

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 28 June 2001

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

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

BILL RETURNED

The following bill was returned from the Legislative Council without amendment:

Freight Rail Corporation (Sale) Bill

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr Speaker, pursuant to the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, tabled the report entitled "Auditor-General's Report 2001—Volume Three", dated June 2001.

Ordered to be printed.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion of No Confidence: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr Amery agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit consideration forthwith of the matter taking the place of the matter of public importance [No Confidence in the Minister for Land and Water Conservation].

MINISTER FOR LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION

Motion of No Confidence

Debate resumed from 6 June.

Mr McGRANE (Dubbo) [10.01 a.m.]: This debate has gone on far too long; it is the longest debate that has taken place in my 2½ years in Parliament. While I have the greatest respect for the honourable member for Hawkesbury, who moved the motion of no confidence in the Minister, I have the greatest respect also for the Minister. At this stage, I am having a bob each way. In a sense, the honourable member for Hawkesbury, a member of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust, is too close to the action. I want to tell the House about my feelings in relation to trusts in general and individual members of trusts. New South Wales has had various trusts since Parliament was established. I believe trusts are a thing of the last century. My philosophy on trusts generally and on individual trustees is that a trust should be constituted by the council of the relevant area, and a management committee of council would better do the work now done by trustees of individual entities. That would give the managing body a better working relationship.

Under the present system, trusts have many problems. For instance, it takes a long time to replace a trust member who dies. It also takes a long time to replace trust members who have not been attending meetings, perhaps because they have moved to other areas. If a management committee of council were to carry out the responsibilities of the trust, committee members could be replaced quickly. Throughout New South Wales many trusts have been established to look after local halls, showgrounds, sporting facilities, racecourses, et cetera. While trust members have the greatest intentions and are dedicated to the discharge of their responsibilities, they do not have political or financial clout, which is a distinct disadvantage. That is why I maintain that management committees of local councils should replace current trusts. That would improve relationships between those bodies and local, State and Federal governments. In the first instance the management committee would deal with local government, which would then deal with the entities now dealt with by trusts. That restructure would streamline the process.

If the funding responsibilities of the present trusts were discharged by management committees of councils, professional people engaged by those councils would prepare applications for grants, and the

machinery of the councils could become involved. That would be to the betterment of the relevant area. At the moment trusts, especially those looking after local halls, have great problems maintaining adequate cash flows to cover just the insurance of buildings and workers compensation premiums. If those matters were under council control, workers compensation matters would be under the blanket coverage of the councils. That in itself would result in big savings. If responsibility for maintenance of buildings, showgrounds and other entities were under management committees of the councils, the money spent on those facilities would be ratepayers' money. In that way the community, especially a small village, would be getting back some of the money that it pays in rates. That money would then be used to maintain local halls, et cetera. That would be a plus for individual areas.

I have had experience with councils, trusts and so on, having spent 28 years in local government. When I first entered local government, I had a philosophy about councils becoming trustees for various halls in the council area where I was shire president. After a long time we got all the halls in the shire of Gilgandra under council control. That has been great in the sense that those halls have been modernised, and sporting grounds and other facilities have been updated as necessary because the council has had the necessary financial backing. One typical example is the showground in the city of Dubbo. Until five years ago it was run by a trust. The individual members of the trust were dedicated. However, the Dubbo showground is an integral part of the development of the city of Dubbo because it is a focal point for ram, sheep and cattle sales, and harness racing as well as the show itself. A trust has run the showground since the establishment of Dubbo.

Five years ago council took over responsibility for the showground. That had to be done because the trust had run into financial troubles regarding development of buildings on the showground site and had nowhere to go. Those buildings were falling into a state of disrepair. An application for development of the harness racing track had been pending for about four years before the council became involved in running the showground. The Minister of the day said that if the council was not involved in the \$1.4 million development of the harness racing facility, he would not approve spending that amount of money on the Dubbo showground. Since then, Dubbo City Council has spent \$2.5 million on the showground. It has done so because, as I said earlier, the showground is an integral part of the overall economy of Dubbo. Ram, cattle, and horse sales are very competitive and one has to have the right facilities. Unfortunately the previous trust had no way of overcoming its financial problems, and amenities were deteriorating. Through the involvement of council, Dubbo now has one of the best facilities in New South Wales for selling sheep, cattle and horses, as well as a great \$1.4 million harness racing track.

All that has happened because the council became the trustee, but the showground was still run by a board of management. The Pastoral, Agricultural and Horticultural Association had the majority on the board of management, so it continued to have a vital input into what it considered to be its ground. Trusts control entities that are owned by the whole of the community, which is why we must have ongoing community entities as trustees. A council is one such entity. It is probably the only ongoing entity in any community. Individual trusts do not have to be concerned about replacement members or financial backing. The Minister should replace trusts with the councils of the relevant areas and allow a board of management to run the entity. At times it is difficult to accept change, but change we must. If our individual areas are to be competitive, we must have good people running the organisation and the right financial backing. Although I have the greatest respect for the honourable member for Hawkesbury, I do not support his motion.

Mr MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [10.11 a.m.]: The honourable member for Hawkesbury has moved a motion of no confidence in the Minister for Land and Water Conservation. The essence of the motion is that the Minister has not acted properly, but rather unfairly and unjustly in shutting down the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust. The motion is about whether the power to deal with local, sensitive environmental issues should be entrusted to local people who have local expertise and know exactly what is happening with the river. The Hawkesbury-Nepean river system, one of our major waterways, provides 90 per cent of Sydney's water supply. Some years ago the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust was set up to deal with pollution and environmental problems that affected the river. The Minister has now decided to close down the trust.

The honourable member for Hawkesbury is a local—the Hawkesbury area covers Richmond, Windsor and many other parts of the north-west of Sydney—and he maintains that local people should be the masters of their own destiny. They should have definite input into how to deal with environmental and pollution problems from urban consolidation that affect our water supply. The Minister maintains that those problems should be dealt with and centralised in Macquarie Street. Shutting down the trust is another blow for the residents of western Sydney. However well motivated the Minister might have been, his actions show ignorance of the great work undertaken by the trust. The Nature Conservation Council, the peak New South Wales environmental body, referred to the trust as an icon for community ownership and management of the catchment.

The decision to shut down the trust fails to recognise the significance of the work it carried out to upgrade and maintain what is regarded as a healthy and productive river system. The Minister, in abolishing the trust, has removed the contribution of local people who know more about it than someone who is stationed in Macquarie Street and another part of Sydney, and the people who have a real desire to preserve the Hawkesbury-Nepean river system and the catchment trust. Many of the 7,000 volunteers who have come forward to work on projects to upgrade and maintain the river system will be lost. This situation is a bit like the movie *The Castle*: Big Brother taking control. In this instance the Government is taking control of this important trust. In *The Castle*, Big Brother wanted to take Mr Kerrigan's house for the airport—the serenity of it all.

In this scenario Big Brother wants to take control of a dedicated group of people who were appointed by a previous government to look after important environmental issues surrounding the Hawkesbury-Nepean River system. It was an arbitrary decision, without any real trial, without the trust being called upon by the Minister to justify its existence or account for what it might have done. The trust was given no opportunity to overcome problems the Minister may have believed existed. It was suggested earlier that the trust was summarily dismissed because it had spent only something like \$69,000 on on-ground works in the 1999-00 budget. The honourable member for Hawkesbury does not agree. He said that in the past three years the trust has spent some \$7.5 million on on-ground works to preserve the river system.

But the Government in its wisdom, or lack thereof, shut down the trust. The independent body has been dismissed and its power transferred to those in Macquarie Street. The Government must realise that the people of western Sydney are involved in the operation of the trust. Ten percent of the Australian population live in western Sydney, and they are entitled to a trust that involves local people with local knowledge to represent their interests and concerns. But the Minister has centralised the power in Macquarie Street. It is the big guy against the little guy. In this instance 7,000 hard-working volunteers, people who have a total commitment to the environment, people who have worked with great enthusiasm and goodwill, will find that they are no longer part of the process that allows them to preserve their environment.

Over the years the trust has achieved many things. The whole aim of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust was to involve the community, local government and State agents in understanding the local catchment. The aim of the trust was to identify environmental projects, to undertake those projects and, by example, to educate others in the catchment. I commend the honourable member for Hawkesbury for his commitment, concern and vigour in assisting to establish this trust. Over the years people's attitudes have changed completely. People are now talking about water run-off, pesticide effluent, tree planting, salinity and flood plain planning. People are discussing many of those issues at a backyard and neighbourhood level. There has been a complete change of culture.

With the greatest respect to the Minister, I suggest that people would not be discussing those issues if there had been no Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust. People on that trust believe that they are no longer part of the action because the Government has flicked them and, because of that, their enthusiasm has waned. They now think that they are not a viable part of the action. It is essential for governments to harness the co-operation, support and work of local people. I believe that this trust effectively did that. It is not good for the Government to return to a situation in which it monopolises and centralises power and decision making. I am pleased to see the honourable member for Wentworthville in the Chamber. She is a former Minister for the Environment and has been a champion of the environment for many years.

The trust that the community had in the Government will end. The Government, which is sensitive to criticism, might believe that the trust has done too good a job. So the Government silenced its critic, an issue alluded to by the honourable member for Hawkesbury. When staff of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust were dismissed or sacked—honourable members can use any terminology to describe that event—it was a case of killing the messenger. The Government, rather than killing the messenger, killed its so-called claim to environmental credibility. That is what this motion is all about. Members of the Opposition who represent north-western Sydney electorates are not alone in their criticism of the Minister's actions. The Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils [WSROC] stated:

The Trust has had a key role in managing, improving and protecting the catchment of the Hawkesbury-Nepean, which is the key river system in Western Sydney.

In addition, the Trust has worked closely in partnership with WSROC, its member Councils in projects such as the recently-launched Western Sydney State of the Environment Report and through the TeamWest process.

Given the close relationship the Trust had built with the region ... there has been no consultation with WSROC, its member Councils or the wider community regarding the decision to dismantle it.

I repeat, if the Government believed that there were problems with the trust, or if it wanted to change direction or change its priorities, why did it not seek the views of the community before making the decision to abolish the trust? Unfortunately, that is not what the Government is about. The Government engages in community consultation only when it suits it. In this instance, the Government would have established, had it engaged in consultation, that the community was overwhelmingly in support of the trust and its activities. No cost-benefit analysis was completed to establish what savings could be achieved by transferring trust programs to another bureaucracy. In the end, there will be a reduction in services, but expenditure will remain the same.

The trustees of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust are dedicated people. They are people with local knowledge and they know what the trust is about. They breathe in the Hawkesbury air and they travel on roads in the Hawkesbury electorate. They have that magnificent Hawkesbury-Nepean River as an environmental backdrop. They have first-hand knowledge, commitment, and an underlying conviction to ensure that that river network, which provides 90 per cent of Sydney's drinking water, is in the best possible condition. The record of the trust over many years has proved that it not only has that commitment but also has produced the results. The Opposition is firmly of the view that the Minister acted unjustly on this occasion. All honourable members should support the motion moved by the honourable member for Hawkesbury. The honourable member for Hawkesbury is right and, sadly, the Minister has been found wanting.

Mr TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [10.27 a.m.]: I state at the outset that I do not support the motion that has been moved by the honourable member for Hawkesbury. My colleagues, particularly the honourable member for Dubbo, have said that they have a high regard for the honourable member for Hawkesbury. I also have a high regard for the honourable member for Hawkesbury. After listening carefully to the debate since the motion was moved, I am of the view that the Minister has clearly articulated why he or his department took the action they did. I do accept the reasons advanced by the Minister. It is entirely appropriate for honourable members to disagree with the Minister's view.

I hope that the Minister will take on board all the issues that honourable members have raised, and I hope that he responds to those issues at the conclusion of this debate. If honourable members move motions of no confidence every time a Minister makes a decision, such as the decision made by the Minister for Land and Water Conservation, every day that the Parliament sits we would be debating motions of no confidence. Taking into account the number of hours that it has taken to conclude debate on this motion I do not think we would be debating anything else in this Chamber. The Minister told honourable members why he took corrective action in respect of this trust. I do not confess to be an expert in the trust. However, the Minister was prepared to defend his actions and he has responded appropriately to the issues.

It would have been better if the motion of the honourable member for Hawkesbury had expressed disappointment and concern at the actions of the Government. The honourable member for Hawkesbury should have put forward constructive suggestions on how to address these issues. I do not believe that, in this instance, a vote of no confidence is appropriate. If we consider the last five or six matters dealt with in this Chamber, we could have moved a motion of no confidence in every Minister, if the Opposition disagreed with those decisions.

As I said, I will not support the motion of no confidence in the Minister, for the reasons I have outlined. I urge all honourable members to liaise directly with the Minister in regard to this issue. This motion is, in effect, asking me to vote whether it is appropriate for this Minister to remain in this House. That is what a motion of no confidence seeks to do. The motion, in respect of an issue like this, is highly inappropriate. In fact, I am surprised that the honourable member for Hawkesbury, who knows how the Chamber operates better than most others, would move such a motion. Honourable members should express their concern about the Minister's proposal by all means. Honourable members who understand the issue much better than I would may be able to form a particular view, but a vote of no confidence in respect of this issue is inappropriate and I will not support it.

Ms ANDREWS (Peats) [10.30 a.m.]: I oppose the motion moved by the honourable member for Hawkesbury and support my parliamentary colleague the Minister for Land and Water Conservation. I say with firm conviction that the new arrangements proposed by the Minister will deliver more on-ground works for the protection of the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment area. The removal of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust will result in greater resources becoming available to fund high-priority projects that have the backing of local government. For example, in the electorate of Peats members of the former trust were noticeable by their absence from active on-ground works. That issue has certainly been canvassed in the Minister's contribution to this debate.

The measures announced by the Minister recently will mean that an additional \$1 million will be available for works that will lead to marked improvements where it matters most. The Minister has established the Hawkesbury-Nepean local government advisory group under the chairmanship of Councillor Robert Bell from Gosford City Council. I might add that most of the electorate that I am honoured to represent falls within the area for which Gosford City Council is responsible. The advisory group will meet for the first time today. It will advise the Minister on what projects are eligible for funding. That funding will be matched by local government or other sources to ensure that we get the best possible outcome.

In parts of my electorate there are urgent on-ground works that might be eligible for such funding. For example, at Patonga and other beaches in the area, coastal restoration works will improve the amenity of those important recreational facilities, ensuring that beachfront erosion is kept under control. Water quality from stormwater drains, the discharge of treated sewage from treatment plants and the close monitoring of the effects of new residential and industrial developments are important elements that need to be closely monitored because of their potential impacts on the catchment. In the southern part of my electorate, of course, there is a multimillion-dollar oyster industry. I am confident that the on-ground projects that will be put in place will certainly protect that industry.

They are the sorts of projects that will be better managed now because of the action that the Minister has taken. Far from being condemned for his actions, he should be congratulated. This Minister has put the focus back onto works that will have a positive impact on the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment. The Federal member for Robertson has written to a number of his constituents, who also happen to be my constituents, regarding the removal of the trust, or the integration of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust into the Department of Land and Water Conservation. A lot of the information that the Federal member gave to my constituents is misleading. It certainly is misinformation.

For instance, he claimed that the trust was being disbanded without notice. That is certainly not true, because in April the Minister issued a media release. That media release was available to anyone who was interested. The Minister indicated that changes would be made to the trust. In his letter the Federal member for Robertson referred to the fact that the Federal Government had provided \$2 million from the Natural Heritage Trust for rehabilitation works. I want to inform the House, as the Minister has done previously, that the State Government or the New South Wales taxpayers contributed \$29 million to the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust in the period from 1993-94 to date. For what outcome? We have not seen one project. We have seen numerous glossy publications, but we certainly have not seen much else.

I advised the Federal member for Robertson to approach the Federal Government to enhance the funding that it provides for Landcare groups, flood mitigation and similar projects. In all those important areas the Federal Government has reduced funding. The Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust found it difficult to manage on an annual budget of \$3 million. I understand the trust was seeking an additional \$600,000. That money was not to be spent on caring for the river but for expenses, the payment of increased salaries and such things.

Mr Rozzoli: Don't lie! It is a disgrace to say that, an absolute disgrace.

Ms ANDREWS: I am not lying.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Hawkesbury will have an opportunity to reply to the debate at the appropriate time.

Ms ANDREWS: I was so alarmed at what the Federal member for Robertson was telling my constituents that I wrote to the Minister seeking information. For the benefit of the House and my constituents, I will quote from the Minister's reply to me dated 26 June, attached to which was a media release dated 30 May outlining a number of outcomes under the new arrangements. In his letter the Minister said:

As you are aware, the decision to remove the trust was made following consideration of the need for greater operating efficiencies leading to on-ground catchment actions. Integrating the trust's work with the Department of Land and Water Conservation [DLWC], other agencies and local government will encourage value adding across government to produce environmental benefit whilst maintaining stakeholder involvement.

The establishment of the Local Government Advisory Group comprising representatives from all local councils in the area will ensure the maintenance of input from local government on catchment issues. The group will operate as an independent advisory body as well as contribute to the implementation of both the Strategic Plan developed by the former trust, and the Warragamba Catchment Management Plan for the upstream area of the catchment.

The Hawkesbury-Nepean River Management Forum comprises a broad range of stakeholder members including landholders, industry and environmental representatives, and recreational interests. The forum will assess the impact of current flow regimes of the estuarine areas of the Hawkesbury-Nepean river system and may provide recommendations for the inclusion of environmental flow conditions in Sydney Catchment Authority's licence.

Much of the specific work of the former trust is being maintained to provide ongoing benefits. The Department of Land and Water Conservation recently initiated a Communication Strategy for NESB growers in the Hawkesbury-Nepean involving 6 key language groups. Through this the department continues to build a relationship of trust with NESB growers to deliver any natural resource management messages and assist them to embrace good management practices.

Additionally, I recently announced funding of \$320,000 in the first year for a number of new on-ground projects for the Hawkesbury-Nepean made possible only through the immediate savings recognised from the Government's new arrangements in the Hawkesbury-Nepean. These projects will address issues such as the spread of noxious weeds, particularly alligator weed, improved management of riverbanks, and catchment, and stream rehabilitation including erosion of riverbanks, and will involve local landholders, community groups, local councils, other government departments and local Landcare groups.

The Minister then stated that he had enclosed a copy of a press release on the announcement. The Minister continued:

All these projects will provide considerable downstream benefits to the Hawkesbury-Nepean community indicating the Carr Government's continued commitment to the entire Hawkesbury-Nepean river system. The decision to implement these new arrangements is an important initiative to ensure that funding allocations will now be targeted at priority outcomes which are assessed as having the greatest environmental benefit.

That last paragraph, in which the Minister pointed out that the projects will have considerable benefits to the community in the lower parts of the Hawkesbury-Nepean, is very relevant to my electorate of Peats. I take great pleasure in supporting my colleague the Minister and I strongly oppose the motion.

Mr RICHARDSON (The Hills) [10.40 a.m.]: I have been following this debate over a protracted period with a considerable amount of interest. In the comparatively brief time the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust has been in existence it has become an important part of the fabric in the Hills district because of the important work it has managed to achieve to protect and improve our environment. The Minister for Land and Water Conservation suggested that the honourable member for Hawkesbury was too close to the subject to be objective. He felt very passionately about this issue. Based on some of the comments the Minister made in abolishing the trust, I am not surprised. I have attended a large number of workshops and other activities organised by the trust but I have never been a member of the trust family per se. So, I am not too close to the subject to be objective.

I recall the point made eloquently by the honourable member for Hawkesbury that if the trust was so useless, it seems absolutely extraordinary that the Minister for the Environment should have handed over a cheque for \$112,000 to run an education program just days before the axe fell on the trust on 6 April. The Minister will understand that this is a government whose right hand does not know what its left hand is doing. Why on earth would the Minister for the Environment give a cheque for a six-figure sum to an organisation that was about to be abolished, an organisation that the Minister for Land and Water Conservation claims performs no useful function whatsoever?

What will the alternative to the trust be? I have some real concerns about this. The Minister suggests that what is to be set up is a reference panel from the Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley, a joint venture of local councils, industry groups and the State Government, plus the Hawkesbury-Nepean forum. That will advise the Government on environmental matters in the area. That is exactly the sort of ad hoc arrangement that existed before the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust was set up. It is precisely because of that that the honourable member for Hawkesbury lobbied so strongly and hard to have the trust set up. There was a total lack of co-ordination between councils, government agencies, farmers, developers and landowners. There was not the partnership that has existed during the eight years the trust has existed.

At that time there was a decentralisation of the decision-making process. The power was put back into the hands of the people. The people had the opportunity to make a difference. Time and again we have learnt that that is not the Labor way. That is not the way this Government has ever conducted its affairs. Yet formation of the partnership was the central reason for setting up the trust. That is what total catchment management is all about. There has to be a clear understanding that government cannot do everything. The Government needs the assistance of voluntary groups and of the community to ensure that appropriate environmental outcomes are achieved. I would like to quote from something the honourable member for Hawkesbury said in his contribution. He said:

It was not the trust's job to perform on-ground works but to facilitate, foster, encourage, educate, raise community awareness and provide advice.

We are not talking about bulldozers and chainsaws. The trust does not have a works depot at its Windsor headquarters. That was never the intention when the trust was set up. If that had been the intention when the trust was set up, the regulation for the trust would be entirely different. The whole structure of the organisation would be entirely different. I strongly contradict the line the Minister has been pushing as the rationale for abolishing the trust, that the trust did not conduct on-ground works. As the honourable member for Hawkesbury pointed out, an independent auditor estimated that for every dollar the Government spent on the trust it got back at least \$2 in on-ground works. That is because of the partnership between the Government, the trust and the community. Of course, some money also flowed in from the Federal Government, and the trust played an important part in lobbying for those extra funds. The Federal Government gave money because it believed in what the trust was doing, and obviously the Minister for the Environment believed in what the trust was doing, otherwise he would not have given that \$112,000 that I mentioned previously.

Some of the work carried out by the trust included the rehabilitation and restoration of the river banks of the Hawkesbury-Nepean. I would have thought one could describe that as on-ground works. It also worked to improve sediment and erosion control in urban development sites, both existing construction sites and greenfield sites. It was involved in bushland regeneration. Anyone who knows anything about bushland regeneration would understand the extraordinarily important role that volunteers play in that regard. Almost all the bushland regeneration carried out in the Sydney basin is carried out by volunteers. The trust worked to reduce the threat of invasive weeds. The trust was planning to lead the development of a pilot emissions trade-offs scheme for nutrients. That is extraordinarily important because nutrients going into the watercourse lead to the build-up of blue green algae.

During 2001 the trust was going to continue to strengthen and expand the Streamwatch network. Honourable members may not be aware that the trust inherited 35 groups in the Streamwatch program when it was set up and it now has—I should say "had" because it does not exist any more—160 groups, involving 2,000 people. It was one of the biggest water quality monitoring networks in any catchment in Australia. Does the Minister say that was not important work, that it was not something that should have happened, that it was not a contribution on the ground? Perhaps he should go to those voluntary groups and tell them that the work they have been doing has been a complete waste of time. I am sure he would be delighted to tell those groups that.

The trust supports three times more groups for each Streamwatch co-ordinator than the New South Wales average, but the Minister says it does nothing on the ground and has done no work of any value. The trust developed a river-bank management program after extensive consultation with more than 800 river stakeholders—land-holders, river users and government. The program, with significant on-ground benefit—note those words—is still guided by a stakeholder steering committee. Through regional habitat networks the trust provides administrative support, training and assistance with funding applications and promotion to 369 Landcare and Bushcare groups with a total membership of 2,500. The Minister simply cannot seem to get it into his head that what we are talking about here is facilitation. It is not the works depot at Windsor; it is thousands and thousands of volunteers, landowners and other stakeholders doing the job.

Some of the other practical achievements include support for the work of nine catchment management committees. Indeed, a number of them have been working in my electorate. More than a million dollars worth of community environmental projects have been funded. An erosion sediment control policy for the catchment is extraordinarily important work—work that we have been led to believe will be carried out in the future by this illusory reference panel. I can remember being involved in the phosphorus action program back in about 1994 or 1995, when I managed to generate significant publicity for the program, encouraging people to wash their cars on the lawn rather than in the street and so on to help reduce the nutrients going into the river, to prevent the build-up of blue-green algae.

There has been significant publicity about sandmining in Maroota, a matter of considerable concern to people in north-western Sydney. The Cattai Catchment Management Committee, with the assistance of the trust, has been involved in planning and management of future mining in north-western Sydney. Much of the sand that is used in building in the Sydney basin comes from Maroota. There are significant considerations relating to pollution of groundwater. Were it not for the work of the trust, there would have been much worse environmental outcomes in the area than there are currently. Another on-ground issue that the trust has been heavily involved with is the riverbank management program, which has been funded by Natural Heritage Trust grants. It has not been State government money that has been going into it; it has been Federal Government money. The aim is to assist land-holders and community groups in the management of their riverbanks.

The program seeks to improve riparian and river habitats and water quality through strengthening riverside vegetation to reduce sediment and pollutants entering the river, and to improve the scenic quality of the

river landscape. A large part of the program has been providing training for riverbank landowners who want to improve the riparian habitat, ensure that erosion is minimised, plant appropriate native tree species and so on. It is not the Government that will do that. An army of paid people with bulldozers and front-end loaders from the works depot at Windsor will not do this job. The landowners themselves will carry out the work. It is extraordinarily important to train and educate those landowners so that they understand appropriate revegetation and regeneration techniques. If that work is not carried out—once again I have significant concerns about the ability of this reference panel to do that job—there will be far worse environmental outcomes.

The trust also established a Hawkesbury-Nepean riparian plant seed bank to supply community riverbank revegetation projects. The Minister might explain what will happen to that seed bank. Will it be taken over by his reference panel? Will it play favourites as to who gets the seedlings and who does not? I recall this work being carried out. The trust completed stage one of a reed mapping and trial planning project which investigated the role of reeds in reducing riverbank erosion and their potential for use in revegetation projects. Much of the work has been at the cutting edge. Of necessity, there had to be a scientific appraisal of the appropriate techniques for riparian management, reduction of riverbank erosion and so on. If we are to return to the ad hoc arrangements that were in place before the trust was formed, what sort of environmental outcomes will there be in the future?

The Minister spent quite an amount of time in his speech talking about the work of the Department of Agriculture with farmers, particularly vegetable growers, in the Hawkesbury-Nepean basin. He would lead us to believe that everything in the Sydney Basin garden is rosy. Recent articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald* damn the Government for failing to deal with pesticide misuse by some market gardeners, particularly those from a non-English-speaking background who have been unable to read instructions associated with the pesticides. My constituent Mr Fred Haskins of Hezlett Road, Kellyville, wrote to me about this very issue in April in high dudgeon after learning of the Minister's decision to abolish the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust. Mr Haskins had done a considerable amount of work with the Australian Chinese Growers Association, with the help of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust. He stated:

Over the last few years a great deal has been achieved. Sheryl [Jarecki, the co-ordinator of the Cattai Catchment Management Committee] and her staff have gained the confidence of the Australian Chinese Growers Association members. A number of students from the University of Western Sydney-Hawkesbury have been given on-farm experience on a range of farms in the Hawkesbury Valley, e.g. stone-fruit, lettuce, cabbage, tomatoes, cut flowers and Chinese vegetables. A video on safe farming practices in Cantonese has been put together by the HNCMT and NSW Agriculture, Orange. A large majority of the Chinese farmers have completed their Agsafe farm chemicals course.

This would not have happened but for the input of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust. The letter continues:

This course was conducted in Cantonese, the translation was performed by Mr Stephen Ng, co-proprietor of Golden Harvest Supplies, Flemington Markets and Ashley Senn, NSW Agriculture agronomists; Windsor. Mr Ng and Ashley Senn have translated the most commonly used farm chemicals and pesticide instruction labels into Cantonese.

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Field trials were conducted at Bringelly with different types of sprinklers on Mr Har Ping's property. Several other farm field days have been conducted by the Australian Chinese Growers Association in conjunction with the HNCMT and the Dept of Agriculture, Windsor.

Here is the important point:

None of these projects could have been initiated without the groundwork put in by Sheryl Jarecki and the staff of HNCMT.

Mr Haskins was absolutely outraged by the abolition of the trust. He was extraordinarily concerned about the potential for the misuse of pesticides, weedicides, fertilisers and so on in the future as a consequence of the trust being abolished. On paper, the Government might save \$3.5 million a year with the abolition of the trust, but we have just heard that \$2 goes into groundwork for every \$1 that is put into the trust by the Government. That is \$7 million of work that is done on the ground—often funded through Federal grants or through the army of volunteers that the trust has managed to mobilise over the years it has been in existence. Does that mean that the Government will spend \$10.5 million to save \$3.5 million? Is that what the Minister has in mind? I have real concerns about that.

The Minister did not have to unilaterally abolish the trust. If he was not satisfied with the way in which the trust was operating, why did he not talk to the trust board or the chief executive officer about ways in which he felt the trust's operations could be improved? Why did he not change the regulation a couple of years ago

when it was reviewed? I remember attending a couple of meetings and having discussions with the trust about the way the regulation could and should be reformed. But that was not good enough for this Minister. He simply unilaterally announced that the trust would be abolished.

The Minister did not look at the important work the trust has been doing. He made no attempt whatever to talk to the trust's chief executive officer and executive staff or to negotiate with them. He certainly did not mention his intentions to the honourable member for Hawkesbury, who is the deputy chairman of the trust and who was instrumental in having the trust set up. The Minister simply turned around and abolished the trust. That is why this motion of no confidence in the Minister has been moved, and that is why I have been pleased to support this motion today. The trust's record stands alone. The trust has been a pre-eminent force for the environment in our area. I am not surprised that the Minister's action has been condemned by every environmental group you can name.

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.00 a.m.]: I strongly oppose this motion, and I strongly support the Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation. I cannot understand why the honourable member for Hawkesbury has moved this motion. It is quite perplexing. The honourable member has a reputation that, in the Opposition, is pretty well unsurpassed. He has credibility, he understands the issues and he is held in high esteem by honourable members on both sides of the House. However, in the twilight of his career in the Parliament he has moved this motion, which has no bearing on real life as we know it.

Many other issues that face the Government and the Opposition might be perceived by the public as being more important than this motion. Lately we have talked much about education, industrial relations, workers compensation and so on. One would have thought that those issues might attract some attention from the Opposition. However, we are debating this perplexing motion of no confidence in one of the best Ministers the Parliament has ever seen, without question. Not only does the Minister know the background to his portfolio; he is sincere and caring about that portfolio. That is not rhetoric; that is reality, and there is support for it.

As a parliamentary secretary and as a member of the parliamentary caucus Aboriginal committee I travel around regional and country New South Wales and I meet many people who have been exposed to the great work the Minister is doing. It is the unanimous view in country and regional New South Wales that the Minister is doing the job, and doing it well. So for the honourable member for Hawkesbury, who, as I said, is in the twilight of his parliamentary career, to move this perplexing motion is disturbing. The honourable member has been a great contributor to the House and he knows the standing orders inside out as he is a former Speaker. Therefore, he knows the importance of a motion of no confidence, and that such motions are moved only in relation to important issues.

In that context, the motion does not make sense. Then again, nor has the Opposition made sense for some time. Much has been said about why the Opposition has no confidence in the Minister, and it relates to the Minister's decision to abolish the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust. The Government and the Minister made the difficult but important decision to restructure the management arrangements for the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment. The bottom line is about better management of the Hawkesbury-Nepean river system. The Hawkesbury-Nepean river system has a future, and it is important to ensure that its management is not caught up in a bureaucratic process with a bunch of so-called do-gooders who want to meet regularly. At the end of the day, when one measures the results of those meetings and the results achieved from the resources put into the management trust, one must question whether it was right to establish the trust in the first place.

Honourable members might be aware that since the Minister announced the changes to the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment there have been many opportunities for people to have their say about the matter. Importantly, I need to point out that the Government, under the auspices of the Minister, has provided many resources to ensure that this restructuring results in better opportunities to manage the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment. The Minister's decision will ensure that better, more cost-effective results are achieved. It is no good having in place a system that is incapable of producing results not only in the short term but in the longer term as well. The decision will free up money for on-the-ground works, and we have already seen that happening through the budget.

The Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust has done a good job since its inception in 1993. Although I recognise that, much of it has been talk rather than final results in the form of action. The trust's focus has been on community education, strategic planning and the development of publications. The

department has been providing the trust with an annual budget of about \$3.6 million, which is a fairly considerable budget. Therefore, the trust's total budget reached about \$4 million to \$5 million a year, amounting to some \$28.7 million between 1993-94 and now. One must question whether we received value for money from the injection of about \$30 million in the river system.

In 1999-2000 the trust spent just \$69,285 on grants for actual on-ground works. Of the \$30 million, only about \$70,000 was spent on on-ground works in 1999-2000. One does not have to be an actuarial genius to work out the inequity of that, the concerns that might prevail and the reasons that brought the Minister to his decision. Many members of the local community agree—and I have talked to members of the community widely about this—that we were not getting value for money. I have also discussed this matter with Coalition backbenchers on the quiet over a beer, as we sometimes do when we clock off, on Mondays or in the late hours of the night. They agree with the perception that we were not getting value for money and it was time the Minister was bold enough to do something about it.

Most of the trust's income—about 60 per cent in 1999-2000—was spent on salaries and wages. So 60 per cent of the trust's income, which is taxpayers' money, was shoved into salaries and wages, and bureaucratic administration. As the House has heard, the chief executive officer was earning \$137,145 a year. Members of Parliament do not earn that much. He was earning close to \$140,000 a year for managing a trust that effectively became a part-time trust in the way it was arranged. No-one will convince me that this would ever pass a community test of value for money. The chairman was also receiving an allowance of \$30,000 a year plus a car. Members of Parliament are not even provided with a car, but he was getting a car, a \$30,000 allowance and an annual salary of about \$140,000.

Of the other 19 trustees, 10 were also accepting annual sitting fees of \$5,897. I shall quote some figures from the trust's 1999-2000 annual report. The trust spent \$78,654 on rent, \$38,310 on cleaning, and \$31,400 on postage. That is a lot more than most electorate offices spend on postage. The trust must have sent out many letters and other things. It spent \$69,854 on meetings. Getting together around the table, breaking a bit of bread and having a talk cost about \$70,000. The trust spent \$37,033 on insurance, and \$23,936 on publications. I have not seen any real value in infrastructure that has been placed in the bureaucratic administration of this trust. Those figures should be compared to the fairly modest sum of \$69,285 spent on grants for on-ground works in 1999-2000. The expenditure was totally inequitable. The situation could not have been left as it was; it needed attention and, thankfully, the Minister gave it the attention it needed.

The trust recently requested an increase in funding of \$600,000 for increased salaries and other operational costs. On top of all the funding that had been provided, the trust wanted an additional amount of almost three-quarters of a million dollars, just to help with a few overheads. I do not know exactly what those overheads were, but they certainly surpass the community's expectations. Planning and publications are all very well—we all like to see nice glossy pamphlets with pretty pictures—but it is time to move on. This issue has gone beyond publications and glossy pamphlets that look pretty. Those pamphlets often go no further than people's letterboxes.

This Government wants to do more than produce leaflets: it wants to carry out on-ground works. That is why the Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation took the decision to subsume the activities of the trust. It is an absolute disgrace that in spite of evidence of an opportunity to better manage and more equitably facilitate the interests of the Hawkesbury River catchment area to deliver results in the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment area, the honourable member for Hawkesbury—who is in the twilight of his career and has been held in high esteem—is totally destroying his credibility by moving such a shonky motion. The motion has no basis.

Mr Fraser: Who wrote this?

Mr STEWART: The words are just flowing because I know that what I am saying is true. It is easy for me to make this speech. My speech did not need major preparation because over the past six years I have seen the Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation deliver results to New South Wales, and I am very proud of that. The motion before the House is ludicrous. In the context of confidence in the Minister, I point out the work that he has been doing, what he has achieved and what he will continue to achieve. By coincidence, I opened my mail this morning and found another example of the diligence of the Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation, namely, a newsletter entitled "Agriculture & Land & Water Conservation Briefs May 2001".

I represent a metropolitan electorate and I do not have the opportunity to become as well acquainted with some of the work of the Minister's portfolio as I would like to be, but these newsletters keep me informed,

and allow me to keep my electorate informed. The Bankstown electorate takes a great interest in matters that come under the Minister's portfolio. The people of Bankstown like to know that country people in New South Wales are receiving an equitable share of government services. They like to know that the Bankstown electorate is making sure that country people are given an adequate opportunity to get on with the job. The Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation is providing the basis for that opportunity.

The New South Wales budget, which was presented by the Treasurer in this House on 29 May, supports sustainable agriculture by an allocation of \$151.5 million of Government funding for 2001-02. That is another record allocation for New South Wales Agriculture which will ensure that the department will continue to develop practical and economically viable solutions for agricultural production. That is a major focus for this Government and it will be achieved through the leadership of the Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation, who has administered his portfolio successfully in partnership with the wider constituency of New South Wales. The newsletter sets out the department's achievements. I have not plucked these examples out of thin air: They are set out in the department's May briefing. The department has revitalised the mandarin industry in New South Wales. I cannot overemphasise the importance of revitalising fruit-growing industries. The Minister has recognised that importance.

Mr Rozzoli: Point of order: I have been very patient, but the honourable member for Bankstown, who has just engaged in a diatribe of drivel, is now concentrating solely on the performance of the Minister as the Minister for Agriculture. What he is saying is totally outside the scope of the motion before the House, which is the Minister's performance as the Minister for Land and Water Conservation. I ask you to bring him back to the leave of the motion.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lynch): Order! Although the debate has been fairly wide ranging, I trust that the honourable member for Bankstown will not spend too much more time on the mandarin industry.

Mr STEWART: The navel orange season, which has just commenced, is another example of the Minister's foresight in recognising the importance of an export industry and giving agricultural industries the attention they need; a new dairy officer has been appointed in Berry; and the north Queensland banana ban has been widened. That proves that the Minister is listening to agriculturalists. The Minister is in tune with the needs of the people of New South Wales and is working to ensure that agricultural produce is not threatened. An upgrade in exotic disease plans has recently taken place. All honourable members would know that exotic diseases can be disastrous for the agricultural industry in this State. This Minister is hot to trot, and he has recognised how important it is to keep infrastructure in place. The upgrade will certainly assist the farming community of New South Wales and, in turn, the wider community of New South Wales.

The newsletter also refers to the See Ya Later Alligator campaign, which cannot be beaten. It refers to alligator weed. Honourable members would know what a terrible pest that is, and the problems it has caused. Under the Minister's stewardship, the See Ya Later Alligator task force has been established to examine ways of alleviating alligator weed infestation. The much-needed irrigators' directory has been released—another example of the Minister listening to advice on what is needed. The directory will enable irrigators to contact the officers in government and industry programs. This Minister ensures that necessary infrastructure is in place. A budget boost of \$562.3 million has been made for natural resource management under the administration of the Minister.

