebush Bay are fantastic and are a credit to the Royal Agricultural Society. I congratulate all volunteers from regional and rural New South Wales. However, it is now time to take another step forward in our pursuit of excellence. Australia exports agricultural and primary products and it is now time to showcase New South Wales to the world. Without doubt we have the world's best sheep and cattle, goats, alpacas and other livestock. New South Wales is also value-adding and I encourage people to visit the pavilions at the Royal Easter Show to see the results.

At the moment we are looking at bringing the city to the country and the country to the city. Now is the time for New South Wales to invite foreign delegations, especially those involved in agriculture, from Europe, the Americas and especially Asia—a country we deal with day after day—to this central location at Homebush. The Royal Easter Show is an ideal opportunity to showcase to the rest of the world what Australia has to offer. Members of the delegations will see the world's best-quality livestock and horticultural produce in one location. It will not cost the New South Wales taxpayer, the State Government or the Australian Government. Foreign delegations who are particularly interested in trade and agricultural products could come to a central place in Australia. We can say to them, "This is what we have. Let's do business."

We are an exporting country and we depend on exporting throughout the world. We need trade. We need the Minister's support to obtain permission for foreign delegations who are interested in trade and agricultural products to come to this country, particularly at this time of the year. We can say, "Come and see what we have. If you like what we have, I am sure we can do business." If Australia does not export, we will go broke. We are an exporting country. We have the best products in the world. We are clean and green and very proud of our products. Our products are better than those of any other country in the world. The Government should make a concerted effort to invite delegations to this country, particularly those interested in agriculture. Delegations could come to this country, see what we have and, if they like our products we can do business. If we do not do that, New South Wales will miss an exciting opportunity.

FIREWORKS REGULATION

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.21 p.m.]: I wish to refer to growing community concerns about the use of fireworks. Fireworks are causing considerable disturbance to local amenities around the Bankstown local government region and throughout the wider metropolitan area of Sydney, based on reports that I continually receive from constituents and others. This has been of particular concern in the past 12 months, when the use of fireworks in Bankstown has become a considerable problem. Almost every week my office receives complaints from residents who are kept awake by the use of explosive fireworks during the late hours of the night and the early hours of the morning. Several local veterinarians have spoken to my office about the effect of fireworks on local pets. They have advised me of a dramatic increase in the number of inquiries about sedatives for local pets because of the trauma caused to them by fireworks. Some veterinarians have had to handle cases where a dog or a cat has become so upset that it has bolted and been hit by a car.

I have also received reports that firecrackers have been thrown from motor vehicles at other motor vehicles waiting at traffic lights, causing immense fright and a potential accident for innocent drivers and bystanders. Local police advise me that while the illegal use of firecrackers is a significant problem in the Bankstown local area, catching offenders is a difficult exercise because often offenders are not at the scene when police arrive. I am further advised by Bankstown police that a number of local incidents have been investigated, where vandalism and damage to property have been caused by fireworks, particularly damage to letterboxes, gardens and garbage bins. Also, police are frequently called to attend to reports of alleged gunshots. When they arrive at the scene, which often involves two or three patrol cars to investigate these serious allegations, the evidence points to fireworks, not gunshots. The valuable resource of two or three patrol cars is taken up for up to an hour to investigate such matters.

To legally handle fireworks in New South Wales, people must have an authority from the WorkCover Authority. An authority is given only after a detailed application is made and is not available for domestic use. An authority can be gained for organised public displays of fireworks, that is, a community event. The people who operate such displays are pyrotechnicians—experts in the use of fireworks. They have licences, training and a background in pyrotechnics. An authority can be obtained for theatrical display purposes and for industrial and agricultural purposes, such as scaring birds off a farm, but not for domestic application. Fireworks are no longer allowed for the traditional cracker night, when people get together and let off fireworks in the backyard—and for good reason. We have gone beyond those days because of the many tragedies caused by fireworks and disturbances to amenities and pets. In 1975 the Dangerous Goods Act was introduced, which dealt with the use of fireworks. That Act was amended in 1999 by this Government to curtail the fireworks problems experienced in our community.

