

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 6 September 2001

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

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

COMMUNITY SERVICES (COMPLAINTS, REVIEWS AND MONITORING) AMENDMENT (APPLICATION) BILL

Second Reading

Debate called on, and postponed on motion by Mr Hazzard.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (REVIEW OF LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [10.02 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The purposes of this bill are to introduce fairness into the relationship between State and local government, improve the transparency of government legislation, engender accountability in the legislative process and improve the effectiveness of government legislation. It is all too easy for governments, under advice from their departments and agencies, to introduce legislation without giving due consideration to the legislative impacts, particularly where practical responsibility for, and the costs of implementation, lay outside the State Government, in most cases with local government. There has been a raft of such legislation in recent years. In most instances resources to cover the costs of implementation have not accompanied the imposed responsibilities. The costs include administration, systems, enforcement and, in many instances, a requirement to engage additional specialist staff or external consultants. In the few instances where consideration was given, it was generally inadequate. These impositions are commonly referred to as unfunded mandates.

It can be argued that this imposition of responsibilities and hidden transfer of costs is somewhat dishonest from a public policy point of view. Under the current system the Parliament is not necessarily made aware of the transferred costs of the legislation. This bill seeks to change that. In the interests of fairness, transparency and accountability—all attributes of good government—it is imperative that a process is in place to ensure that a mechanism is in place to identify, assess and account for potential impacts. It would be irresponsible to oppose such a mechanism. We need to recognise that local government is a legitimate sphere of government. It is not a network of State Government branches or agencies—despite the apparent views of many of those in government and many of the bureaucrats who run our State agencies. Local government is a democratically elected sphere of government, with councils primarily accountable to their communities through the ballot box, not the State Government.

Local government is fiscally distinct from State Government. While it may operate largely under State legislation, the Local Government Act and the Planning and Environment Act, unlike State agencies it is not a financial dependant of the State Government. Councils are largely financed by the community through rates and charges, with additional government support primarily provided by Commonwealth financial assistance grants. Indeed, State government grants to local government represent only about 5 per cent of local government revenues and that has been declining as a proportion of total revenues.

While recognising local government as an autonomous sphere of government, it is also important to recognise that local government plays a critical role in the implementation of State, and to a lesser extent Commonwealth, government policy and programs. Much of the State Government mandate is delivered to the community through councils. The effectiveness of government policies and programs will be dependent, in

many cases, on local government's capacity to implement them. Governments and their bureaucracies should not ignore this fact. This includes national competition policy—a complex issue that I will not stick my fingers into now.

We should also recognise the important role that local government plays in the provision of infrastructure and services in the community. For example, local government is responsible for the vast majority of roads and bridges in the State—83 per cent of total road length in New South Wales. It is responsible for virtually all water supply and sewerage infrastructure and services outside the Sydney and Hunter water districts. Local government owns and operates the majority of airports outside the metropolitan area, including large regional airports such as Williamtown, Wagga Wagga, Ballina and Dubbo. Local government is also responsible for waste services, parks and sporting facilities, the public library network and associated services, a large proportion of health and community services, and planning, environment and building regulation.

Local government has been increasingly taking on additional responsibilities, such as natural resource management, economic development, law and public safety. It is also taking on greater responsibility in traditional areas, such as waste management, health, community services and environmental management generally. The increased responsibilities have resulted from the combined effects of new legislation, the devolution of responsibilities from other spheres of government, the abrogation of responsibilities by other spheres of government and rising community expectations.

Communities are increasingly demanding that councils do more in areas, such as the environment, aged care, youth services, health services, job creation and economic sustainability, and councils must respond to these demands. It should be remembered that by its very nature local government is the sphere of government that is closest to the community and the most responsive to the community. Councils do not shy away from these additional responsibilities. Councils are generally prepared to take them on, and they are often best placed to fulfil them efficiently and cost effectively, provided they have the resources. For a start, they are out there on the ground with administrative structures in place. They possess detailed local knowledge, cover the whole of the State and remain uniquely responsible to the community.