Under the stewardship of the Minister 100 jobs will be relocated to the central west. The Premier announced that the Department of Land and Water Conservation will transfer 100 positions from Sydney to Dubbo. Members opposite should be listening to what is said in Parliament. Plans have been unveiled for a \$3.6 million extension at Dubbo for the Department of Land and Water Conservation—another example of additional, much-needed infrastructure. The country community applauds this Minister for listening. Water-sharing plans are progressing well. The Minister has continually emphasised the importance of water-sharing plans; he is very much in tune with that need.

It is worthwhile mentioning that the newsletter also refers to additional funds for the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment. In May the Minister announced additional funds for on-ground rehabilitation works for the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment. This is a direct result of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust being disbanded because it has made available an additional \$1 million a year which can be redirected into on-ground works. In spite of that, the honourable member for Hawkesbury thinks that it is not a good idea to disband the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust. As a result of the changes that the Minister has made, an additional \$1 million will be available to address problems in the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment area. The Minister also opened the floodplain management conference.

I mentioned these matters to illustrate that there are dozens of examples which show the great on-ground work that is being done by the Minister, yet this ludicrous motion is before the House. In so far as country town water management is concerned, safety upgrades will be undertaken for the Sooley Dam in Goulburn; new water treatment facilities will be provided in Brungle, near Tumut; and there will be improved water supplies in Boggabri. I could provide more examples, because this Minister never stops. He has the bone, and he is chewing it firmly. He will not let go. He is out there; he is tenacious. He is making sure that the Government is delivering in meeting the needs of country and rural areas of New South Wales.

In conclusion, I point out that the changes that have been made in relation to management of the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment are changes that had to be made, and they are changes that have been made for the better. As I have already indicated, and as other honourable members who preceded me in this debate have indicated, the changes will result in a direct injection of \$1 million a year. A much more hands-on approach is being adopted to meeting the infrastructure needs of the Hawkesbury-Nepean area. This will result in greater community involvement in management of the river system because the bureaucratic overlay that was part of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust has been removed. There is now a flatter decision-making basis. It is no longer the case that somebody is being paid \$140,000 a year to make brochures.

This Government is simply making sure that equity is part of the management of one of this State's most important river systems so that people such as the honourable member for Hawkesbury and his constituents will be able to tell their children—and grandchildren, in the case of the honourable member—about the Hawkesbury-Nepean rivers in the future. That is very important. I do not want my 11-year-old boy to grow up saying that that thing glowing in the distance is the Hawkesbury River. The Government's decision is about ensuring the future management of a complex river system, involving a hands-on approach and sincere and progressive opportunity being put in place. I support the Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation. As I have said, he is amongst the best this Parliament has seen. The honourable member for Hawkesbury should publicly retract his motion, and he should feel disgraced and dishonoured that he chose to move it.

Mr AMERY (Mount Druitt—Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation) [11.20 a.m.], in response: I acknowledge the contributions of members to debate on this motion. I know that the honourable member for Hawkesbury, as the mover of the motion, will wind up the debate. I thank members representing the electorates of Bankstown, Peats, the Northern Tablelands, Dubbo, Tamworth and Londonderry for speaking against the motion and in support of the Government's and my position. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour spoke at length about the Coffs Harbour catchment. I think his contribution should be put under the heading "Confused" in *Hansard*. However, generally speaking I believe the honourable member, as Opposition Whip, did a good job by filling in for the Opposition, which was struggling to find speakers in the early stages of the debate on this motion.

Before I respond to some of the matters raised today, I refer honourable members to the speech I made in regard to this matter about a month ago, when I first had an opportunity to respond to the motion. The contribution I made for almost one hour dealt with almost all the arguments that have been raised by Opposition members in relation to this motion. However, I should like to highlight a couple of matters. There seems to be a conflict about what constitutes on-ground works, what is being funded by the \$3.5 million that was previously allocated to the trust, and what the Opposition is claiming. It is claiming millions of dollars worth of projects.

Conflict has arisen about the \$3.5 million allocated by the New South Wales Government to run the trust. As I have said, about \$68,000 of that money goes into projects for on-ground works. The Opposition has tried to cloud the debate by saying that it did all those Landcare, Bushcare and Rivercare projects, which are on-ground works; that they were co-ordinated by the trust and should be counted as the on-ground works of the trust. The Landcare, Bushcare, Rivercare and other projects—that is, the externally funded projects—will, of course, continue in every other catchment around New South Wales without the need for a Hawkesbury-Nepean-type trust.

The honourable member for Peats referred to the fact that the Federal member for her region, the Hon. Jim Lloyd, issued a letter in relation to the Landcare, Bushcare and Rivercare projects, stating that the whole world would come to an end as a result of the abolition of the trust. The honourable member for Peats should be telling her constituents and those of the Hon. Jim Lloyd that the Coalition Federal Government has cut Landcare funding by more than \$30 million, from \$63.5 million in the current financial year to only \$31.2 million in the coming financial year. In the Murray-Darling Basin, the Federal Coalition Government has cut Natural Heritage Trust funding by \$15 million. The Federal Government has also cut funding for Bushcare projects by more than \$16 million, from \$100 million to \$83.8 million.

I can assure honourable members that if the Hawkesbury-Nepean trust is to take credit for the projects of those organisations, in the coming 12 months, as a result of Federal Government cutbacks, there will certainly be a reduction in on-ground works. The honourable member for Peats should remind her constituents that the Hon. Jim Lloyd should be the one explaining why funding for those sorts of projects has been cut by his Government. I thank the Independent members for their contributions. They are not members of any political parties. They come from a wide variety of areas—for example, the Northern Tablelands, Dubbo and Tamworth—and they have different backgrounds. All of those Independent members reject this motion.

The honourable member for Northern Tablelands made a very good point. He said that there is always disagreement and difference of opinion about government policy, and that the Opposition is always attacking the Government over one issue or the other. The honourable member said that if we used a motion of no confidence to settle every one of those disagreements between the Government and the Opposition we would be debating and voting on a motion of no confidence virtually every day, and the House would do nothing else but deal with these types of motions. I think I made some reference to that in my contribution last month. The honourable member was obviously suggesting that the entire motion is inappropriate and over the top. That is a very good reason why the motion should be defeated.

The Opposition stated that the Hawkesbury-Nepean trust has done many wonderful things, and that it co-ordinated all the volunteers involved in the Bushcare and Landcare projects. That is true: the trust has done that. If that is the way these organisations should be co-ordinated, I pose the question: Why not have a Hawkesbury-Nepean-type trust for every river catchment in the State? The trust is the most expensive model; it is the only one of its kind. The Newcastle River Catchment Management Trust takes a rate from the local community, but the Hawkesbury-Nepean trust is one of a kind. The Opposition appears to be suggesting that as the Hawkesbury-Nepean trust is so successful—spending nearly \$4 million a year, or nearly \$30 million since it was created—I would be justified in setting up a trust of this nature in every similar situation.

New South Wales has 34 river basins, including subcatchments. I understand that there are also 54 surface water management groups and subcommittees, and about eight or nine major natural resource catchments that are managed by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission. Does the honourable member for Hawkesbury suggest that the Hawkesbury-Nepean trust is so successful that we should have one of these very expensive processes in place to manage all of them? The proposition is absurd, yet that is the basis for the Opposition's case. The Opposition suggests that the Hawkesbury-Nepean trust is so good, and that the concept was such good value for money, that I should set up a similar trust in every river catchment around New South Wales. If I did that, the Opposition waste watch committee would move a no confidence motion in me—probably justifiably—for wasting taxpayers' money to the extreme.

Whilst the debate has probably been helpful in filling some of the earlier stages of this parliamentary session in so far as ensuring the introduction of legislation, frankly the debate has been inappropriate and a waste of time. Let me reject a couple of arguments put by the Opposition. As I have said on a number of occasions, there are no conspiracy theories involved with the decision to abolish the trust. I have been amused by comments to that effect. The decision to abolish the trust did not come about, as some have alleged, because the trust opposed the development of the Australian Defence Industries site at St Marys. As I said in my opening speech, I was reminded of that fact when that red herring was raised.

The decision also did not come about, as some have claimed, because of any agenda by the Government, the department or me to pick off, one by one, catchment management boards. The honourable member for Southern Highlands spoke about catchment management boards that we are going to abolish as a result, and suggested that this is simply the thin end of the wedge. That argument is just too silly to devote much time to. The Government's decision to abolish the trust was also not, as was claimed by several people, exclusively because of the then imminent retirement of the trust's chief executive officer. I will refer to that matter in more detail in a moment.

I will put these conspiracy theories to one side and turn to the more substantive matters of fact. First, I have the utmost confidence in the work of the individual members of the trust. I have observed their work over the years, as individuals, in other forums, and so on. If I were targeting members of the trust, why would I appoint the chairman of the State Catchment Management Co-ordinating Committee to other projects? I hope he continues in his present position as chairman of the committee. He is also held in high regard by my colleague the Minister for the Environment, who appointed him to the board of the Sydney Catchment Authority. Conspiracy theories and hit lists are starting to sound a bit silly!

Another former trustee on the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust is Councillor Robert Bell, who I have now appointed as chairman of the new local government advisory group. I have also appointed

one of my critics on television and in the media, Jenny Smith from the Nature Conservation Council, to the Hawkesbury-Nepean River Management Forum. So much for me conducting a personal vendetta against the organisation or against individuals! On my own behalf and on behalf of the department and the Government I reiterate that there is no conspiracy. My actions were predicated on the need to achieve a better outcome for on-ground works.

The honourable member for Hawkesbury said "Disgrace! Disgrace! Everything was good value." However, the department has given me details of some of the contractual arrangements of the chief executive officer, who resigned one month before I made my decision. The chief executive officer had a favourable arrangement with the trust, which confirms my argument that too much money was spent on bureaucracy and salaries. It was obvious that the trust was investing too much money in administrative overheads. The contract of employment of the chief executive officer with the trust provided for a termination payment equivalent to half his annual remuneration package after he resigned. Critics of my action to redirect money to on-ground works in the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment would find it hard to explain how the extremely favourable pay-out provisions of the chief executive officer promoted environmental outcomes. To say that the provisions were favourable is no exaggeration.

I might add that the chief executive officer submitted his resignation from the trust in March—honourable members should bear in mind that the trust was wound up in April—and then sought to have himself reinstated by the trust one month later. He then walked away with half his annual remuneration at senior executive service level, number two equivalent, which is more than many of the hardworking people living in the catchment earn in a year. I understand that on legal advice the department had no choice but to pay the money, and I emphasise that the trust was not closed down by the department, thereby ending the contract of the chief executive officer mid-stream. The money received by the chief executive officer is no longer available to improve the riparian health of the Hawkesbury; it is another example of administration costs of the trust. I repeat that the trust's considerable resources were being substantially devoted to inappropriate staffing levels. I was concerned that after all the years since the establishment of the trust the taxpaying community needed to know whether it was getting a return on its investment.

Hard as it is for members of the Opposition to accept, particularly the honourable member for Hawkesbury, the trust was not disbanded for any reasons related to conspiracy theories, opposition to developments or a desire to get individual trustees. As I have said, I have appointed many of the trustees to other organisations. Perhaps the critics will claim, as some have, that the extensive work of other government agencies—including Sydney Water, the Sydney Catchment Authority, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Land and Water Conservation, whose record was highlighted by the honourable member for Bankstown in the Chamber this morning, the Environmental Protection Authority, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and New South Wales Fisheries—will come to a grinding halt now that the trust has been disbanded and that the work of the many volunteer groups such as Bushcare and Rivercare will cease. As I have said on many occasions, that could not be further from the truth.

The work of the agencies and volunteer groups will continue in the Hawkesbury-Nepean, just as it will in every other catchment around the State, without the need for expensive bureaucracies to manage and prepare reports for them. The groups will continue to receive appropriate support, particularly from the Federal Government for as long as it continues to fund the many excellent projects supported by the Natural Heritage Trust. During the past couple of financial years there has been a record amount spent on new and upgraded sewerage treatment plants by Sydney Water. Water quality and monitoring for domestic, agricultural and industrial purposes are features of the attention that the Government gives to the most important waterways. The fight against noxious weeds is pursued with vigour by the aquatic weeds task force, which is chaired by Ken Archer from New South Wales Agriculture, and acts as a partnership with other agencies, local government and community groups with a budget of more than \$100,000.

I am pleased that the work of that task force will be supplemented by an additional \$40,000 grant I recently announced to focus on preventing aquatic weeds from clogging our precious waterways. That grant came about directly as a result of the savings made by my action to disband the trust and will be welcomed by the many recreational users of the Hawkesbury-Nepean river system. That was just one grant in the more than \$220,000 worth of works and projects which I have recently announced. More money will now be spent on things that matter: projects such as riverbank restoration and regeneration, and on-ground works to support the excellent work of a myriad of local volunteer groups. They are the sorts of projects that the more than one million residents of the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment deserve. They are high-priority projects that my department, in close consultation with local governments and other local groups, will fund in the coming years.

I reiterate what I have said in this Chamber and in other places: I am proud of the decision in the long-term, for important reasons. The decision will result in better outcomes for the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment system. I reject the argument that the motion was inappropriate. Opposition members have shown an indifference, with a couple of tongue-in-cheek remarks, to this motion being allowed to go on for so long. I thank the honourable member for Gosford and the honourable member for Hornsby, who protested about this matter being put off, but I note that they could not stop smiling during their contributions. If ever I saw indifference, tongue-in-cheek contributions and laughter about a motion it was on this occasion. Surely members do not think this motion was taken seriously by anybody! Any major political party would not allow it to go on for months and months to fill the parliamentary program. From the banter and comments in the corridors it seems that this matter has not been taken seriously by the political colleagues of the honourable member for Hawkesbury.

I will not back away from the decision to disband the trust. Better on-ground works for the catchment and better outcomes will result from that decision. Taxpayers and residents of western Sydney know that when an organisation is set up to plan a process, that planning process must come to an end eventually so that we can get on with achieving outcomes. The taxpayers of this State and residents of Western Sydney have seen the trust spend \$28 million to \$30 million in the eight or nine years it has been operating. The plans I have announced appear in *Hansard*. As many Government members have said, it is time to move on. Does the Opposition intend to promise in the next election that it will not only re-establish the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust but will establish catchment management trusts in all 34 river basins in New South Wales with associated administrative costs of \$4 million?

If the Opposition does not do so it should explain why one catchment should be treated differently to all other catchments in New South Wales, where volunteer groups are co-ordinated and work well with local councils. If the Opposition intends to not only restore the trust, at whatever cost, but treat every catchment and volunteer group in the same way it should announce that promise and its budget in this Chamber during the next session. I reject such a ridiculous motion. I am proud of my decision in relation to the trust because it is an area in which the Government has been able to remove red tape and put the savings made into on-ground works within the important community of the Hawkesbury-Nepean. In conclusion, I thank honourable members on this side of the House and crossbench members who spoke in opposition to the motion. I thank them for their support and for their encouraging words. Let us get on with the job of improving this catchment and all the other catchments in New South Wales.

Mr ROZZOLI (Hawkesbury) [11.40 a.m.], in reply: If ever there was a reason for supporting the motion it was given in the closing remarks of the Minister for Land and Water Conservation, who showed his abysmal ignorance of his own portfolio area. If ever there was a reason to vote no confidence in a Minister, it is that reason. I thank honourable members on this side of the House who supported the motion: the honourable member for Ballina, the honourable member for Coffs Harbour, the honourable member for Southern Highlands, the honourable member for Burrinjuck, the honourable member for Hornsby, the honourable member for Baulkham Hills and the honourable member for The Hills.

I would point out that those on the other side who opposed the motion certainly comprised the B team of the Government. One asks: Where was the Minister for the Environment? Where was the Minister for Western Sydney? Why did they not mount a stern defence of the Minister for Land and Water Conservation? Obviously they did not do so because they do not agree with what was done by the Minister for Land and Water Conservation, and have themselves no confidence in the Minister. They would dearly love to cross the floor and vote with the Opposition on this motion. But, of course, the rules of their party do not allow them to do that—and I respect the rules of the party.

The Minister for Land and Water Conservation challenged the validity and sufficiency of the subject matter of the motion to ground a motion of no confidence. He spoke on what justifies a no confidence motion, and spoke of a number of matters that he believes justifies a no confidence motion. Some certainly do not apply in this case, but the majority of those matters to which the Minister drew attention, if one thinks them through, establish the validity of this motion. In addition, the Government has debased the forms of this House. That is one of the reasons that drove me to take this particular form of the House to drive home the point of the absolute incompetence and abysmal ignorance of the Minister in relation to his portfolio.

The fact that debate on the motion has dragged on so long is solely the product of the incompetence and mismanagement of the Minister for Police, who is the leader of Government business in this House. This motion could have been dealt with a long time ago if that Minister had so chosen. It was his choice to drag out the

debate like this. It was his choice to show contempt for the forms of this House. His mismanagement of the business of this House almost warrants a no confidence motion in its own right. This motion of no confidence should be supported because the action of the Minister in disbanding the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust is symbolic of all that is wrong with the Minister's administration of the Department of Land and Water Conservation. That department is totally demoralised and has been failing in its objectives for many years.

The arguments in support of the Minister were characterised by their total superficiality and the regurgitation of facts that were quite wrong. Again, if there was any reason to support this motion, it is the absolutely pathetic defence of this Minister by an absolutely pathetic B team of the Government. The Minister spoke in self-praise of his decision to reduce the 45 catchment management committees to 18 catchment management boards. He said that the Government wanted less talk and more outcomes. But what is the principal role of catchment management boards? It is to produce strategic plans—to talk, to plan and do exactly what the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust was doing. That is an important part of overall catchment management.

The Minister made the extraordinary claim that the motion was flawed because I, as the mover of the motion, was too close to the issue to be objective. With the Minister it was the reverse: he was so far from the substance of the issue that he does not know, understand or care to understand what is involved in his action and what are the ramifications of his action. Apparently, in the eyes of the Minister, it is a crime to care about things, it is a crime to care about your community, it is a crime to care about the environment, and it is a crime to care whether governments produce effective outcomes in the management of the environment or in fact all areas of government administration.

The Minister claimed that his action is simply a routine change that will produce more effective outcomes. But he has not established that his action will do that. Where is the evaluation that the Government undertook to produce evidence that what the Minister has done will be more effective? The Government, under Minister Yeadon, reviewed the trust's works. They were again reviewed as part of the regulation review process. In both instances the work of the trust was endorsed as effective and necessary. By his own admission the Minister summarily dismissed the trust, without any evidence or justification that his assumption was correct. As the honourable member for Ballina said, he has learnt nothing from the experience.

This is a big issue. As I said, it is symbolic of the maladministration of the Minister's department. It is a big issue because it is symbolic of the contempt that the Government is constantly showing for major community consultation processes. That the Minister represents a Government that is now constantly criticised for its inability to consult effectively is a big issue. But, of course, the difference between the Minister and the rest of the Government is that at least the rest of the Government talk about consultation. They do not do much about it, but they talk about it. The Minister is completely out of step with the rhetoric of his Government on community consultation.

To hear the Minister—and he repeated it in the closing stages of his response—one would think that all the work of planning and strategic management had finished, and that it was now just a matter of getting on and actually doing a few on-ground works to deliver the product. Anyone who understands anything about catchment management would know that is completely incorrect. Because the restoration of environments and river systems is a lengthy process, the need to maintain strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation and education of the community is an ongoing role. It is a role that is in fact addressed in the white paper on Plan First, the planning document advocating a new planning system for the State, and a document that advocates the setting up of equivalents in its own field of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust on a regional basis throughout the whole of New South Wales. Not that I commend the Plain First document as a substantial document—it is the most pathetic document that I have ever seen produced by a government department. It is a disgrace that the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning would even put on the table a plan that is so simplistic and unsubstantiated. But that is a debate for another day.

The Minister's continued reliance on the one-line mantra about another level of bureaucracy is simply wrong. He has misled the Parliament and the public, and that is sufficient offence to warrant questions about his ability to manage his portfolio. I give some instances. The Minister claimed that the trust duplicated the work of other agencies. That is completely false, as other agencies would testify. The trust was set up carefully so that it would not duplicate the work of other agencies, but in fact would value-add to them and help them to facilitate the work that they were doing by co-ordinating with other agencies. Indeed, the Minister spoke about moving about the corridors of Parliament, the corridors of power and moving amongst the community and hearing

scuttlebutt. But wherever I go the experience is the exact opposite. I have had telephone calls, letters and approaches from people who work for other government agencies who simply cannot understand why the Minister did what he did. They think it is about the stupidest decision there ever was.

Just as the Minister claims he has heard from Opposition members that they consider this motion not to be of great substance, I have had numerous comments from members on his side of the House agreeing that it was about the most stupid thing that could possibly have been done. That is an argument that will get neither of us anywhere because we, I suppose, have a tendency to hear what we want to hear. But I can assure the Minister that there are members on his side of the House who violently disagree with what he did. The Minister claimed that the trust was not known outside its own area, which, of course, is false. The trust was known and highly regarded throughout the State. It was known nationally and internationally, and it was highly regarded by many international organisations for the quality of its work.

If the Minister ever bothered to follow the business of the international river symposium in Brisbane he would know that that statement is correct. The Minister claimed that it was impossible to identify one tangible project that was produced for the \$28 million that it had cost to run the trust, yet the Minister, in an earlier speech, listed project after project—he conveniently ignored many more projects, probably because he did not have time to include them all—highlighting the great work that the trust had done and the tangible projects that it had produced for the \$28 million that it cost over the 7½ years, and not the nine years, that it was in existence. Government members cannot even get their figures right. The trust was in existence for 7½ years, not nine or 10 years.

If we add up the cost to the Department of Land and Water Conservation [DLWC] we see that, in that time—and this is something that is admitted by the Minister—there were dozens of tangible and worthwhile projects. That is what the Minister said on the one hand, though he contradicted himself on the other hand. I do not think the Minister is confident about his evaluation of the trust. The Minister continued to repeat the nonsense about spending only \$69,000 on on-ground works. He also contradicted that statement during the course of his speech. The Minister knows in his heart of hearts that that nonsense statement has been blown out of the water on numerous occasions. The Minister repeated the same, tired old lines over and again. I doubt whether he has ever read any annual reports of the trust or whether he has taken the time to understand what it was on about.

The Minister has either taken bad advice from his department or he has taken no advice from his department. It is one thing to draw one's own conclusions, but the lady who was given the job of winding up the trust—Sue Kemp, Assistant Director-General—has now left the department, presumably in disgust as the job that she was given to do was without validity. She has now left the department and, according to an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, in the process she took with her a \$12,000 performance reward. If we are to say things about people receiving moneys that they perhaps do not deserve, that deserves a mention. The Minister dismissed the Healthy Rivers Commission report as yet just another report—another one of those things that fills a space in time. I am sure that the Commissioner of the Healthy Rivers Commission, Peter Crawford, will be pleased to know that the Minister dismissed that report so lightly. Yet it is a report that this Government is using to make ongoing decisions.

That report recognised the invaluable work of the trust. The commissioner indicated that there is a major gap in the strategy which he suggested existed because the trust was not there to fulfil its important role. The report was strong on the recommendations that were made for the continued role of the management of the catchment by the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust. The Minister noted—something that is germane to this debate—the failure of agencies to deliver on outcomes on which the trust had delivered. The Minister constantly criticised the capacity of government agencies to work together and to deliver efficacious results, in this case, in relation to the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust. The Minister has taken a backward step by removing one of the very mechanisms that was able to deliver more efficient on-the-ground activities and other activities for the benefit of the catchment.

The Minister referred to the statement of joint intent [SOJI] and he listed the agencies involved in the SOJI on the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment. He listed those agencies but he conveniently omitted to state that Cabinet had decided to include the trust as a signatory to the SOJI and as a major player in the delivery of its outcomes. As the honourable member for The Hills rightly said in debate, it is a case of the right hand of the Government not knowing what the left hand was doing. No-one believes the Minister's assertion that the trust is not needed—not even the Minister's colleagues. I was disappointed with the contribution of various Independent members who showed, first, their great ignorance about the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust

and, second, their great ignorance of land and water conservation generally. One has to suspect that their motivation in supporting the Minister was far removed from any motivation of honesty and integrity for land and water conservation outcomes in this State.

The Minister referred to stormwater management, but he seems to have failed to realise that councils have been relying on the trust for advice on stormwater management plans and for the co-ordination of cross-border plans. That facilitation of cross-border planning is a role which has not been taken up by anyone. It will not be taken up by the local government advisory group or by the water forum because it falls outside their jurisdiction and their brief. The Minister does not seem to be able to come to terms with the valuable interlinking role that the trust had with volunteers. He seemed to ignore the fact that, although volunteers are available all the time, and that Australians were great volunteers and wanted to contribute, they need to be brought together and co-ordinated if we are to achieve maximum benefit. The number of volunteers working in the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment rose dramatically over the 7½ years since the trust has been in existence. The Minister conveniently ignored that fact and he seems to believe that life will go on without organisation, without motivation and without commitment. That simply will not happen.

The Minister said that the Government was delivering on environmental flows. Many would disagree with that statement. The Government may be delivering on rhetoric concerning environmental flows, but it is delivering little else. The Minister is certainly not delivering on environmental flows in the Hawkesbury-Nepean. The Minister continually made reference to the infamous \$69,000 for on-ground works. Later, the Minister said that the DLWC would remain committed to continuing the on-ground works in which the trust was involved. Surely in making that statement the Minister was suggesting that there was more than \$69,000 a year for on-ground works. The Minister is quite correct if he assumed that there was more than \$69,000 for on-ground works. The Minister took one unrelated line from an annual report, he did not analyse what it meant, and he came up with a completely spurious and dishonest statement—a statement that did nothing for his personal integrity. The Minister also claimed on the *Stateline* program—and these words have been taken from that program:

A disgruntled trust member claimed that the trust was responsible for up to 12 sewage treatment plants.

On several occasions I listened carefully to a video recording of that program and there is no such statement in that program. The Minister lied to the House. He has misled the House on a clear, factual issue. He misled the House and created a false impression about the motivation and the integrity of people on the trust—which did him no credit and which led to a lack of confidence in him. It is bad enough that his subjective comments are misguided and ill-informed, without committing deliberate falsehoods to the record. The Minister then spoke about the Warragamba Dam flood management strategy. The Minister does not have a flood management strategy in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Basin. At best, he has a flood evacuation strategy. Floods will continue to ravage the Hawkesbury-Nepean, as they have always done, due to the incompetence of this Government.

If the Minister had built up the Warragamba Dam wall it would have provided exactly the same benefits as the spillway that is currently being constructed and it would have provided flood mitigation at the same time. The Government did not avail itself of that opportunity. When the next major flood comes through, as it inevitably will, the Minister will have condemned the people of the Hawkesbury to a loss of property and possibly a loss of life. So the Minister should not state that his Government has in place a responsible flood management strategy. As I said earlier, as a result of the floodplain management committee the Minister might have in place an evacuation strategy to get people out of that area in time before they drown, but no flood mitigation strategy is in place.

The Minister said that organisations are judged on their outcomes. The Department of Land and Water Conservation has certainly been judged on its outcomes and it has been found wanting by the community. The trust, on the other hand, has been judged by the community as being highly successful. A number of people have written to the Minister and suggested that, rather than abolishing the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust, he should have abolished the Department of Land and Water Conservation, as that would have been a step in the right direction. He would be much better off giving the work the department was doing to organisations like the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust. That is a better way of delivering efficacious and cost-effective outcomes not only to the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment but to catchment throughout the rest of the State.

Even rank-and-file Department of Land and Water Conservation staff members rate the trust as being more successful than their own department and they were amazed at the Minister's action in abolishing it. In any event, the Minister's department has continually placed increased administrative workloads on the trust when all

it has ever wanted to do was get on with the job of cleaning up the river and improving the catchment. The Minister made derogatory comments about the trust asking for a further \$600,000 to help implement its work. It was not for increased salaries and bureaucratic costs but because the Government continued to load more and more work on the trust. That meant that, without additional funds, it could not deliver on the work it was basically set up to deliver. Again, the Minister made the statement in complete ignorance of the facts.

The Minister also mentioned noxious weed activity. This is dangerous ground for the Minister to preach on. The Department of Agriculture has a dreadful track record in regard to noxious weeds. It has continually—not only under this Government but also under previous governments—underresourced the need. The current hyacinth problem in the north and serrated tussock and alligator weed problems have all been grossly underfunded. For instance, serrated tussock, which has been a problem for 30 years, was allowed to drift on by consecutive governments. It is only in recent times that the Department of Agriculture has taken serrated tussock seriously. When the Minister set up an aquatic weeds task force to replace the former alligator weed task force, he mentioned:

... as a result of the savings we have made, \$40,000 will be spent on fighting alligator weed in the Hawkesbury-Nepean area.

Does the Minister have any idea how far that money will go? It will go absolutely nowhere. His own aquatic weeds task force indicated that it would need at least \$300,000 each year to maintain an effective spray program to halt the spread of alligator weed pending the outcome of biological weed control research by the CSIRO. The Minister's \$40,000 is an absolute joke and it is seen to be a joke by the people of the Hawkesbury and by people who are knowledgeable about noxious weeds. The Minister's statement is a disgrace and further underlines his ignorance of his portfolio and the fact that the House should have no confidence in his capacity to implement his portfolio responsibilities. His personal record and the records of the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Land and Water Conservation are disgraceful.

Comparisons the Minister made with the Upper Parramatta and Hunter trusts are also false because they both have clearly defined construction roles. Of course they spend more time doing construction work—if that is the Minister's interpretation of on-ground work—because that is their charter. We pointed out ad nauseam, but the Minister is too thick to understand, that the regulation of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust was very specific. It was not a trust set up predominantly to do construction work. The Minister was critical of the publications the trust produced. In doing so he clearly demonstrated that the trust was an extremely active body, as each publication followed a good deal of practical, on-ground work. That was the trust's role as defined by regulation, but the Minister refused to understand that or appreciate the value of its work.

As I said before, the increase in funding sought by the trust was only because the Government was giving it increased statutory tasks in the catchment. Without some additional funding it would have had to cut back on the very on-ground works that the Minister is seeking to protect. In any event, he need only to have knocked back the request for additional funds, if that was his wish—an outcome that would not have been unexpected. The Minister is not honest in what he has told the House. The trust came into being because agencies and councils were failing to consult with each other and to integrate their work. When a task is everyone's responsibility it usually finishes as no-one's responsibility. That is what was happening on the Hawkesbury, and that is what will happen again. The Minister said that the trust was not the only agency involved in managing the catchment. Of course, that is correct. But what it did was drive the dollar far more effectively than had previously been the case.

Many of the activities the Minister mentioned were simply not happening before the trust came into being. The success of many of those initiatives were substantially enhanced by the work of the trust, a fact acknowledged by everyone but the Minister. The Minister gave too much credit to the Department of Land and Water Conservation for its level of commitment. Rhetoric does not mean outcomes on the ground. His sustainable agriculture policy released some years ago in the Hawkesbury is failing dismally. It is rhetoric. He has the glossy brochures he complained about, but day by day I constantly face assaults on the sustainability of agriculture in the Hawkesbury-Nepean Basin.

With the wide range of expectations placed on the trust the cost of running the trust was a small contribution to the health of the catchment. It assured integrity of outcomes in so many fields, for example, the Hornsby SOJI, the strategic plan, state of the environment reporting, pollution offset schemes and input to planning instruments. In the final analysis the Minister claimed that an additional \$1 million would go to on-ground works with savings from staff reductions and reductions in overheads. But he is keeping the building operational with all its attendant costs. He says he will continue to support the very programs he has slandered. As he knows—and the public knows—the Department of Land and Water Conservation is a notoriously bad manager. It has no credibility with the community or local government.

The Minister will not be able to produce \$1 million in savings, but no doubt with creative accounting he will make it look as though he has. At the end of the day, all he has done has been for \$1 million, which probably does not exist anyhow. The Minister, in his original statement, said that we would save \$3.5 million to go to on-ground works but, by his own admission, that has been reduced to \$1 million. From what I hear about the cost of operating the local government advisory group and the water forum, plus the work the Minister is going to do to continue work that was previously carried on by the trust, he will find it will cost him more than the \$3.6 million spent on the trust, and the results will not be anywhere near as effective.

The Minister mentioned support for his stand that he received from the community. He was most unspecific. He referred to one staff member saying that what the Government was doing was the best thing that had ever happened. He did not refer to any quotations from people who had written to him, whereas members on this side of the House referred to many people who support the trust. If one staff member was critical of the work of the trust, the rest of the 33 full-time staff and the 30 or so part-time staff completely disagreed with that person. I do not think that person actually existed.. I would worry if the Minister was doing the numbers on my preselection, because with his way of calculating numbers he has a lot to worry about in his future political career.

It would be interesting to hear where the Minister's support comes from. If it was really credible he would have cited specific instances. As I mentioned earlier, not even his ministerial colleagues were prepared to enter the debate to defend him, because they do not agree with what he did. We also hear on the grapevine that the Premier is now deeply aggrieved that he took the Minister's advice as quickly as he did and agreed to support the abandoning of the trust. The Minister challenged my statement about the existence of documentation regarding the abolition of the trust. It was the department that said there was no documentation. It was obviously done over one of those famous cups of coffee—the old cappuccino syndrome—but we will find out from the upper House committee when it probes these matters what was the true process by which the decision was made to abandon the trust.

No matter what the Minister does, the trust will continue to be respected for what it has achieved. Certainly, there are moves in the community to try to fill the void that has been left by the abolition of the trust. Then we had the most extraordinary statement from the honourable member for Bankstown, who spoke about so-called do-gooders. That will go down well in the Hawkesbury-Nepean area when people hear about these contentious remarks made by people who do not understand what they are talking about. Finally, the Minister said that if the Opposition agreed to the re-establishment of the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust it should do so with all other catchments in the State. That shows the Minister's abysmal ignorance of the trust's work and the reason the trust was set up.

It also shows his abysmal ignorance, as a member representing an electorate in western Sydney, of the special needs of Western Sydney and of the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment. The Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment is the most populated catchment in the whole of New South Wales, with the most complicated set of problems and the greatest number of conflicts across a wide range of issues. Of course, there is a special case for the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment in relation to its management structure. The fact that it needs a management structure like the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust is not a call for the same demand in every other catchment of the State. I ask honourable members to support this motion of no confidence.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 31

Mr Armstrong
Mr Brogden
Mrs Chikarovski
Mr Collins
Mr Debnam
Mr George
Mr Glachan
Mr Hartcher
Mr Hazzard
Ms Hodgkinson
Mr Humpherson

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

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

Noes, 53

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

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

NEW SOUTH WALES—QUEENSLAND BORDER RIVERS AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 25 June.

Mr D. L. PAGE (Ballina) [12.21 p.m.]: I lead for the Opposition on the New South Wales—Queensland Border Rivers Amendment Bill and indicate at the outset that the Opposition will not be opposing the legislation. The object of this legislation is to amend the New South Wales—Queensland Border Rivers Act 1947 to ratify and approve an agreement between the Premiers of New South Wales and Queensland which was recently made. It therefore amends the existing agreement. The substantive amendment is to replace the system of annual accounting that is used in relation to the sharing of water between New South Wales and Queensland with a system of continuous accounting.

With a system of annual accounting of water, the unused portions of a State's allocation lapse at the end of an accounting period. For an individual, that means that if he or she does not use his or her water allocation, he or she will lose it. To be more precise, under annual accounting, the portion of unused water is forfeited to other users. That may lead to inefficient or wasteful use of water. If, on the other hand, water users are able to carry over the unused portion to meet needs in a future year, obviously there is no incentive to waste water. The continuous accounting method is also more consistent with the concept of a water right.

Last year this House passed the new Water Management Act which included the concept of a compensable water right. That concept was developed with the idea of providing certainty from year to year so that under a licence arrangement, if water is available in the storage system, people know that water is available to a water user. Continuous accounting is compatible with that concept in the sense that it provides a capacity for a water user to be able to access water in a future year, provided that there is water in storage, whereas at the moment annual accounting means that if a person does not use a water allocation in a designated year, that person will lose the right to be able to access water resources, and the unused portion would then be shared among other water users.

At the State level, New South Wales is entitled to 57 per cent of the available regulated resource in the border rivers. Under annual accounting, the unused portions of each State's annual allocation at the end of the accounting period is pooled and shared between both States. The State with the larger volume of unused allocation effectively forfeits the proportion of its allocation to some other State. Therefore, under the current arrangement New South Wales water users cannot be guaranteed that they would receive their 57 per cent

because, if the water is not used, it is shared on an allocation basis which is more likely to approximate 50 per cent. New South Wales, one of the larger States and with a larger entitlement, would be forfeiting some of its allocation to Queensland under that arrangement. The State which has a more efficient use of water is penalised under annual accounting.

Under continuous accounting, the unused allocation in any one year is carried over within each State's account and can be used in the following year or years. Therefore a State's account can only be reduced by the actual use of water. That is fairer and it leads to a more efficient use of water. With the added certainty that continuous accounting provides, better and more sustainable resource management can occur. I also note that the Murray-Darling Basin Commission has a similar continuous accounting scheme for the Murray system between New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. By virtue of this bill, New South Wales will have a consistent approach to accounting for water in respect to its southern and northern borders.

Over the years the Opposition has maintained regular contact with the Border Rivers Food and Fibre group. I have to say that that group, which has made some pretty useful suggestions about water management, has advised that it has no difficulty with the legislation. It is also worth noting that the Queensland Government has already passed similar legislation in the Queensland Parliament. We in New South Wales can be confident that the terms of the agreement between the Queensland Government and the New South Wales Government will be honoured, and the terms will be backed by legislation in both States when this legislation is passed. From the point of view of New South Wales, there is no reason to fear that the Queensland Government will renege and leave the New South Wales Government high and dry. That is simply not a possibility.

I understand that the arrangement has been trialled over a number of years and it has been proved to work very well. The Opposition is confident that the legislation will result in implementation of a system that is known to work well and that it will provide no incentive for people to waste water because they feel they have to use their allocation to avoid losing it. Another interesting point in the broader context of whether the Queensland Government is administering the cap in the same way as is the New South Wales Government is that there exists an argument that the Queensland Government is not seriously committed to the cap as are other governments. Although Queensland is still very much in a development phase, I would have thought that this legislation provides some security for other States in relation to Queensland's approach to water usage, at least as far as border rivers are concerned. Obviously this legislation will have no impact on rivers in the north.

I would have thought that this legislation would instil confidence that equitable arrangements were being put in place as far as border rivers are concerned. I reiterate that the annual accounting model encourages a waste of water by promoting the use-it-or-lose-it mentality. This legislation changes that by enabling people to carry forward their unused allocations of water for use in future years. As I indicated earlier, currently New South Wales is entitled to 57 per cent of water in the border rivers. Continuous accounting will serve to protect New South Wales' share. This legislation also brings border river allocations into line with the interstate arrangements concerning the Murray Valley and creates consistent arrangements across the broader management of water resources in New South Wales.

As I indicated earlier, the Queensland Government has already passed its legislation and there is no reason to think that the Queensland Government will renege on this arrangement. In conclusion, I make the observation that, as a result of this legislation, water users will be able to carry over their unused water allocation for future years. That will lead to better management of water resources for each State, in line with the allocation policy for individual river pumping. I have no difficulties with this legislation. I think it is solid. The Opposition supports the bill.