Now it is almost impossible for people to apply for a fireworks permit unless they can demonstrate that they have the appropriate training, adequate amenities for a fireworks display, permission from neighbours, written permission from the local council and authority from the WorkCover Authority. Then they can go to a retailer, show the permit they have obtained after making application and paying a fee to WorkCover, and obtain the fireworks. Unfortunately, this regulated process is being disregarded because in New South Wales people can readily gain access to fireworks. Last Friday I took a local reporter to a fireworks retailer who operates in Villawood, in the Bankstown area. The retailer, named Thumping Thunder, is situated on Woodville Road. I walked straight in and, without a permit and without any questions, was able to purchase a lot of fireworks. Not only was I able to purchase fireworks that are permissible under the Dangerous Goods Act with a permit, I was also able to purchase dangerous fireworks that are illegal in New South Wales, such as skyrockets and bungers. They were freely made available over the counter.

Today I have called on the Government, through the parliamentary Labor Party caucus, to ban the sale and possession of fireworks in New South Wales. In this day and age members of the general public should not have access to dangerous fireworks. People should be able to watch organised fireworks displays that are conducted at appropriate venues by a licensed pyrotechnician. Fireworks should never be used in the backyard or on domestic premises. I call on the Minister for Industrial Relations and the WorkCover Authority to take action in relation to this problem. I know that the Minister is receptive and is working on the matter. I am sure that in the not too distant future the Government will be able to report to the House some good news about the banning of fireworks to members of the general public.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [10.26 p.m.]: I wish to again speak about school closures in New South Wales, specifically in my electorate. I addressed this issue several weeks ago in this House and raised community concerns about the proposals that the Minister had put to the media. Since then parents and citizens meetings have been held at Vaucluse High School and Dover Heights school. The level of anxiety in the community is rising rapidly. One of the most important points to come out of those two parents and citizens meetings was the sudden realisation that the community is going through a so-called consultation process on the school closures without any information. They are working from a press release from the Minister's office, pamphlets about rationalisation, and media reports in the newspapers.

One of the first actions of the parents and citizens meetings was to draft a list of questions seeking basic information on which parents and friends of the schools could make fundamental decisions. On behalf of both schools, I put those questions on notice, in the form of questions Nos 1845 and 1908. I have also written to the Minister for Education and Training stating that, although he has several weeks to respond to the questions, that would be far too long for the period of consideration the Minister has set aside. I wrote to the Minister on 4 and 6 April asking him to urgently answer the questions I put on notice.

The important point I make is that the parents can do virtually nothing until the detailed information is provided. When that information is provided, the consultation period should begin. If the Minister is genuine in wanting the local communities across Sydney to consider his proposals, he must provide detailed information, not merely a press release. If the Minister has done his planning on the proposal for rationalisation of schools and the closure of several schools, that detailed information should be available.

The questions I put to him—19 from Dover Heights High School and 26 from Vaucluse High School—are basic and reasonable. They contain no great sense of outrage or rhetoric. They seek simple information. The Minister started this period of consultation and publicity as the school holidays approached. He must be able to

provide the most basic information sought in the questions. I plead with him to provide that information in the next 24 or 48 hours before the Easter break, otherwise the consultation period will be an absolute joke. Communities, certainly in my area and in many others, are working on what they have read in newspapers and in the press release. Clearly, the matter will not be resolved for the community if that is all it has to work with. If the Minister has done his planning he must be able to answer these questions quickly and in some detail within the next 48 hours.

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.30 p.m.]: The Government takes seriously any proposal to close a public school. As the honourable member for Vaucluse is aware, an intensive period of consultation accompanies any such proposal, and involves the school community and the wider community. The consultative period is just beginning. Announcements were made only recently. Schools close only if they lose enrolment numbers and are no longer viable—not from a financial perspective but from a curriculum perspective. They can no longer offer the best education to their students. Terry Metherell closed many schools in this State without going through the proper consultative procedures and without an understanding of curriculum needs. The Government is making assessments much more effectively in consultation with the school community, and this harnesses the opportunity for future students to have the best possible education. That is the Government's first and foremost consideration.

HAMILTON TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.32 p.m.]: On Monday afternoon, at the invitation of Mr Arthur Portus of 47 Stewart Avenue Hamilton I met with the residents of 18 households in his area to listen to their concerns that the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] had failed to adequately consult them about the proposal to install traffic control measures at the intersection of Stewart Avenue and Parkway Avenue, Hamilton. The residents were clearly frustrated and angry about the level of response by the RTA to their suggestions for traffic control measures at the intersection. They were particularly concerned that the RTA had not been prepared to meet the residents on site to see the problem, hear their views and concerns, and discuss their proposals.

This issue first came to prominence in 1997 when Newcastle City Council identified the intersection of Stewart Avenue and Parkway Avenue as a crash location, and sought its inclusion for funding under the Federal black spot program in 1997-98 and again in 1998-99. Stewart Avenue is an undivided arterial road carrying 14,400 vehicles per day; Parkway Avenue is a median-divided collector road carrying 6,600 vehicles per day east of Stewart Avenue. Traffic signals were proposed as an option to prevent crashes that have occurred at the location. Thirteen tow-away or injury-type crashes occurred at the intersection between January 1994 and September 1999. In 1999 the RTA commenced an investigation and design process to deal with traffic safety by installing traffic signals and S lanes in Stewart Avenue to provide right-hand lanes for turning traffic.

Following objections from residents during the initial display period, the second option for S lanes without traffic lights was presented in the second display period. These proposals were considered by the Newcastle City Traffic Committee on 15 May 2000 and 22 January 2001, and by the Strategic Issues Committee of the Newcastle City Council on 6 June 2000 and on 13 and 27 February 2001. The council adopted the RTA's option for traffic signals and S lanes on 3 April. The residents who met with me last Monday were strongly of the view that these processes did not fully deal with their objections and concerns. They were particularly affronted by the failure of the RTA to directly answer their proposals and explain why they were not appropriate. Residents of Stewart Avenue will be badly affected by the combination of S lanes and traffic signals.

The S lanes will direct traffic, including heavy vehicles, along the steeply cambered kerbside lanes on both sides of Stewart Avenue. This will eliminate kerbside parking for several homes on both sides of Stewart Avenue to the north and south of Parkway Avenue. It will also make access to and exit from home driveways extremely difficult and potentially dangerous, especially during the morning and afternoon peak hours. These traffic measures will permanently impact on the ability of residents, yet the necessity for traffic control measures occurs at only two discrete peak periods: morning and afternoon.

These traffic management changes were precipitated by the desire to improve traffic safety at this important intersection, which serves local traffic and provides access to two schools, sporting facilities and shopping centres in the area. That desire has brought into focus the conflict between the need for traffic safety and the amenity of residents impacted upon by the change. It is important that their views be taken into account.

I ask the Minister for Transport to ensure that the RTA responds to the suggestions put forward by the residents before it determines the best solution to manage traffic at this complex intersection. The residents have

provided me with a comprehensive package of letters. I will convey them to the Minister for Transport and ask him to ensure that the matters within them are fully addressed by the RTA in its final consideration for traffic management devices at this intersection.

KEMPSEY DISTRICT HOSPITAL

Mr STONER (Oxley) [10.37 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House community concerns about Kempsey District Hospital, which is the main hospital for the Macleay district, on the mid North Coast. Over the past five or so years services provided by Kempsey District Hospital have been gradually reduced. I instance the closure of a number of beds and the reconfiguration of the hospital to include palliative care and renal facilities. The effect has been a net loss of up to 12 beds. Staff numbers have been reduced. The number of operations performed is down and my figures suggest that this year operations could be down by as much as 48 per cent, with an indicative reduction in the budget of Kempsey District Hospital.

More and more patients are referred from the Macleay area to the Port Macquarie Base Hospital. Kempsey Hospital once performed a wide range of surgery but is now restricted to day-only and elective surgery. I understand that there are too few doctors to perform adequate emergency surgery at Kempsey District Hospital and that they may perform only low-risk caesarean sections. Hence the need for patients to travel further afield to Port Macquarie, Taree and possibly Coffs Harbour hospitals. The area health service maintains that for some years it has attempted to recruit surgeons, but not enough has been done. No discharge planner is in place at Kempsey District Hospital, but certainly one is needed.

The persistent rhetoric from the health bureaucracy is that it wishes to maintain Kempsey District Hospital as a level three facility, but its actions do not match its words. Indeed, the operating theatre at Kempsey District Hospital does not meet current accreditation standards. I understand that the main reason for that is that there are no separate exit and entry doors; there is only one entrance and exit door to the operating theatre. Indeed, a consultant's report dated 30 September 1999 states:

The hospital's operating suite is likely, in a matter of a very few years, to become unacceptable to surgeons.