Mr SLACK-SMITH (Barwon) [12.30 p.m.]: As my colleague the honourable member for Ballina said, the Opposition supports the New South Wales—Queensland Border Rivers Amendment Bill, which is a commonsense bill that ratifies the interstate agreement which was drawn up in 1946. It will modify the water sharing arrangements between the States to allow each State more control and independence over management of its share of the resources of the border rivers. The Opposition supports the continuous accounting of water allocations for a very important reason. I understand that the Namoi, where I currently irrigate, is one of the first river valleys to experiment in continuous accounting.

Previously, the general experience of farmers was that if at the end of the water year an allocation of water was left in a reservoir or dam, the immediate reaction was to pump out the water as fast as possible into the dual system, which often resulted in a lot of water being wasted. If farmers did not pump the water out, the water was either given to someone else or kept in the system. Some people who wished to either increase their

water entitlements or not have their water entitlements cut were able to use the argument of history of use. As a consequence, those farmers pumped the water out, and in a few years time they could say, "Look, my history of use says that I have used my entire allocation every year." It is unfortunate that such a state of affairs has to occur.

I know that the bill has been well received in the Namoi. It will mean that if a person has an allocation of, say, 1,000 megalitres of water in a dam, that water will remain theirs and it can stay there. That person can use, say, 800 megalitres of that allocation and leave 200 megalitres in the dam. That allocation of water will be constantly adjusted, and if the water is taken out of the dam the allocation in the dam will fall. Of course, if there is an extra allocation or an adjustment, through rain, for example, the allocation will be topped up. As a management tool, the bill will make it much easier for farmers to plan future plantings of crops and water regimes—that is, how many megalitres of water per hectare they will be able to put on their land—and will therefore will make farmers' decisions about production somewhat easier.

In his second reading speech the Minister said that under the bill, New South Wales is entitled to use 57 per cent of the available regulated resource. The fact is that 57 per cent of the resource is supplied by New South Wales. It has nothing to do with the blues versus the maroons, or fierce interstate rivalry. It is a fact that New South Wales supplies 57 per cent of the resource, and therefore New South Wales should be entitled to use 57 per cent of that resource. Queensland is quite happy about that arrangement, so there is no problem about that aspect. As far as efficiency is concerned, as water is a very limited resource in New South Wales, the creation of more water storages and cloud seeding definitely have the potential to improve the productivity of our State.

If a farmer has to pump the water out, and he decides to pump it into underground water storage on the farm, the evaporation rate is very high compared to the evaporation in large dams, because the surface area is much greater and the depth is much more shallow, and therefore the temperature of the water is higher. It is a well-known fact that in some water storages more than 5,000 litres of water per minute can be lost through evaporation. The entire irrigation water that is used in the Darling River is nowhere near the amount of water that evaporates from Menindee Lakes every year. With those few comments the Opposition supports the bill, which, after a little trimming around the edges, will assist the great irrigation industry of New South Wales.

Mr AMERY (Mount Druitt—Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation) [12.36 p.m.], in reply: I thank the Opposition generally for supporting the bill. Constituents who live in the areas affected by it will certainly appreciate the fact that they have facilitated the bill passing through the Parliament. In particular, I thank the honourable member for Ballina, the shadow Minister for Land and Water Conservation, for his contribution, and the honourable member for Barwon, the shadow Minister for Agriculture, for his support for the bill.

I would like to explain how the carry-over arrangements will work. When I put this matter to the Labor Party caucus recently the honourable member for Tweed asked how the process will operate, and I will provide the House with that information shortly. The honourable member for Ballina spoke about the cap management, Queensland's commitment to the cap, and so on. Perhaps it would not be within the leave of this bill for me to broaden the debate to deal with that aspect. However, I can advise the honourable member that I understand the Queensland Government will take a proposal to its Cabinet in July with respect to the cap management, both for the border rivers and other catchments in that State. The Government is also concerned about Queensland's commitment to the cap. We will not know what type of cap Queensland is committed to until the conclusion of the Cabinet meeting in that State.

Members would be aware that when we adopt our process to the cap, it will be based on the 1993-1994 level of development. The honourable member for Ballina alluded to the fact that Queensland's compliance with the cap is still in the development stage. Queensland believes that because it is developing its water resources at a much later stage in the game, that State's cap should be brought in at a level of development, which hypothetically could be 1998-99, 1999-2000, or beyond. We are very concerned about that, because whatever year Queensland introduces the cap it will have major implications on the water that will be available for extractive use and environmental purposes here in New South Wales.

The New South Wales Minister for the Environment is very concerned about the current rate of floodplain harvesting in Queensland and also about Queensland's commitment to cap management. I can advise the honourable member for Ballina that Queensland is committed to the principle of a cap. We probably should accept the fact that it will be some time before we will see what that means as far as extractive use is concerned. The matter will be raised with the Murray-Darling Basin Commission, and no doubt it will be keenly debated.

Honourable members who have followed the water debate would be aware that South Australians in particular have had a lot to say about this matter, and have criticised both Queensland and New South Wales about the principle of cap management. Although this State has a couple of catchments that are over the cap level of the Murray-Darling Basin, we are managing those into the cap process, but the State collectively is under the 1993-94 cap. South Australia certainly cannot complain about New South Wales' compliance and commitment to cap management.

The honourable member for Barwon explained why this continuous accounting system is favoured not only by water authorities actually managing their water resources but also by irrigators and so on. The honourable member for Barwon said that under a yearly allocation system, where you use it or lose it, farmers are encouraged to build fairly substantial on-farm storage. As the honourable member for Barwon correctly pointed out, their storage does not have the capacity of a large public dam to reduce its absorption rates, so the water that is pumped into on-farm storage not only results in a loss of the resource to farmers as a result of high evaporation rates, but seepages into the groundwater can affect salinity and the like.

For all sorts of reasons—management of water and environmental outcomes—there should be a system in place to ensure that water users who do not use their entitlement in one year will not be penalised. There is no need for them to pump out the water they do not use and lose it to evaporation or seepage into aquifers. The comment of the honourable member for Barwon about the pressure put on water users is valid. I do not agree with his solutions to the water issue, when research is being carried out into cloud seeding, which has had checkered results from time to time. He supports the idea of creating more water storage.

There is currently an emphasis on the user-pays concept, which is part of the Council of Australian Governments water reform process. It would be very expensive for water users if a user-pays concept was adopted with the water storages and dams of past decades, with which we are all familiar. Our ability to create more water storages is limited, not only for environmental reasons. The honourable member for Tweed asked how the carry-over works. The maximum that can be used in any one year is 100 per cent of the entitlement. It is not a matter of carrying over an unused portion for many years and then extracting it in a dry season. For example, a water user who had an allocation of 100 per cent and used 80 per cent in the first year would retain 20 per cent in the account.

If in the following year there was an allocation of only 50 per cent, that person would benefit from the previous year's good work and water efficiency, and that 50 per cent allocation could be increased to 70 per cent because of the 20 per cent carry-over. These measures will improve the economic efficiency of water users and minimise the impact on the new environmental flow rule. It is not a matter of a water user or an organisation accumulating unused portions over many years and then perhaps extracting that amount because of drought conditions. That would cause environmental stress.

As a safety valve, in any one year water users will not have access to more than 100 per cent of their entitlement. But there are benefits to them if it happens—as it does on many occasions—that the allocation is reduced because of water unavailability, climatic conditions and the like. In relation to the cap, which was raised by the honourable member for Ballina, the department is examining a submission from the Border Rivers Food and Fibre organisation, a representative of which came to see me a short time ago, about the methodology used for the management of the border river system. We will respond when the investigation is completed. I thank members of the Opposition for their support and commend the bill to the House.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time and passed through remaining stages.

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS

Financial Year 2001-02

Debate resumed from 27 June.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.45 p.m.]: The budget delivered in this Chamber—the sixth budget in surplus to be delivered by the Treasurer, the Hon. Michael Egan—received an extremely positive reaction across New South Wales, most significantly in the Hunter. The day after the budget was brought down, the morning *Newcastle Herald* devoted 13 pages to the Government's positive

spending programs for the post-Olympics period—huge capital works programs. In the years following the Olympics there will be spending across the State in capital works, schools, health, TAFE and all areas of government to ensure that the economy of New South Wales is kept in a positive state. I commend the Government for that decision. The Government has acknowledged the need for upgrades, improvements and increased maintenance in our schools. It has taken positive action in the post-Olympics period to ensure capital works spending of some \$5.581 million for schools, hospitals, roads and other public facilities.

Spending for the Hunter has been detailed by other honourable members. I will concentrate briefly on the areas within my electorate or within the city of Newcastle that were major beneficiaries under the program. I commend the Minister for Health for his efforts to ensure equitable recurrent health funding and capital works funding. Between now and 2007 the Newcastle-lower Hunter plan will receive \$234 million for capital works required to transform our hospital system into a twenty-first century system to deal with the health needs of the people of Newcastle and the lower Hunter. That spending will go towards improvements on capital works at the Belmont Hospital, the building of a Bone and Joint Institute at the John Hunter Hospital, the building of a polyclinic for care service in the central business district of Newcastle—an important part of the project—and the rebuilding of the Newcastle Mater Misericordiae Hospital, which has now been taken up by the State Government following attempts to obtain expressions of interest from the commercial health care areas and also the charitable health care system.

That enormous package of spending complements the spending that is already occurring within this budget. Almost \$6 million has been allocated to continue the building of the John Hunter Pathology Centre and \$1.445 million to the Lowie Lodge detoxification and child health section that will be built at the Belmont Hospital. This is very important health spending in the Hunter. Following the Menadue report on our health care system, year by year the pattern is of an increase in spending in the Hunter to enable the provision of a far more effective health service. I must say that mental health services in the Hunter once again are in the news, with concerns being expressed about changes to community-based mental health care at crisis centres in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie and the potential transfer of after-hours care from those centres to the James Fletcher Hospital, with a consequent reduction in the contact of clients of that very important service in the Hunter.

I have taken those concerns to the Minister for Health. I am sure my colleagues will have done the same. We hope that that matter is looked at carefully before any changes are made. No health matter is of more concern to the community than mental health services. The trauma that it brings to both the persons unfortunate enough to suffer from a psychiatric illness and to their families and the community tells us that we need to apply the maximum resources to assist people who require that form of health care.

I move on to transport, an essential part of the services provided to the public by the Government of New South Wales. We should congratulate Minister Scully on the efforts he is making to ensure public transport spending in the Hunter. I mention in particular that in my electorate work is being done to improve access for State Rail to the port of Newcastle. The budget allocates almost \$15 million for the rail network into the port of Newcastle, to both Port Waratah and Kooragang—our major loading areas for coal, the principal export from the port of Newcastle; in fact, a world leader in coal exports. Getting coal to and from the port involves complex issues, which require great co-ordination between train controllers and Kooragang loader operators. These works will assist in the flow of trains to the port from Beresfield down. They will also enable passenger rail services to operate without being impeded.

The port of Newcastle has infrastructure that is pivotal to the development of industry not only in Newcastle but right across the Hunter Valley. That has been so since the start of settlement in the area. The major project of the Newcastle Ports Corporation at the moment is to secure for the port a multipurpose terminal, to broaden the use of the port so that it does not necessarily depend on bulk cargoes but will be able to compete with other Australian ports in the breakdown of container cargoes and the diversification of the port. I understand approvals have been given by the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning for the development of a multipurpose terminal on the BHP site, with the strictest conditions for remediation of the site being applied under the Environment Protection Act and the Contaminated Lands Management Act. That is a most important issue.

It is my hope, and I think the hope of every member of this House, that the port corporation will be successful in its worldwide search for shippers to involve themselves in the development of the port. I understand there is very significant interest by shippers in the port of Newcastle in setting up the multipurpose terminal. I hope we will move quickly to a positive outcome so that we may move ahead with development of what I believe will be the future of the port. The bulk cargoes, of course, will remain a very important part of the port's activity, but it is important to develop diversified cargo, using our great links via the F3 to western Sydney, our rail links, the Golden Highway and links to north-western New South Wales.

While I am on this subject I should say that the passing of the corporatisation bill by this House leads to the possibility of a joint sale of FreightCorp and the National Rail Corporation. The debate on that issue, which has been going on more in the community than in the House, could lead to the view that transport planning and logistics planning by Federal and State governments are lagging behind, and that rail is not getting the support it requires to compete with the road transport system. I understand, from reading the report on regional and rural New South Wales that came with the bill, that particular benefits given to road transport in the form of the Federal Government not recapturing from road transport the full cost of the impact of road transport on our roads mean that road transport is attracting a subsidy that puts rail transport at a disadvantage.

In the interests of New South Wales and Australia generally, but particularly in the interests of the environment and safety, much greater effort should be put into getting co-operation, acceptance and support at State and Federal level for our long-line rail haulage, linking not only Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne in particular in a way that facilitates a quick flow of heavy rail traffic through the Sydney area, but obviously to address issues on the North Coast and in other areas where there is a need for upgrade. I acknowledge the work being done at the State level. I note in particular planning to decrease rail travel times between Sydney and Newcastle—planning that will be going on over the next decade. But that still will not address speeding up the transfer of goods by heavy rail on the east coast between Melbourne and Brisbane.

I mention in the context of transport the survey referred to by the Minister yesterday, which is being conducted in Newcastle at the moment: the Bus Plan. The Government is trying to redress the loss of one million passengers on bus routes in Newcastle over the past five years. The proposed route change will directly link bus services to major retail and employment centres along major arterial roads. Buses in Newcastle are the glue that binds together the social fabric of our community.

It must be remembered that \$15 million of the \$30 million that it costs to run the bus system in Newcastle goes towards concession fares, which enable the aged, disadvantaged, mothers and children to use the bus system for communication, social intercourse and trips to work and school. In effecting these changes we must ensure that aged and disadvantaged members of the community have to access those centres. I urge everyone in Newcastle to take time to respond to that survey, thus ensuring that the bus services that are designed as a result of community input and discussion meet the needs of the travelling public in Newcastle. I hope that these changes to services will ensure a return of the passengers that were lost to the system over the past few years.

I refer now to the Carr Government's important program to conserve 5.6 million hectares of national parks. Since the Government came to office there has been a 35 per cent increase in the conservation of national parks, a magnificent result for this Government. An amount of \$1.1 million has been set aside in this year's budget to establish and manage the proposed Stockton Bight National Park. The honourable member for Wallsend, who is in the chair, would be aware of the enormous effort that has been made by the conservation movement over the past 30 years to secure that outcome. There were groundbreaking negotiations and discussions between Worimi Land Council and the National Parks and Wildlife Service concerning native title rights and lease-back arrangements. As a result, 4,000 hectares of Stockton Bight National Park will be conserved. An amount of \$1 million will be spent on designing and implementing stage one works for the 125-hectare Blue Gum Hills Regional Park in the electorate of the honourable member for Wallsend, a wonderful asset for people in the western part of Newcastle.

Additions to the National Park Estate will enable people to travel from Tomaree National Park in the Port Stephens area through Stockton Bight, Fullerton Cove Reserve, Kooragang Nature Reserve, Hexham wetlands, Shortland wetlands, Blue Gum Hills Regional Park, Watagan Mountains National Park, Lake Macquarie State Recreation Area—which was included after a great campaign by the honourable member for Lake Macquarie—and Glenrock State Recreation Area, which was included after the efforts of the Premier when he was Minister for the Environment in the Wran Government. That leaves one small piece of land, the Belmont wetlands. We must ensure that, when BHP hands back the land that it owns on Kooragang Island, in the Belmont wetlands area and in west Wallsend, it has addressed remediation in those areas. From my perspective, the transfer of the Belmont wetlands into the conservation zone will give Newcastle and Lake Macquarie a wonderful conservation asset not only for today but for the future. I commend the motion to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr R. H. L. Smith.

[Mr Acting-Speaker (Mr Mills) left the chair at 1.06 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

ASSENT TO BILLS

Assent to the following bills reported:

Long Service Leave Legislation Amendment Bill
Casino Control Amendment Bill
Consumer Credit (New South Wales) Amendment (Pay Day Lenders) Bill
Crimes Legislation Amendment (Existing Life Sentences) Bill
Police Powers (Drug Premises) Bill
Police Powers (Internally Concealed Drugs) Bill
Corporations (Ancillary Provisions) Bill
Corporations (Administrative Actions) Bill
Corporations (Consequential Amendments) Bill

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Routine of Business: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr Whelan agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit the routine of business to be called on.

ONE NATION PREFERENCES

Ministerial Statement

Mr CARR (Maroubra—Premier, Minister for the Arts, and Minister for Citizenship) [2.18 p.m.]: Today I underline the Government's policy on preferences to One Nation. The Government is opposed to giving preferences to One Nation. That has been our position since 1996. It was a policy I thought had bipartisan support.

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

Mr CARR: That apparently is no more.

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

Mr CARR: During the lead-up to the 1999 State election the Coalition supported the Government's position. This morning I learned that the Leader of the Opposition has reversed the Coalition policy.

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

Mr CARR: In an interview with her local newspaper, the *Weekly Times*, the Leader of the Opposition said:

In a tight election preferences could be crucial, so why risk a Labor victory by putting One Nation last?

The Leader of the Opposition is now advocating Liberal preferences for One Nation. That is a reversal of the Coalition's policy position at the last election. This is her celebration of her tenth anniversary in Parliament. There is finally a policy from the Coalition: a reversal on One Nation preferences.

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI (Lane Cove—Leader of the Opposition) [2.19 p.m.]: If the Premier cared to quote what was actually said in the article at length, I said there would be no change from the position at the last election. I am happy to have my press secretary, who took the notes of the meeting, come down and confirm that is exactly what I said. I would like to ask the Premier, though, what is the Labor Party going to do at the next election? Will they do what they did last time? They did not put One Nation last in the upper House. Their failure to put One Nation last in the upper House had serious consequences about who got into this place. If they had been fair dinkum about putting One Nation last we would not have had the hypocrisy of Mr Roozendaal saying, "Oh yes, we are going to do the right thing," but not telling the electorate that they were actually piking. You piked! Where is the member for Maitland? Has he disappeared? Members on this side of the House remember "Thinking of voting for One Nation?" You wanted One Nation, authorised by Della Bosca. "Thinking of voting One Nation?"—authorised by Della Bosca—"Vote Labor Party." John Della Bosca authorised it. The Premier is an absolute hypocrite! Don't talk about what we are going to do and what we said!

BILLS UNPROCLAIMED

Mr SPEAKER: Pursuant to standing orders, I table a list detailing all legislation unproclaimed as at 28 June 2001.

PETITIONS**Coptic Christians in Egypt**

Petitions praying for justice, equality and freedom from unjust persecution for Coptic Christians in Egypt, received from **Mr Anderson, Miss Burton, Mr Collier, Mrs Grusovin, Mr Hartcher, Mr Humpherson, Mr Stewart and Mr Thompson.**

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.**

Malabar Policing

Petition praying that the House notes the concern of Malabar residents at the closure of Malabar Police Station and praying that the station be reopened and staffed by locally based and led police, received from **Mr Tink.**

Randwick Police Station Downgrading

Petition praying that the House notes the concern of Randwick residents at the major downgrading and possible closure of Randwick Police Station and praying that the station be staffed 24 hours a day by locally based and led police, received from **Mr Tink.**

Cronulla Police Station Upgrading

Petition praying that the House restores to Cronulla a fully functioning police patrol and upgrades the police station, received from **Mr Kerr.**

Chatswood High School

Petition asking the House to support the retention and refurbishment of Chatswood High School, received from **Mr Collins.**

Vaucluse Electorate School Closures

Petition requesting funding for public schools and opposing the merging of local schools, received from **Mr Debnam.**

Lake Illawarra South Public School

Petition seeking the provision of a new hall for the Lake Illawarra South Public School, received from **Ms Saliba.**

Thirroul Railway Station

Petition calling on the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads to fund easy access facilities at Thirroul railway station, received from **Mr Campbell**.

Queenscliff Geographical Names Board Classification

Petition praying that the House reinstate Queenscliff as a suburb with the Geographical Names Board, received from **Mr Barr**.

Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust

Petition praying that the House reinstate the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust as soon as possible, received from **Mr Rozzoli**.

John Fisher Park

Petition praying that the Government supports the rectification of grass surfaces at John Fisher Park, Curl Curl, and opposes any proposal to hard surface the Crown land portion of the park and Abbott Road land, received from **Mr Barr**.

Compulsory Desexing of Cats and Dogs

Petition supporting the compulsory desexing of cats and dogs which are not registered for breeding purposes, as occurs in the Australian Capital Territory and in many other countries, received from **Mr D. L. Page**.

Manly Lagoon Remediation

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

Blue Mountains National Park Fire Management

Petition praying that the boundary of the Blue Mountains National Park in the vicinity of Bowen Mountain remains as it is, in accordance with recommendations of the local Rural Fire Service—the Grose Vale Brigade—and that the management of the fire buffer zone remains within the jurisdiction of the Rural Fire Service, received from **Mr Rozzoli**.

Brothel Regulation

Petition praying for legislation to allow for more flexible zoning in relation to the operation of brothels, received from **Ms Saliba**.

Manilla Courthouse

Petition requesting an upgrade of the Manilla Courthouse, and praying that the sittings of the Manilla Local Court be reconvened, received from **Mr Slack-Smith**.

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**.

Greyhound Racing Authority

Petition requesting the Minister for Gaming and Racing to direct the Greyhound Racing Authority to follow the provisions of the Trade Practices Act, particularly with regard to unconscionable behaviour, with regard to regional racing clubs, received from **Mr Hickey**.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON SALINITY**Report**

Ms Allan, as Chair, tabled the report entitled "Interim Report" dated June 2001.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

COUNTRY TEACHERS HOUSING INCENTIVES

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. Given that just three months ago he told the House that he would no longer provide furnished accommodation for 1,200 teachers in 90 country towns because it was too costly, why has he now agreed to exempt teachers in the Western Division, while discriminating against teachers in other isolated areas?

Mr AQUILINA: That is not at all correct. The Leader of the Opposition has her facts wrong. The fact is that I have written to the Teacher Housing Authority advising that the whole issue in relation to the provision of furniture for premises by the Teacher Housing Authority is under review. In fact I have written also to a number of members of Parliament, on both the Coalition and the Government side, advising them precisely of that fact.

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: I seek leave to table a letter to the honourable member for Murray-Darling in which the Minister says—

Leave not granted.

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: Mr Speaker, may I leave the letter on the table for the information of members?

Mr SPEAKER: Yes, the Leader of the Opposition may do that.

ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION

Mr GREENE: My question without notice is to the Premier. What is the latest information on initiatives to protect the environment?

Mr CARR: That is a good question.

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

Mr CARR: If the honourable member for Wakehurst tries the patience of the Chair, the consequences can be very great. Over the past six years, the Government has taken hard decisions to protect the environment while at the same time encouraging environmentally sustainable development and jobs. This of course includes tackling salinity and creating 270 national parks. As the Attorney General, and Minister for the Environment reminded the House this week, New South Wales has one of the five best national parks system in the world. The program also includes cleaning up our beaches and waterways and saving our native forests. This week I announced a comprehensive policy on coastal protection and today the Government banned jet skis from Sydney Harbour. Further announcements on the environment are imminent.

Later honourable members will be speaking during an urgency debate on greenhouse measures, led by the Minister for Energy. Again I am pleased to inform honourable members that New South Wales businesses are taking up the challenge of tackling the greenhouse gas emissions issue. I can report that 170 businesses have signed up to the program of the Sustainable Energy Development Authority [SEDA] to shift to energy-saving technology, which will save businesses approximately \$13 million a year. The program will prevent the pumping of over 210,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Companies are reducing emissions by installing energy-efficient airconditioning and lighting; better using insulation; installing gas generators in buildings; and installing computers and information technology [IT] systems that shut down automatically when not in use.

The SEDA program has set a target of reducing emissions by approximately one million tonnes, saving businesses approximately \$85 million on current energy bills by 2006. This is equivalent to taking more than 219,000 cars off our roads. Companies that have signed up for the program include Arnotts Ltd and Merck Sharp and Dohme (Australia) Pty Ltd, which is a global pharmaceutical company. Investing in greenhouse gas reduction can provide companies with returns on investment of 20 per cent. We need to build on that achievement. I now call on the State's major companies to join with me in promoting environmentally responsible business.

Mr J. H. Turner: Point of order: My point of order is that the Premier is asking companies to join him in relation to environmental matters. Will he instruct his Minister for Roads to filter the stacks?

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

Mr CARR: Aren't members of the Opposition a bunch of whiners? They have not a positive policy or positive idea whereas the Labor side of politics in New South Wales is presenting ideas and policies. The Coalition does not have a suggestion to make. Members of the forum of leadership on greenhouse issues will include the chief executive officers of some of the nations largest companies, such as the paper giant AMCOR and the Commonwealth Bank. Each of the member companies will report on their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Companies that have met or exceeded energy efficiency targets that are set in negotiation with SEDA will be acknowledged. The Commonwealth Bank is investing in energy-saving technologies in its offices across Australia. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions is a global priority but it is not one that government can tackle alone.

The only way we can reduce emissions and protect our environment from further damage is through a united effort. Individuals can make a difference. Business must play a central role.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I place the Deputy Leader of the Opposition on three calls to order.

Mrs Chikarovski: Filter the stacks.

Mr CARR: The Leader of the Opposition says, "Greenhouse does not exist". She is one of the greenhouse hedgers.

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

Mr CARR: The New South Wales Government has led the world in other environmental initiatives. We can, and should, lead in the global effort against greenhouse gas emissions.

TEACHER SHORTAGE

Mr J. H. TURNER: My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. In the light of his comment yesterday that there is more to New South Wales than western Sydney, how does he respond to comments by a Teachers Federation organiser for the Central West who says that the shortage of teachers in country areas has reached such a desperate level that finding suitably qualified casuals is now a luxury for most schools?

Mr AQUILINA: I recall that yesterday, when I was trying to provide some advice in relation to the strategies being implemented by the Government to improve teacher supply in country New South Wales, the Leader of the Opposition was interjecting and I was prevented from doing so.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I remind the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that he has been placed on three calls to order.

Mr AQUILINA: I reiterate a number of issues I raised yesterday relating to the provision of teachers for country schools. I remind honourable members that the Government has put in place a significant number of strategies, which are receiving a very good response. In February this year I announced the provision of a number of scholarships to teacher education students in their final year of technological and applied studies, mathematics and science. Already a number of applications have been received. The applicants have accepted the offer of a scholarship and have commenced their final year of teacher training.

I make explicitly clear that this program involves offering to students who are in their final year of a teacher training course—undergraduate or postgraduate—a permanent job, provided that they undertake a

position that is allocated to them in country New South Wales. Provided that they take that position, they will have a job for three years. Not only that, but the department will pay their higher education contribution scheme [HECS] fee for the last year of their course and on top of that \$1,000 for other expenses. This is one of our innovative programs to ensure that we provide teachers to country New South Wales.

[Interruption]

The Opposition has asked a question; one would think members opposite would listen to my response. We are providing the specific advice that they require. Yesterday I referred to the provision of opportunities for those involved in various trades or professions who may wish to take up teaching later in life, at a mature-age level. Two years ago in the Hunter, because of the closure of BHP, a number of people working as laboratory technicians and in various engineering fields indicated that they would like to become teachers. In conjunction with the University of Newcastle, we worked out a program whereby—

Mr O'Doherty: Point of order: All members are interested in hearing the Minister's answer, but it would be relevant for the Minister to answer the question. The question was about casual teachers in country areas. Under the standing order relating to relevance, I ask you to bring the Minister back to the leave of the question.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister has the call.

Mr AQUILINA: The Opposition asked a question about teacher shortages. I am referring to specific programs that this Government is undertaking, but members opposite continue to interject. These programs are aimed at providing a supply of teachers to country New South Wales, and, indeed, for western Sydney in areas that are difficult to staff. I inform the House that the Government has met casual staffing needs by offering principals mobile permanent teachers. The scheme, which is used in western Sydney, will be expanded into country locations. Some schools have received two permanent mobile teachers. Teachers in addition to permanent mobile teachers are appointed to cover permanent teachers on leave.

Mrs Chikarovski: You said there were 27,000. Where are they?

Mr AQUILINA: There are teachers waiting to be employed as permanent teachers. They are on a casual list, they are waiting to be appointed, and they are available for principals to ring up. In fact, during some weeks more than 25,000 teachers have been given a payment for filling in casual places. Despite claims to the contrary, a large number of teachers are available for casual placement, and most of the time we are able to meet the needs that arise. However, I acknowledge that from time to time, due to vacancies becoming available at very short notice, we may not be able to fill a specific casual vacancy within a location. We are working on that. As I said, we have been providing innovative programs, which I outlined yesterday and today, and which apply not only to Sydney's west but also to country New South Wales.

NORTH COAST FLOOD RECOVERY

Mr NEWELL: My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Emergency Services. What is the latest information on the North Coast flood recovery effort?

Mr DEBUS: Between January and March this year New South Wales faced a series of floods and storms along the coastal belt and inland from the Hunter Valley to the Queensland border. By March, natural disaster declarations had been made for 28 local government areas and a large portion of the North Coast was under water. Serious flooding had occurred in the Richmond, Clarence and Macleay regions, and other localities had been affected by storms and heavy rain. I pay tribute to the more than 1,300 State Emergency Services volunteers from 83 units who participated in the flood response operation. Collectively, they worked for almost 45,000 hours and were ably supported by emergency services workers from the Rural Fire Service, the New South Wales Fire Brigades, the Volunteer Rescue Association and the police.

Their task was enormous. Thousands of people were forced to evacuate as floodwaters rose, leaving their homes uninhabitable. Hundreds of businesses had goods and property destroyed by the floodwaters, and faced a heartbreaking clean-up and recovery effort. Emergency services workers conducted dozens of rescues of people trapped in their vehicles by floodwater, or who had medical conditions requiring them to be moved to other locations. The situation was so bad that on 12 March the Premier announced the establishment of a whole-of-government task force to co-ordinate the massive recovery operation in the wake of the devastating floods throughout the North Coast.

Within 24 hours of its establishment the North Coast Region Recovery Co-ordinating Committee had met in Sydney to determine the strategy for the recovery. The next day, it met in Coffs Harbour to be briefed by the local councils affected. An initial assessment of the flooding and storm damage led to a recommendation that the Government appoint a locally based co-ordinator to oversight the recovery effort. On 16 March the Premier appointed a recently retired senior army officer, Brigadier Philip McNamara, as the regional co-ordinator for the recovery, based in Coffs Harbour.

In concert with the appointment of Brigadier McNamara, the Government announced that it would provide additional measures of assistance under the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements [NDRA] to assist the plight of the flood victims. This additional assistance was in the form of an increase in the maximum amount available through low-interest loans for primary producers and small businesses, from \$80,000 to \$130,000. There was also an interest-free period of two years to new and existing loan recipients through the Rural Assistance Authority.

Other measures involved extending the NDRA provisions to small businesses indirectly affected by the flooding and including the estuarine fishers in the Richmond, Clarence and Macleay river systems as being eligible for small business assistance. Many people and organisations responded to calls for the donation of stock fodder. To assist in the distribution of this fodder and other goods the Government announced that it would provide up to \$300,000 to pay for the cost of freight for these materials. This was over and above the subsidies normally available.

In addition, the Government committed \$4 million as its contribution towards the cost of constructing a levee at Lismore, which was badly hit by an earlier flood. Today I can announce that the Government has reviewed the long-term policy on natural disaster assistance to local councils. We will introduce new measures to limit further the contributions that individual councils will be asked to make repairs to public infrastructure and roads damaged in storms and floods. Each local council's liability will be capped at a maximum of \$50,000 each financial year, no matter how many natural disasters strike. I am pleased to announce that repairs to minor public roads damaged in a declared natural disaster that are not normally maintained by local councils will be funded under the natural disaster relief arrangements. The same provisions will apply to Crown roads on land managed by the Department of Land and Water Conservation. That will ensure that some rural and regional residents whose access to their properties is affected by floods and other emergencies will now qualify for assistance to have their access repaired. That is another victory for Country Labor.

The recovery process was extremely well managed by Brigadier McNamara and his support team. Within one week all homes had power reconnected and access to telephone services. By week two repairs were under way on the levees at Grafton and Ulmarra and all but two families were back in their homes. By mid-April 80 per cent of local bridges were back in place, or temporary bridges had been erected. Brigadier McNamara has prepared a comprehensive report, which recommends holding a debriefing of all councils, agencies and organisations involved in the operation. That debriefing will be held at a regional centre on the North Coast in the near future. Brigadier McNamara's report contains other recommendations to improve the response to major flooding. The report has been referred to the State Emergency Management Committee and its recommendations will be progressively considered in the context of the review of natural disaster arrangements recently agreed to by the Council of Australian Governments. That is another significant development.

SYDNEY HARBOUR JET SKIS

Ms HARRISON: My question is directed to the Premier. What is the Government's response to community concerns about jet skis on Sydney Harbour.

Mr CARR: As I have said on many occasions, Sydney Harbour is a working harbour. Ferry commuters pass fishing trawlers returning to their moorings after a night's work. Cruise boats share the water with tugs and cargo ships. We still see a family out fishing in a rowboat or dinghy. It is the Government's responsibility to protect the harbour and to manage all those competing interests. The use of jet skis on Sydney Harbour raises some serious questions. Between 1997-2000 the number of jet skis registered in New South Wales increased by 50 per cent.

Mr Humpherson: Point of order: During question time there is limited time to ask a limited number of questions seeking information in relation to matters of public interest. This question pertains to a matter that is already in the public domain. The information sought by the question and which the Premier is providing is

already publicly available. There are previous rulings from the Chair which directly relate to this matter. Questions should not seek information that is already publicly available, and is known to be publicly available, and answers to such questions should not be provided.

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

Mr CARR: I can understand why his preselection is under threat. I can imagine someone going along to a monthly Liberal Party branch meeting and copping that! To the people who ride them, jet skis are a fun, fast way to get around. To the water police, they are a drain on resources. To sailors, rowers, ferry masters and environmentalists, they are a headache and a nuisance. For a start, these craft are incredibly noisy. One study found they produced noise levels in the range of 85 to 105 decibels, rather like some of the noises heard in this Chamber from time to time. That is loud enough to require ear protection for prolonged exposure. Eighteen months ago, a woman swimming at Balmoral Beach was hit by a jet ski. The rider abused her before speeding off. Last year there were 551 incidents involving jet skis in the State. In one incident police issued an infringement to a jet ski rider who was travelling at 25 knots in an 8 knot zone.

Water police have reported groups of 50 jet ski riders gathering in hot spots such as Hen and Chicken Bay in the Parramatta River and Balmoral and Clontarf in Middle Harbour. On one occasion at Hen and Chicken Bay a can of petrol was held over a police vehicle with the offender threatening to set it alight after the police had intervened on the way to fine people who had been abusing jet skis. In April this year the New South Wales Police Service Marine Area Command advised the Government that jet skis should be excluded from all of Sydney Harbour. In the overall scheme of things, jet skis just do not fit in. With the noise they generate, the high speeds at which they travel, the risk they pose to public safety, the threat to the environment and the absorption of police time these watercraft are clearly incompatible on a busy waterway that is also a precious gift to our environment.

[Interruption]

The honourable member for Gosford has interjected. If he remains in the House until later in question time, I will read out some statements he has made. But do not distract me now, I want to focus on the matter before me. People cannot ride motorbikes at high speed around public parks. From October this year the Government will ban jet skis from Sydney Harbour, from Parramatta to the Heads, including Middle Harbour and the Lane Cove River. The ban will apply to all personal watercraft colloquially known as jet skis. Jet skis are power-driven vessels not more than 3½ metres in length with an in-built propeller. A jet ski has a fully enclosed hull, and is designed to be operated by a person standing, sitting astride or kneeling on the vessel. People will know what I am talking about if they are on the harbour after October and they see an offender. Honourable members laugh, but I think it is always right to define the terms. We will do what Governments in other jurisdictions have already done. We will make the harbour off-limits.

I learnt on the Internet that in the United States of America, jet skis are banned in 66 of 87 national parks, and the ban will be extended to all parks by September 2002. Starting this summer, they will be banned on Sydney Harbour. The ban will be effected via a regulation to the Maritime Services Act. Licence and registration fees will double. The cost of a three-year licence will go from \$109 to \$218. The registration fee will go from \$105 to \$210. That will fund education and enforcement, not only for the harbour but for waterways around New South Wales. Jet skis will be closely monitored in other areas such as the Central Coast, Georges River, Botany Bay, Pittwater and the Shoalhaven. This decision has not been taken lightly. It has been taken on police advice after complaints and many incidents of concern, and after excessive investment of time by the Waterways Authority and by the police. With the steady rise in the number of jet skis we run the risk, if we allow the use of the harbour to continue, of our harbour turning into a speedway. These craft are a risk to the public. They are a risk to the environment. They do not belong on the greatest harbour of all.

PRINCE HENRY HOSPITAL SITE DEVELOPMENT

Mr BROGDEN: My question without notice is directed to the Deputy Premier, Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and Minister for Housing. Now that the Minister has taken control of all coastal developments, will he scrap plans by Landcom for a massive housing development, including buildings up to seven storeys high, on one of Sydney's premier undeveloped coastal sites at Prince Henry Hospital?

Dr REFSHAUGE: The Landcom developments at Prince Henry are totally compatible with the coastal policy. There is not a master plan.

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

Dr REFSHAUGE: The brochure to which the honourable member refers is not a development application and any proposal that is agreed to will fit in with the coastal policy. He can laugh as much as he likes but the coastal policy will fit the whole of New South Wales.

[Interruption]

I meet with a number of people. The other day I met with Remo Nogarotto. He brought some people in. Remember the Leader of the Opposition's chief of staff, Ken Hooper? Where is he now? Is he doing some work there? Next month I have got John Hewson in. Robert Webster, the one-time National, one-time Liberal, who rose almost to be the leader, comes in to talk about things, as do Tim Moore and Rod McGeoch.

Mrs Skinner: How many of those are on your staff?

Dr REFSHAUGE: Wendy Machin, who has taken over a task force, comes in. Ian Kortlang comes in. The honourable member for Wakehurst invited me to come and meet some of his friends.

DEVELOPMENT FUNDING ALLOCATION

Mr ARMSTRONG: My question is directed to the Minister for Local Government, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs. How is he going to explain to people throughout regional New South Wales that the Treasurer has already rejected the Public Accounts Committee's recommendation that more than \$17 million of development funding be aggregated and allocated exclusively to rural areas?

Mr WOODS: It is true that the Government has a strong, well-developed and rigorous regional development policy.

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

Mr WOODS: A raft of policies and programs are out there for the public to see.

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

Mr WOODS: We are open to suggestions on how we can improve those. In fact—

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

Mr WOODS: We are looking to improve those all the time. One case in point is the regional investment tours that we started to develop a couple of years ago and have been running throughout the State. When we first started those we received criticisms and suggestions from those taking part, and as a result we have improved them over time. We will continue to do that. Whilst I have the greatest regard for the Public Accounts Committee and its splendid chairman, the honourable member for Fairfield, that does not mean that I agree with all of its recommendations.

For example, the report recommends that the Department of State and Regional Development advise councils against setting up development organisations, and also that the department not provide assistance to regional companies to export products. Those recommendations go against the whole structure of working in partnership with local communities and local government to foster job creation. Moreover, there are demonstrably many successes that the Government has had during the period it has been in office in producing jobs and investment in country areas. But the big difference between the Government and the Coalition is that we have a raft of policies and programs out there on public view, whilst those on the other side of the House have nothing—no policies or programs that we can even look at.

Mr Armstrong: Point of order—

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

Mr Armstrong: The Minister has not realised that the Treasurer has duded him out of \$17 million for rural development.

Mr WOODS: About the only policy I have seen from that side of the House in recent times is on their desire not to say the word "country". Since we had that little kerfuffle over there about the country Liberals, here in question time the Leader of the National Party has not uttered the word "country". Even the leader-in-waiting, the member for Coffs Harbour, is embarrassed by that. When he was asked about the country Liberals he said, "We are embarrassed by that." No wonder! The leader of the Coalition, when asked about it, said, "There are no such things as country Liberals."

Mr Stoner: Point of order: Standing Order 138 requires that an answer must be relevant to the question. The question is about the \$17 million that the Minister was duded out of and that country New South Wales was duded out of.

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

Mr WOODS: Why are they so touchy about this word "country"? A couple of National Party conferences ago the suggestion was made that they put "country" back in. They knocked it backed. The National Party no longer has any interest in the country, so much so that National Party members do not even want to say the word. They have deserted country people. There are a raft of policies out there covering regional development. We are continually looking for suggestions on how to improve them. There will be no cutback in funds to the regional efforts we are making in country New South Wales.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Coffs Harbour will remain silent.

Mr WOODS: We will not do that because we believe in country areas of New South Wales. We have a belief that if we are going to have a prosperous New South Wales, it has to be right across the State. That is why we put the effort in.

COURT DELAYS

Mr CRITTENDEN: My question without notice is to the Premier. What is the Government's response to Opposition claims of delays in the court system and related matters?

Mr CARR: I did see a press release issued by the honourable member for Gosford that made me very alarmed. I discussed with my colleague the Attorney General whether these accusations could possibly be true. The honourable member for Gosford alleged some terrible delays in the way the Local Court system worked.

Mr Hartcher: They are absolutely true.

Mr CARR: It has astonishing statistics in it. "All true," you say. We will see.

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

Mr CARR: I can say that more than 241,000 criminal prosecutions were lodged with the Local Court last year and, despite its enormous workload, 94 per cent of criminal matters were finalised in less than six months last year, well above the national average. The Local Court is our most visible and accessible court, sitting in almost 160 locations around the State, including many regional centres and remote bush towns. The shadow Attorney General is clearly ignorant of this fact. These country courts remain open but do not sit every day. He might find that, to use his own words, "quite concerning", but magistrates object to sitting in empty courts for days on end, twiddling their thumbs. After all, they are not a shadow cabinet! There has to be a better way. These decisions are made by the court system itself. We do have something called the separation of powers. The shadow Attorney General has a tenuous grasp of the judicial separation of powers following that release of his press statement on 15 February 2001 defending the Director of Public Prosecutions [DPP]. He said:

The DPP must remain independent from Government so that politician (sic) were not running the judicial process and looking after their mates.

What really caught my eye was a quote in his 5 June press release in which he said:

Level 5 Downing Centre has dropped from an average of 39 days—

a month—

to just under 33 days per month.

Honourable members should bear in mind that that is an average, so there must be some pretty long months. Does the shadow Attorney General want this Labor Government to have the court sit 70 or 80 days? It is interesting to hear that the shadow Attorney General said:

Level 5 Downing Street has dropped from an average of 39 days—
a month—

to just under 33 days per month.

I was talking about this matter over a beer with our colleague the honourable member for Murray-Darling. Within a short space of time he confirmed the name by which we all know him—Banjo Black. He produced a bush ballad on this theme, which is as follows:

Thirty days have September
This one Hartcher should remember
Were he not a boundless fool
He would have learned this fact at school.
I sense that Chika has on toast
This numbskull from the Central Coast
For in life skills he is no longer a marcher
A sprinter who falls flat, that's Hartcher

POLICE INTEGRITY COMMISSION INQUIRY

Mr TINK: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Police. Will the Minister extend the term of office of the Police Integrity Commissioner for as long as it takes to complete his investigation into the conduct of the Commissioner of Police to counter any actions by Mr Ryan's lawyers which may delay this important inquiry beyond the current term of the Police Integrity Commissioner?

Mr WHELAN: It is public knowledge that the Police Service is not appealing the decision made by the Police Integrity Commissioner. It is public knowledge that the Police Service is complying in all respects with the orders of the Police Integrity Commissioner. If the Police Integrity Commissioner is desirous of extending his term, I will gladly grant it. However, the legislation provides that we cannot reappoint the Police Integrity Commissioner for more than two terms. As this is his second term, that would require legislative amendment.

Mr TINK: I ask a supplementary question. In light of the Minister's answer—

Mr Gaudry: On a point of order: I believe that Opposition members have already asked a supplementary question.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition sought leave to table a document. She did not ask a supplementary question. The honourable member for Epping has the call.

Mr TINK: In light of the Minister's answer, in which he talked about the limit in the current legislation on the term of the Police Integrity Commissioner, will he now support the bill, notice of which I gave this afternoon, and extend the sitting of the Parliament so that we can extend the term of the Police Integrity Commissioner to enable him to complete this inquiry? In doing so, will he acquaint himself with the transcript of the hearings of the Police Integrity Commission this week, which illustrates how counsel for the commissioner is frustrating the Police Integrity Commission inquiry?

Mr WHELAN: I thought that standing orders allowed for supplementary questions, not further questions. The honourable member obviously was not listening to what I said. If the Police Integrity Commissioner states that there are some difficulties in relation to concluding the inquiry I would expect him to provide me with that advice. Of course, if possible, the Government would consider reappointing him. However, if there is a statutory prohibition—

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

Mr WHELAN: The honourable member for Epping can rest assured that the Government will take the necessary action to keep the Police Integrity Commissioner, Justice Urquhart, in that position to conclude the inquiry.

Mrs Chikarovski: On a point of order. In order to facilitate what the Minister has just said I give an undertaking on behalf of the Opposition—

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

FIREARMS AMNESTY

Mr GAUDRY: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Police. What is the latest information on the Government's firearm amnesty?

Mr WHELAN: I am sure that the honourable member would be interested to know that, from tomorrow, police stations across New South Wales will be flooded with firearms—illegal, unregistered and unwanted firearms; firearms of all descriptions; firearms that the Government, the Police Service and responsible gun owners want off the streets and out of the hands of criminals. From tomorrow, anyone possessing an illegal gun in New South Wales can hand it in to the police—no questions asked—under the Government's three-month firearms amnesty. This amnesty marks the beginning of the Government's tough new laws to combat the illegal trade of guns in New South Wales. The Firearms Amendment Trafficking Act comes into effect this weekend. Those laws create a new range of anti-trafficking offences. They increase from 10 to 14 years gaol the penalty for anyone found guilty of illegally possessing a hand gun or prohibited firearm.

Any person who supplies firearms to an unauthorised user is liable to 20 years imprisonment. These laws are specifically designed to combat criminals involved in the illegal trade of guns. The purpose of the amnesty is to give gun owners a last chance to become properly licensed, properly registered and legal. The message is simple: If people have an illegal firearm, they must hand it in. No questions will be asked. If they have a licence or a permit to possess a firearm it is their responsibility to ensure that that firearm is properly registered. Those people without a licence or a permit who are not authorised to register, possess or use a firearm must surrender their weapons. This is their last chance. These laws are a key part of the Government's strategy to reduce the number of dangerous and unwanted weapons in the community.

This amnesty will give gun owners a last chance to comply with the law. The alternative is also simple—up to 14 years gaol. In order to educate gun owners, the New South Wales Police Service has developed an advertising campaign, including newspaper advertisements, billboards and flyers. The Firearms Registry is also writing to all firearms licence holders and a firearms amnesty recorded hotline has been established. The number is 1300 557 772. It will provide people with information regarding gun laws, licensing, registration and other related questions that they need answered. Police officers need the assistance of the public to help them identify illegal guns and remove them from the community. If anyone is aware of a person who has an illegal firearm in his or her possession that person should be encouraged to hand it in. There will be no questions, no names taken, no prosecution and no recriminations. This is also a reminder call to licensed gun owners to ensure that all their firearms are properly registered.

These people have already demonstrated their willingness to comply with the law by obtaining a licence or permit. Now it is time to ensure that they still fully comply with the legal obligations that go with the privilege of owning a firearm. History has shown that amnesties work in removing unwanted firearms from the community. Honourable members may recall that, during the national gun buy-back scheme, which ran from October 1996 to September 1997, almost 200,000 firearms were surrendered. That figure includes 37,000 non-prohibited firearms surrendered voluntarily by people who no longer wanted to retain them. We have the toughest laws in the country and we will continue to lead the fight against illegal guns. The amnesty, which commences tomorrow, runs until 22 September. This is the last chance for those in possession of illegal firearms.

PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS ASSETS

Dr REFSHAUGE: Yesterday the honourable member for Davidson asked me a question about serious allegations of fraud in relation to a Department of Housing property at The Rocks. I gave the House an undertaking that I would make further inquiries into the matter if the honourable member provided specific details. I can inform the House that although the honourable member for Davidson has not provided specific details, I have had officers of my department investigate the substance of the allegations. I understand the honourable member for Davidson was also busily briefing members of the press gallery in an effort to breathe life into the allegations, although he again was reluctant to provide any specific details. However, after receiving advice from my department I now understand why.

Mr Hartcher: Point of order: Under the standing orders an attack upon a member of Parliament must be by way of substantive motion.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister is replying to a question asked by the honourable member for Davidson. In the proceedings of this House it is not unreasonable for a Minister to attack a member of the Opposition.

Dr REFSHAUGE: Having received advice from my department, I understand why, without parliamentary privilege, the honourable member for Davidson was reluctant to give journalists any specific information.

Mr HARTCHER (Gosford) [3.21 p.m.]: I move:

That the honourable member for Marrickville be not further heard.

The House divided.

Ayes, 32

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

Noes, 57

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

Question resolved in the negative.

Dr REFSHAUGE: I am advised that the claims made by the honourable member for Davidson during question time yesterday were wrong. To respect the privacy of the family concerned I will not name them or provide the address of the property in question. However, I can inform the House that the original tenants of the property in question were an elderly couple who were very ill. Their son, who owned a hotel which he sold in 1988, moved in to care for his sick parents. Within the space of 12 months both parents had died. Their son, who

was raised in the property, applied to the Department of Housing to succeed his parents' tenancy. This application was refused as he failed to meet the eligibility criteria. He appealed against the department's decision. An independent appeals committee upheld the department's decision. I am advised the property was vacated and the keys were returned to the department. The honourable member for Davidson must accept that he cannot make serious accusations without evidence.

Questions without notice concluded.

ONE NATION PREFERENCES

Personal Explanation

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: Prior to question time the Premier made a ministerial statement in which he claimed that certain remarks attributed to me indicated a change of position in relation to the Liberal Party and One Nation. He referred to an article in the *Weekly Times*, which is my local newspaper. At that time I said that the Premier was selectively quoting, and I now reiterate that statement. For the purposes of clarity, I have subsequently checked with the reporter who wrote the story, and she has confirmed to me that the words referred to by the Premier were in fact the question she put to me. She further confirmed that I gave the following answer:

I have no problem with the party decision to put One Nation last.

I stand by that statement, and I expect the Premier to withdraw the next time he comes into the Chamber.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

Department of State and Regional Development

Mr O'DOHERTY (Hornsby) [3.31 p.m.]: Yesterday the Public Accounts Committee, which has credibility—it is a bipartisan committee chaired by a government member—presented an excellent report into the Department of State and Regional Development. The value of the budget given to that department is \$100 million. Yesterday's report by this bipartisan committee, chaired by a government member—

Mr Hazzard: An excellent report.

Mr O'DOHERTY: Indeed, it is an excellent report. The report states that the Department of State and Regional Development is wasting public money, and that the money the department spends distorts markets. In other words, that spending has a counterproductive effect in the economy where it seeks to assist. The report further states that there is no way of knowing whether the claims by the Department of State and Regional Development that it is creating economic activity and jobs in the economy are true. More than that—it seriously doubts whether the claims are true at all! I refer honourable members to some of the statements made by the committee. The Chair of the committee, the honourable member for Fairfield, said:

The Committee is also concerned DSRD is claiming "victories" for economic activity that would have occurred without its intervention. One simple example is in the export of NSW Government services ... A simple, objective measure of the Unit's success, namely the proportion of total AusAID expenditure won by NSW vis-a-vis other jurisdictions, proved NSW to be a substantial under-performer, contrary to the Department's claims.

The committee, in its recommendations, states:

The Committee is concerned the Department has overstated its contribution to economic growth.

The Government is deliberately telling lies to overstate its economic impact on the community. Some \$100 million worth of public expenditure is at stake, and the Government is lying. Who says so? The honourable member for Fairfield and the Public Accounts Committee say so. The report further states:

Current claims of victories for New South Wales are shrouded in mystery, not independently audited and appear designed more for press release than the honest economic amelioration of the State.

That confirms what we have been saying for six years. The Government tries to govern for and by press releases, not for and by the economic amelioration of the State. In other words, the Government does not govern to do things right or to have an impact in the community; it simply governs to be able to say it has done

something. The report states that the Government's claims cannot be verified, that when it has spent money it has done the easy thing, and that the jobs and economic activity it claims to have created would have happened anyway, whether or not it spent the money. In the report the committee recommends other ways in which the Government could use this money. For example, it states that much more money should be spent in country areas.

Members of this House who represent country electorates should be able to vote on my motion so that they can tell the Government that the money should be spent in country areas to promote regional economies, generate economic activity where there is genuinely not any economic activity, and create new jobs where those jobs would not otherwise be created. The Government should be condemned for its failure to accept this report; it has brushed the report aside. The Minister for Small Business laughed it off. The Treasurer, who is accountable for \$31 billion of spending in New South Wales, simply shrugged the report aside.

Does the Treasurer care that a credible committee has stated that money is being wasted within his department? No, he does not. But that is little wonder, because the Auditor-General presented a report today which shows that he will be muzzled unless the Government takes action in this session. For example, unless the Government takes action, the Auditor-General will not be able to report on the true and accurate cost of the Olympics. What is the Government doing about that? The Auditor-General's report is fascinating because it states that the Government led him to believe that it would introduce legislation in this session to amend his powers to enable him to act as an independent watchdog over the finances of New South Wales.

Has the Government done anything about that? No, it has not, and it stands condemned for that. The Government, by its inaction, is muzzling the Auditor-General; it will ensure that no report on the true cost of the Olympics is ever written. If the Government does not introduce legislation in another place before the end of this day, pass that legislation through all stages, and bring it to this House by the end of this day, we will know that the Government is not fair dinkum about accountability for public spending in New South Wales. There could hardly be a more important matter than debating the Government's lack of willingness to be accountable for the \$100 million that the Department of State and Regional Development expends across all areas and the Auditor-General's ability to report on that expenditure. This Government is not fair dinkum about accountability.

Climate Change

Mr YEADON (Granville—Minister for Information Technology, Minister for Energy, Minister for Forestry, and Minister for Western Sydney) [3.36 p.m.]: The continual threat of global warming makes the issues in my urgency motion a top priority for the Government, as it should for the Commonwealth and, indeed, the Opposition. Land-holders know that the weather is changing, droughts are more common and the effect of that on their industries is increasing. The first issue concerns the overwhelming majority of Australians who want the Commonwealth to ratify the international protocol so that real benefits can be delivered to every citizen across the globe. At the same time, the State Government accepts its responsibility to have meaningful programs to deliver reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. That is why the Premier, at the recent Council of Australian Governments meeting, proposed that all States and Territories introduce compulsory greenhouse benchmarks for electricity retailers.

Once again leadership is required from the Commonwealth to guide the debate and to see literally overnight results from such a policy. New South Wales would be penalised for going it alone. At the same time it would be unconscionable for our State, which already leads the nation, to carry the load alone. This issue must be debated now so that the Parliament can send a clear message that the environment is at stake and the Commonwealth needs to play its fundamental part to protect the environment. The Federal Government's greenhouse renewable legislation is a good initiative. However, the New South Wales Government would argue that, although that legislation goes some way to addressing the issue, it does not get effective results on the ground for the expenditure involved.

The type of process we are putting forward is one that will see such results produced in the shortest possible time and for the least cost. Existing benchmarks require electricity retailers to reduce emissions by 5 per cent on a per capita basis by 2000-01, as compared to 1989-90 emission levels. We propose extending those levels to 2005-06. If a national scheme were to be implemented we would expect the benchmarks to be met through a combination of measures: sequestration of forestry; running existing low-emission generators, notably gas, more intensively; demand site management; and, finally, investment in new low-emission generators, both gas and renewables. We also anticipate that there will be significant investment in State Forest plantations as

part of the sequestration site. This could mean the creation of hundreds of jobs over the life of plantations in rural and regional areas. The Commonwealth has a responsibility to lead the debate on a national scheme, yet it is New South Wales that is consistently forging new and innovative solutions to greenhouse problems. It is New South Wales that is looking for solutions that do not simply throw money at the problem.

The policy espoused by the New South Wales Government will deliver more than the Federal 2 per cent renewable energies legislation. Energy companies will invest significant funds into renewable and low emission generation, as well as carbon sinks. A perfect example of this initiative is a unique agreement between Integral Energy, State Forests, and the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning [DUAP] to plant five hectares of threatened Cumberland woodland in western Sydney. Integral Energy is paying for the project; DUAP has donated the land; and State Forests is providing the expertise. That is an absolute showcase of co-operation and partnership. Seeds have been collected for the project and I am advised that planting will begin before the end of the year. The planting will not only have great outcomes for biodiversity but the trees will also absorb carbon and help to tackle the greenhouse problem.

The Energy Smart Business program is yet another achievement. Today the Premier outlined how chief executive officers from some of the nation's largest companies have formed the Premier's Forum to provide leadership on greenhouse issues. The first member companies, AMCOR and the Commonwealth Bank, will meet with the Premier each year to measure their success in reducing greenhouse emissions. Over the next five years the program is expected to reduce emissions by almost one million tonnes and will result in savings to industry of \$85 million on energy bills. The greenhouse debate will not move forward until the Commonwealth accepts that it must assess greenhouse policy based on practical programs and outcomes that take into account the cost to the community. This is exactly—I repeat, exactly—what New South Wales is doing.

Question—That the motion for urgent consideration of the honourable member for Hornsby be proceeded with—negatived.

Question—That the motion for urgent consideration of the honourable member for Granville be proceeded with—negatived.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Matter of Public Importance

Mr Moss, by leave, withdrew the matter of public importance relating to Bankstown Airport.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Bill: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr WHELAN (Strathfield—Minister for Police) [3.41 p.m.]: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit the resumption of the debate on the Sydney Water Catchment Management Amendment Bill

Mr HARTCHER (Gosford) [3.42 p.m.]: While members of the Coalition are happy to facilitate debate, we would have preferred the Leader of the Government in this House to have given us more time. Clearly, this is important legislation that raises the significant aspect of retrospectivity, which was not addressed in the Minister's second reading speech. One of the reasons why Coalition members would have liked more time to consider this legislation—this is why we are not eager for standing and sessional orders to be suspended on this occasion—is simply to obtain some auditing and funding advice on the issue of retrospectivity.

Motion agreed to.

SYDNEY WATER CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 27 June.

Ms SEATON (Southern Highlands) [3.43 p.m.]: Barely 24 hours ago the Attorney General, Minister for the Environment, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Arts delivered

his second reading speech on the Sydney Water Catchment Management Amendment Bill, which has been described by the Government as a housekeeping bill. In the words of the Minister's staff, it is "simply a bill that ties up some loose ends". Apparently, the Minister wants this legislation passed by the House today. This is a sign of the increasing arrogance of this Government. It has brought forward legislation that will affect thousands of people in the Sydney catchment and expects this House to rubber-stamp it without scrutiny. That is just not going to happen.

The Opposition will oppose this bill, not because of a particular desire to stand in the way of potential improvements to public sector management, accountability and transparency—all of those principles are fundamental tenets of the Opposition—but because the Opposition was not shown the bill and was given no briefing until I demanded one this morning. The Opposition was told that because the debate on the bill might be brought on at any time during the day, it might not be possible for me to be briefed before 10.00 a.m. I have discovered that a briefing note was prepared and circulated to some honourable members of this House, but not to the Opposition. The Opposition has not been extended the courtesy of an opportunity to examine the bill or to understand what the Government is trying to achieve.

The Opposition ought to be given the opportunity to ask sensible and relevant questions on behalf of the taxpayers of New South Wales and the residents of the catchment area. I am appalled by the increasing displays of this Government's arrogance. Although that is not a surprise for Opposition members, when a bill such as the bill before the House has the potential to affect thousands of lives in the catchment and cost people money, the Opposition's alarm bells start ringing. It has been put to me that this bill will simply improve accountability, but I have been shown no evidence to support that claim. I have been told that the bill emanates from a recommendation made by the Crown Solicitor that certain changes must be made to provide for the establishment of the Sydney Catchment Management Fund. I also have been told that the Crown Solicitor has suggested that provision be made for charges for certain services that are supplied or that may be supplied in the future by the Sydney Catchment Authority.

It is most extraordinary that the effect of the amending provisions is to be taken to have commenced on 8 January 1999, approximately two years ago. The Opposition adheres to a very important principle, namely, that retrospective legislation is banned. The Opposition generally takes a very dim view of any legislation that attempts to create a fact of something that has happened some time in the past when the legislation was not operational. I have been shown absolutely no evidence of the Government's claims of justification. I requested a copy of the Crown Solicitor's advice and the advice on which the Government acted to cause this bill to be drafted. I was told that I was not to see that advice, that it was secret, that the advice given by the Crown Solicitor was Cabinet in confidence. I was not allowed to see it, nor was I offered any type of summary or briefing on the Crown Solicitor's advice to the Government.

I was also told that the Auditor-General had no problems with this legislation. But when I asked to see the Auditor-General's advice, when I asked to receive a briefing, and when I asked to see some sort of written indication of what the Auditor-General had said, I was not shown any evidence. Nor was I given any of that information at any time on the day after my briefing, even though a member of staff who had briefed me undertook to try to get back to me with at least some answers to some of the questions I had asked. I want to know whether or not a particular incident in the management of the Sydney Catchment Authority has led the Crown Solicitor to produce this recommendation. I hold grave concerns that the Government is trying to cover up or obscure some incident, and that incident has created a crisis of confidence in the management and accountability of the Sydney Catchment Authority which has led the Crown Solicitor to make a recommendation—a recommendation that the Government does not want the Opposition to see.

The Government did not wish to even give a briefing. I want to know what the Government is hiding. Why is it that only 24 hours ago the Minister delivered his second reading speech and now, just before 30 June—the end of the financial year—the Minister is trying to rush this bill through and keep from the Opposition information that I believe is relevant to any rational assessment of the merits of this bill. It would be irresponsible of members of the Opposition to simply trust the Government, rubber-stamp the bill and let it go through. For me to do so would be an abrogation of my responsibility, first, as the member for Southern Highlands, whose constituents are largely affected by the Sydney Catchment Authority and its powers; and second, as the shadow Minister for the Environment. I simply will not do it. This is a last-minute, sneaky, unjustified attempt by the Government.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the bill relates to new section 24E, which refers to fees for services supplied by the Sydney Catchment Authority. It refers to the authority having the power to charge for

the supply of any services under the Act or regulations, and states, "such fee as is prescribed by the regulations for the supply of the service". It also refers to a very alarming new addition to the powers of the Sydney Catchment Authority. It refers to the prospect of a new State tax that might be levied on landowners, land users and residents of the catchment. New section 24E (1) (b) provides:

if a fee is not so prescribed, such reasonable fee as it determines for the supply of the service.

This opens the door to a raft of new fees, charges and taxes potentially being levied on residents, landowners and land users in the catchment. I asked the Minister's office to provide me with information as to what those new fees might include and what this portion of the legislation referred to, and I was told that some additional information might be given to me. It is now some hours since I requested that information, but no new information has been supplied to my office. I consider that to be a discourtesy—not to me personally but to every person who lives in the Sydney catchment and every constituent of the Southern Highlands. The Government is trying to rule by stealth, and the Opposition will simply not put up with that.

Today the Premier announced a \$272 million funding package for works in the catchment, ranging from the much-overdue upgrade of the Goulburn sewage treatment plant and ongoing works at Wingecarribee swamp, which have already been announced perhaps four or five times, like a revolving door. I had hoped that within that \$272 million funding package there may be some mention of a commitment for funding to upgrade Wombeyan Caves Road, but I did not see any such commitment. The residents of Wombeyan Caves Road have done their best to stress to the Government that the road is unsafe because its condition has been allowed to run down. The road is an absolute goat track from Mittagong to Wombeyan Caves.

Thousands of tonnes of roadbase are washing into the Sydney catchment every year. The Sydney Catchment Authority admits in its annual reports and audits that unsealed roads contribute significantly to poor water quality in the catchment. We have made pleas to the Parliamentary Secretary for Roads in this regard, but those pleas have simply fallen on deaf ears. The residents of Wombeyan Caves Road are today out on that road fixing it themselves. They are carrying out do-it-yourself road repairs, because they cannot get the State Government to commit, through the roads budget, increased funding for improvements to the road.

I have written to the Minister in support of applications by council that funding be provided through the Sydney Catchment Authority to upgrade the road to prevent roadbase washing into the catchment. I was hoping to see in today's announcement relating to the \$272 million funding package reference to the fact that Wombeyan Caves Road would eventually receive funding for an upgrade. However, I am disappointed that I have not seen a reference to Wombeyan Caves Road in any of the material I have received to date. I hope that the Minister may be able to tell me that I am wrong about that, and that he has approved funding for improvements to the road.

I wonder whether the Government is considering funding that \$272 million package by imposing a new raft of fees for a new raft of services that this bill will open the door to. I wonder whether that \$272 million will be partly funded by revenue that will come from the imposition of new fees and charges that this bill, if passed, would enable. As I have received no answers to my questions and no explanation on that point, I remain unconvinced. I also want to know why the provision relating to fees for services supplied by the Sydney Catchment Authority appears in this bill but did not appear in the original Act. I have not yet had an opportunity to compare the original Act with this bill.

I was given an undertaking that I would be supplied with that information, but to date I have not received it. On that basis, I am not able to commit the support of the Opposition to the bill. Even if I did have an answer on that, I continue to have concerns about the lack of transparency with regard to the Crown Solicitor's advice. I want to know why we cannot see the Crown Solicitor's advice. I want to know what particular incident has occurred to cause the Government, at five minutes to midnight before the end of the financial year, to try to rush the bill through this place.

Mr Fraser: It will be retrospective, too.

Ms SEATON: That is right, it will be retrospective for two years. I do not think I have ever seen a bill containing a retrospectivity clause of two years. The Opposition will move an amendment to the bill in the other place. That amendment will seek to refer this entire matter to a general purpose standing committee of the Legislative Council so that the committee can demand to see the Crown Solicitor's advice and the Auditor-General's advice and perhaps interview both of those officers. In that way the committee may be able to get to the bottom of what has happened within the management of the Sydney Catchment Authority that has generated

this recommendation and the need for such a hasty approach to the passage of this bill. The Opposition supports the principles of accountability and transparency. We certainly want the Government to be more accountable and transparent, and we certainly want the Government to improve levels of public sector management and competency, and to improve the delivery of a good product to the people of New South Wales. However, we cannot support the bill.

Mr BROGDEN (Pittwater) [3.58 p.m.]: I join my colleague the shadow Minister for the Environment and honourable member for Southern Highlands in indicating the Opposition's concerns about the bill and its objection to the legislation. The bill was introduced yesterday, and debate is now being rammed through the lower House on what is, I understand, the last day of sitting before the House adjourns for the traditional winter break. The Coalition has had inadequate briefing on the bill and insufficient time to study it closely. Primarily for those reasons, the Coalition is unwilling to support the legislation.

The Minister, in his capacity as Attorney General, is fully aware of the need for the Parliament to closely study legislation. Therefore it is grossly disappointing that the Minister on this occasion has sought to rush this bill through the Parliament. It raises several questions about why the legislation must be dealt with in this House today and then shunted across to the upper House as quickly as possible. Why is it that, just days before the end of the 2000-01 financial year, the legislation is being rushed through the Parliament? It has been retrospectively introduced, and will be backdated to 8 January 1999—indeed, before the term of this Parliament.

Honourable members are being asked to vote for legislation that backdates the implementation date to a time prior to the commencement of this Parliament. But why? It is clear from the Minister's speech that something has gone wrong. Has the Sydney Catchment Authority done something illegal? Has it operated outside its authority? Has it entered into contracts, required payments or made payments that have now been found to be illegal and without a legislative basis? Is the Government trying to paper over the cracks by passing retrospective legislation? Yesterday the Minister made a short second reading speech. I mean no disrespect when I say that the Minister is known for his long speeches, but on this occasion his second reading speech occupied a little over a page in *Hansard*. He took perhaps five to 10 minutes to introduce legislation, then ran away and now wants to jam it through this Chamber today. In the Minister's second reading speech he said:

I turn now to the bill. The Crown Solicitor has advised that the Sydney Water Catchment Management Act 1998 should be clarified to ensure the authority is unambiguously brought within the operation of section 21 of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983. Accordingly, the intention of this bill is to insert provisions into the Sydney Water Catchment Management Act to clarify the authority's financial powers. These amendments will insert a new division 5, "Financial Provisions", into the Act. The provisions will create a Sydney Catchment Management Fund. The creation of the fund will clarify the authority's powers to receive moneys, and, out of that fund, to spend public moneys so it can properly fulfil the important responsibilities that have been given to it by Parliament.

Having read that extract from the Minister's speech it is clear that the Government got the bill wrong in the first place. After the Sydney water crisis three years ago the Government had ample time, with the full support of the Opposition, to put through this legislation properly. The Opposition supported the concept of the establishment of the catchment. We supported the break between Sydney Water and the catchment authority and, indeed, we supported the break under this Minister, after the 1999 election, of the ministerial control between the Minister responsible for Sydney Water and the Minister for the Environment for the control respectively of Sydney Water and the catchment authority. We support those initiatives. Not only is the Government happy to drag \$1 billion out of Sydney Water over five years, it now wants to take money out of the catchment authority. Indeed, the dividends paid by the Sydney Catchment Authority to Treasury in the past year were \$10 million. That money should be spent on the catchment and not returned to Treasury. The Minister is pulling money out of the catchment authority and giving it to Treasury and at the same time imposing fees and charges on land owners in the catchment—

Mr Fraser: And fines.

Mr BROGDEN: And potentially fines, as the honourable member for Coffs Harbour said—in order to pay the piper. He is taking money off landowners, putting it in the fund, and sending that money off as a dividend to Treasury. Will any of the moneys from the fund to be established by the Minister be sent as dividends to Treasury? Where will the money go? The legislation does not clarify what fees can be charged. In fact, new section 24E (1) provides:

- (1) The Authority may charge, for the supply of any services under this Act or the regulations: ...
 - (b) if a fee is not so prescribed, such reasonable fee as it determines for the supply of the service.

Standing orders having been suspended, honourable members in this House are being forced to deal with the bill in less than five days so it can be rushed over to the upper House to be dealt with before the end of the financial year. The constituents of the honourable member for Southern Highlands and the honourable member for Burrinjuck will be thrilled about one particular clause in the legislation. I can imagine the mayors of Mulwaree and Goulburn holding a party and burning this legislation because the Opposition is being asked to give the Minister and his agency a blank cheque paid for by the landowners and the residents of the catchment. To this date the Government has still not finalised the regional environmental plan [REP]. Recently the honourable member for Burrinjuck and I met with representatives from Mulwaree Shire Council to talk about their enormous concerns about the REP.

Now, many months after the promise that there would be community consultation and after waiting for some finality, there is still no REP. That means that decisions about the future livelihoods of landowners in the Southern Highlands and the Southern Tablelands areas will be left on hold while the Minister takes time to consult with the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning and work out what will happen with the REP. It is not good enough that the Minister has now decided to slip through legislation that allows him to charge what he likes when he likes. The Opposition will not support this bill because we are being asked to have faith in the Minister and his Government and to take them on trust. That is too much to expect. Why is this legislation being rammed through at a minute to midnight? Has the authority conducted illegal activities?

I note also that the Minister said in his speech that the office of the Auditor-General has been advised of the bill and is aware of the proposed amendments. He said, "I am advised that no concerns have been raised." Has the Minister received a letter from the Auditor-General? Has the Minister tabled that letter or is he willing to table it? The Opposition also understands that the Minister is in receipt of advice from the Crown Solicitor. Once again that advice has not been offered to the Opposition in the tradition of this House at an informal briefing. It has not been tabled or quoted from extensively by the Minister. The Opposition is as interested as the Government in protecting Sydney's drinking water supply. Traditionally, the cost of protecting that water supply has been funded by Sydney Water and, before that, the Sydney Water Board.

The Minister now has his own agency which is separate from Sydney Water, and he is milking the landowners in the Southern Tablelands and the Southern Highlands of dollars and putting their future into doubt to fulfil his program. Why is Sydney Water not making a contribution? Why is Sydney Water, the big user of the catchment, not being levied? Why is Sydney Water not contributing to the safety of its own catchment supply from its enormous dividends? As I said earlier, during the past five years Sydney Water has paid \$1.1 billion in dividends and tax equivalent payments to the Government. The Minister's budget papers indicate that during the next five years Sydney Water will contribute another \$1 million. Unfortunately, in the true style of the Carr Government the Minister has not indicated how much of that will come from waste and from individual water agencies but, in general, we can expect that during the next five years Sydney Water will be milked by the Government of funds to go to Treasury and back to consolidated revenue.

Why not spend that money where it is needed—on the catchment? Why not levy Sydney Water rather than the landowners? Why not use this legislation to form a relationship with Sydney Water, which does the hard work, and use its funds to assist in catchment management? The provisions of this legislation are appalling. We have only hours left in this sitting before we adjourn until the ringing of one long bell to consider any amendments made in the upper House to the controversial workers compensation legislation. The Government has slipped this bill in at the last minute. This week has been fascinating, as my colleagues would agree. First of all, the Premier, the architect of overdevelopment in New South Wales, spoke about urban buildings of more than three storeys. Today he banned jet skis on the harbour. All week we have had speeches about dogs, cats, whales, penguins and now this legislation is being rushed through. Anything the Government can do to avoid the disaster it is facing with the workers compensation legislation will suffice.

The bill is yet another Government tactic to try to avoid dealing with the substantive issue before Parliament at the moment, that is, the Government's crisis over WorkCover. The Attorney General is using this tactic to waste the time of this House and force legislation through. It is not the usual practice of the Government to force legislation through like this. We are disappointed that the Government has chosen to do so. The shadow Minister, my colleague the honourable member for Southern Highlands, has indicated to the House that the Minister's office has refused to extend to her, on behalf of the Opposition, the normal courtesy of a briefing. Then, when officers did come forward, they were not able to answer important questions. The Minister may not be aware of the usual practice of this Chamber, because for the period that Labor was in Opposition he was not a member of Parliament. As I recall he was a casualty and was not here in those interregnum days of the Fahey and Greiner governments.

If the Minister expects to have a working relationship with the Opposition, we expect honesty from him. We expect to see the documents to which the Minister referred in his second reading speech. We expect understanding and we expect to see the advice from the Crown Solicitor. We expect to see the letter from the Auditor-General in which he indicated that there are no problems with the backdating of this legislation. The Opposition has enormous concerns about being asked to take on trust a request from the Attorney General to backdate the legislation some 2½ years, that is, back to a time when this Parliament was not sitting, to the time of the Fifty-first Parliament. We have enormous concerns about the ambiguity of this legislation, the Government's approach to it, and the determination of the Government to ram the bill through this House. Why can it not wait until September?

The Minister's colleague the Minister for Community Services has delayed for further consideration legislation on permanency in adoption procedures, because that is important legislation. This too is important legislation. It has obvious problems. Does the Sydney Catchment Authority have letters from landowners and others who have had financial relationships with the catchment authority? Has legal action commenced, or is legal action threatened? Why is this legislation being rushed through? Has the Sydney Catchment Authority been operating illegally? The Minister is not willing to tell us the answers to those questions. Therefore, there is a clear presumption on the part of the Opposition that the indecent haste and rush associated with this legislation indicate that the legislation must have enormous consequences, and that financial and legal consequences have forced the Minister to rush this legislation through, to roll over the concerns of the Opposition, and to take the bill before the upper House.

We hope that in the upper House the minor parties will join with the Opposition in an effort to interrogate the Government on this legislation to a much greater extent, to find out what has gone wrong, why the bill is being forced through at short notice, and why the Minister for the Environment is not willing to come clean on important matters. Perhaps the upper House will be able to extract documentation from the Minister. As my colleague indicated, we will be looking to refer this bill to a committee so that we can get more information about it. We are not willing to support the legislation because of the indecent haste of the Government in introducing bill and rush it through.

Ms HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [4.13 p.m.]: What a black day for the New South Wales Parliament! The arrogance and contempt of the Carr Labor Government have reached new lows. The shadow Minister has not even been afforded a proper briefing—a tactic that must have been planned for a long time, because legislation just does not happen overnight. For the shadow Minister to be informed that she cannot even see such important advice as the Crown Solicitor's advice, because it is marked "Cabinet in confidence" or for some such reason—though we are debating this legislation 24 hours after the shadow Minister was advised that the bill would be coming before the Parliament—just stinks of arrogance and contempt. The citizens of New South Wales, and the constituents of the electorate of Burrinjuck in particular, will have to wear this legislation.

The bill comes before the House two days before the end of the financial year. The second reading speech was delivered only yesterday by the Minister for the Environment. Even then, it was a quick, skulking speech. It lasted only a few minutes. It was as though this debate was not expected to come on, despite the fact that the bill may have been a long time in the planning. This was an opportunity to rush the bill through before the end of this sitting. The Minister has taken that opportunity. I want to know who has pushed him. I have a great deal of respect for the Minister. I just wonder what has gone on that this bill must be rushed through in this way. Is the Minister being asked to fundraise for Treasury? The Opposition will not support any legislation that is rushed through in this absurd manner, when honourable members have not even had time to study the bill sufficiently and have been refused access to critical advice, such as the Crown Solicitor's advice. We need to know what is in that advice. It is outrageous that the Government is being hush-hush in the face of these questions and critical comments.

I am a member of the Public Accounts Committee. That committee is committed to ensuring that the Government is a transparent government. There is nothing transparent about having only 24 hours notice of a vital piece of legislation. This is vital to my electorate and to the electorates of the honourable member for Southern Highlands, the honourable member for Monaro and the honourable member for Camden. We are now at the eleventh hour. It is at five minutes to midnight that the Government brings in this retrospective legislation. It goes back 2½ years. This is outrageous. The Government wants the bill to have effect before I became the member for Burrinjuck.

I cannot believe that the Minister for the Environment is serious about this legislation. He sits opposite in the chair. Does he really believe that he is doing the right thing by the citizens of New South Wales and our

constituencies? Why is the Government dragging money from the catchment authority? Is it just to raise more general revenue for Treasury? Is it because the Sydney Catchment Authority has in some way operated illegally? Is that why the Government is making this legislation retrospective? What is the Minister trying to hide? What is the Government trying to hide? I hope the Minister will answer all of those questions in his remarks in reply.