Accreditation of the operating theatre is required, and a review of this theatre will be done in November this year. This is of great concern to the local community. Macleay is a growing region servicing such areas as South West Rocks, Kempsey and the upper Macleay. A 350-bed gaol is about to be built at Kempsey, which will place further demands on the hospital. The Kempsey hospital action group has made four requests: first, that the operating theatre be upgraded to accreditation standards; secondly, that surgeons be appointed to the hospital; thirdly, that obstetrics and caesareans be provided for at the hospital; and, fourthly, that a discharge planner be put in place at Kempsey District Hospital.

Those requests are reasonable, but thus far the area health board and the area health service have been evasive about these issues and have not delivered on any of them. Without a representative of the Macleay district on the area health board, it seems that this is set to continue. I ask that the Minister for Health intervene. The great budget increases announced last year have not flowed through to this good country hospital. In a country area, patients simply cannot be diverted to another hospital. If they are, they are greatly inconvenienced because they are away from family and friends. There are additional transport costs for visitors, as well as inconvenience and discomfort for patients having to travel up to an hour and a half to get treatment elsewhere.

SOUTH COAST COUNTRY MUSIC FESTIVAL

Ms SALIBA (Illawarra) [10.42 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of honourable members the South Coast Country Music Festival, which was held in my electorate on the weekend. This wonderful festival began on Thursday 5 April with a showcase and luncheon and ran through to Friday. On Saturday there were talent quests and on Sunday there were a number of organised concerts and activities. On Sunday I had the opportunity to attend the festival with my daughter, Sarah. We had a wonderful time. We watched the line dancing, involving people from about the age of 80 through to preschoolers. It was wonderful to watch so many people of different ages enjoying themselves on such a great occasion.

The festival would not have been possible without the work of the organisers, particularly the two festival co-ordinators, Di O'Dwyer and Keiran Shepherd. They put a lot of time and effort into organising the festival. Festival activities were held at the Kembla Heights Bowling Club and the Kembla Heights Community Centre, and outdoor activities took place at other venues. There were concerts, at which I heard people from throughout the State perform. People from Dubbo, Parkes, Sydney and other places throughout New South Wales, as well as other parts of Australia, came to be part of the festival. It was a great opportunity for the South Coast Country Music Association.

Special recognition must be given to the President of the South Coast Country Music Association, Owen Bignell, and to the other committee members who worked so hard to ensure that the festival was a success. I have written to the Minister for Energy because the association is looking for a place to call home in the Illawarra region. Indeed, Alan McKendrick, a committee member of the association who has been committed to the association for a number of years, came to see me about this matter.

The association is looking at a bowling club near Tallawarra power station that has not been used for some time. The association is looking at perhaps making that site its home, where it can conduct its annual festivals. People visiting the site would understand that that is the heart of country music in the Illawarra, and the association would have a home where it could encourage young talent in the region. The number of young performers at the talent quest on Sunday showed that there is young talent in the region. It is good to see local talent involved.

The South Coast Country Music Association has been in existence for nearly 30 years, and its members are committed to the philosophy of providing entertainment and enjoyment for families. I would like the association to have a place it can call home in the Illawarra region without having to spread itself over a number of areas. It would be great to see the festival held on one site where it can be recognised—similar to the Tamworth Country Music Festival, but a much smaller version. Having a permanent home in the region would recognise those who have been involved in country music in the region for a long time and who are committed to ensuring that local talent is recognised. The festival was great, and I thoroughly enjoyed it, as did my family and, I am sure, many other people. I want to see the festival grow, as it should, as a tourist attraction for the Illawarra region.

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS ELECTORATE HEALTH SERVICES

Ms SEATON (Southern Highlands) [10.47 p.m.]: Tonight I raise what is effectively becoming a bureaucratic border war in my electorate in which the casualties are local people who need health services. Much of my electorate is covered by two local government areas: Wollondilly and Wingecarribee. A smaller part of my electorate is in the Shoalhaven council area, but the bulk of it is in Wollondilly and Wingecarribee. Wingecarribee shire is served by the Wingecarribee health service, which provides services to patients outside Bowral hospital and the private hospital.

Macarthur health service provides external outreach services to patients in the Wollondilly shire, and that is where the problem starts. The Macarthur area also includes the highly populated areas of Campbelltown and, to a lesser extent, Camden. Yet again the people who live in Wollondilly shire feel that they are well and truly in no man's land in terms of community health services.