Why is the Minister acting with such indecent haste and panic as he rushes to get this bill through? It is not as if the people of Mulwaree, Goulburn, Gunning and Tallaganda have not been treated with enough contempt by things such as the regional environment plan in relation to the Sydney Catchment Authority. We have spent a long time arguing that what was coming through in the regional environment plan was being rushed, and that people were being penalised for being farmers. The guidelines were not clear. We did not know the exact nature of the intent behind each of those guidelines. It was only after incredibly intense pressure by constituents and Opposition members of Parliament that there has now been a slowing with respect to that regional environment plan.

I call on the Minister to do the same with this legislation. How can he expect Opposition members to support legislation that has not been sufficiently considered? It has been in the Chamber for only 24 hours and Opposition members have not been given essential advice. How will the Government explain to the constituents of New South Wales, but particularly those affected by the Sydney Catchment Authority, what it is doing? Why is the Government penalising constituents for being farmers? New South Wales is the most taxed State in Australia. Country people are sick of being taxed. I reiterate what was said by the honourable member for Pittwater on the issue of fees for services supplied by the authority. The bill provides that the authority "may charge, for the supply of any services under this Act or the regulations ... if a fee is not so prescribed, such reasonable fee as it determines for the supply of the service."

I hope the Minister will explain what is being referred to in that provision. Honourable members have been given insufficient time to properly study this legislation. We have not been provided with essential pieces of advice. This is a con job. It is a rush job by a Government that is trying to get things through on the run, on the hop. It is an absolute disgrace that the Government would allow this legislation to be debated in the Parliament this afternoon. It is five minutes to midnight. As I mentioned at the beginning of my speech, this is a black day for the New South Wales Parliament, and a black day for the Government. If the Government is serious about wanting to be considered transparent, it will not allow this legislation to go through in this manner.

Mr FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [4.20 p.m.]: I agree with the concerns expressed by the honourable member for Southern Highlands who is the shadow Minister for the Environment, the honourable member for Pittwater who is the shadow Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning, and the honourable member for Burrinjuck. Last night, when the Minister made his second reading speech, I noted in the overview of the bill the following statement:

The amendments are to be taken to have commenced on 8 January 1999, being the date on which the Sydney Catchment Authority was constituted under section 6 of the principal Act.

I have been a member of Parliament for almost 11 years and this is the first time that I have witnessed a retrospective bill being introduced at midnight and being rammed through the House at the end of the sitting. The overview of the bill also states:

The object of this Bill is...

- (a) to provide for the establishment and operation of a Sydney Catchment Management Fund.

A perusal of the provisions in this legislation and the Minister's second reading speech establishes that this bill raises more questions than it answers. The Minister said in his second reading speech that the Sydney Catchment Management Fund would protect and enhance the quality of Sydney's drinking water. All honourable members want that. The Minister also said that the fund would undertake research and educational programs. Opposition members have no problem with that, but who is to pay for it? The honourable member for Burrinjuck referred in her contribution to fees for services and she said that the provision she referred to would apply to any fees received by the authority for services to suppliers. Are those fees for education services? Do any provisions in the bill refer to erosion? The Minister said in his second reading speech:

The authority ... is better targeting contamination risks.

The authority is initiating on-the-ground action in the catchments, targeting soil erosion, on-site septic systems, weed infestations, pests, stormwater sewage treatment plants and industry waste.

Will the Government impose fines for any breach of this legislation, or will it provide individuals with advice? Will members of the department be responsible for providing that advice? The Sydney Catchment Management Fund will have broad and wide-ranging objectives, but where is the accountability? Opposition members have not been provided with any assurances in relation to these issues and they lack the confidence to support the bill. I draw the attention of the Minister to the provisions in the Protection of the Environment Operations Act and the Protection of the Environment Administration Act. The Minister would be aware that under that legislation fines have increased horrifically.

The Minister said in his second reading speech that industries would be targeted if they breached the legislation. Farming is an industry. The legislation provides that anyone may be convicted of polluting a waterway if he or she places solids, liquids or gases into a waterway or if those elements are washed, blown or percolate into a waterway. That could apply in relation to septic systems and it could impact on industry. Massive fines may be imposed on farmers and on industry even if they unknowingly cause damage to the catchment area. I do not trust the people who have been given authority by the Government. There has been a suggestion that that authority should be delegated to local government inspectors. We all know that at times government inspectors can be fairly pedantic, especially in relation to broad-ranging definitions such as the those contained in the Protection of the Environment Operations Act and the Protection of the Environment Administration Act. Government inspectors could impose such heavy fines on land-holders that they would be bankrupted or driven off their properties. New section 24B (f) of the bill states in part:

The following amounts are to be paid into the Fund:

...

(f) any penalty, fine or forfeiture recovered in proceedings for an offence against this or any other Act ...

I have always been extremely concerned about the Act, which was introduced by Tim Moore, Minister for the Environment in a former Coalition government. This bill has the potential to bankrupt many industries and destroy many communities. This legislation, which was introduced late last night, does nothing to inform us about what the Government will do with the money in the fund, apart from undertaking research and educational programs and enhancing the quality of Sydney's drinking water. As I said earlier, the Opposition supports those initiatives. The Minister also said in his second reading speech:

The authority, together with Sydney Water, is providing a multi-barrier approach to the protection of the drinking water ...

That is not education. To me that reeks of an impost on business, farmers, and all those in the catchment who are threatened by the provisions in this legislation. The Minister must inform honourable members how that money is to be utilised by the Sydney Catchment Management Fund. How will the fines that are imposed as a result of this legislation be collected? Will that money be used for educational purposes? Will council inspectors and other members of the Environment Protection Authority impose those fines? That is an issue about which I am concerned. I refer to another issue of concern that has been raised by other Opposition speakers in debate. The Minister said in his second reading speech:

The office of the Auditor-General has been advised and is aware of the proposed amendments. I am advised that no concerns have been raised.

Why was it necessary for the Minister to provide advice to the Auditor-General? Why was there a need to do that in the first place? The Minister said, "I have been advised that no concerns have been raised." The Minister or his department must have had some concerns, or that matter would not have been drawn to the attention of the Auditor-General. There are concerns about, and problems in relation to, this legislation. One of those problems is the retrospective nature of this bill. I echo the sentiments expressed by my colleagues and implore the Minister to withdraw this legislation and to discuss these issues with Opposition members. If the Minister has nothing to hide he will have no difficulty in showing us all of the relevant correspondence.

Why did the Government find it necessary to push through this legislation at the end of the session? Why could the Government not wait until September to introduce this legislation? After all, it has been around since February. I want the Minister to give us answers to the important questions that I have raised, questions about which councils, land-holders, businesses and farmers in that catchment area require answers from the Minister. The Minister has an obligation to them, to this Parliament and to the people of New South Wales to provide those answers. The Minister should give this bill some transparency.

Mr DEBUS (Blue Mountains—Attorney General, Minister for the Environment, Minister for Emergency Services, and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Arts) [4.27 p.m.], in reply: As I have previously

indicated, and notwithstanding her remarks to the contrary, the honourable member for Southern Highlands has been briefed by members of my staff. The Crown Solicitor has advised that the Sydney Water Catchment Management Act must be clarified simply to ensure that that authority is unambiguously brought within the operation of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983 No. 21. It was always the intention of those who drafted the bill, and it has been the assumption of those who have worked with it ever since, that the authority was within the operation of that Act. Once we received an opinion to the contrary, it obviously became urgent that we make whatever clarification was necessary to restore or remove any ambiguity. In other words, the passage of this bill, in a significant sense, will ensure that nothing happens. The passage of this bill will ensure that the way in which the Sydney Catchment Authority behaves does not change at all.

This is a machinery bill. It will do nothing to alter the functions of the Sydney Catchment Authority [SCA] or to alter the purposes for which the Sydney Catchment Authority currently spends money or collects it. There are analogous provisions in sections 138 and 139 of the National Parks and Wildlife Act which established something called the National Parks and Wildlife Fund. The fund that is proposed in this bill will simply codify the purposes for which the Sydney Catchment Authority may spend money. Those purposes are no different from those currently operating. The fund will not expand or diminish anything at all. What we need to be sure of is that the financial activities of the authority remain under section 21 of the Public Finance and Audit Act.

To protect the catchment areas the Sydney Catchment Authority provides grants and subsidies to community organisations, to councils and to other bodies. Honourable members opposite would be aware of that. For example, the Government recently announced that the Sydney Catchment Authority will provide \$27 million to local catchment councils to help them upgrade sewage treatment facilities. The first of those grants will be to Goulburn council for \$700,000. Obviously other grants are in the pipeline. It is in that context that I received advice from the Crown Solicitor that there needed to be some clarification of the financial power of the authority. It was in that context that I sought the advice of the Crown Solicitor, and the answer from the Crown Solicitor was that the Government should amend the Sydney Water Catchment Management Act in the way it is doing.

Notwithstanding the cries of distress from members opposite, I point out that it has never been ordinary practice to release the Crown Solicitor's advice to the Government. It is not proposed to do so in this instance. It is never the case that the Crown Solicitor's advice is released in circumstances like this. It does not matter whether people have 24 hours notice or 24 months notice, the advice is not normally released. However, as I have said, the advice points to the need to amend the Act to clarify these financial powers.

Parliament's intention in 1998 when the legislation was first enacted was very clear. The authority should take the lead in protecting Sydney's drinking water catchment. It has done so. It has performed very well. Again contrary to some of the rhetoric that has been expressed by those opposite in the past few minutes, relations and levels of confidence in relations between the Sydney Catchment Authority and local government areas in the Southern Highlands are increasing, and increasing rapidly. Within the past few days I received a letter from the Mulwaree Shire Council expressing exactly that sentiment. The SCA needs to spend money to protect our catchment areas. If the Crown Solicitor is of the opinion that an amendment is necessary to clarify the powers, obviously the Government will make such an amendment.

The amendments we are introducing need to be deemed to have commenced on the same day that the Sydney Catchment Authority was created. Otherwise, commonsense tells us that clarification will not be effective until today. Obviously, if what we are doing is introducing an amendment that has the purpose of ensuring that we are going to go on as we always have with respect to the financial powers of the Sydney Catchment Authority, we have to make that amendment relevant at the time the Act commenced. That is the only way to assure certainty and achieve the necessary clarification.

I have indicated that it is not at all the normal practice to hand over Crown Solicitor's advice in circumstances like this, but in a concession to members opposite I indicate that before the bill is debated in another place I will provide material that I hope will go some way to satisfying any real concerns they may have. I am not speaking so much of concerns that are being expressed for merely rhetorical purposes, but I will attempt by the provision of appropriate material to satisfy what I regard as sensible further questions on the matter. It hardly takes a genius, however, to work out that if I have a choice between introducing this legislation, which will clarify the everyday, working financial powers of the Sydney Catchment Authority now, and leaving it until next September, and I have advice of the sort I am talking about, I will introduce it now. In so far as there is any ambiguity, I want it overcome. In the meantime, I give this absolute guarantee—

Ms Hodgkinson: What is so secret about it?

Mr DEBUS: There is nothing secret about it. I give this guarantee: that nothing contained in this bill will change the operations of the Sydney Catchment Authority in any way at all. I commend the legislation to the House.

Question—That this bill be now read a second time—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 50

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

Noes, 34

Mr Armstrong	Mr Maguire	Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Brogden	Mr McGrane	Mr Stoner
Mrs Chikarovski	Mr Merton	Mr Tink
Mr Collins	Mr O'Doherty	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	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Rozzoli	Mr Fraser
Mr Humpherson	Ms Seaton	Mr R. H. L. Smith
Mr Kerr	Mrs Skinner	

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time and passed through remaining stages.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Precedence of Business: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr Whelan agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit the consideration forthwith of General Business Notice of Motion (General Notice) No. 445 [NAIDOC Week and Aboriginal Reconciliation].

ABORIGINAL RECONCILIATION

Mr MARKHAM (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.45 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) recognises NAIDOC Week 2001 from 8 – 15 July as an event of national importance to all Australians;
- (2) notes the significance of National Aborigines Day on 13 July 2001;
- (3) acknowledges there is “unfinished business” on a national level from the formal reconciliation process; and
- (4) reaffirms its bipartisan commitment to Aboriginal reconciliation.

NAIDOC Week is a celebration by Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders of their survival. It is also recognition of the ongoing fight for justice and equity for their peoples. National Aboriginal and Islander Week is an event of national importance for all Australians. It is a time to celebrate the heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose cultures extend back as far as 50,000 years and are amongst the most ancient on our planet. The fact that these cultures continue to exist in 2001 is reason enough for celebration.

NAIDOC Week is a time to celebrate the unique features that indigenous cultures contribute to our national identity. Within the general Australian community there is a growing awareness of what it means to be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australian, especially amongst young Australians who are keen to explore the combined history of the peoples who form our nation. However, few Australians would be aware of the long fight and struggle that goes back as far as the 1920s to celebrate National Aboriginal and Islander Week and National Aborigines Day. NAIDOC Week is the outcome of a long history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander efforts to bring issues of concern to the attention of governments and the general public.

In 1924 the Australian Aboriginal Progress Association [AAPA] was formed in Sydney under the leadership of Fred Maynard. The AAPA tried to raise the awareness of the struggle of Aboriginal people but was forced to abandon its work in 1927 due to constant harassment by police. In 1932 William Cooper from Cummeragunga formed the Australian Aborigines League in Melbourne. In protest at conditions under which Aboriginal people were forced to live, Cooper drafted a petition to King George V. The Commonwealth Government informed him that this would be an unconstitutional act. In February 1935 Cooper called for a deputation to the Federal Minister for the Interior asking for representations of Aboriginal people in Parliament, a unified national Department of Native Affairs and State advisory councils on Aboriginal affairs. Nothing came of this move.

In October 1937 Cooper presented the royal petition to the Commonwealth asking that it be delivered to the King. The Government was slow to react. On 13 November Cooper called a meeting of Aboriginal people suggesting that they hold a day of mourning on the next Australia Day to publicise their cause and stir the consciousness of non-Aboriginal Australia. William Ferguson also launched the Aboriginal Progressive Association [APA] in 1937. Together, William Cooper and William Ferguson planned the first day of mourning. In order to gain public support for the day of mourning, William Ferguson and the President of the Aborigines Progressive Association, J. T. Patten, wrote a pamphlet entitled “Aborigines Claim Citizens Rights”. The pamphlet condemned the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Act 1901-1936 and the Aborigines Protection Board, and called for new policies on Aboriginal affairs, with full citizenship status for Aboriginal people and rights to land.

The following Australia Day, 26 January 1938, the Australian Aboriginal League and the Aborigines Progressive Association combined to hold a day of mourning. The day marked the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the First Fleet landing at Sydney Cove. William Cooper then wrote to the National Missionary Council of Australia [NMCA] on 31 January 1939 seeking the council's assistance in promoting a Day of Mourning. In January 1940 the Sunday preceding the Australia Day holiday became the first Day of Mourning. In 1955 the NMCA suggested that Aborigines Day should become a national day, with the aim of changing negative attitudes towards Aboriginal people and to include not only the churches but also the Commonwealth and State Governments and other bodies. Aborigines Day was changed to the first Sunday in July.

In 1957 the National Aborigines Day Observance Committee [NAIDOC], with the support and co-operation of the Federal and State Governments, the churches and major Aboriginal organisations, was formed. In 1957 an Aboriginal pastor, Sir Douglas Nicholls, persuaded the NMCA to nominate the second Sunday in July to be a day of remembrance of Aboriginal people and heritage. In 1991 NADOC became known as

NAIDOC to include Torres Strait Islanders. The Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders [FCAATSI] decided in February 1972 that National Aborigines Day on 14 July 1972 would be the occasion for a massive national protest against the needless suffering of Australia's original peoples. Aboriginal people and other concerned people were asked to take part in marches right throughout the country to show the Federal Government that a substantial number of people care about the needs of Aboriginal people.

In 1984 the national committee of NAIDOC called for the Federal Government to declare National Aborigines Day a national public holiday. Many others, including ATSIC, have since asked that the Government adopt this suggestion so that all Australians would be able to celebrate and recognise the indigenous peoples and cultures that make Australia unique. Many Torres Strait Islanders commemorate the Coming of the Light Festival during the week before NAIDOC on 1 July. This day marks the day when the London Missionary Society first arrived in the Torres Strait. The missionaries landed at Erub Island on 1 July 1871. Religious and cultural ceremonies in the Torres Strait and on mainland Australia are held on 1 July each year. Currently NAIDOC celebrations continue to give Australia's indigenous people the opportunity to display the richness of their culture and heritage to the rest of the Australian community.

Australia's indigenous arts, crafts and lifestyles, for which there is a growing international appreciation, are continuing to develop a distinct personality for our nation, both as a cultural producer and as a desirable destination. All Australians are invited to join in the NAIDOC celebrations from 8 July until 15 July. During that week, people should put aside their differences and demonstrate to the rest of the world the capacity of this great nation to offer new hope, a new sense of optimism and a new identity. There is a growing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are playing a significant role in developing Australia's future. They come from a wide diversity of fields. The prowess of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on sporting arenas is renowned throughout Australia.

Currently many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are using music, art, culture, education, employment and politics as vehicles to express pride in their culture. All indigenous people are showcasing their strong identity and they are proud of it. However, indigenous people do not all have to be champions: They do not all have to be prominent. Many indigenous people are leaders within their communities and their leadership is crucial for the long-term stability of their community and culture. While they may not receive the high-profile status or the recognition they deserve, they are the silent achievers within their communities. It is encouraging that the wider Australian community is joining with indigenous people to celebrate NAIDOC week. After all, we all have a lot to celebrate.

NAIDOC is now used widely to refer to all the events and celebrations that go on during National Aboriginal and Islander Week. Each year NAIDOC Week has a theme. In the past, these schemes have represented issues that are important to indigenous people. This year there has been a great deal of discussion about the unfinished business in Aboriginal affairs at a national level, namely, customary law, an apology to the stolen generations, and a treaty between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-indigenous Australians. The theme for NAIDOC 2001 is "Treaty—Let's Get It Right". This is a very important time for all Australians. Decisions will be made which will shape the future of our country for years to come. Australia must try to make the right decisions. It is the time to right the wrongs of the past.

Australia is a very different country today from what it was when the Australian Constitution was drawn up. At the 1967 referendum, more than 90 per cent of voters supported the removal of negative references from our national Constitution. Despite the positive changes, there is still some unfinished business. Indigenous Australians believe that the Australian Constitution should now refer to them as citizens and should therefore define a citizen and our rights and responsibilities. Indigenous Australians believe their status, as the indigenous people of Australia, should be recognised in some form of agreement. This agreement should also indicate a respect for the land and indigenous cultural heritage and a commitment to justice and equity for all. Indigenous Australians know that progress takes time, sustained effort and the support of the Australian people.

The scene for this year's NAIDOC is about putting into practice some of the ideals of reconciliation. It challenges all Australians to acknowledge a very important aspect of our shared contemporary culture. It is also another opportunity to recommit ourselves to an Australia which respects a common set of laws to which all are accountable and from which all are entitled to an equal dispensation of justice. I encourage all honourable members to join in their local NAIDOC activities and to share in celebrations which demonstrate the ideal of an inclusive, but diverse, nation. I can assure the House that many events will take place during NAIDOC Week right throughout New South Wales. I encourage each and every honourable member to seek information and find out what is planned for NAIDOC Week in each honourable member's electorate and to attend as many functions as possible.

Mr HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [4.55 p.m.]: The Opposition supports the motion that has been moved by the honourable member for Wollongong. It is always timely for Australians to reflect upon their intrinsic national identity, particularly the significant role and input that Australian Aborigines contributed to the formation of our national identity. Therefore, the recognition of the National Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders Day Observance Committee [NAIDOC] commemoration of NAIDOC Week from 8 July to 15 July is an event that is worthy of acknowledgement by this House. The Opposition notes and supports the significance of National Aborigines Day and acknowledges the unfinished business which has been referred to in the motion. The Opposition reaffirms its absolute commitment to Aboriginal reconciliation. On a number of occasions this Parliament has made its position on Aboriginal reconciliation clear.

The motion refers to unfinished business at a national level, and for the reason that honourable members of this House try to find our common ground rather than our differences, the Opposition will not be moving an amendment. However it must be said that, in the view of the Opposition, unfinished business is not something that is found only at a national level. Unfinished business can be found at a national and State level and the Opposition supports all the comments in relation to unfinished business and the importance of the Aboriginal reconciliation made in this House by the honourable member for Wollongong. But it is opportune, during the few minutes available to me during this debate, to examine an issue which is a topic of discussion in the public arena, namely, domestic violence in indigenous communities.

On behalf of the Coalition—and, I would think, on behalf of the Labor Party and the Government—I suggest it is time for governments of all political persuasions to focus on the issue of domestic violence in Aboriginal communities. As a former shadow Minister for Corrections, I visited many gaols throughout New South Wales. In conversations I had with Aboriginal inmates, I discovered that many of them had been incarcerated as a result of matters related to domestic violence. Time and time again I found that alcohol and drugs, but particularly alcohol, were contributing factors in domestic violence. There is an enormous rate of incarceration of indigenous people in Australia. The latest Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] figures showed that on 1 March 2001 there were 4,070 indigenous prisoners in Australia which represents 19 per cent of the Australian prisoner population.

I draw to the attention of the honourable member for Wollongong that, sadly, the highest number of indigenous prisoners, 1,169, was actually recorded right here in New South Wales. I am sure that the honourable member is aware of those statistics but I respectfully suggest that he should take up this matter in a Labor Party forum. While I know that it is important to discuss Aboriginal reconciliation and the furtherance of a better relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians, it is also appropriate to reflect upon the sad and desperate figures to which I have referred.

As I have said, domestic violence is a major problem. Some of the comments that have been made in another parliament in recent days are most unfortunate. Any person who names individuals and accuses them of criminal offences, some of which go back many years and have quite serious import, should think very carefully before making such assertions and allegations. With regard to the deputy-chairman of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, comments about what occurred more than 30 years ago, even if it was unacceptable behaviour, does not really contribute to the debate today. Today, many Aboriginal people, particularly women and children in abusive relationships, find that they are not able to access the support they need. An interesting article written by Anne Summers in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 25 June stated:

This is not just an Aboriginal problem; this is an Australian problem. The women and children who are being bashed, raped and killed are Australians, and just as deaths in custody were perceived to be a national blight, so must violence against indigenous women and children.

Anne Summers argues for a national response, and I do not disagree with her on that aspect. Each State has an obligation to ensure that we are part of providing a mechanism for indigenous Australians, in particular, to create and formulate their own solutions. Coincidentally, in November last year I sought the assistance of one of the interns provided to various members of this place in preparing a review of domestic violence in Aboriginal communities in New South Wales. An excellent report was prepared for me by Emily Johnson from the University of New South Wales. It notes the difficulties and problems experienced in New South Wales with regard to domestic violence. I suppose what emerged from that report was nothing particularly new. It was the sort of review that one might expect of the literature if it were written competently, as it was by Emily Johnson. In her report Emily Johnson states:

There is a lack of research in NSW about the extent of domestic violence. Most reports on this issue represent only a small area.

In other words, we do not know enough about domestic violence in order to address the problems that obviously exist. Emily Johnson further states in her report:

The usual problems of domestic violence for women are exacerbated in Aboriginal communities for many reasons, including:

- Lack of cultural awareness on the part of existing mainstream service providers. The police were particularly noted but other organisations such as the ALS and health and counselling services were also implicated.
- Lack of specialist services for women and children of domestic violence.
- Perpetuation of racist myths and stereotypes by some white service providers.
- Lack of knowledge of services available—

particularly for Aboriginal people—

- Cultural isolation, a lack of family networks and lack of anonymity in small communities.

During NAIDOC Week, from 8 to 15 July, we should celebrate the marvellous contribution that Aboriginal Australians make to our national identity. But we also need to reflect upon the things that we, as non-indigenous Australians, need to be doing to help indigenous Australians have the sort of life that they are entitled to have.

The policies to be developed at a State Government level, regardless of whatever political party is in power, should include the requirement that the Aboriginal Legal Service develop policies that do not exclude domestic violence victims from representation if an offender is Aboriginal. Currently, apparently, the Aboriginal Legal Service has a policy that excludes domestic violence victims from representation if the offender is Aboriginal. That is obviously extremely counterproductive and very unfair to Aboriginal women and children, and some excellent efforts have been made to address the issue. I cite the Many Rivers Violence Prevention Unit at Kempsey. Jackie Curran, the lawyer at that centre, was kind enough to speak to Emily Johnson about the way the unit works. In her report Emily Johnson states:

At the moment, Many Rivers VPU is hoping to set up a counselling service within their offices because this is one vital facility which the community lacks. As it stands, Many Rivers is now only equipped to provide legal advice and in those circumstances, the problems that the victims face go well beyond legal ones.

In other words, we need to have a far more comprehensive approach, and we need to listen to people such as those who work within units like the Many Rivers Violence Prevention Unit, so that we can create policies that will make us, as non-indigenous Australians and as indigenous Australians, proud to be able to say we are doing everything humanely possible to ensure that indigenous Australians are given a fair go. We will not do that until we address domestic violence and reduce the rate of incarceration. I encourage both the Government and the Opposition to continue their efforts to develop appropriate policies, but with a greater sense of urgency than has occurred in the past, and to celebrate during NAIDOC Week the future directions we will take in that regard.

Mr THOMPSON (Rockdale) [5.05 p.m.]: The honourable member for Wakehurst referred at some length to domestic violence in Aboriginal communities, and I share his concerns with regard to that issue. I am disappointed—and this is not a criticism of the honourable member—with the rather skewed position that the media has taken on this issue in recent times. Having read much of the press and the comments of politicians in other places, one would swear that this is an issue that is almost isolated to Aboriginal communities. In fact, it is not. It is not insulated, isolated or limited to Aboriginal communities. It is a big problem throughout the broader Australian community, both indigenous and non-indigenous.

Put simply, NAIDOC Week is a celebration by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of their survival. It has evolved through a long history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander efforts to bring issues of concern to the attention of governments and the general public. Each year NAIDOC Week has a theme, highlighting issues of particular importance to indigenous people. Last year the theme was "Building Pride in Our Communities"; in 1998 the theme was "Bringing them Home"; and in 1988 the theme was "Recognise and Share the Survival of the Oldest Culture in the World". The theme for NAIDOC Week 2001 is "Treaty—Let's Get It Right".

The formal decade of reconciliation, which was set in place by the unanimous vote of the Federal Parliament in 1991, came to a close last year. The year 2000 was a remarkable year in the long journey towards reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, more than one million of whom participated in people's walks all over the country to show their broad support for reconciliation and for action to make it happen.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in its final report kept its recommendations to a minimum—just six in all. The final two recommendations are that each government and parliament recognise that, "this land and waters were settled as colonies without treaty or consent" and that they negotiate a process to achieve "agreements or treaties" protecting indigenous rights. Further, the Commonwealth Parliament should enact legislation drafted by the council "to put in place a process which will unite Australians by way of an agreement, or treaty, through which the unresolved issues of reconciliation can be resolved". In presenting the final report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, the council's chair, Evelyn Scott, said that those two recommendations would be subject to much debate. She said at the time:

These address the need for some formal settlement of the issues created by our shared history, whereby Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were dispossessed of their land without either treaty or consent.

She continued:

All I want to say is that we must have a conversation about these issues. It will take time and much public education and discussion.

So the theme for NAIDOC Week 2001 "Treaty—Let's Get it Right" should be seen as a step towards encouraging and extending public discussion and education about the concept of a treaty or formal agreement. There has been some public discussion of this in the past, but there should be, and I believe there will be, much more in the future. The discussion and debate will not be limited to parliaments or officials but will be an issue in the broader Australian community. Just as the reconciliation movement was ultimately claimed by the people, as demonstrated by the walks last year, this necessary process of considering a treaty will also become a people's movement as the general public comes to better understand what it is all about.

There is a wealth of information available to people who are interested in finding out more, not only about reconciliation and treaties, but about indigenous issues generally. I encourage everyone to check out the web sites of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the ABC, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, the United Nations and the various Australian universities. There is virtually no end to the depth and range of information on these important issues. As people come to a better understanding of what is meant by a treaty, I believe they will see the merit and value in going down that path. I applaud the selection of "Treaty—Let's Get it Right" as the theme for NAIDOC Week 2001, and trust that it opens up a discussion on a treaty and other options to protect Aboriginal rights into the future.

Mr STONER (Oxley) [5.10 p.m.]: My electorate has one of the largest Aboriginal communities in the State—in particular at Kempsey, but also at Bellbrook, Crescent Head, Bowraville, Nambucca Heads—and the small community of the Bindi tribe at Wauchope. Certainly the motion of the honourable member for Wollongong must be supported by both sides of the House. During NAIDOC Week all of Australia must recognise the intolerably high rates of unemployment, poverty, health and housing problems besetting Aboriginal people. Associated with that poverty and general hopelessness amongst many Aboriginal communities are drug and alcohol problems. The recent events mentioned by the honourable member for Wakehurst have highlighted unacceptably high domestic violence and sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities.

The honourable member for Wakehurst mentioned the Many River Domestic Violence Prevention Unit. Jackie Curran, who works at that unit in Kempsey, is doing a fantastic job in proactively and effectively dealing with domestic violence, which is unacceptably high in Kempsey and the many other Aboriginal communities I have mentioned. It is appropriate on National Aboriginal and Islander Day for us to embrace the Aboriginal people not just as Australians but as the original Australians. It is also time to acknowledge the wrongs committed against indigenous people by past generations and to articulate a rejection of the repugnant sentiments that accompanied those events.

In my opinion reconciliation is a two-way process that does not involve just saying "Sorry"; it also involves the wronged parties saying "I forgive you" and both parties then going forward. In fact, in my view forgiveness is the key to Aboriginal people moving on and escaping the trap of unemployment and poverty. When Jesus' disciples asked him should they forgive those who wronged them seven times, he replied "No, 70 times seven." I am pleased to see positive examples of Aboriginal people making that step and participating constructively in our contemporary Australian society. One excellent example is the Booroongen Djugun aged care facility at Greenhills.

Mr Markham: Fantastic!

Mr STONER: It certainly is. That is where young Aboriginal people receive training, qualifications and jobs. It is interesting to note that that facility provides aged care to all indigenous and non-indigenous

Australians. I must acknowledge the groundbreaking work of the Booroongen Djugun Aboriginal Corporation management team of Gerry Morris and Val March—another excellent example in the electorate of my colleague the honourable member for Lismore. The honourable member for Lismore recently presented certificates of achievement to five Aboriginal apprentices who had completed four-year apprenticeships in carpentry and bricklaying. They have been involved in building houses and a health centre for the Mulli Mulli community near Woodenbong. Those examples illustrate real reconciliation in practice. The Coalition supports the motion moved by the honourable member for Wollongong, and it is timely that it is being debated on the last sitting day of this session.

Mr MILLS (Wallsend) [5.15 p.m.]: It is a pleasure once again to support a motion moved by the Parliamentary Secretary assisting the Deputy Premier on Aboriginal Affairs. The motion is in these terms:

That this House:

- (1) recognises NAIDOC Week 2001 from 8 – 15 July as an event of national importance to all Australians;
- (2) notes the significance of National Aborigines Day on 13 July 2001;
- (3) acknowledges there is “unfinished business” on a national level from the formal reconciliation process; and
- (4) reaffirms its bipartisan commitment to Aboriginal reconciliation.

I welcome every opportunity that any member of Parliament or any public figure in Australia has these days to speak about reconciliation and to indicate our support for getting it right as we go forward on the relations between our indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

The theme for this year's NAIDOC Week is "Treaty—Let's Get it Right". A few weeks ago I was pleased to receive an invitation from Ray Kelly, Chief Executive Officer of Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Co-op Ltd, in relation to National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Week Awabakal Treaty Walk. The honourable member for Newcastle and I have been invited to participate in the NAIDOC Week treaty walk to be held in Newcastle on Monday 9 July. We will speak at a gathering at Christ Church Cathedral and then go on the treaty walk. That will be an opportunity for Aboriginal people and the Hunter community to get together and indicate their support for a treaty.

Just as many people from the Hunter came to Sydney and participated in the reconciliation walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge last year, I hope that people—particularly those who are not at work or on school holidays—will support Aboriginal reconciliation and come on the treaty walk in the Hunter valley. This year the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission [ATSIC] delivered a challenge to the people of Australia to build a national treaty between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, which I welcome and support. I will be indicating my support when I speak briefly at the function in the Hunter on 9 July.

Today is the final full day in office of the Governor-General, Sir William Deane. It was a surprise to many people when he was chosen as Governor-General, but what a wonderful man he is! He has been a great comfort to the disadvantaged people of Australia. I know that on the top of his list is his concern for Aboriginal people and helping to find a way forward for them. He was a great healing vice-regal representative in this country. I know that the Aboriginal people have a great affection for Sir William Deane. I pay tribute to his work and congratulate him on a great term of office. I wish him well for the future and I wish his causes well, because I know he will keep working for them. His last official function in the Hunter region was a get-together with Ray Kelly of Awabakal to Plant a Tree for Reconciliation in the bush behind Yallawah Place, the Aboriginal accommodation unit, at John Hunter Hospital. Farewell to William Deane. I thank him for his work over the past five years in promoting the cause of reconciliation .

Last night the honourable member for Newcastle referred to a report called "Let's Get on with It: Report of The Hunter People's Inquiry into a Treaty". That report was published at the beginning of this month, and a copy of it was presented to me. This was a report on a forum held late last year chaired by Bill Jonas, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner. Bill Jonas, when talking at that forum, said a number of important things. In conclusion I want to quote briefly from what he said:

What we've had overall is for those two hundred years and continuing today a great power imbalance in this country, whereby Aboriginal people by any socioeconomic measuring stick, and by any political measuring stick are the most powerless and the most disadvantaged in this country ... if there is a measure of how profound and how enduring and how deep the disadvantage is, it is that statistic which says Aboriginal people die twenty years younger than white people ...

Now, over many years, in an attempt to do something about redressing that imbalance and stopping that disadvantage from continuing there have been calls for something like a treaty.

That is the theme of NAIDOC Week. I urge honourable members to support the week.

Mr MARKHAM (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.20 p.m.], in reply: I thank all honourable members who participated in this debate in recognition of NAIDOC Week. It is good to have bipartisan support because the only way forward for this Parliament is with bipartisanship, regardless of who is in government, because governments will come and go. It is good to know that there are honourable members of the Coalition who have a real commitment to Aboriginal affairs and the improvement of the lot of the Aboriginal people of this State.

On 13 and 14 June I was in Walgett to attend a forum organised by the Murdi-Paaki region of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission [ATSIC]. The forum came about following a survey of the social disadvantage of Aboriginal people living in Brewarrina, Bourke and Walgett. The report on that survey, which was launched at the seminar, was prepared by the Australian National University centre of Aboriginal economic policy research. The report spells out that indigenous Australians in that part of New South Wales face all of the worst tests of being disadvantaged, whether the disadvantage is life expectancy, imprisonment rates, domestic violence, lack of work, young people leaving school at a far younger age than the general community, health problems or housing problems. It dealt with the complete range of issues.

The conference was to do with the empowerment of the Aboriginal people, and I was proud to be part of it because its workshops identified issues affecting that very community and discussed possible solutions to those issues. A number of bureaucrats attended the conference, along with members of the New South Wales and Federal governments, to listen to what Aboriginal people had to say and to listen to what the Aboriginal people see as solutions to the issues they raised. As I have said in this House many times before, if we want to get it right we must listen to what Aboriginal people are saying about their communities, and then act with them to make sure that all possible effort is made to put measures in place to address the issues.

Next week, from 8 to 15 July, is NAIDOC Week, an important week, and one in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will highlight many, many issues to the general community of Australia. We should listen and act on what is said. Already, proactive measures have been taken in some areas regarding a treaty. I refer, for instance, to the Bega Land Council, which recently announced a compact between the three Aboriginal communities of Wallaga Lake, Merrimans Land Council and Eden Land Council. That compact, of some six or seven pages, spells out what the council should be doing to meet the concerns of the Aboriginal community, and what the Aboriginal people in those communities should be doing as part of the broader community.

Some people are concerned about the word "treaty". I have no problem with the word "treaty", or "compact" or whatever the term may be. If it furthers the cause of indigenous Australians to achieve equality with the rest of us, so be it. NAIDOC Week will highlight that very fact with its theme of unfinished business, "Treaty—Let's Get it Right". ATSIC has been working strenuously to put out a discussion paper so that people will know what some of the questions are, as well as the answers to some of those questions. I know that Rod Towney, chairperson of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council, launched a program on behalf of the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council regarding a treaty.

Aboriginal communities want to know what the views are on a treaty. NAIDOC Week's theme of unfinished business, "Treaty—Let's Get it Right", is very timely in that those two leading organisations in Aboriginal society in this State and country are leading the campaign in that way. I think each and every one of us will be asked in the near future to make an assessment of what we believe should happen to achieve a better understanding and recognition of Aboriginal people and their rights in this country. Whatever form it takes, I believe we should be able to do that on a bipartisan basis. I have no doubt that we could do that here in New South Wales. Whether it can happen elsewhere may be a different story. It is happening in local government, and it should be happening in other organisations. Let us get it right, get the unfinished business finished, and let us make sure that the Aboriginal people get all the assistance we can give them to meet the projects that they identify as worthy of their communities. [*Time expired.*]

Motion agreed to.

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS**Financial Year 2001-02****Debate resumed from an earlier hour.**

Mr TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [5.26 p.m.]: The Northern Tablelands welcomes its fair share of the \$5.5 billion being spent on upgrading schools, hospitals, roads and other public facilities announced in this year's State budget. I said publicly it is a solid budget. I called it a solid budget, and I certainly welcomed the increased allocations for education generally and for other key areas. I said also that it is disappointing for rural regions looking for taxation concessions and other incentives to enable them to grow and relocate businesses and create jobs in local regional communities.

Although it is good that payroll tax is to be reduced to 6 per cent, I believe it should have been abolished altogether in rural regions. The State Government has missed an opportunity to do this. We must have positive discrimination in order to arrest the population drift occurring from particularly inland centres in regional New South Wales, and Australia generally for that matter. To that extent I think the Federal Government also missed an opportunity in the debate on zonal taxation. I acknowledge the work of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, which has done an enormous amount in this regard. Though the Federal Government has indicated that it is looking at zonal taxation, that Government is yet to actively consider its implementation. That is absolutely necessary to create positive discrimination in order to arrest the decline in inland and regional Australia.

The taxation incentives that the State Government has put in place across New South Wales have been welcomed, but there must be opportunities to consider a differential rate, that is, positive discrimination in favour of country areas in respect of payroll tax and other State responsibilities that could send the message of unashamedly creating an incentive to locate or grow opportunities in regional areas. That is an opportunity missed by this State budget. I am not confident that the Treasurer sees the need in this regard, given his response to the report today of the Public Accounts Committee. We still have some work to do to bring the Treasurer and other Ministers to understand that the population drift from those regional centres is not a matter on which they can simply be dismissive.

I have with me some of the reports that are available to the community. For example, the Human Rights Commissioner, Chris Sidoti, has examined some of the issues of concern to regional areas. Amongst the publications that I have with me is a recent report by the Jesuits. Figures I have for New South Wales for the past five years show an economic decline in inland Australia. That trend must be reversed. It is not good enough for the Government to implement policies; we want to slow down this economic decline. The Government must implement policies that seek to turn around that decline and encourage prosperity and growth. We do not want industry in regional areas to die. The Government's policies must seek to intervene and discriminate in this area.

Concern has been expressed in many metropolitan areas about the pace at which regional areas are developing. We must find solutions for regional communities that are screaming out for that sort of development. I have already referred to specific budgetary allocations for the Northern Tablelands area, but that area will also benefit from untargeted State department allocations. There has been a recent budgetary allocation to improve health services in the Northern Tablelands area, and I thank the Minister for Health for that allocation. The Minister for Police and the Minister for Corrective Services have undertaken a number of reviews in my area. I hope that, as a result of allocations in this year's State budget, some of those projects will bear fruit. Negotiations relating to those projects are still under way.

I turn now to education. People in my electorate have been waiting for some time for an increased budgetary allocation for education in that region. This year we have received a much-needed budget boost. I know that the honourable member for Wallsend, who is in the chair, has an interest in the New England area, as he is a member of the Council of the University of New England. Education facilities in the Northern Tablelands electorate have responded positively to the State budget allocation for education. An amount of \$80 million has been set aside in this year's budget for school halls. I hope that the Northern Tablelands electorate receives some funding for urgently needed halls at Guyra Central School and Newling Public School in Armidale. Those schools have been waiting about 30 years for school halls. I hope that that additional budgetary allocation will result in positive news for those communities.

Other specific budgetary allocations for the Northern Tablelands electorate include \$1 million for planning realignments of the New England Highway north of Armidale and \$3.1 million for widening the New

England Highway. That work will be carried out by the Roads and Traffic Authority but will be funded by the Commonwealth Government. However, that is still good news for my electorate. I thank the Federal Government for that funding and I thank the Roads and Traffic Authority for undertaking that work. Other allocations include \$326,000 for Aboriginal housing at Inverell and \$60,000 for sealing the Tenterfield-Bald Rock National Park Road. I thank the Minister for Transport and Minister for Roads, the Hon. Carl Scully, for his intervention and for ensuring that that allocation was made.

Allocations also include \$32,000 towards the salaries of road safety officers at Armidale- Dumaresq Council; \$78,000 for upgrading school safety zones; \$1.78 million for improvements to bridges over Crooked Creek, Beardy Waters and Dandahra Creek; and \$376,000 for pest and disease control in State forests. In addition, I have had positive feedback about the abolition on 1 January 2002 of the debits tax on bank accounts and stamp duty on superannuation, and franchise agreements being abolished from 1 July this year. Those budgetary allocations will provide enormous benefits for local communities. An amount of \$15.2 million has been allocated for road and transport infrastructure and services in the Northern Tablelands electorate, which is welcomed. Those allocations will provide better road links and transport facilities. However, there will always be a shortfall between what is allocated and what is needed in the country.

I have made representations to the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads about the Guyra to Ebor Road, Main Road 187 and a number of other regional roads with which local government is struggling. Whilst councils have responsibility for those roads, they simply cannot fund the maintenance of them. The whole regional road funding formula must be reconsidered. Progress will be made on the Dandahra Creek Bridge on Gwydir Highway with a budgetary allocation of \$555,000. An amount of \$960,000 has been allocated for a new Beardy Waters Bridge on the Gwydir Highway, \$60,000 has been allocated to extend the sealing of the Bald Rock National Park Road in Tenterfield shire, and \$700,000 had been allocated for initial sealing work on Thunderbolt's Way, which is in the Uralla Shire Council area. The council is absolutely delighted that that funding is continuing. Good reconstruction and sealing work is being done by Uralla council. An amount of \$319,000 has been allocated for road pavement work on Gwydir Highway in the Inverell shire, which, having an enormous responsibility in relation to road maintenance, welcomes those budgetary allocations.

More than \$900,000 has been provided for a range of road safety and traffic management improvements, including \$40,000 for improvements to Waterfall Way and Barney Street intersections in the Armidale-Dumaresq Council area. Funding for local councils to undertake improvements on roads under their care and control include \$574,000 for Armidale-Dumaresq Council, \$44,000 for Glen Innes council, \$651,000 for Guyra council, \$2,074,000 for Inverell council, \$308,000 for Severn council, \$750,000 for Tenterfield council and \$798,000 for Uralla council. There will be other allocations from education, health and other departments which will be welcomed by our communities. A great deal more must be done in relation to police and corrective services in those areas in my electorate that have been stifled.

The Minister for Police and the Minister for Corrective Services are actively considering representations made to them by the communities in the Northern Tablelands electorate. People in the city often take for granted the proximity of services. They do not have any idea how important it is for people living in Inverell and Armidale to have dialysis services. I thank the Minister for Health for his intervention and for assisting in the provision of dialysis services in those communities. People from Inverell had to travel seven hours three times a week to receive dialysis treatment. That is an appalling situation for them, their families and their carers. The Minister for Health responded by providing those facilities. Those communities are happy that that basic service has been provided at both Inverell and Armidale. I hope that health services generally continue to benefit from increased funding.

Over the years funding for health has been increased substantially. Regrettably, demand for health services will continue to increase. I would like to have some additional capital funding for the hospital in Glen Innes. Whilst it has received some funding for an internal fit-out, new facilities are required. Plans for such a facility should be put on the drawing board so that discussions can commence. Many areas in the Northern Tablelands area have benefited from capital investment in recent years, particularly Inverell and Armidale. Money has been allocated for multipurpose services at Guyra and Emmaville, which is good news.

I acknowledge the hard work of the Minister for Health since he has taken over this portfolio. Regional communities are still facing problems. Whilst these funding allocations are welcome, I look forward to the untargated budgetary allocations to be made in the future. Businesses need incentives to locate and expand in those regions. The Federal Government, in particular, has enormous opportunities with zonal taxation, and State governments can follow suit to provide that economic stimulus and growth. As I said, the inland population figures clearly show that more of the same is just not good enough. We must intervene and return those regions to prosperity. Government policy is a critical first step in that regard.

Mr HICKEY (Cessnock) [5.40 p.m.]: The Treasurer recently released the first New South Wales budget of the new millennium. It is a budget that will build on the sound fiscal policies that have been developed and implemented over the term of the Government thus far. The New South Wales Government has a proven track record in financial accountability and ensuring that the State's finances are distributed through the community to the areas of most need. Once again, the budget shows that the Carr Labor Government has followed its foundation policies of social responsibility. The Government not only looks after the big end of town and makes decisions about spending based on keeping the multinational companies and big business fat and well fed. The Government is committed to supporting honest players and giving them a fair go.

All the residents of this great State are acknowledged in the budget. As a Labor government we are committed to ensuring that social and capital infrastructure is in place, maintained and developed. Through sound economic planning all the people of New South Wales can be assured that they live in a State that has a big future, both economically and socially. It is the so-called little people who toil with integrity that make this State great. The Government recognises their efforts and supports their endeavours through strategically directed funding. The funding allocations in this budget show that the Government is prepared to take a role in leading the economy and assisting the labour market to adapt to change.

The 2001-02 budget shows that the New South Wales economy is healthy and that the current Government has prepared our State to take on the challenges that lie ahead. The budget aims to enhance the opportunities for development in all electorates in the State. The Government has ensured that the financial position of the State has thrived even though a number of recent adverse factors have had an impact. Those factors include the slowdown in the world economy and the introduction of the GST by the Federal mates of the Opposition. Even the recent collapse of HIH Insurance has not stopped the Treasurer from delivering a budget that shows sound projections for the future.

Honourable members will have noted that the Government has produced five budget surpluses in a row and a reduction in general government net financial liabilities of around \$9 billion. Our net assets are about to reach the \$90 billion mark. The budget provides substantial allocations for our schools, hospitals, transport and public infrastructure. It allocates sufficient funds to allow the services it delivers to develop and provide first-class opportunities for our constituents. On top of all that, the Government can afford, for the fourth year in a row, to provide substantial tax cuts. For the first time, Country Labor has its own budget paper. I am sure members who represent country areas will be pleased that this year's budget provides rural and regional New South Wales with 48 per cent of the State's public works and road maintenance expenditure.

The Cessnock electorate has been well provided for in the budget. The allocations are a demonstration of the Government's commitment to Country Labor and country New South Wales. The budget delivered \$3.9 million to the Cessnock electorate for education and training. The Minister for Education and Training has advised my office that in 2001-02 the State budget will provide for initial funding of \$3.688 million for the multipurpose building at the Cessnock campus of TAFE, and \$6.961 million for horticultural facilities at the Kurri Kurri campus. Programs to be included include turf, forestry, landscaping and nursery. That is a big plus for the Kurri Kurri area and the Kurri Kurri campus.

I attended a site inspection with the director of Kurri Kurri TAFE. He showed me where a golf course is being established. It will be utilised, because students stay there for blocks of a week at a time. They will be able to use the golf course while gaining skills at TAFE. The hard work that has gone into that facility should be commended. I was pleased with the decision of the Minister to provide \$600,000 for the replacement of demountable buildings at the Abermain Public School. The demountables there were long overdue for replacement, and it is great for that school to see that done. The Government is replacing demountables across the State in order, and that will benefit all schools. These commitments are a firm demonstration of the Government's resolve to ensure that students in rural and regional New South Wales have access to the best possible training facilities. It is great to have the Carr Government again at the forefront of that initiative.

Cessnock also benefited from funding in the budget for the environment, with \$80,352 being allocated to local groups for action on the environment, and \$78,852 allocated for rehabilitation the Aberdare East mine site. Considering Cessnock's long history with mines and the problems associated with derelict mine sites, that is a step in the right direction. The Minister for the Environment should be applauded for that initiative. I had the pleasure to present a cheque for \$1,500 to Bellbird Public School for a Bugwatch and Streamwatch program that was initiated by the Minister for the Environment. Overall, the environment is in good hands. The Government is trying to ensure that the community finds local solutions. That is a great step forward by the Government. The Singleton area has an allocation of \$7,500 for management of Howe Park. It has been a controversial issue in the Singleton area. It is good to know that the Minister is trying to address the problems there.

The Minister for Sport and Recreation allocated \$1 million for the sport of shooting. Clearly the Minister takes that sport seriously and is allocating funding across the State. Projects that have been funded in the past three years have been targets, shooting bays, shooting benches, upgrades of fences and the provision of access to sporting facilities for people with disabilities. That is good to see in my electorate, a strong shooting environment where the sport is well loved. The Minister for Disability Services has allocated a considerable amount of money to the disability sector. She has boosted funding by \$60,000, which takes funding for older people with disabilities to \$105,389.

In addition, there is a one-off grant of \$43,068 to provide a vehicle, office and service equipment, ramps and the like. The Minister is trying to ensure that the disability sector is well looked after. On top of that, the Minister allocated \$1.04 million for respite care through life activities. That money is to be shared between the electorate of Maitland and the electorate of Cessnock. The Minister is right on top of her portfolio, and that shows a firm commitment by the Carr Government to the disability sector. I am proud to be part of a Government that looks after those who need assistance.

Cessnock roads and infrastructure did not miss out either. The Minister for Roads has taken note of the needs in the Cessnock electorate and has provided in excess of \$20 million for road improvements in the area. The Minister has provided the first \$3 million instalment of \$10 million to reduce traffic problems and improve the streetscape through Cessnock, which was well accepted by Cessnock City Council. That program is important to the Cessnock township, where Main Road 220 is being used as a de facto highway because the F3 does not link with the New England Highway and numerous trucks traverse Main Road 220 between the F3 and the New England Highway.

It is time the Howard Government took responsibility for its national highway program and built a link road between Branxton and Seahampton. That should be done as a matter of urgency. It is good to know that the Government is trying to provide some relief. In the meantime the Howard Government is not doing much to alleviate the problem and the pain being caused by the national highway. I am appalled by that, as are the people in the townships I represent. Traffic on Main Road 220, which passes four schools and runs through the Cessnock central business district, is causing a lot of grief.

Along with other infrastructure programs that the Minister for Transport is putting forward, \$1 million has been allocated for the replacement of the Surveyors Creek bridges 2 and 3 on George Booth Drive at Buchanan and Richmond Vale, and \$600,000 is being provided upfront to replace the Wollombi Brook Bridge at Millfield. That bridge is unique because it has attracted insect-eating bats, which are causing the RTA some consternation. That allocation of funding has helped to overcome the problem: breeding boxes will be installed under the bridge, which is unique. The new bridge will be 13 metres in width.

Mr Fraser: How wide?

Mr HICKEY: It will be 13 metres in width.

Mr Fraser: That's just a pedestrian bridge.

Mr HICKEY: A 1.8 metre-wide walkway will provide safe pedestrian access to and from the bridge. Anyone who travels over the Millfield bridge can clearly see that a new bridge is necessary. The existing bridge has been in use for the past 75 years and is long past its use-by date. It is great to know that the Minister for Transport is addressing the situation and meeting the Government's commitment to fix the problem and alleviate the pain in that area. The Government will continue to support local councils, with allocations for improvements on roads under their care and control. More than \$2 million has been committed to local government in the Cessnock electorate.

Country rail services attracted a total of \$207 million across the State in this budget. That allocation will be spent on maintaining and improving country lines, including \$40 million to reduce speed restrictions and improve the reliability of passenger services. What a great win for country areas! I must make special mention of Singleton, the home town of none other than the Leader of the National Party. Make no mistake: some bridges in the area needed repair because it was dangerous to cross them. I can happily report to the House what a difference a New South Wales Labor Government budget makes to the improvement of life for some Singletonians. The Leader of the National Party would have to agree that the headline in the *Singleton Argus* said it all, "\$7 million to the shire".

The article stated that Singleton council would receive a capital injection of \$7.228 million, some \$3.5 million of which will be used to replace four bridges on the Putty Road over Swamp Creek, Burrowell

Creek, Howes Valley Creek and Old Paddock Creek south of Singleton. The crown achievement must be the Redbournberry Bridge. As the local member I fought tooth and nail to deliver this project to the Singleton community. I approached the Minister directly while he was in the electorate. And what a result Country Labor achieved! The Government has allocated \$2 million to begin work on the bridge as soon as possible. What else can I say, and what else can honourable members expect? It is a big tick for the Minister and for the New South Wales Government. And it is a massive all-round win for Country Labor.

Mr FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [5.55 p.m.]: Although I do not want to appear negative during my speech on the budget estimates, I highlight the fact that once again the Government is concentrating its efforts on NSW—that is, Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. I do that on the basis of correspondence I received recently from Dr William Ross, who is a surgeon of some renown in Coffs Harbour. Over the past 12 months, because of a lack of funding at Coffs Harbour Base Hospital, Dr Ross has had to put his hand in his own pocket to pay for a chemotherapy nurse to look after mastectomy patients on whom he has operated at the private hospital because the operations could not be done at the base hospital.

Basically, those operations were classed as elective surgery and, therefore, there was no funding to enable people with breast cancer to have their operations performed at the base hospital. That is an absolute disgrace. Dr Ross, in his correspondence to me—I will make it available to the Minister for Health—highlights all the deficiencies that he sees in the Mid North Coast Area Health Service. In his letter he states that the Minister promised the Mid North Coast Area Health Service \$46 million in extra funding. If that area health service has an extra \$46 million Coffs Harbour Base Hospital is not seeing any of it. Indeed, we are not seeing any of it in the Coffs Harbour electorate. First, the nurse who was promised in correspondence from Terry Clout, the Chief Executive Officer of the Mid North Coast Area Health Service—

Mr Markham: A good CEO.

Mr FRASER: The honourable member for Wollongong says, "A good CEO". In correspondence Mr Clout is a good CEO. In a letter dated 12 April 2001 to Dr Ross, Mr Clout said:

Thank you for your letter of 21 March 2001 on the subject of Breast Care Nurse in Coffs Harbour. I apologise for not responding to you earlier.

The case for funding of a 0.6FTE Breast Care Nurse was made in July 2000 within a Cancer Service—Surgical Enhancement submission. The extra funding provided in 1999/2000 has been used for services enhancement and extended waiting times.

The unsuccessful submissions, however, have been retained for reference when future enhancement funding is under consideration.

Such a position would be of high priority as Cancer Care is part of the targeted priorities of the Area Health Service and NSW Health and is cited within the final draft of the women's Health Strategic Plan as a high priority for new positions in recognition of NHMRC guidelines to best practice.

The position of Breast Care Nurse will be funded from 1 July 2001, from the \$300,000 specifically provided to enhance Cancer Services across the Area in 2001/02.

I would also like to formally recognise the steps you have taken in introducing this service in Coffs Harbour to support recognised best practice for your patients.

Today is 28 June. This position was promised by Terry Clout on 12 April, in response to a letter of 21 March from Dr Ross. As at 28 June, that position has not been advertised. Sunday will be 1 July and the position has not been advertised. That is a disgrace, and it is an indictment on Mr Clout, on the Mid North Coast Area Health Service, and on this Government for not providing sufficient funding to provide the important service that can be rendered by a breast care nurse to people who have had mastectomies or partial mastectomies owing to breast cancer. That is the recommended treatment and we are told that sufficient funding is available. If the funds are available, why has the position not been advertised? Why are the people who live in my electorate relying currently on the generosity of a surgeon in Coffs Harbour to provide that service out of his own pocket? If the funds are available for the appointment of a breast care nurse, why cannot the people who live in my electorate have their operations completed at Coffs Harbour and District Hospital? That is a disgrace.

In recent days I had to ask Mr Clout to leave my office. I suggested to him that the operating theatres at the Coffs Harbour and District Hospital are closed and he said, "No, they are not. They are just not operating to full capacity." The week before last, seven surgical procedures were cancelled from that hospital's list. People cannot obtain a colonoscopy at the hospital because there are no facilities for diagnostic tests. People are being asked, "Did you undergo an examination? Where?" The Rotary Club has done a tremendous job in raising funds

for preliminary diagnosis of bowel cancer. If the people undergo a preliminary examination and receive a positive result, they have to wait for up to three years in Coffs Harbour for a colonoscopy to assess whether or not they have bowel cancer. In spite of that, the Government continually asserts that there are sufficient funds for the provision of medical treatment.

The Parliamentary Secretary at the table, the honourable member for Wollongong, may smile but I suggest that he should go to his electorate and tell his constituents that they are not able to have a diagnostic procedure which could save their lives carried out at their local hospital, and note their reaction. That would be an abominable situation in any electorate, but I will not have the Parliamentary Secretary sitting back in this House smiling and thinking that the situation is funny. I have had the experience of delivering such a message to my constituents. The honourable member and his colleagues should visit my electorate. I could issue a media release stating that I have invited the honourable member and Mr Clout to explain to the people of my electorate why they are unable to obtain simple diagnostic medical services that may save their lives.

The Parliamentary Secretary should tell me why people who have cancer are being told by the Coffs Harbour and District Hospital that cancer surgery is elective surgery. I invite the Parliamentary Secretary to tell me and my constituents why the operating theatres were closed at least during the week before last and why seven procedures were removed from the operating list. The Parliamentary Secretary should also tell me why children who have extremely bad tonsillitis cannot have a tonsillectomy at the Coffs Harbour and District Hospital earlier than three years of waiting. The situation is a disgrace and exists in stark contradiction to the media statements released by New South Wales Health which state that the budget has delivered "record health dollars" for Sutherland, the Central Coast, the Hunter, the Illawarra and western Sydney. Nowhere is the Mid North Coast Area Health Service mentioned in the context of record funding levels for health services.

The Coffs Harbour electorate is funded at the lowest per capita rate for health services of any health service area in New South Wales. The media releases to which I refer were obtained from the Government's own New South Wales Health web site by Dr Ross, who sent them to me. Dr Ross and other doctors in Coffs Harbour are disgusted and the people in the Coffs Harbour health services catchment area are also disgusted. Specialist services are provided in the Coffs Harbour electorate and patients are treated at a rate that is 50 per cent greater than the catchment rate for the Coffs Harbour area. People who come from Grafton obtain specialist services at Coffs Harbour but have a waiting list of only three or four months for diagnostic services in Grafton. Even though people who come from Grafton are within the catchment of the Coffs Harbour and District Hospital, they are unable to obtain treatment there. The situation is absolutely unacceptable.

I put it to the Parliamentary Secretary as a member of the Executive of this Government to visit my electorate and tell my constituents why I am unable to obtain for them the care that they need, and then try to smile. The Parliamentary Secretary can tell the people of my electorate why the intensive care physician resigned. After I had phoned the Minister's office, I received numerous assurances in correspondence from Mick Reid and Terry Clout that the former physician would be offered a permanent position immediately. The Parliamentary Secretary should explain to me why a fortnight ago that physician resigned and went to Dubai. The reason that happened was that the health service could not pay him. How was that problem addressed? It was addressed by hedging. An intensive care physician from Canberra was employed. He arrives at lunchtime on Monday and leaves at 2.00 p.m. on Friday. He is paid in excess of \$1,000 a day and also is paid accommodation expenses.

Far more is being paid for the services of that physician than the \$1,500 a day or \$400,000 a year for the provision of a service on a permanent basis. The area health service could not provide funding of \$300,000 to retain the services of Dr Gary Miller—a highly qualified man who was relied upon by specialists who were lucky enough to have urgent cases treated in the hospital's theatre and cared for in the intensive care unit. Presently my electorate does not have an intensive care physician. The Minister knows, as all honourable members know, that the position needed to be filled because there was a significant manifestation of need. Since the physician has left, the department is saying to me that he resigned. Why did he resign? That happened because he was promised a contract last September but nine months later had not been appointed.

I have a ream of correspondence to which I have not received any replies. When I questioned Mick Reid about that, he said, "Oh no, I did not do that." If Mick Reid contends that he did not guarantee that physician a position, then he is lying. If Mr Clout makes a similar assertion, he is lying. I keep a record of my telephone messages and I have the notes of the assurances I was given and the promises that were made. Dr Miller has also kept notes. My electorate has lost a physician who is highly qualified. It is impossible to obtain the services of intensive care physicians in rural and regional New South Wales. We have lost Dr Miller because

the Government will not provide sufficient health funding for my electorate. That is an absolute disgrace. I could go on ad infinitum about what has happened in the health services system in the Coffs Harbour electorate. I could give myriad examples to demonstrate that funding is not getting through to my electorate.

I place these details on the record to draw these matters to the attention of the Government. I implore the Parliamentary Secretary at the table, the honourable member for Wollongong—it is a pity that the Parliamentary Secretary assisting the Minister for Health, the honourable member for Heathcote, is not present in the Chamber—to make sure that my speech is drawn to the attention of the Minister for Health. Health services in the Coffs Harbour electorate are an absolute disgrace and the level of service is totally unacceptable to me personally, my constituents and to the electorate generally. It is also unacceptable to the doctors and nurses who work their guts out at the Coffs Harbour and District Hospital. They do a tremendous job in a hospital where stress levels are second to none. If this Government can issue press statements about record health funding in Labor electorates in the Newcastle-Sydney-Wollongong area, it can make good its statements and direct funding to rural and regional New South Wales, specifically to Coffs Harbour.

I urge the Government to sit down with, and listen to, the President of the New South Wales branch of the Australian Medical Association [AMA], Dr Mike Ridley, who has been my doctor for 20 years and who does not get along with the Minister or with New South Wales Health. The Government should pay attention to what he has to say because he knows regional and rural health better than anyone else in this State. I urge the Government to take up his plea and ask him how the lack of services in the Coffs Harbour electorate can be fixed. He will tell the Government that money will fix it. Every time a health services problem occurs in my electorate, an investigation reveals that money has been wasted. When problems occurred with the psychiatric unit, medical staff were flown in and the costs were double the costs of permanent medical staff. Because of a quirk of budget, the Government does not want to provide long service leave and superannuation entitlements and is letting people go who would otherwise have been employed permanently. The Government's approach is costing more in the short term than would a permanent appointment in a year.

Dr Ross has stated in correspondence addressed to me that when the new hospital is open next year, two theatres out of four will be kept closed because there will be insufficient funding. Despite promised enhancements, health services in my electorate are being funded at a 1999 level, not at a 2001 level. My electorate's health services have been underfunded before and they are underfunded now by a huge amount. I have received documentation from my local hospital which is a magnificent newsletter. It must have cost a fortune. The newsletter is titled "Shifting Times" but might have been more appropriately titled "Shifting Dollars". The newsletter states that there is a need to raise \$600,000. Why is that money needed? The hospital needs money for beds for the new hospital. I am led to believe that this Government is willing to spend \$8 million to provide the people of my electorate with a variety of medical services, yet this document calls for sponsorship for the provision of hospital beds. The Mid North Coast Area Health Service must know about this newsletter because the newsletter carries an advertisement for the health service's fun day. The newsletter refers to sponsorship opportunities and states:

While the NSW Government is paying for a new Coffs Harbour Health Service building and for most of the new equipment needed, there is very little of the present equipment that can be moved to the new facility.

In this exciting new development, over \$8 million is being spent on equipment. However, the Radiology Department alone will need more than \$1.6 million for equipment and the purchase of beds will need around \$600,000.

The sum of \$2.2 million is needed for equipment. I urge the Government not to play with the people who live in my electorate and to give them the money. The need for \$2.2 million has been stated publicly and we do not know what else will be needed. If the Government builds an \$80 million hospital and \$50 million in funding is required for necessary facilities in that hospital, that funding should be provided. The local area health service would not allow the patient care facility for relatives to be moved to the new site—until they decided that politics might be involved because the mayor up there is the Labor candidate in the Federal election campaign. We have been pushing for that for nine months. The health service said, "Aesthetically, we do not want it out there." Now it has said that it should be moved there. It is a disgrace, and I cannot accept a situation like that in my electorate.

I invite the Minister, the Parliamentary Secretary in the Chamber and Mick Reid to come to my office and meet the poor residents of Coffs Harbour whose knees are shot but they cannot get into hospital to have a knee replacement or a hip replacement; they cannot get so-called elective surgery. They are stuck at home, they are costing the health service a fortune because district nurses have to go to their homes to attend to them, and Home Care has to meet their shopping and other needs. It would be far cheaper to fund the hospital theatres at

the level at which they are able to operate, thereby ensuring that operating lists are not withdrawn on a daily basis. Those people would then be able to have a level of care and standard of living that the rest of us take for granted.

The Government loves to play games with regard to teeth care. It says, "The Federal Government withdrew its funding." The Federal Government gave a one-off payment to the State Government to try to reduce the teeth care waiting list. The State Government then withdrew its funding, and the funding for teeth care is now so poor that there is a seven-year waiting period for some cases in Coffs Harbour. Thousands of people are on that waiting list, and they cannot get their dentures or their broken teeth fixed.

Last Christmas a Coffs Harbour resident needed to have a plate repaired. It took us three months to have that dental work carried out. He could not eat anything but soft foods for three months. He came to my office in tears. Eventually we had him jumped up the queue to have a new plate made. Such a state of affairs is unacceptable. That is the sort of care that the Government is professing to deliver as increased care. The facts do not lie. The fact is that the Government has changed the criteria for waiting lists and operations, and the residents of the Coffs Harbour electorate are suffering as a result. It is unacceptable that two theatres of a new hospital have to be closed on a permanent basis because the hospital does not receive the necessary funding.

In the short time I have left I wish to raise another issue that shows the arrogance with which this Government treats the people of regional New South Wales. A budget was delivered in this House by the Treasurer. The Budget Papers show funding for major capital works, which the Coffs Harbour electorate benefited from. Yet last Friday a document was delivered to my office which was addressed to all members of the Legislative Assembly setting out a list of asset acquisition projects by electorate. The document was dated 29 May. Why were Coalition members not allowed to have that document on the day that Labor members were given the document? Why is it that the document is sent to us almost a month later?

When the Government tells us that it will give us funding of \$60 million but that funding does not materialise, the Government is playing games. For example, the Government tells us that the funding for roads expenditure will be \$5.25 million for the Lyons-New England Road, Coffs Harbour, dual carriageway. That road was opened a month ago; it is complete. How can the Government fund \$5 million into a project when it has already been completed? Also, that funding of \$5.2 million was Federal-State funding, not simply State funding. The budget shows that \$2.4 million is to be provided for planning, followed by further funding for planning in the amounts of \$1 million, \$154,000 and \$100,000, totalling \$10.9 million. Yet \$5 million of that funding really does not exist because it was last year's funding. And what did Labor announce? It announced funding of \$482 million for roads. Yet the budget amount is \$10 million, and that is because the Government has not paid last year's bills.

The Government announced funding for the Bellinger River area of \$7.3 million. That is repair funding for the floods that occurred there. It announced other council funding for Coffs Harbour and Bellingen totalling \$600,000. That funding is less than Federal Government funding for the Roads to Recovery program. It disappoints me that the Government must employ cheap political stunts to claim some wins in the Coffs Harbour electorate, yet the figures that it claims do not match actual expenditure; in fact, they are estimated long-term figures.

The estimated completion date for the Sapphire to Woolgoolga dual carriageway is marked as "N/A", meaning not applicable. In other words, no-one knows the estimated completion date for that project. At the end of the day, this Government stands to be damned. I could go on for hours, but obviously I do not have the time. I implore the Parliamentary Secretary and members on his side of the House to come to Coffs Harbour and see the plight of the residents. Members opposite can sit back with their smug attitudes, but I bet they have tears in their eyes when they see those poor beggars trying to walk out of my office because they cannot get their knees done. It is a disgrace, and this Government has a responsibility to improve health funding and all other funding for the Coffs Harbour electorate.

Mr E. T. PAGE (Coogee) [6.15 p.m.]: Many members of the mainstream community have contact with the drug problem on a daily basis, and have had for a long time. Perhaps someone close to them suffers or has suffered an addiction; others are simply victims of drug-related crime, or they observe people who are compelled to inject in unsafe conditions on the street. The Department of Health's Chief Medical Officer, Dr Andrew Wilson, has estimated that potentially some 35,000 people in New South Wales have some degree of opiate dependency, although this number could be as high as 50,000. The opiate group obviously includes heroin, as well as methadone, pethidine and morphine.

The year 1999 will go down in history as the year that significant inroads were made in both community and legislative perceptions of the so-called "drug problem" and possible legislative strategies, after the image of a teenager shooting up was splashed across the front page of the *Daily Telegraph*. Early that year State and Territory leaders met and endorsed a package of drug strategies, which included a heroin trial in the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria, investigation of safe injecting facilities, and tougher trafficking sanctions. In the meantime, the New South Wales Labor Government opened the 20-bed Fairfield detoxification unit, Corella Lodge, providing detoxification services and counselling.

At the Premier's Conference in April that year, the State leaders agreed to a plan saving taxpayers \$100 million per year in the cost of housing prisoners. This involved amending police powers to allow the diversion of drug users to treatment programs rather than placing them automatically in the hands of the mainstream legal system. Not only did this strategy break ground in allowing addiction to be treated as an illness, rather than simply criminal behaviour, but it kept users away from prison culture and its influences.

As many will remember, the New South Wales Drug Summit was held from 17 to 21 May 1999. The aim of the Summit was to create a better understanding of the nature, cause and extent of the drug problem, and to examine existing and new approaches that could be adopted to improve policies, services and programs in relation to drug policy. In the lead-up to the Drug Summit, the tolerance or T-room was opened in the Wayside Chapel at Kings Cross. The T-room was closed after just over a week of operation, but those responsible had proved their point: the world did not end because drug users were offered a safe and controlled environment in which to inject. The organisers saw no need to continue to make their point post-Summit, as one of the crucial recommendations in the final communiqué was that a medically supervised injecting room be trialled.

Finally, the medically supervised injecting room [MSIR] trial commenced at Kings Cross on 6 May this year. It opened with broad-based community support, but clearly Dr Ingrid van Beek and her team have done a wonderful job in getting the service up and running in the face of a great deal of political and media scrutiny. I was amazed at the level of support in the community for this breakthrough in drug strategy. Five years ago one would have been hanged in the street if one had suggested such a proposal. People are obviously becoming more and more concerned about drug problems and the effect that drugs have on the lives of those who are affected by the habit. People are now prepared to open their minds and to try new strategies to address various aspects of the problem as it impacts upon society.

I understand that funding for the MSIR comprises less than 1 per cent of the additional moneys allocated to implement the recommendations arising from the New South Wales Drug Summit. In my view it is money well spent. To date the injecting room has dealt professionally and effectively with four overdose events so far. Without the trial, those incidents may otherwise have occurred in unsafe and life-threatening circumstances. It is not only life-threatening for the users but for the police and ambulance officers who are called to attend when a person has overdosed and requires attention. Stopping an overdose in the street is not only for the benefit of the user but also those public servants who attend the scene and take action. The service also continues to refer clients to treatment and social welfare programs. A person who overdoses in the street certainly has no incentive to get some advice or to be referred somewhere. However, the controlled condition in the MSIR is an important aspect of the program.

It is important to emphasise that the trial is only in its early days, and the service will be fully evaluated by an independent group of national academic standing. The group's first draft report has been submitted to the Government. According to official figures, 303 registered clients used the MSIR in the first month and 46 users were referred to other support and health services. I understand that none of the stakeholders will be involved in the evaluation phase so as to ensure that the process remains objective. In the meantime, the trial should be given a fair go. We should not be pre-empting the results because they will be assessed in due course. For now, Dr van Beek and her team should be allowed to go about their business away from the political and media spotlight to be able to carry out the trial in a proper clinical fashion.

To my mind, the approximate \$4.3 million cost to run the trial estimated by the Department of Health will be money extremely well spent. That amount also compares favourably to other health initiatives, so it would be inconsistent and inappropriate for cost to become an issue in the continuation of this invaluable trial. It is a contradiction that the Opposition has failed to actively support the MSIR trial, when the highly successful needle syringe service, which gives clean needles to addicts, was a Collins Coalition initiative. According to the Opposition it is okay to provide needles so that addicts can inject, but it is not okay to provide safe and medically supervised surroundings for them to do so. Where is the sanity?

Today, needle syringe services operate statewide from 800 outlets and distribute 10 million needles per year. Those programs are of course very cost-effective AIDS strategies. We must continue to support and

maintain our needle syringe services because countries and cities which initially introduced similar programs, but have since become complacent, are now experiencing new AIDS epidemics. Vancouver is a prime example, it has a similar demographic arrangement to Sydney. The decrease in support from their local authorities for needle syringe services, combined with an increase in cocaine use, which Sydney has also experienced, resulted in a rapid and immediate increase in HIV infection. In fact, the incidence of HIV infection jumped from 4 per cent of intravenous drug users in 1992 to 23 per cent in 1996. In New York and Brazil, where needle syringe programs have been introduced, the very high prevalence of HIV has been pegged back. In this perspective, a 10¢ needle certainly provides value for money!

Of the millions of syringes distributed annually to drug users, of course the odd one finds its way into a public place. Unfortunately those situations are often used against needle syringe services by their opponents. It is my understanding that there has not been one worldwide incidence of HIV contraction through treading on an infected needle in a community setting. Whilst spurious arguments and misinformation are often used against those and other services for drug users, the services themselves are invaluable in providing front-line advice, support and referral for clients. There is no doubt if parties on both sides of the political fence had not had the perspicacity to support the needle exchange program Australia would have a much higher incidence of AIDS than it has now. It is difficult for members of the Opposition to argue that somehow an injecting room gives the wrong message whereas a needle exchange program does not. In my view they are both essential steps in addressing the drug problem.

I am concerned about the report from the deliberations in the United Nations at the moment to address HIV and drug problems throughout the world. It is in endemic proportions in Africa, parts of Asia and some island communities. The orthodox Islamic countries, supported by the Vatican, have been able to pressure the rest of the world to delete any reference to homosexuals, prostitutes and intravenous drug users. That decision means that there will be possibly hundreds of millions of people throughout the world in years to come who will contract AIDS because of those regressive policies.

I am not concerned about the religious views of individuals. It is up to a person to decide in what he or she believes but it is horrendous if those views should be compulsorily transferred to other people to bring about devastating results on people in various parts of the world. I am amazed that in Malaysia there is a tremendous prostitution problem and a rising incidence of aids and HIV. It is ridiculous for that country to decide that those people should not be recognised as part of the problem. Certainly people there will be condemned to a very horrible and painful death because of the country's regressive strategies. I hope at some stage in the future when it becomes more obvious to those beleaguered people that there are changes in policies in the United Nations to allow a proper approach to me made to address the AIDS problem.

In the publication of the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, "New South Wales Drug Trends", it is clear that not only has the age of heroin users dropped, but there was a consistent increase in the number of people participating in methadone programs between 1995 and 1999. Further evidence of the increased use of heroin comes from the Australian needle and syringe program survey, which reported that for the period covered by the 1999 study, the response rate for heroin being named as the most recently injected drug increased from 31 per cent to 59 per cent. In reality, heroin use rates have increased worldwide. Where appropriate strategies have not been put in place to facilitate the safer injection of heroin, the proof of their effectiveness is unfortunately in the HIV infection rates.

It is quite acceptable in our community on both sides of the political fence for people to be on methadone programs. It is seen somehow as an acceptable and legitimate saviour for people who have a drug problem yet the same people cannot accept that it could be reasonable to have a heroin trial to allow people who use heroin illegally to use it legally so that they can get be helped to break the habit and get their lives on to a reasonable track. It has got to be recognised that there are large amounts of money to be made with drugs. The drug problem will never be solved in the community until the money is taken out of that trade. While drugs are illegal, and users have to pay exorbitant amounts to secure them, billions will be made from it.

The people who get caught are only the messengers. The big traffickers never ever get caught. It is amazing that in Australia, New South Wales included, although a large number of people are in gaol because of drug problems, perhaps trafficking in drugs, not one of those persons who could be regarded as part of the focal supply group of drugs in Australia has ever been found, let alone appeared before a court and sentenced to gaol. Part of the future strategy needs to be—and I think society eventually will come to this because eventually there will be no alternative—to take the money out of the drug use equation, thereby making drugs available to addicts under controlled conditions, so that they do not have to rob my house to get enough money to buy their next fix from some entrepreneur.

The community and governments are faced with many challenges in relation to drug use and abuse. Primarily, we need to focus on finding more effective and innovative ways to discourage young people from trying drugs in the first place, whilst also providing much-needed information about harm minimisation and rehabilitation options. This, of course, is not as easy as it sounds, because we are talking about an horrendous habit. People do not shoot up on drugs merely because they have some sort of fancy; those people have a major addiction which they cannot readily shake. We need only think of the number of people who are addicted to smoking cigarettes to realise that. Although that is affecting their health and may eventually kill them, they still have great difficulty in breaking that habit.

There may be some accusation that what we will do will send mixed messages, such as drugs are not a healthy or safe choice, but if we have to go down that avenue we should do so based on accurate information about how to use drugs less dangerously. We cannot cut our young people off from potentially life-saving advice simply because of the choices they make. It is also essential that parents themselves are armed with accurate and appropriate information which both allays their anxieties as much as possible given the situation, whilst skilling them to negotiate their way through what is an incredibly stressful time. Those stupid advertisements commissioned by the Federal Government and directed at parents are worse than useless.