Recently I received correspondence from a local general practitioner, Dr Tim Rankin, whose surgery is in Bargo. Dr Rankin is enormously well respected in Bargo and the Wollondilly area. He has served that community for a very long time with a great deal of distinction. He drew to my attention the fact that many of the patients he looks after are oriented towards Mittagong and Bowral for shopping, cultural activities, education and other facilities and, therefore, look to those towns for many of the things they rely on for daily life, although technically they are in the Wollondilly shire.

Dr Rankin said that when patients in the Bargo area needed health services, Wingecarribee Health Service denied them those services because they were not in the Wingecarribee shire area. This is simply a border war. Wingecarribee Health Service says that it will not deal with anyone who lives across the border. That is all very well, but when Dr Rankin rang up Macarthur Health Service and asked for services for a patient in the Bargo area he was told that that service could not be provided because of a high level of unmet demand. I wrote on behalf of Dr Rankin to the Minister for Health and to Mr Ian Southwell, Chief Executive Officer of the South West Area Health Service.

Recently, when I visited Yanderra Public School, a woman who lives in Bargo, and who has lived there for a long time with her husband, came to see me. This woman's husband, who became seriously ill, was being treated by Dr Rankin. He was admitted to Bowral private hospital and at some point it was decided that he should be moved to Bargo. At that stage, he was very much in need of some home-based palliative care and support in the home. That sort of care was not available in the form of home visits to Bargo as a result of these ridiculous border wars between Macarthur and Wingecarribee health services. Wingecarribee Health Service said, "No, we cannot help as you do not live in our area." Macarthur Health Service said, "We would like to try, but we are unable to provide the service because we have an overdemand on our resources."

Even if that were the case, why could there not have been some budget transfer to the place where patients look for help—in this case the Wingecarribee area? This is a bureaucratic hard-line approach. The gentleman was assisted only because Dr Rankin, who happened to work not terribly far away, took it upon himself to make daily visits to this gentleman's home to give him the care that he needed, to make his time at home more comfortable, and to enable him to remain at home with his wife at a time when he desperately needed it. Not all doctors are available or are inclined to provide that service. Because Dr Rankin has such a great commitment to his local area and to this family he made the time available to visit this gentleman simply because Macarthur Health Service could not and Wingecarribee Health Service would not. Why is the system not designed to serve people rather than force people to serve the system? It seems to me to be the wrong way around. I call on the Minister for Health to fix these problems. [*Time expired.*]

HINTON BRIDGE CENTENARY

Mr PRICE (Maitland) [10.52 p.m.]: I refer tonight to the Hinton Bridge celebration. Hinton Bridge, one of the few remaining wooden bridges on the Hunter River network, bridges the Paterson River and still has in place an old mechanical lifting span which was used to lift the centre of the bridge and enable sailing ships to travel to Paterson. February this year marked 100 years since the official opening of that bridge. Last Sunday saw a re-enactment of that opening. Mr Max Lantry, president of the centenary celebration, was a member of the official party. The Minister for Public Works, the Hon. Morris Iemma, officially participated in that celebration and unveiled an historic commemorative plaque that referred not only to the original opening but also to last Sunday's event as a century of the effective use and crossing of Paterson River at Hinton.

The day-long program was briefly threatened by rain, which passed. The re-enactment, which depicted people in period dress, went off like clockwork. The tremendous program included the presentation of certificates by the Federal member for Paterson, Mr Bob Horne, to a number of outstanding elderly citizens in the region. Mr Ryan Kwanten, better known as Vinnie from *Home and Away*, participated in the parade. Prior to the parade wreaths were laid at the memorial gates of Hinton school by members of the local Returned Services League [RSL]. That laying of wreaths was organised by the local RSL sub-branch and by the Vietnam Veterans Association. The ceremony, which was extremely well attended, was a meaningful ceremony on the day as it coincided with Rats of Tobruk celebrations around the country.

The street parade had everything that everyone could imagine—from farmers and cattle, to all sorts of ancient farm implements, to floats of various types. Schoolchildren and teachers from Hinton public school were in period dress. The parade culminated at the reserve near the hotel where we were entertained by Scottish dancers and local schoolchildren from Largs Public School and Iona school doing bush dancing. There was a ballet display and Morpeth schoolchildren danced around the Maypole. A tremendous day was had by all. Other important events included Cobb and Co. coach joy rides for children and interested adults, which are often held in Morpeth. The river vessel *Lady Joy* provided river cruises the entire afternoon.