The Government's Social Justice Budget Statement 2001-2002 states that additional funding for New South Wales drug program initiatives have brought the projected expenditure on government programs between July 1999 and June 2003 to close to half a billion dollars. Specifically, over four years, \$93 million will be spent on compulsory and voluntary treatment programs. Some \$25 million will assist families and young people, including those in detention, through support services. The sum of \$9 million has been allocated to school and community education and action initiatives, \$23 million will boost drug services in New South Wales gaols, and \$5.5 million has been dedicated to crime prevention activities.

The establishment of the youth drug trial and its auxiliary services is a positive development. I am confident that Labor's commitment of \$8 million for this trial will go a long way towards altering the path of many young people and giving them invaluable treatment, support and modified lifestyle options. I fully expect that the Department of Community Services "Getting it Together" program will contribute much to this end, offering case management which will meet the education, housing and other social and medical needs of clients.

The Health Department recently launched the New South Wales Drug Treatment Service's Plan 2000-2005. It notes that the Government has made provision for \$120 million to be allocated over four years to improve the provision and quality of drug treatment services. The MSIR trial, and other drug initiatives, clearly articulate this Government's commitment to facing up to drug issues within the community. While the Opposition behaves in a reactionary and negative manner towards initiatives such as this trial—which already is saving lives—the New South Wales Government is working towards implementing meaningful programs that produce significant results in both rehabilitation and harm minimisation. I sincerely hope that any proposed or new drug treatment facilities will be welcomed and embraced by communities, which often can only watch powerlessly as lives and families are torn apart by drug addiction.

Mr PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee) [6.34 p.m.]: This year's budget again was a disappointment to the constituents of the Murrumbidgee electorate. I will go through a few of the major subject headings. Obviously the most important issue for everybody in New South Wales is health, and I will start with the Griffith hospital. Those who know Griffith and what is happening there would know that numerous studies have identified Griffith as one of the fastest growing, if not the fastest growing, country towns in Australia. It has terrific development and terrific people, but one of its biggest problems is finding enough people to fill the jobs that are available, ranging from doctors and nurses to the most basic of work.

In that context of a rapidly growing and modern city it is unfortunate that our hospital is going in the opposite direction. The maternity ward at Griffith Base Hospital has not been refurbished for many years. There was a recent announcement of the ward being painted and having a few other superficial things done to it. However, mothers who have had children in the maternity ward in the past three years, with few exceptions, describe it as being wholly unsatisfactory. My sister and sister-in-law have had children at the hospital, which they generally regarded as being unsatisfactory.

Only a month ago a good friend, Allison Perrison, travelled 200 kilometres to Wagga Wagga to have her baby. It is now common for people from Griffith to make that long journey to have children at the private Calvary Hospital, which is regarded as far superior to the Griffith Base Hospital. That is unfortunate. Until four or five years ago the Griffith Base Hospital was highly regarded by the people of Griffith and beyond. But a hospital cannot maintain its reputation and standard without having the money to spend to maintain its services at that level. Unfortunately, Griffith Base Hospital has fallen into that category.

When my friend had her baby in the Wagga Wagga hospital, there were nine Griffith mothers giving birth at the Calvary Hospital. That requires a 200-kilometre journey. Obviously, it involves trips on more than the day on which the mothers have their babies. Families and friends must make a few trips prior to that occasion, that is if they have the time to make the journey at all. In a modern Australia I do not regard that as acceptable for a town of 25,000 people. There is no excuse that nothing is happening in Griffith, or it is no good spending money on a dying town. It is anything but that. It is growing rapidly. However, as I have said, it is unfortunate that the hospital is going in the opposite direction.

A lot of lobbying of the State Government has been done on this issue by representatives from Griffith—Simon McKenzie, Ray Gamble, mayor Helen Brain and others, me, former member Adrian Cruickshank—all looking to have something done. Unfortunately, little has been done. Three years ago it was promised that \$400,000 would be spent on an upgrade of the physiotherapy wing of the hospital. Work on that upgrade has only just begun. Of course, the people of Griffith are thankful for that funding, but it is only the beginning; a lot more needs to be done.

The hospitals of Leeton and Narrandera have suffered significant downgrading of the services that they provide. That is reflected in the difficulties that those towns are having in attracting medical staff and nurses. I am afraid that people have just given up hope. Every day that goes by, less and less is said about the plight of those hospitals, and there is less and less protest about those issues than there was in the days when the Greater Murray Area Health Service was established. At that time there was enormous protest. Basically, the people of Narrandera have been hit about the head so many times that they appear to have been battered into submission.

The Jerilderie multipurpose centre will go ahead, three years after it was originally promised. I do not think that work on that project has commenced. In Finley we have an extraordinary situation. Finley is one of many towns in New South Wales which is having difficulty attracting general practitioners. Some doctors in that area are able to perform surgery and there are visiting surgeons. The services of an anaesthetist have finally been obtained but he has been told that he cannot practice his chosen specialty—anaesthetics. A brand new operating theatre was built in Finley a few years ago, but not even minor surgery can be performed at the moment and no babies can be delivered.

Expectant mothers have to go to Albury, which is 150 or 160 kilometres away—something which I find quite extraordinary. In Deniliquin, in the south-west corner of my electorate, a hospital is desperately in need of redevelopment. Four or five years ago the Greater Murray Area Health Service released a redevelopment plan, but that plan has been shelved. The local council, other interested persons in Deniliquin and I are trying to get that redevelopment option happening again. I have corresponded with the Minister's office and I hope to get some support in that regard.

I refer now to education. The Government promised to replace demountable buildings at Yenda and Hanwood schools, which is a welcome announcement. For those honourable members who do not know, last year Yenda school was burned down. Unfortunately, almost 12 months later teachers and children are still in demountable classrooms. Three classrooms in an administration area were burned down. However, the school is likely to be reimbursed only for the value of the buildings. It will not receive the replacement value of the rooms that were destroyed. That left the school in the lurch. It could have had buildings constructed not long after the fire, but it would have been left with only half the buildings that it had prior to the fire. Obviously, Yenda school is not the only school that has been affected by such a policy quirk. I would like to see those problems rectified. People at Yenda have been disappointed as a result of the Government's decision.

Yenda, which is about 16 kilometres from Griffith, is expanding rapidly. Yenda school, which is also expanding rapidly, is a terrific school. People like Jenny Geddes, a parent at Griffith High School, have been working hard to secure airconditioning for all the rooms at that school. When I went on a site tour with the Public Works Committee we had a look at that school. Some rooms at that school have airconditioning, but most do not. I have made representations in relation to that issue. The school, the parents and citizens association and individual parents, such as Mrs Geddes, have all been working hard to achieve that goal. Mrs Geddes approached Mr John Della Bosca about this issue on the last occasion that he was in Griffith, but unfortunately not much progress has been made. Griffith, which is 700 kilometres west of Sydney, gets pretty hot in summer. Temperatures of 45, 46 or 47 degrees are not unfamiliar in February, when schoolchildren return to school. That is a pretty serious issue.

Deniliquin High School has been trying for a long time to get airconditioning installed. The school has submitted daily temperature recordings to the department to try to motivate it to install airconditioning.

Deniliquin, which is about the same distance from the coast—it is 700 kilometres inland—gets very hot in summer and it is uncomfortable for teachers and students. Obviously, that lack of airconditioning is having an impact on children at both Deniliquin and Griffith high schools. Finley High School has been without a technical building for some time. The previous technical building was demolished when Jim Small was the member for Murray because of a white ant infestation. The Government promised to replace that building. I inspected that school earlier this year and there is still no replacement building, which is a matter of concern to teachers and parents. Parents who are considering sending their children to high school would hardly be motivated to do so if facilities such as that are not provided. That school, which performed brilliantly in the Higher School Certificate—it is well above the State average—is a school of which I am proud. I am proud to represent Finley High School, a terrific school with terrific teachers.

I refer now to roads. In the Western Riverina three shire councils—Griffith, Carrathool and Leeton—are forging ahead. I referred earlier to Griffith, but Carrathool shire, which has a \$15 million cotton gin and another about to be established, has benefited from significant overseas investment for all sorts of horticulture. There are large potato plantations in Berrigan and Hillston. Grapes and citrus are grown and there are some big olive plantations. Olives make me nervous, but plantations in this region have benefited from investments from major companies. A large Italian olive oil company, which realised the potential in Australia, sent some of its representatives to establish a large olive orchard, which is terrific news. Hillston and Gilgowie are experiencing the difficulties that are being experienced in Griffith—a lack of people to fill jobs. However, I suppose that that is a good problem in any electorate. Carrathool, Leeton and Griffith shires are not able to fund the necessary infrastructure that is required to support all that development.

Something extraordinary has happened on a 22-kilometre stretch of road which runs along the Murrumbidgee River, just north of River Road. Half of that road is in Griffith shire and half is in Carrathool shire. It has been said that it will cost \$4.8 million to seal that 22-kilometre stretch of road. There are significant developments along that stretch of road. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints owns a large property in that area. It has invested in significant corn plantations in conjunction with Parle Foods in Griffith and it is now engaging in significant exports to Japan. That large concern, which employs 200 or 300 people, has a \$50 million factory in Griffith. It is generating a lot of produce on that stretch of River Road. Two or three other properties have significant vineyards and olive orchards.

Those private companies have committed themselves to fund one-third of the total cost of \$4.8 million—that is, \$1.6 million—to resurface the road. The councils have also offered to pay one-third, a further \$1.6 million, and I have asked the State Government to pay the other third. That is quite an extraordinary offer by those private companies. They are so desperate to have this road surfaced to assure the quality of their product that they are each prepared to contribute one-third of the total cost of that public infrastructure. So far the State Government has not agreed to fund the other third, but I hope that with further negotiations something can be organised. I note the presence at the table of the Parliamentary Secretary for Roads.

The police station in Griffith is a disgrace. It was constructed about 70 years ago to accommodate four police, with a residence. It now houses about 40 police. The Griffith local area command is now split into two, half in the old police station and half in rented premises on the other side of town. That is highly inadequate. The facilities at the police station for general duties officers are substandard and in many respects quite dangerous. Last year WorkCover conducted an audit and found about 20 inadequacies in the station, most of which have been addressed, but the state of the whole police station is most unsatisfactory. The former member for Murrumbidgee, Adrian Cruickshank, the local branch of the Police Association, the local council and I have lobbied hard for something to be done about that.

There is an offer on the table by private developers, who are prepared to construct a new police station, and again with ongoing negotiations with the Police Service I hope that arrangements can be made. I reinforce the point that Griffith is experiencing rapid growth and it is a negative for the police station to not keep pace with the rest of town. It is a great concern to the people of Griffith and to the police who work there and have to take offenders into a substandard police station. A few police whom I know very well have some grave concerns. I hope that with ongoing negotiations with the Government a suitable solution can be reached.

Ms ALLAN (Wentworthville) [6.52 p.m.]: I have pleasure tonight in speaking to the 2001-02 State budget. I have had the opportunity on an annual basis to speak on the budget since my initial election as the member for Wentworthville in 1988. Generally speaking, I have tended to focus on the four key areas of concern to my electorate. They are health, law and order, education and transport in western Sydney. I tend to assess each budget on the basis of its ability to deliver in those four key areas, because they are of primary

concern to the constituents of Wentworthville. This budget has delivered par excellence in all four areas for the people of Wentworthville. I congratulate, in particular, the Premier and the Treasurer on their effort in the compilation of the budget to ensure that those core areas for my constituency have been addressed yet again.

My colleague the honourable member for Parramatta spoke at length two nights ago about the great wins in this budget for Westmead Hospital. Westmead Hospital is adjacent to the electorate of Wentworthville. It is about one street out of the electorate. However, we like to claim a sense of ownership of it because many of my constituents look to the hospital at Westmead as a primary source of health care. Westmead Hospital is of State significance when it comes to delivering health services; nevertheless, it is hard to discourage locals from looking at hospitals like Westmead or its compatriot, Blacktown Hospital, as having direct service relevance to their health needs. There have been major improvements in the delivery of services at Westmead. With the brand-new Blacktown Hospital, built in the past financial year by the State Government, we have an improved level of service. Many of the health concerns raised by my constituents have been addressed by the upgrades announced in this budget for Westmead Hospital. It is a big winner in this budget.

Transport is an area of overwhelming significance for the electors of Wentworthville. Although people should think beyond their travel requirement to and from work or their recreational activities, it is a major issue for those who are not close to public transport. In the electorate of Wentworthville roads continue to be the primary issue, whether they are the major roads such as the Great Western Highway and the M4, or arterial and local roads in the municipalities of the four local government areas represented in my electorate—Baulkham Hills, Blacktown, Holroyd and Parramatta.

More than \$1 million of the \$3 million allocated in the roads budget for Wentworthville is for road safety improvements. It is an important testimony to the continued commitment of the Carr Government to improving roads and transport for motorists and public transport passengers in my electorate. The highlights were: \$750,000 for planning on the future Parramatta to Mungarie Park rapid bus-only transitway; just under \$250,000 for planning work on the future Blacktown to Wetherill Park rapid bus-only transitway; more than \$1 million for maintenance of State and regional roads within the electorate; and more than \$1 million for a range of road safety and traffic management improvement projects.

The Minister for Transport is a neighbour and I like to think my electorate benefits from having the Minister for Transport located so near. We very much appreciate his personal and political commitment to the rapid bus-only transitway. It has been a long-term grievance of people in western Sydney that they have so little access to public transport. It has been a priority of this Government and previous Labor governments to try to deliver public bus services to western Sydney. It is not an easy call, Mr Acting-Speaker, as you are well aware, as your electorate of Liverpool also has a strong reliance on the private bus network. Nevertheless, it is absurd that people in western Sydney do not have access to cost-effective and incredibly efficient bus services. The development of the rapid bus-only transitways will facilitate that.

The proposed transitways are part of a 90-kilometre network planned by the Government for western Sydney. It is an environmentally friendly alternative to the car and current transport modes. Many people who do not live in western Sydney assume that the environment in western Sydney is a healthy one. Anyone who is aware of the geomorphology of the Sydney Basin would know it is an unhealthy place to live, because air compresses there, particularly in the afternoon, and there is very poor air quality in various regions around western Sydney, whether it is south-west Sydney or north-west Sydney.

Unless we get a very good breeze through western Sydney during the afternoon we do not have good air quality. That is another incentive for the Government to develop environmentally friendly public transport alternatives to car travel. It is horrible to think that we in western Sydney have to breathe car fumes caused by people in other parts of Sydney. I am also pleased that the Government is going to continue to support local councils, with the allocation of \$4 million to councils to improve local roads. A constant concern expressed by all councils within my electorate is insufficient funds to service local roads.

Our local road network is heavily used, and it is of the utmost importance to the constituents of Wentworthville that nearly \$4 million will be spent to improve local roads. My constituents rely, and I suppose they are lucky to be able to rely, on a very efficient western Sydney rail network. We also welcome the \$300 million increase in statewide rail funding that will occur this year. This will involve important areas of allocation: \$80 million to accelerate track maintenance work across the State and \$38 million for train maintenance. Those of us who travel fairly regularly on trains on the Western Sydney rail network are constantly aware of how important it is to keep the trains clean and efficient.

There are many problems with train cleanliness, and I am aware that the Minister for Transport has this as a personal priority. He has travelled on trains and observed the lack of cleanliness at times. I am delighted that extra money is being provided in the train maintenance budget to improve the overall quality of our train service. Many members of Parliament do not have the opportunity to travel on trains in other countries. I have been lucky enough to have had that opportunity, and it always impresses me that trains in other countries seem all the more clean than the trains in our city. The construction of 81 Millennium train carriages is an important part of the transport portfolio in the current budget, and I hope that some of those carriages will appear on the western Sydney rail network.

Another important area of the budget for my constituents is education. I am absolutely delighted that the State education budget focuses on increased funding for school maintenance. I do not have many new schools in my area. My area was largely settled in the postwar period, although a lot of redevelopment, especially medium-density redevelopment, has occurred since then. Most of the schools were built in the 1960s and are starting to look their age. The school in my electorate that I attended, Greystanes High School, has had some appalling maintenance problems in recent years. Thanks to the intervention of the Minister for Public Works and Services, the situation has improved. Also, as a result of assistance provided by the Minister for Education and Training, we will see a dramatic turnaround in the condition of that school. Other schools in the electorate are in a similar category, and they will receive improved funding as a result of the Ministry for Education and Training giving priority to school maintenance. That has been warmly received by staff and parents in the electorate. It is certainly overdue.

School maintenance in my electorate has fallen off the agenda at various times under successive governments, and I am pleased to have it back on the agenda. While I am talking about schools, I want to highlight one local school, Pendle Hill Public School, in the electorate of Wentworthville. Currently, the local media is running a scare campaign that this school is planned for closure. Pendle Hill Public School was developed in the postwar period and it has not had much new development. A large amount of land is attached to the school. Today I received an assurance from the Minister for Education and Training that the school will definitely not close. Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on the way one looks at it, my electorate falls into the marginal Federal electorate of Parramatta, so people with an interest in destabilising the State Government often run scare campaigns.

I suppose they do that with a view to getting more votes at the Federal Government level. Currently the Federal electorate of Parramatta is held by the Coalition parties and they like to run scare campaigns on State issues to encourage people to think that the Labor Party is deserting western Sydney. Their current exercise—and in a moment I shall refer to another one relating to law and order—to pretend that Pendle Hill Public School will close is nonsense. That school has an outstanding reputation in the local community, especially as a result of its work in multicultural communities. That will continue and the school will not close, despite the current scaremongering.

Another important area for my electorate is law and order, and I am sure that is common to a number of other western Sydney electorates. Wentworthville police station has been earmarked for improvements by the Government over a number of years. That police station has also become the target of scaremongering by our political opponents, who claim that the Government has no commitment to law and order in the western Sydney community generally and Wentworthville in particular. Although Wentworthville has a police station, it could certainly benefit from having a new police station. Nevertheless, the police stationed at Wentworthville perform a number of important duties for the Wentworthville community. I do not think the people of Wentworthville will mind if they do not get a new police station as long as they have a very competent police service in Wentworthville and the surrounding areas.

Most of our police direction comes from the major police stations in Blacktown and Merrylands, but the subsidiary outlets in Seven Hills and Wentworthville continue to complement the overall service that is provided. I am pleased that Wentworthville will benefit from completion of the project to fit first response police cars with mobile data terminals. We are a direct beneficiary of that initiative in this year's police portfolio budget. Ten of these terminals will be installed in Blacktown, seven in Holroyd and three in the greater Hume region.

My area draws from a variety of service providers. Whether it is the compilation or the geography of the electorate, we have four local government areas, five Federal electorates and numerous police commands. Sometimes we get caught because we seem to be on the periphery of a number of service providers. However, we are winning in terms of police services; we are enjoying a better level of service on law and order because

we are receiving the benefits of rationalisation, improvements and greater provision of resources in both Blacktown and Merrylands. Yet we are retaining a local identity by continuing to have a local police presence in Wentworthville.

The environment remains an important area of concern for all members of our community, including the people of western Sydney. My electorate is adjacent to Parramatta Park, and I am delighted that \$2.5 million is provided in the budget for the newly created Parramatta Park Trust. I look forward to having a productive relationship with the Parramatta Park Trust, which is about to be appointed. I am sure the trust will work closely with its neighbours, such as the Parramatta Leagues Club, which has enjoyed a strong presence in the park for many years. It is important that Parramatta Park, which is the major recreational facility for people living in western Sydney between Parramatta and Blacktown, be well serviced, and the creation of an independent trust and the provision of a discrete budget for that trust will ensure that the full potential of Parramatta Park is realised.

The previous Carr Government created Lower Prospect Canal Reserve. The local community group that has been monitoring the Government's performance on this issue for several years now is absolutely delighted that works in the Lower Prospect Canal have now begun. The canal is no longer used to supply water to Prospect reservoir. It will become an integral part of the reserve, and works have finally begun. The canal will be filled in, and various passive recreational works will be undertaken around the canal. As a result of that, the community is delighted that at long last the management plan we put in place is being implemented. Those key areas of recreation around Lower Prospect Canal, which is at the southern end of my electorate, and Parramatta Park, which is at the northern end, will provide key recreational areas for the people living in Wentworthville.

I conclude by repeating that this is a good budget for western Sydney. There are many electorates in western Sydney. There is an overlap between some of the gains we make in the budget, because it is difficult to say that one electorate benefits from a particular project when we all know that people living in Smithfield, Wentworthville, Seven Hills or Blacktown will benefit from improvements to Westmead Hospital, Blacktown Hospital, the M4 or whatever. Nevertheless I am confident that the money that has been provided for my constituents of Wentworthville in this year's budget is, in fact, an improvement on what has been provided in the past. That shows that the Government has a strong commitment to regional improvements for western Sydney. When honourable members refer to regions, a great deal is heard about the bush and sometimes it is forgotten that western Sydney is a region and is a beneficiary of these budget allocations because of that.

I compliment the Office of Western Sydney, which goes from strength to strength. It has provided a great focus for ensuring that necessary budgetary gains in western Sydney are channelled into the relevant areas. This year's State budget is a great budget for western Sydney, which also sometimes experiences temperatures of 46 degrees Celsius. I have empathy with the honourable member for Murrumbidgee, who referred to high temperatures in Griffith. I invite him to visit western Sydney, which also experiences hot weather, but at least budgetary allocations are spent appropriately in my electorate.

Ms MOORE (Bligh) [7.10 p.m.]: The State Budget reveals huge profits from booming urban consolidation. Over the past two years the Government has reaped a windfall of \$1 billion in stamp duty on contracts, conveyancing and mortgages on top of expected revenues of \$3.5 billion for the period. For the upcoming year \$2.4 billion in revenues is again expected from these sources, and continued urban consolidation is likely to lead to yet another windfall. How much of that has been allocated for facilities to support higher residential densities and for people affected by high accommodation costs? Inner Sydney has the highest rate of population growth, but police numbers are inadequate and falling. Reduced funding is commercialising Centennial Park and Moore Park land and a review of bus services is repeatedly deferred. Adding to that neglect are attempts to sell off police and school real estate. The Council of Social Service of New South Wales [NCOSS] assessed the budget and stated that the Government needs to work harder:

How well, with very strong State Budget revenues and a comfortable political margin, has the Carr Government done in improving the living standard (social and economic) of low and modest income earners, in our communities?

The Council of Social Service of New South Wales regards that as the key question in its mid-term review of the current Government. Unfortunately, the overwhelming answer is, "Not nearly enough". In responding to the 2001-02 State Budget, I agree with NCOSS, particularly its claim that the Government has failed to properly address issues of public and affordable housing. I was very concerned that housing was not mentioned in the Treasurer's Budget Speech, particularly given the estimated 97,000 people on the public housing waiting list. According to NCOSS statistics, median rents in Sydney rose from \$225 in March 1999 to \$260 in December 2000. It should be remembered that 28 per cent of people in New South Wales earn less than \$35,500 per year, yet pay over 30 per cent of their income on rent.

According to 2001 Productivity Commission estimates, New South Wales "boasts" the highest proportion of public tenants suffering overcrowding and tenant dissatisfaction levels, with location, amenity, and quality of housing being below the national average. In addition, Department of Housing staff are underresourced and stressed, with inadequate support to prevent high rates of absenteeism and low staff retention. Shelter New South Wales acknowledges that budget spending on housing has increased by 10 per cent to a total of \$616 million, which is enough to match the Commonwealth Government's shortfall. I supported the Minister for Housing's motion condemning the Commonwealth Government for decreasing funding for public housing.

I acknowledge the Government's commitment of an additional \$17.9 million to the crisis accommodation program for homeless people and people in crisis. I hope that some of this funding, along with a partnership project by the Department of Community Services [DOCS] and the South Sydney City Council will provide long-term solutions for the increasing numbers of homeless people in my electorate, particularly in Tom Uren .Square, Woolloomooloo. But there are still nearly 100,000 names of people on the housing register and homelessness is an increasing problem in Sydney. Some of the Government's stamp duty and gambling taxes blow-out must be spent on providing more public housing and more options to prevent homelessness.

I welcome the record \$7,549 million funding for education and training, particularly the allocation of \$157 million to school maintenance and \$140 million to improving literacy and numeracy. However, I am concerned about the Government's proposal to dramatically change the structure of schooling in inner Sydney by selling off a number of schools. The Government's blueprint for change has been developed without consultation, social impact assessment, or supporting educational arguments. The planned sell-off ignores inner city population growth and looks like real estate profiteering. I am pleased that Cleveland Street High School has been given a reprieve from closure following the Minister's assurance that an alternative community developed proposal would receive his full attention. I remain concerned that Redfern Public School is still slated for closure, despite its importance for the community, particularly the Aboriginal community.

Any Government decision about small community schools in Redfern and Waterloo needs to be made in the social context of South Sydney having low school attendance rates and serious drug-related youth crime. Last week's street riots in Waterloo and the endemic problems in Eveleigh Street are tragic reminders of the need for an all-of-government, long-term solution for this area, particularly for the Aboriginal community. I share the concern of NCOSS that there is no redistribution of State finances from wealthy private sector schools to provide much-needed assistance for low income students attending State schools.

During the 2001-02 financial year, \$50 million of the \$176 million allocated following the Drug Summit will be spent on improving methadone programs, expanding home detoxification and implementing a new heroin overdose plan, among other things. New resources will be produced, including a New South Wales family drug information kit and a community education campaign. I am pleased to be a member of both Community Drug Action Teams in my electorate, in Redfern and Kings Cross. It is vital that communities are able to participate in developing location-specific plans for tackling drug problems in their area.

Over the next two years, a medically supervised injecting room will be trialled in Kings Cross. I believe that initiative must be given the best chance possible to demonstrate that it can save lives, get drug users into treatment, and improve local amenity by getting injecting off the streets. With drug-related crime increasing and in the light of the number of young drug-addicted street workers in Kings Cross, Darlinghurst, and East Sydney, we need to reconsider trialling prescription heroin for chronic users who have failed in other treatments. Despite many Drug Summit participants being persuaded by international evidence of reduced crime, overdoses and homelessness, my motion for a trial was only narrowly defeated. A trial is supported by the New South Wales Director of Public Prosecutions, as well as the Royal Australian College of Physicians and the Justice James Wood, who presided over the Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service.

While the budget attempts to put a positive spin on the state of policing in New South Wales, it confirms the community's serious concerns that the New South Wales Police Service restructuring is targeted to save money, not to improve services and implement the Wood royal commission reforms; that the service is seriously understaffed and urgently needs effective strategies to retain the hardworking police by recruitment to increase their numbers; that high-tech equipment is given greater priority than community policing methods; and that a uniformed police presence should be provided on our streets to improve safety. While community protest appears to have stalled plans to close up to seven inner city police stations and to amalgamate the remainder into supercommands, I understand that radical restructuring is still intended. A revised proposal is being developed in secret.

While I have met with the Deputy Commissioner, he did not provide me with any details and I remain very concerned about the plans for policing in Bligh. Indeed, the Bligh community is increasingly dissatisfied and angry about rising crime as reported by the Bureau of Crime Statistics, and dwindling police numbers, as reported by the Police Association. Although I meet regularly with local area commanders in my electorate, I am not reassured by their reports that everything is fine, with arrests up and crime down. Residents and business operators report that drug dealing is still blatant and that crime and antisocial behaviour continue unchecked. Overstretched police commands are unable to respond to all complaints because all units are already dealing with other serious crimes.

Local communities, particularly in areas affected by the known drug hot spots of Eveleigh Street and Kings Cross, are beyond their endurance with assault, malicious damage, vandalism, drug dealing, injecting, robberies, street violence antisocial behaviour and social problems. I believe that our policing system, with its focus on community policing, works if it is adequately resourced. The New South Wales Police Service needs to be built up again through recruitment and we need to keep the hardworking and conscientious police officers whom we have.

An additional \$100 million has been allocated in the budget for New South Wales Corrective Services for wardens. It is of major concern that more gaol wardens than police officers are being recruited. Additional money is needed for prisoner rehabilitation programs, such as more education, vocational training and work programs, so that prisoners leave New South Wales gaols with real options and are not soon back in gaol. I welcome the Government's ongoing commitments to redressing the social and economic disadvantages that affect Aboriginal communities across the State. I remain concerned that the Government has thus far failed to address the terrible problems faced by inner-city Aboriginal communities, specifically those in Redfern and Waterloo.

The social justice budget statement provides information about the Aboriginal Community Development program, which is a \$200 million housing and infrastructure program delivering housing and infrastructure to 22 communities. Eight more are to be added in 2001-02. The program has been directed to priority Aboriginal communities and aims to improve the overall living standards and health of Aboriginal communities in New South Wales. Among the stated objectives of the program are the following: to target problems in selected communities rather than those across the whole State; to select communities on a needs basis, rather than on submissions; and to provide sustainable and viable solutions.

On several occasions I have raised with the Premier and his department the need for a place management project for the Eveleigh Street precinct of Redfern. I have also made several private member's statements on this issue, which is becoming increasingly urgent and tragic, as evidenced by the recent Channel 10 filming of yet another child injecting heroin. A long-term, comprehensive, whole-of-government, place management project is urgently needed in the Eveleigh Street precinct, a project which could be linked to the highly effective projects under the Aboriginal Communities Development program that are running in other parts of the State. Rescuing future generations of Australia's most significant urban Aboriginal community must be a high priority for the Government and for all Australians.

The major road project affecting the Bligh electorate in this budget is the \$400 million cross-city tunnel, which has recently been submitted to the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning for what appears to be almost certain approval. I remain concerned that, with a project of this scale, the Government has not ensured comprehensive traffic management in adjacent areas, particularly in Paddington and Edgecliff, and measures to reduce the negative impact of changed traffic patterns on residential inner-city streets. I am also concerned that the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] continues to oppose in-tunnel filtration to prevent concentrated exhaust emissions, particularly emissions from the tunnel portal at Kings Cross where the RTA's own studies reveal that air quality in the most densely populated square kilometre in Australia will worsen.

With the ongoing and worsening damage caused to my constituents' homes by the construction of the Eastern Distributor, I call on the Government to review construction methods to minimise the risks and to guarantee the full restoration of any damage from the cross-city tunnel construction at no cost to home owners. That is particularly important having regard to the extremely dense concentration of people living in Kings Cross, Darlinghurst, East Sydney and Woolloomooloo, adjacent to the route of the cross-city tunnel. I welcome the allocation of \$14,000 to South Sydney City Council under the road safety program. Increased safety initiatives are urgently needed. I ask the Minister to monitor action on this grant, so that it does not remain unexpended, as occurred with the 1998 grant of \$15,000 to enable South Sydney City Council to conduct a pedestrian access and mobility study. Pedestrian safety, access and priority remain matters of significant concern throughout the inner east.

The proportion of people in Bligh who use public transport or walk to work is dramatically above the Sydney average. Despite that, issues I have raised persistently with the Government are still not addressed. A promised review of bus services in the inner east has not occurred. There has been no comprehensive, effective assessment of changing public transport needs in the inner east, with my constituents continuing to complain about services that are unreliable or infrequent and which do not go where people need to go. Bus passengers are forced to travel via Central or the city whatever their destination, with no service linking Woolloomooloo and Redfern. No bus services go directly up Cleveland Street to and from the inner west to service Redfern and Moore Park. The Moore Park precinct remains underserved by public transport. There is no progress on constructing light rail from Central station to Moore Park, the University of New South Wales and beyond.

Urban consolidation, a policy supported in principle to limit urban sprawl, is being undermined by a lack of overview and compensating action. There is no effective monitoring of impacts and there are no mechanisms in place to ensure that amenities, such as the provision of open space, keep pace with increasing residential densities. Last year I sought from the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning an audit of open space in the inner city to assess the extent of the growing crisis, and to provide a responsible basis for urban consolidation in inner Sydney. I again call on the Minister for a much-needed audit. Little is being done to address the crisis, despite the Ministry of Urban Infrastructure Management's 1999 document entitled, "A Regional Summary of Major Urban Infrastructure Investment—Today and Tomorrow", which proposed a comprehensive park system, open space enhancement, access to foreshores, and development of links between existing parks and waterways.

A particular highlight in the past year, for which I commend the Government, is the commitment to transfer the Sir David Martin Reserve at Rushcutters Bay to the care and management of Woollahra Council. That is the culmination of a 20-year community battle to acquire this foreshore public land for public recreation, as required under the terms of the Commonwealth-State agreement that transferred the land to the New South Wales. I commend the Minister for Energy for reaching an agreement with Sydney City Council and the Minister for Police which may achieve a new park in Surry Hills on the site of the Police Centre car park. Following a strong local community campaign to have a proposed substation moved away from residences, it will now be built adjacent to the Police Centre, with an in-principle agreement for Sydney City to buy the car park to landscape for a city park after construction of the substation is complete in 2004.

However, the last year has seen continued battles to maintain open space and recreational facilities against the pressures to sell off the farm. Although the latest development proposals for the White City site at Paddington are significantly reduced, little land will be transferred to public ownership to compensate for the proposed rezoning, apart from a pocket park and paths through the site. The community remains angry that, despite \$30 million of public funds spent on the new tennis facilities at Homebush Bay, the Government did not require any public benefit at White City in return for the investment of taxpayers' money.

Police and Community Youth Clubs New South Wales has demanded \$4 million from Woollahra Council to purchase the Paddington Police and Community Youth Club, even though the land was donated by a former council for youth services and the building was funded by public subscription. This is another priceless community facility being stolen and flogged to the highest bidder. Despite the police Minister's legislative responsibility for the Police and Community Youth Club's board, he has taken no action to preserve this important facility for the recreational and developmental needs of future generations of young people living in this increasingly densely populated inner-city area.

In Redfern, the New South Wales Health Department is demanding a development-based valuation on the Douglas Street site, despite the land currently being zoned open space and South Sydney City Council wanting to buy it to maintain it for a park for our area, which is a community of high need. At Garden Island, both State and Federal governments have failed to ensure genuine public access to the five hectares of open space on Garden Island. Defence properties that could have given access to Kings Cross for both residents and tourists have been sold off and a massive warehouse was approved in February on the eastern foreshore. Federation Trust funding of \$6 million has only provided income-generating tourist access by ferry, with plans for pedestrian access along the eastern foreshore quietly shelved.

The budget papers report that total expenses for the Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust have increased significantly. According to the trust, expenses have risen from \$4.5 million in 1990 to \$9.6 million in 1999, to a predicted \$14.5 million in 2004. I would appreciate the Premier explaining these figures from the trust. Why have expenses risen so dramatically? How much of these costs relate to the trust's marketing and commercial programs? How much is being spent on increased senior management and consultants? Why are the

benefits of these increased costs not reflected in dramatically improved basic maintenance of grass and trees? Why are the ponds still so polluted? Why is the heavily used pedestrian path around the park flooded and impassable whenever it rains?

The budget papers do not make clear that the Government's contribution to the parklands has also dwindled dramatically. According to the trust, Government funding has gone from \$3.2 million, or 71 per cent of expenses, in 1990 to \$3.4 million, or 35 per cent of expenses, in 1998, with \$1.6 million, or 11 per cent of expenses, predicted for 2004. The increasing gap between Government funding and trust expenditure is filled by the escalating commercialisation of the parkland. That comes at not just a financial cost, but an unacceptable social, heritage, environmental and health cost. The progressive commercial exploitation is transforming the parklands from a precinct for passive recreational and participatory sports to a commercial entertainment complex, including commercial spectator sports, and an entertainment and shopping complex. Commercially leased facilities include tennis courts, a golf club and a restaurant. Special events such as the current circus and pay parking on precious grassed areas support the increasing commercial activities.

The Government's failure to adequately fund this precious public parkland has devastating long-term consequences. The greed, duplicity, hypocrisy and secrecy that led to the discredited proposal for a McDonald's restaurant on Moore Park continues. The Centennial and Moore Park Trust has quietly abandoned any commitment to end car parking on grassed areas of Moore Park by 2003. The trust has secretly included the introduction of pay parking in Centennial Park. The trust has diverted part of a Federation grant to construct a new car park, including removal and transplanting of 100-year-old fig trees to put in an access road for its commercial tenants in the tennis centre. The developers are still seeking a McDonald's-type development at Moore Park. The trust's agenda for the Moore Park planning study includes proposals for major commercial developments at the current E. S. Marks athletic field, with last-minute proposals for temporary venue car parking on the grassy site near the current golf course car park. I call on the Government to set a clear funding formula that ensures parklands of regional and State significance—such as the Centennial Parklands and the Botanic Gardens and Domain—are adequately funded to preserve and enhance them for current and future generations.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Lynch.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Ms MEAGHER: I seek leave of the House to note private members' statements for a period of up to 77 minutes.

Leave granted.

KU-RING-GAI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL RESIDENTIAL STRATEGY

Mr O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [7.30 p.m.]: I want to raise again the tortuous and slow path that Ku-ring-gai Council has been taking with the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning [DUAP] in relation to State Environmental Planning Policy 53. I again raise this matter in this Chamber because we still do not have a decision. This week the Premier has brought planning issues in this city and across the States to the fore. The Premier has been very good at taking a long-term position and a very broad-brush approach to issues that really do affect local communities. I regret to say that when it comes to looking after local communities, there is a huge gap between the rhetoric of the Premier and what is actually going on on the ground.

It is 15 months since Ku-ring-gai council unanimously agreed on a draft residential strategy. That was a significant achievement, given the years of conflict and division in the former council and the enormous work that the new council had to do following the September 1999 local government elections. It is 15 months since that draft residential strategy was agreed, almost a year since it was submitted to DUAP, and still the residents of Ku-ring-gai have no indication from this Government, the Minister or the department as to what the future holds for planning across Ku-ring-gai. I say delay if delay provides a better result, but I do not say delay for what appears to be delay's sake. Clearly DUAP and the Minister deserve to have bombs put under them because Ku-ring-gai residents have waited far too long.

An adverse consequence of the delay is that State Environmental Planning Policy 5 is creating havoc across the Ku-ring-gai environment. It suits developers in the current climate, where there is no medium density

planned for Ku-ring-gai, to buy land zoned for residential density at a cheaper price and put as many as 12, 14 or 16 units on those sites under the guise of SEPP 5 developments. That will end once council has a medium density strategy. Those developers will be forced to buy their residential blocks in the medium-density zones at a higher price. The Government's delay in making a decision on SEPP 53 is providing a windfall to developers across Ku-ring-gai, but more important, it is having a significant effect upon streets, neighbourhoods and local communities. Clearly a multiunit SEPP 5 development can change the character of a street in places like Wahroonga, but equally across Roseville, Lindfield and Killara significant streetscapes are being changed by these SEPP 5 developments.

I also make the point that the delays relating to SEPP 53 are also causing delays in the adoption by Ku-ring-gai council of other local planning instruments designed to give local communities, the Ku-ring-gai community, a greater say in planning across it. This delay also means that we do not know where Plan First will fit. Plan First is the Carr Government's regional approach to planning across the city. As I have said before, I am not in favour of Plan First because under that plan places like Gordon, Lindfield and Roseville in my electorate of Ku-ring-gai will be treated like Chatswood. There is a huge difference between the residential commercial developments going on in Chatswood and all of the suburbs that I represent in this Chamber.