I give some credit and thanks to the Roads and Traffic Authority which, after some 11 months of maintenance on the bridge, was able to ensure that the carriageway was clear in both directions for the festivities of the day. That was quite a feat. I am not sure whether the carriageway is still clear. I suspect that on Monday the RTA again started work on its maintenance program. But it was an excellent effort on its part. The organising committee and, in particular, its secretary, Mrs Vicky Bellamy, extend thanks to the Minister for Public Works for his attendance on the day. Thanks go also to the Premier's office for a special grant of \$1,000 to ensure the smooth staging of the event. That was appreciated by the crowd. The event will remain as part of Hinton's folk history. It will remain also in the memories of those who attended for many years to come. It was a great day and a great commemoration. I was glad to be a part of it.

DUBBO EDUCATION FACILITIES

Mr McGRANE (Dubbo) [10.57 p.m.]: Exciting times are ahead for education in Dubbo and its surrounding districts. I am pleased that the Parliamentary Secretary for Education is in the Chamber tonight. Construction is well advanced for a new multi-campus high school in Dubbo, which will cater for all public students in years 10, 11 and 12. The facilities at this multi-campus school, which is being built at a cost of \$17.1 million, will complement and support modern teaching practices and allow for greater learning interaction by students, thus stimulating and enhancing learning outcomes. Comprehensive communication cabling for voice, video and data is provided throughout the school to support modern teaching practices. That will also provide comprehensive networking, Internet and email access for students and staff.

The senior campus, which is part of a precinct that includes Charles Sturt University, will provide a number of opportunities for students to access resources from both facilities. This first stage development is an

\$8 million investment by Charles Sturt University. Dubbo campus, which has been operating for the past three years, has increased its numbers dramatically in the last year. In excess of 300 students are studying at Dubbo's Charles Sturt University. At present those students are housed in an area that was once under the control of TAFE. At present, Charles Sturt University is offering bachelor of education, bachelor of social welfare, nursing and accounting degrees.

The good news about the involvement of the Charles Sturt University in Dubbo is that the majority of the students are from Dubbo and the surrounding district. The university's presence has helped to stop the drain of young people who wish to further their education from regional areas to other metropolitan centres. Western area students have indicated that, due to the cost factors involved, they would not have been able to further their education if they had had to study at a university in another location.

Also helping to stem the flow of young people from country areas is Dubbo's technical and further education [TAFE] college, which continues to deliver practical and sustainable courses to the residents of Dubbo. TAFE continues to play an important role in the retention of skills in the workplace which some other people take for granted. Those skills are essential to ensure that communities remain viable as places of commerce. In Dubbo there are three public high schools, one Catholic high school and one Christian school. Dubbo is well catered for at all levels of education, with five infants and primary schools which are recognised for their commitment to the education of students in the Dubbo region.

Another unique aspect of Dubbo's education scene is the School of Distance Education which caters for students throughout Australia as well as for many students in South-East Asia and beyond. The School of Distance Education is an eye-opener for those who are used to the usual face-to-face classroom teaching methods. The school utilises technology to deliver education outcomes for those who cannot obtain access to schools. I urge the Minister for Education and Training to consider the establishment of a preschool in Dubbo's Gordon estate. The Gordon estate's population is predominantly Aboriginal and many problems exist in the area. The establishment of a preschool will help to turn around children's lives at an early stage and give them the opportunities that others take for granted.

Two aspects which have been missing from Dubbo's education mixture have been the private school sector and boarding school facilities. An approach has been made by two different areas of the Anglican Church to build two separate grammar schools in Dubbo. One proposal is for a day centre and the other one concerns a boarding facility. This proposal will enhance the education facilities that already exist in Dubbo. Both proposals have separate goals, but they complement what is happening in education in Dubbo at the present time. I commend the Government for its foresight in developing education as a key aspect of regional development, especially in the Dubbo area, for its further commitment to regional education, and for creating Dubbo as a centre of education excellence.

Mr WHELAN (Strathfield—Minister for Police) [11.02 p.m.]: I indicate to the honourable member for Dubbo that I will ensure that the attention of the Minister for Education and Training is drawn to his well-researched and highly articulated policy objective which has been presented on behalf of his constituents. I listened attentively to what he said and found a lot of value in it. I am sure that the Minister for Education and Training will respond to the honourable member's comments.

Private members' statements noted.

House adjourned at 11.04 p.m. until 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday 11 April 2001.