I am concerned that rumours abound within government circles of a decision that is about to be made in relation to this matter. I am concerned that I cannot get a definite response from anyone, be it the director-general of the department or the Minister. It is time for the State Government to accept the strategy put forward by Ku-ring-gai council. I have said in this place before that I do not fully support everything that is in that draft residential strategy but I support the concept of local communities making planning decisions that affect local areas. I support local communities being responsible for local planning decisions and, to that extent, I urge the Government to stop the delay, end the procrastination and, more importantly, stop those developers ripping off people in Ku-ring-gai and changing the nature of Ku-ring-gai. We need a decision. It is time the Government bit the bullet. I ask the Premier to stop the rhetoric and order his planning Minister to give Ku-ring-gai council an answer on this matter.

BANKSTOWN AIRPORT UPGRADE

Mr ASHTON (East Hills) [7.35 p.m.]: It is timely that I raise once again the issue of the privatisation and therefore upgrade of Bankstown airport. As honourable members know, the airport is in the middle of my electorate of East Hills. While the public in most of south-western Sydney may feel that this matter has dropped slightly out of view, in fact the wheels of the Federal Government's bureaucracy are quickly turning to make the upgrade and expansion happen. As honourable members would know, the Federal Government has advised that indicative offers for the purchase of Kingsford Smith Airport [KSA] close on 13 July. Final bids have to be submitted by mid-September. As honourable members also know, in this Chamber I have consistently opposed the sale of Bankstown airport since the matter was first raised nearly two years ago. The Carr Government is on record, with local Labor members of Parliament and local councils, as saying that it will have nothing to do with facilitating this sale and upgrade of Bankstown airport.

The Federal Government initially intended to sell KSA and Bankstown airport together, but has deferred the sale of Bankstown airport to 2002. Bankstown airport has been offered as an overflow airport for KSA, and to provide increased capacity for regional aircraft. Obviously, with higher value slots going to KSA to maximise the sale price, the so-called "overflow" traffic will be regional aircraft, and possibly small jets. The Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, has said that the sale conditions for Bankstown airport will encourage an upgrade to attract overflow aircraft. Of course, that is playing with words for, in reality, if Bankstown airport is virtually rebuilt, its facilities modernised and its terminals and tower rebuilt and its runways lengthened, widened and strengthened to take heavier tonnage, there may be no overflow from KSA at all, simply an increase in regional aircraft at Bankstown, based on lower landing fees, aggressive marketing and probably Federal Government advertising. However, regional planes will be forced to Bankstown by the cost of landing at KSA and there will not be overflow aircraft at all.

While it seems that there will now be an environmental impact statement about Bankstown airport, what is of particular concern to those people in my electorate, myself and the people of the south and southwest Sydney region is that much of what is happening now with the sale of Sydney's KSA and Bankstown airport is subject to what is called commercial in confidence, and so the Federal Government can hide behind that aspect of the proposed sales.

I remind the House that issues I raised nearly two years ago about the privatisation and expansion of Bankstown airport still have not been answered. I might try to answer a couple of those questions. Why is the

Federal Government committee effectively placing Sydney's second airport in the middle of Australia's largest city? The answer is simple: Because that Government could not care less about the people in south and south-western Sydney. What advantage does a regional aircraft airport at Bankstown have for the people of New South Wales who live outside Sydney, the people of Bankstown? The answer is: None at all.

What advantage is there for a potential buyer of Bankstown airport? The site is clearly unsuitable for an increased airport. It cannot take jets—and we will make sure that it will not. With the failure of Compass years ago, and Impulse more recently, it is unlikely that any new operator could make a go of establishing a competitive airline in New South Wales or Australia, especially if it is landing at Bankstown. Might I congratulate the Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation for having stopped a potential land swap between Bankstown council and Bankstown airport, for that may have enabled access off Milperra Road to the airport site, allowing expansion of the airport site. This is further proof of this Government's commitment to oppose any Bankstown airport upgrade.

My constituents are also not fooled by the decision to defer the sale of Bankstown airport until 2002. The Federal Government does not recognise that the Bankstown proposal is very hard to sell. And, yes, the pun was intended. Hundreds of thousands of people live around the site; the Georges River runs along it; schools adjoin the site; indeed two schools, the Bankstown Grammar School and the Noar El Houda Islamic College, are sited on airport land. They will have to go. The Federal Government has put the sale off until after the next Federal election. This might seem to be good politics, but the social, environmental and financial difficulties will not go away. The councillors of Bankstown, Canterbury, Hurstville, Liverpool, Fairfield, Sutherland and Auburn, and indeed inner-city councils, have all agreed to commit large expenditures to oppose this negligent and high-handed proposal. The people of Sydney's south-west have not gone away, and are still prepared to do all they can to ensure that the Bankstown airport expansion and upgrade does not get off the ground.

GOOLMANGAR SCHOOLS SPEED ZONES

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [7.40 p.m.]: I raise an issue pertaining to my electorate. The member for Lismore gets to sit on a number of traffic committees of councils in the electorate. I will outline the concerns of schools in the area, especially the little schools that ask that the speed zones outside those schools be reduced. Tonight I speak in particular on behalf of the Goolmangar Public School Parents and Citizens Association and the teachers and students of the Goolmangar Primary School, who have sought my assistance and that of the Lismore City Council to approach the Minister for Roads, the Hon. Carl Scully, with a view to having the zones outside those schools reduced to 40 kilometres an hour.

Whilst I speak on behalf of the Goolmangar schools, this is certainly a problem affecting many country schools. I am sure every member who represents a country area will have been approached to have school zones reviewed. There seems to be a mentality—and it is not a reflection on the local Roads and Traffic Authority people—of, "No, we cannot do anything about it." However, the genuine pleas made by the schools reflect the problems that they see every day, with traffic passing the schools at speeds that are certainly not acceptable. The Goolmangar Public School is on the famous Nimbin Road, which is very busy. It is used by buses, trucks, cars and motorbikes. The road is used by residents, workers and tourists. The tourists use the road to visit Nimbin and as a route to Brisbane. The Goolmangar school community feels speed limits are not being adhered to. Often, vehicles speed through the school zone at more than 60 kilometres per hour.

The Parents and Citizens Association feels that a reduction in the limit to 40 kilometres per hour would reinforce the need for motorists to reduce their speed. The Goolmangar school is approached on both sides by bad corners, which greatly restricts road vision. That, combined with the uneven road surface and the lack of clear ground on the road verges, presents a dangerous situation. Goolmangar school would be typical of many country schools; they are not situated on long, straight roads. That is particularly so of schools in the electorate of Lismore, which seems to have more curved than straight roads. Travelling at 40 kilometres an hour through a school zone is much safer. This would allow motorists time to react should a crisis arise, especially considering the approaches to the school do not allow clear vision.

A greater proportion of the school students of the Goolmangar Public School are transported to school by parents' vehicles because of a lack of school bus services to Hayden Road. This means that vehicles frequently use the bus bay/letdown point. The association says that parents need to feel safe when pulling into the letdown point and also pulling out. Many parents feel that the area is unsafe because of the speed at which vehicles travel and the poor vision that they and other motorists have. Sadly, country areas do not have enough police. That is another argument. I am not being critical of police, because they cannot be policing every school site every day.

I am pleased that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Roads is at the table. The Minister and the Parliamentary Secretary, if they check with members who represent country schools, would know that this is not an isolated problem. I ask that the RTA be given more latitude in the adjusting downwards of the speed limits outside country schools, rather than issuing a blanket "No, we cannot reduce the limit on the speed zone without consultation with local schools and the community". It is pleasing that the little schools in country areas are once again becoming a force. More students are attending those schools, so the problem certainly will not go away. It can only get worse. The RTA must be in a better position to address these problems in the future. I ask the Parliamentary Secretary to approach the Minister with a view to having this problem addressed.

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Parliamentary Secretary) [7.45 p.m.]: The safety of schoolchildren is a priority of the Carr Government and of the Minister for Transport, the Hon. Carl Scully. School zones in country areas are reviewed on a case-by-case basis. The honourable member has made quite a convincing presentation to the House this evening. I will convey that to the Minister along with my representations. I have had the opportunity as Parliamentary Secretary to travel on a school bus in the honourable member's electorate to undertake an inspection of local roads. The point he made about roads in his electorate being more curved than straight probably applies a lot more broadly than to just roads in his electorate. I will convey the presentation made by the honourable member to the Minister, and I will furnish him with a reply as soon as possible.

PORT STEPHENS ELECTORATE VOLUNTEERS

Mr BARTLETT (Port Stephens) [7.47 p.m.]: I am very lucky to represent the electorate of Port Stephens. I would suggest, because of the small nature of the six or so villages of about 7,000 to 15,000 people I represent, the scattered nature of the settlement, and the environment, there are probably more volunteer organisations in my electorate than nearly any other electorate in New South Wales. There are a few volunteer organisations and people I would like to speak about this evening.

On 16 June I had the privilege of presenting a cheque to Mr Hans Siegers of the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard at Port Stephens. He was awarded one of the four Volunteer Emergency Services scholarships for the whole of New South Wales. He was the only water service volunteer to get an award; others went to State Emergency Services, bushfire brigades and the like. Hans got a cheque for \$2,500. I thank the Minister for Emergency Services, the Hon. Bob Debus, for that funding. Hans plans to use the scholarship money to visit the Royal New Zealand Coast Guard Service to inspect, participate in and report on the activities of this highly efficient rescue organisation. Subsequently, I was in touch with the mayor of Tauranga. I hope to organise some sister city accommodation for him. My best wishes to Hans on his trip to New Zealand and within Australia.

The next day, 17 June, I handed out certificates to the Community Transport Group of Port Stephens, at a ceremony at the Shoal Bay Country Club. The Community Transport Group at Port Stephens has been established in the Port Stephens local government area for the past 17 years. During this time the group has had approximately 60 volunteers. It currently has 10 volunteer drivers to convey transport-disadvantaged people to appointments and other destinations.

Last year, using three vehicles, they travelled over 6,500 kilometres and took 355 people to medical appointments and other commitments. That group has two 19-seater buses fitted with disabled access, a 14-seater bus and a station wagon. There are regular services to Newcastle each week from Nelson Bay and one from Karuah. The group operates regularly from Raymond Terrace, Nelson Bay and Tilligerry peninsula to Newcastle. I acknowledge the work done by Julieanne Gordon, Narelle Fisher, Jill Harris, Sonja Houston, Pam Johnstone, Vivien Scott, Brian Kates—who was not at the ceremony on the day—and Joanna Buckland-Jones. Three other awards were given to employees who had been with the group for almost 17 years. They were Les Payne, Coral Thomas and Brian Hankinson. I had pleasure in presenting certificates also to volunteer drivers. I say to that group: Well done and keep up the good work.

The final matter about which I would like to speak tonight is the Hunter Kids Big Day Out, which was organised by ClubsNSW, Newcastle and Hunter Valley zone. In this the International Year of Volunteers, clubs of the Hunter region organised a day in Tomteland for 2,100 sick, disabled and disadvantaged children from Newcastle and the Hunter region. Regional clubs from ClubsNSW and Club Keno donated about \$10,000. I attended that event. It was a magnificent day. People came from everywhere. There were volunteers from the Smith Family, the Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul, the Department of Community Services, Riding for the Disabled, local schools, the Lions Club of Nelson Bay and Raymond Terrace Rotary Club. It was a great day. Danny the dolphin launched his act on the day. I thank Tony Drew, the chief executive officer of Soldiers Point bowling club for organising the event and Charles Eason, a board member from ClubsNSW. The event received tremendous support and \$50,000 in sponsorship from local businesses and clubs, and 2,100 sick, disabled and disadvantaged kids and their carers had a great day.

ELECTRO OPTIC SYSTEMS

Mr WEBB (Monaro) [7.52 p.m.]: Tonight I refer to a good news story from Queanbeyan. Electro Optic Systems [EOS], an innovative firm which commenced operations in Queanbeyan in 1986, is involved in the laser tracking of space objects. Recently the firm was reported in an article in the *National Business Bulletin* as having received a business star award. I quote the opening lines from that article:

We create the products that create our market.

That statement was made by the Chief Executive Officer of Electro Optic Systems of Australia, Dr Ben Greene. He referred to that company's relationship with its customers and said:

In particular we focus on enterprise-critical problems that they can't effectively solve. We then—

- develop a brief based on their requirements, and use our extensive laboratories and R&D capability to develop solutions to those needs at our own cost.
- sell solutions back to our customers on a fixed-price basis.

The article in the *National Business Bulletin* then states:

Their defence products business (called Fire Control Systems Pty Ltd) was spun off from EOS in January this year after an 8-year development program. EOS remains the majority shareholder in this company, but its spin-off has allowed EOS to refocus on space systems, its core business.

The company started with an original team of four people and now employs more than seventy people across both operations.

The company operates an 18,000 square foot, state-of-the-art facility at Queanbeyan ... where it is focused on R&D and the production of electronics, lasers, software, and specialised optical systems.

EOS also has a purpose-built 8,000 square foot facility in the United States, used for production of large-scale optical telescopes for the world market.

EOS products are exported to Europe, the Middle East, Japan and the United States, with NASA being one of its better known clients. It won the 1996 Telstra and Commonwealth Bank New South Wales Small Business Award and several Australian Export Awards.

We are the only one-stop shop for major turn-key tracking or for observatory systems. Our space systems group now sells everything from lasers right up to a full observatory including instruments, telescopes, buildings, and tracking instruments.

EOS currently operates a satellite laser ranging and tracking system at Mount Stromlo in the Australian Capital Territory, which it designed. The article continues:

Our market research shows that over \$1.2 billion is spent globally each year on telescopes, instruments and observatories for space applications ...

Our business ... is now growing at about 50% annually.

The company also tracks space debris. The article also states:

In 2000 EOS disclosed it had been developing a space tracking system of unprecedented capability, to address an emerging problem for its customers.

According to NASA there are presently around 130,000 debris objects larger than 1 cm in orbit around the earth.

This debris presents quite a danger to satellites and space-age technology. The article continues:

Currently technology can only track debris larger than 10cm.

EOS has the ability to track debris that is only one centimetre in diameter. It is also involved in supplying quality infrastructure. The article states:

According to Dr Greene, over the past 15 years EOS could not get from suppliers the quality, price/performance and delivery times that their customers demanded.

Vertical integration was progressively forced on us ...

The subsidiaries emerging from this process allow us to offer responsive and innovative turn-key solutions as a prime contractor, as well as generating profits selling sub-systems directly to the market.

The company, which is faced with the challenge of expanding its global business, has recently seen meteoric growth. This is just one of the success stories from the Canberra and Queanbeyan districts. Other space-age technology businesses in Australia include Marco Engineering, which is located just out of Queanbeyan, Maestro Modems, which produces one of the best modems in Australia, and Sustainable Technologies Australia, which produces titanium oxide solar panels. These industries and others in the Australian Capital Territory and in Queanbeyan are leading Australia and New South Wales in space-age technology. I am proud to have them in my electorate.

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING FAIRFIELD OFFICE

Mr TRIPODI (Fairfield) [7.57 p.m.]: I have some good news about my electorate. I refer to the Fairfield office of the Department of Housing and take this opportunity to commend that office on the work that it has done. I praise the efforts of public servants in our community. I acknowledge the commitments and hard work of people in the Fairfield Department of Housing, who are confronted with a range of issues. I take this opportunity also to thank the leadership group in the Fairfield Department of Housing for the hard work that it has done. In particular I thank the area manager, Alex Ferguson and two people who work with her—team leader Bob Timmis and senior customs services officer Guz Loizou.

I will refer, first, to Bob Timmis, with whom my office has been dealing for many years now. On every occasion he responds to people's concerns with enormous humanity and efficiency. He creates and is responsible for the human face of the department, which has the difficult task of housing the needy. He does not just give my office and the community a standard departmental response—a response that is insensitive to particular issues and problems. His response to the concerns and issues raised by my office and by my constituents generally is a humane, caring and sensitive response. He is a great example of someone in the public service who is serving the public as best he can in difficult circumstances.

Gus Loizou works directly with the people. He is at the coalface; he is the troubleshooter in the department. He is capable of solving just about any problem in any situation. These people confront an enormous number of issues. Gus always follows through on the issues and finds a solution. I do not always accept the solution but in 95 per cent of cases we agree. In the other 5 per cent of cases he has an argument that survives any scrutiny and assessment. The Fairfield Department of Housing has an enormous staff turnover because it is an extremely stressful job, but these two people have managed to work in Fairfield for a long time. Their names often come to my attention when constituents thank me and them for the work they do.

Staff at the Department of Housing do not just house people; they deal with a whole range of issues. They deal with angry people, frustrated people and aggressive people. They deal with people with mental health problems and substance abuse problems. They deal with domestic violence and marital and family breakdowns. They have to be sensitive to the cultural needs of 133 different nationalities that live in Fairfield. They deal with disabled people and aged people. They get involved in disputes between neighbours and, on occasions, these involve the whole community. When one looks at the gamut of issues facing these people, one can see why they suffer enormous stress in their workplace.

I take the opportunity in Parliament to commend the whole team of the Department of Housing at Fairfield. They deal with one of the neediest areas in New South Wales. This is the first port of call for migrants to this country. They are the people who have the most difficulty, having to adjust to a new world. They also have very low incomes and a range of other problems, many that they bring with them from overseas. Only over time can public servants understand the problems that these people experience, be sensitive to them and manage them in the way they do at the Fairfield Department of Housing. I want to do something unusual, and that is to praise these public servants for their commitment and for the sensitivity they exercise in the performance of their duties, and generally to say on behalf of the tenants of the Department of Housing in the electorate of Fairfield: Thank you for your commitment and for the results you generate.

SUTHERLAND SHIRE DEVELOPMENT

Mr KERR (Cronulla) [8.02 p.m.]: I want to speak tonight about development in the Sutherland shire. Over the past 10 years the degree of conflict between development within the Sutherland shire and the expectations of the community have accelerated. This is similar to the pattern experienced across the Sydney region overall during the same period. The environment and development issues in particular are now well and truly on the public agenda for the twenty-first century. While most people are legitimately concerned about environment and development issues, legislation and the process that provides the land management within New

South Wales are becoming increasingly complex, effectively alienating the broader community. This constrains public participation at all levels of the planning process, which is provided for by the legislation.

People are ultimately concerned with the development outcome itself, but for the community to have a real say as to what development should occur, the community must first be involved in the plan-making process. The plan-making process set out in part 3 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act and consequent plans effectively provide the most important considerations for council when determining development applications. Last year council released for public comment Sutherland draft local environmental plan 2000. This plan came under substantial criticism from various directions.

Concerns raised included insufficient emphasis on the environment, lack of a sound strategic planning base and insufficient changes from the current planning controls to appropriately manage the extent and scale of inappropriate redevelopment that has occurred. Having regard to the controversy associated with the production of a new local environmental plan, council engaged Mr John T. Woodward to undertake a public inquiry into the preparation of the plan. The outcome of the Woodward inquiry was published in March. The inquiry was conducted through December 2000 and January 2001, normally a bad time for community involvement. Consequently, the Woodward inquiry was critical of its inability to achieve a cross-section of community views, stating:

The lack of a range of views from across a wide cross-section of the Shire community is disappointing and a matter for concern. The operation of a new LEP for the Shire requires a sense of ownership of the final plan if continuous conflict and undermining of plans is to be held in check.

The inquiry also summarised a number of issues raised by those making submissions to the inquiry. They include a need to protect the natural environment of the Kurnell Peninsula; a desire to use surplus government land for open space; a need for more walkways and cycleways; the obligation for further development in the Sutherland shire, having regard to the housing and development needs of the Sydney region as a whole; inadequate consideration of public transport and traffic planning; the need to retain industrial land and employment opportunities; development pressures within the Cronulla Centre; and the obligation to protect the ecological significance of the Taren Point-Shell Point wetlands.

The inquiry recommended against continuing to utilise existing local planning controls or proceeding with the draft local environmental plan in its exhibited or amended form. The alternative recommended by the Woodward inquiry is to pursue a new shire local environmental plan that draws on the just released New South Wales Government white paper. This new plan is to provide three distinct but linked aspects of local planning, being: five key planning strategies for the shire; land use and development and design controls focused on localities in the shire; and preparation of local action plans as supportive and complementary to the other two.

The five key strategies to be prepared are: a natural environment strategy; a revised housing strategy; an open space and recreation strategy; a transport and traffic strategy; and an employment, social and economic development strategy. The findings of the Woodward inquiry are extremely important and their review and understanding by the people of the Sutherland shire is encouraged. The strategies recommended by the Woodward inquiry must achieve broad-scale acceptance by all groups within the community if the ultimate outcome is to provide greater certainty. There is no one greater single problem arising out of the current planning framework in the Sutherland shire than certainty.

Purchasers of land have no certainty about what they may be able to develop. Residents have no certainty with regard to what may be developed in their neighbourhood. Applicants, including design consultants, have no certainty in regard to what form of development may be acceptable to council. Council planners often have limited certainty as to what the adopted policy context of council is in regard to different developments. Council itself is likely to be unclear as to what its policy context should be when considering development, particularly having regard to the complexity of the process and the overriding considerations of the State Government. I urge all members to become involved.

LIVERPOOL ELECTORATE BANK BRANCH CLOSURES

Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [8.07 p.m.]: I wish to talk about declining banking services in the Liverpool area, particularly at Miller. On 15 June I received a letter from Ron Campbell, the Regional Manager, Sales and Service, of the Commonwealth Bank. The opening few lines of that letter read:

On Friday, 27 July 2001, the Commonwealth Bank's Miller branch will cease operations.

The decision to close this branch was taken only after a thorough investigation of many factors, including both current and future business trends, customer usage and the alternative services.

We will continue to have a strong presence in the area with branches at Liverpool, Casula and Westfield Liverpool. All these branches offer Autobank facilities.

There is more in the same tone from the Commonwealth Bank. It was presumably a cynical attempt to placate the opposition from me and the local community to this outrageous announcement. It was spectacularly unsuccessful. The local community is appalled at the closure of the Miller branch of the Commonwealth Bank. The Miller branch is located in the Miller shopping centre. It is an integral element of that shopping centre and a focal point of the community. The decision by the Commonwealth Bank to close this branch is a classic example of a bank putting profit before people. It treats Miller and all of Green Valley with contempt. It exhibits the unrestrained avarice of private banks. It indicates the obsession about maximising profits, which seems to be characteristic of banks.

Outrage greeted the announcement. I have prepared a petition, which is circulating in the local community. It can be signed in my office or at the local Department of Housing office at Miller, amongst other places. There is a whole host of problems with the closure of this bank. A campaign committee has approached me and it is likely that there will be a protest outside the Commonwealth Bank on the day of the closure. Many people want proper branch services at a bank. People who used to travel to Miller for such services will now have to travel to Casula or Liverpool. At the very least that is inconvenient for the elderly or for people with a disability. It is also extremely expensive. It might not be expensive for those who make decisions about closing bank branches, but it is certainly expensive for pensioners who want to use branch services.

I note from the front page of today's *Sydney Morning Herald* that the chief of the Commonwealth Bank earns \$2 million per annum. In addition, he made an \$8 million killing on some share sales. It is not surprising that someone like him does not understand the cost to a pensioner of travelling from Miller to Liverpool to use an alternative branch. One alternative that is proposed is to use an automatic teller machine [ATM]. That is fine, but what about the significant number of people in my electorate who have difficulties with English and, frankly, cannot understand enough to use an ATM? What about people who have difficulties using technology or who are frightened of it? It seems appalling that these people are being ignored. The need to travel to other branches will simply lengthen queues at those branches; queues will simply get longer and longer.

It will mean a decline in the quality of service provided by the banks. There will also be a real problem for shopkeepers who are used to depositing cash with banks at the end of the day. These are not the only branch closures in Liverpool recently. On 27 April the Colonial Bank at Liverpool Plaza stopped offering branch services. On 4 July the National Australia Bank branch at the corner of Scott and Macquarie streets is slated to close. These issues have gained a lot of currency lately, but it is worth noting that there is a long tradition of people understanding that banks are interested in profit, not people. In 1894 a bloke called W. G. Spence wrote:

Usury is robbery, and every private bank, or finance agency are but legalized stealers of the people's labour results. The money power is the great power of the age and the sooner it is destroyed the better ... Financial institutions are absolutely unscrupulous, inhumane and careless as to who sinks, so long as their shareholders get their usury.

I should add that W. G. Spence ratted on the Labor Party during the conscription debate. But despite that, what he said in 1894 was completely accurate. I quote a poem written in 1894 by our greatest poet, Henry Lawson. The last four lines of his poem *Freedom on the Wallaby* states:

We'll make the bankers feel the sting
Of those that they would throttle.
They needn't say the fault is ours
If blood should stain the wattle.

Such feelings have been expressed for a considerable time. It is interesting to note that in the second reading speech on 15 October 1947 in the bank nationalisation debate the great Labor Prime Minister Chifley said:

... private banks are conducted primarily for profit and therefore follow policies which in important respects run counter to the public interest ...

Nothing has changed. The banks have learnt absolutely nothing, despite having been told this for more than 100 years. Like the Bourbons, and with about as much political progressiveness as the Bourbons, they have learnt nothing from history. They continue to exploit and continually ignore people. They continue to treat people in Australia generally and those in my electorate in particular with absolute contempt. They deserve to be condemned thoroughly by everyone.

Mr MARKHAM (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [8.12 p.m.]: I listened to what the honourable member for Liverpool said. No doubt all members throughout New South Wales have experienced branch closures, especially in the bush.

Mr Hazzard: Which bank?

Mr MARKHAM: The Commonwealth Bank, the National Australia Bank—you name it! All banks are tarred with the same brush. A number of bank branches in my electorate have closed. I know that the people's bank, the Bank of Bendigo, has a branch at Oak Flats and will establish two community banks at Port Kembla and Dapto.

Mr Hazzard: And Collaroy.

Mr MARKHAM: I do not know about that. The big banks treat the people of New South Wales and, indeed, Australia, as a joke. They have total contempt for the people who ensure that their livelihood is guaranteed. It is time governments intervened to ensure—

Mr Hazzard: Is that Labor Party policy?

Mr MARKHAM: No. It is time governments ensured that what the honourable member for Liverpool has said tonight becomes a reality, that we have proper banking facilities in this State and, indeed, in this country. We must ensure that ordinary people are able to access financial institutions. The banks ride roughshod over the people of New South Wales and, indeed, Australia, and it is time we pulled them into gear.

WAKEHURST ELECTORATE BANK BRANCH CLOSURES

NORTHERN BEACHES BUS SERVICES

Mr HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [8.14 p.m.]: Although I did not intend to talk about bank closures, I cannot let the moment pass without agreeing with my colleagues on the other side of the House. That is becoming less rare, which is a worry. My electorate has had exactly the same problems with the banks. Unfortunately we had a similar situation with the Commonwealth Bank and the Colonial Bank. When the Colonial Bank closed we were told that we would get much better service from the Commonwealth Bank. However, the other day the queue at the Commonwealth Bank in the heart of Dee Why was out the door. I suspect that it is exactly the same—

Mr Markham: Everywhere.

Mr HAZZARD: The honourable member is right. The strategy is one of wear them down. The banks think that if they do not provide sufficient staff in branches, eventually people will use ATMs. That is okay if people want to use ATMs, but the banks must get serious about letting people know when it is appropriate to use an ATM and when it is not. If people want to be served by a person—I agree with my colleagues opposite on this matter—it is time the banks got serious about delivering that service. They should be doing that in my electorate, as they should be doing it in the Liverpool electorate and in every other electorate in New South Wales. Originally I intended to talk about bus services on the northern beaches.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills): Order! With the indulgence of the House, and in accordance with a ruling by Speaker Rozzoli, the honourable member for Wakehurst may move on to another topic.

Mr HAZZARD: I thank the House for its indulgence. My comments about bank branch closures were an introduction. I want to talk about bus services on the northern beaches.

Mr Markham: Taking people to banks.

Mr HAZZARD: We need buses to take people to banks, hospitals and medical services. Some areas on the northern beaches do not have a decent bus service. First, I acknowledge that hardworking bus drivers and others in the local depot contribute magnificently to the local community. However, I am concerned that perhaps they are not receiving the necessary support from the Carr Government. When the honourable member for Maroubra became Premier he said that he wanted cleaner air and to get more cars off the road. Yet on the northern beaches life is getting more difficult; we have a much busier traffic flow. We would all be pleased to have improved bus services.

On the northern beaches the 100 bus service runs to the airport. This bus service leaves the peninsula and makes its way to North Sydney and in so doing provides the only direct bus service to North Sydney. The service then moseys its way across the harbour bridge and up to the eastern end of Martin Place. Many people, especially the elderly, use the 100 bus service to travel to medical specialists in Macquarie Street. The service is

not necessarily used by people taking flights overseas or interstate; they simply use the bus service to get from the northern beaches to the city to visit their doctors.

A few weeks ago it was announced that the 100 airport bus service will terminate. I have been told by constituents and other people on the northern beaches that when a survey of the service was undertaken termination of the service was almost a fait accompli. The consultants who checked the number of people using the service got on the bus at Dee Why, got off at North Sydney and simply asked people, "Where have you come from? Where are you going to?" That is a silly way to conduct a survey. That certainly gave the message to my constituents that the agenda was operating from the Carr Government level. Termination of the 100 service is a disappointing outcome for residents on the northern beaches.

When I asked senior management of State Transit whether they would at least consider providing a bus service from Dee Why to the airport during peak hour, especially for airport workers and those who need to get to the airport early, the answer was no. I then asked whether they would provide extra services, not necessarily for North Sydney but simply to the eastern end of Martin Place so that people can travel to medical specialists. The answer was, "We will see when we get around to our next major review". That is not good enough. I call on the Carr Government to get serious about delivering better bus services on the northern beaches. We need cross-regional bus services; we need the 100 airport bus service, perhaps in a modified form; and we certainly need more services to the eastern end of Martin Place. I call on the Government to deliver some fair dinkum, decent bus services and, at the same time, tell the banks what they should be doing.

Mr MARKHAM (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [8.19 p.m.]: I wish to reply to the two private member's statements that the honourable member for Wakehurst made. In relation to the first, I think the honourable member should refer the matter to the Federal Minister for Finance and Administration, the Hon. John Fahey. I will make sure that the second part of his two-part private member's statement is brought to the attention of the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads in New South Wales.

AUSTINMER SURF-LIFESAVING CLUB AWARDS NIGHT

Mr CAMPBELL (Keira) [8.20 p.m.]: In this International Year of Volunteers, one of the iconic organisations comprising people who volunteer in our country is the surf-lifesaving movement. I draw to the attention of the House the annual presentation night of the Austinmer Surf Life Saving Club Incorporated and, importantly, the season that the club had in the summer of 2000-01. Austinmer Beach was fatality free as a result of the good work of the professional lifeguards employed by the Wollongong City Council during the week and also as a result of the volunteer members of the Austinmer Surf Life Saving Club.

The evening was a very friendly one, which seems to be typical of the functions hosted by organisations of volunteers. They are honest and decent people. Tom Ellicott, who is the president of the club, extended a warm welcome to everybody who attended and spoke very eloquently in support of the members of his club while acknowledging the contributions that they had made as a team. Steve Perkiss has been associated with the club for a long time and, as club secretary, was responsible for organising the function. The Parliamentary Secretary, the honourable member for Wollongong, would know Jan Wilton, who has been a member of the Austinmer club for 50 years. When one considers that the club has been in operation for only 91 years, Jan Wilton's membership is quite remarkable. Jan has contributed tremendous efforts as a lifesaver, a competitor at carnivals and an administrator. The club presented him with a special award, and it was a great pleasure to present the award to such a gentleman.

The Best Senior Member and Carnivals Award was won by the veterans boat crew, who won a gold medal at the Australian titles. Greg Stray, Martin Wilton, Paul Wilkinson and Brendan Wilton were coached by Denis Paterson, who is a life member of the club. The club captain, Mark Roebuck, put in a huge effort throughout the year and acted as the master of ceremonies for the evening's function. He introduced the Beaches Encouragement Award, which was presented by Barry and Colleen Gilbert from the Beaches Hotel. The hotel is a major sponsor of Austinmer Surf Life Saving Club. The award was presented to McLeay Herriott, a 13-year-old young man who is a strong contributor to the club and who has a big future in competition. A number of bronze awards and lifesaving awards were also presented throughout the evening. Dave Eadie made a huge effort in providing support for the training of young people who received those awards.

The Best Cadet Award at the Orca Carnivals, which involves the junior membership of the club, was awarded to Tegan Wiblin, who competes in the under-11-years level and is also a strong competitor for the club. The Best Junior at Carnivals Award was presented by a long-term member of the club, Graham Mutch, and was

awarded to the junior boat crew comprising Zac Martin, Shane Grose, Glen Sweeney, Tim Holland and Josh Gunning. The crew worked very hard at training to be very competitive. The Swim Point Score 2000/2001 Award was presented by Jan Wilton, to whom I referred earlier, to McLeay Herriot and Alex Herriot. I referred earlier to McLeay Herriot. I should add that Alex also has a strong future in surf sports and in the volunteer lifesaving area of community service.

The Best Patrol Award was won by a patrol comprising Sue Pritchard, Darren Riordan, Geoff O'Donnell, Lesley Head, Ross Mills, Greg Anning and Neil Wiblin. The season extended from September to April, and the volunteers contributed eight months of patrols, which demonstrates the commitment of people who undertake beach patrols, undergo training, and contribute instruction. The Patrol Person of the Year Award was presented to Steve Maron, who contributed 55 hours of formal patrol. The Best All-Round Member of the club was awarded to David Eadie, who contributed 78 hours of patrol as well as a great deal of instruction for the junior members.

The Best Senior Member Award was presented to Mark Roebuck, the club captain, who contributed a huge effort to ensure that the club functioned extremely well and maintained its patrols of the beach throughout the season. The Austinmer Surf Life Saving Club has a strong junior program which is known as the Orcas. Sue Pritchard has been instrumental in organising the juniors and in ensuring that they had a strong program of development. I take this opportunity to congratulate Sue on her hard work and achievements. I congratulate all members of Austinmer Surf Life Saving Club on their service as volunteers to the community.

Mr MARKHAM (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [8.24 p.m.]: The honourable member for Keira has again informed the House of the annual awards presentation evening of the Austinmer Surf Life Saving Club. I recall that the honourable member informed the House of last year's awards function and I was as pleased on that occasion to respond to his remarks as I am on this occasion. The Austinmer club is a great surf club and is one of 17 great surf clubs within the Illawarra branch of the Surf Life Saving Association of this State. On 14 July the Illawarra branch will hold its presentation evening.

Throughout many years of my association with the branch, I cannot recall having missed this annual occasion. However, it so happens that this year's function will coincide with a very important day during NAIDOC Week. I have been invited to attend as a guest the Browns Flat Aboriginal Housing Corporation's Black and White Debutantes Ball in Bombaderry. I have conveyed my apology and an apology on behalf of my wife to Mr Ken Sweeney, the District President of the Illawarra branch of the Surf Life Saving Association, but I have no doubt that my parliamentary colleague the honourable member for Keira will convey my views and support for the surf-lifesaving movement and its volunteers who patrol beaches right throughout the summer.

TELSTRA PRIVATISATION

Mr TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [8.26 p.m.]: During the past week the people of the Northern Tablelands electorate received an up-beat message from the Federal member for New England, Stuart St Clair, about the a substantial improvement to services in the area since the part privatisation of Telstra. I actually have the exact words spoken by Stuart St Clair in the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's *News Online* article. He stated:

The Member for the northern New South Wales seat of New England, Stuart St Clair, says, 'services have substantially improved since Telstra was partly privatised.'

Mr St Clair seems to be saying that the substantial loss of employment by Telstra employees since partial privatisation of services is good news for the people of New England. I would not like that statement to be some form of massaging of local communities in preparation for full privatisation. I fear that is the case.

The phone calls, faxes and mail received by my electorate office in response to the statement made by the Federal member offer ample evidence that all is not well with Telstra services in the Northern Tablelands and New England electorates. There have been some improvements, but they have not scratched the surface in meeting the requirements of country consumers. I have been informed on very good authority that funding under the Commonwealth Government's commitment to the Networking the Nation program has all but dried up and that the Commonwealth Government will be approaching the State Government to enter into a partnership to sustain the program and supply further mobile phone and Internet services to rural communities. In other words, the Commonwealth Government is abnegating its responsibility and the commitment that was made.

Moreover, the Commonwealth Government intends to approach the State Government to try to top up the funding to ensure that the commitments given by the Commonwealth Government can be completed. If that

is so, I make an early claim for the 10 mobile phone towers that are needed in the areas around Tenterfield, Glen Innes, Bundarra, Delungra, Yarrawich and Hillgrove. At present, there is no mobile phone coverage in these areas at all. Moreover, quite a number of the small communities that are situated in those areas have no communications services at all. I trust that the Networking the Nation funding will stretch to complete the mobile phone towers planned for Walcha and Ashford in the current round. I pause to indicate that the honourable member for Tamworth, who is present in the Chamber, has also raised the lack of communications in regional communities.

Recently I heard of a tragic incident in which a farmer died after a motorbike accident on his property. He was not found for some time. If he had been able to contact his home by the use of the mobile phone, his wife might have been able to save him. Appropriate mobile phone coverage is essential for farmers and people who live in the country in terms of their safety, day-to-day management and during times of crisis as such as bushfires, floods and drought. Since the people in my electorate were told that their services had been so dramatically improved, I have been informed by many people in the area that an enormous quantity of cable has been left lying around because the contractors do not have the time to put it back underground after carrying out repairs. There are long periods of delay for connections and repairs. I understand that at least 800 outstanding repair jobs have been identified but are now part of a long waiting list. In Armidale 10 years ago, for example, repairs were carried out within 48 hours. The waiting period now is up to three weeks.

Another concern is the unsatisfactory Internet service to regional communities. Some committees have no Internet service at all, and some have two kilobits, which is virtually nothing. The situation is creating enormous frustration for farmers, students and operators of small business. Even basic connection speeds of 19.2 kilobits are barely adequate. All rural communities should have access of 64 kilobits or more. These days farmers require Internet access as a basic risk management tool. It is of no use to them to have all the information they need on the Internet when it is unavailable to download. It would make all the difference to the efficient operation of their businesses if they were able to have up-to-date information about weather forecasts, futures contracts, product and commodity prices, and so on.

Statistics now show that the majority of farmers rely on off-farm income to remain economically viable. Many more opportunities would exist for all people on the land to take part-time or full-time telework if they had higher speed Internet access. Farmers in my area with inadequate Internet access have told me that it can take up to an hour and a half to download a photograph and that their service is continually dropping out. The message from country people is clear: they want the advantages of modern technology and the opportunities that come from improved services provided by Telstra. Although the Federal Government has responsibility for the major part of this facility, I hope that, whatever the situation, these services can be improved for the people of my community. I am informed that the Federal member does not have a Telstra phone. I am, therefore, surprised that he has made the comments he has. [*Time expired.*]

Private members' statements noted.

BILLS RETURNED

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

Appropriation Bill
Appropriation (Parliament) Bill
Appropriation (Special Offices) Bill
State Revenue Legislation Further Amendment Bill

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

Insurance Protection Tax Bill

Consideration of amendments deferred.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr Whelan agreed to:

That this House at its rising this day do adjourn until Friday 29 June 2001 at 10.00 a.m.

House adjourned at 8.34 p.m.