Local government is being starved of the financial resources required to meet these responsibilities. I will discuss this later. The Commonwealth Grants Commission [CGC] has recently acknowledged the growth in local government responsibilities and functions, legislated and otherwise. In its recent draft report entitled "Review of the Operation of the Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act 1995" the CGC acknowledged reports that the changes have resulted from devolution, raising the bar and cost shifting. Devolution is where another sphere of government gives local government responsibility for new functions, that is, unfunded mandates.

Raising the bar is where another sphere of government through legislative or other changes increases the complexity of or standard at which a local government must provide services, hence increasing its costs, also unfunded mandates. Cost shifting is where local government agrees to provide a service for another sphere of government but funding is subsequently reduced or stopped, leaving local government holding the bag for a service that the community expects; or where another sphere of government ceases to provide a service and must intervene in the interests of the community, that is, unfunded mandates by stealth, ambush or abrogation, and increased community expectations.

The commission's analysis of local government expenditure in the period 1961-62 to 1997-98 showed an increase in the relative importance of recreation and culture, and housing and community amenities. It showed an expansion of education, health, welfare and public safety services and, as would be expected, a decline in the proportion of expenditure on roads and property-related services. The CGC concluded that local government responsibilities have broadened and are increasingly providing human services. I would confidently assert that there has also been a substantial increase in environmental expenditure, although not readily identified in the standard financial classifications. An independent analysis by a respected body like the CGC supports local government assertions that responsibilities and functions have increased. Local government can no longer be dismissed in terms of roads, rates and rubbish. The analysis also supports the conclusion that, to a significant extent, this is the result of unfunded mandates.

The CGC concluded that where the source of financial pressure is the result of changing policies or actions of other spheres of government, it would be appropriate for that sphere to acknowledge local government's need for greater financial assistance. Examples are the Protection of the Environment Operations Act, the Local Government Amendment (ESD) Regulation, stormwater management planning, the Local

Government (Approvals) Amendment (Sewage Management) Regulation, the Waste Minimisation and Management Act, the Contaminated Land Management Act, environmental objectives for New South Wales waters and the Marine Parks Act.

I would hope that I am largely preaching to the converted when it comes to recognition of the important roles and responsibilities of local government. I would be disappointed if there were not a high proportion of members who have served—and in some instances still do—on councils. However, it does seem that some members tend to forget their local government roots in the heady atmosphere of this Chamber. Financial constraints for local government and unfunded mandates resulting in increased responsibilities and functions are placing an unsustainable burden on local government and local government resources. Many honourable members will know first hand that local government finances are severely strained, and becoming increasingly more so.

This is the result of several factors. First, Commonwealth Financial Assistance Grants to local government have remained static in real terms and have fallen as a proportion of Commonwealth tax revenue from around 2 per cent of income tax in the 1980s to less than 0.6 per cent now. There has been no provision for increased responsibilities, mandated or otherwise. I note that Federal Assistance Grants were originally introduced by the Whitlam Government in specific recognition of the important roles and responsibilities of local government. To its credit, the Fraser Government honoured this commitment. Local government Federal Assistance Grants peaked under the Fraser Government and have been declining ever since. Second, there has been a steady decline in the proportion of State Government grants to local government as a proportion of overall revenue from around 12 per cent of local government revenue in 1974-75 to around 5 per cent now. Third, the mandate is unfunded, which is at the core of this bill. Fourth, the revenue raising capacity of local government is severely limited.

The Commonwealth and to a lesser extent State governments have a broad range of taxing options available, many of which are growth linked—for example, income tax, company tax, payroll tax, stamp duties and poker machine taxes. Local government has only one tax option, that is, rates, which would be a growth tax in the absence of rate pegging. Rates make up about 50 per cent of council revenue in New South Wales, although this varies across different councils. Other major components are user charges and fees, and grants, which represent about 17 per cent of average revenue. Last, but not least, is rate pegging. It has been soundly argued that rate pegging is both an unnecessary and inefficient constraint on local government. New South Wales is the only State that maintains rate pegging; even Jeff Kennett backed away from the idea of rate pegging.

In other States rates are kept in check by the ballot box—as they should be. As a democratically elected sphere of government, local government is accountable principally to the electorate, not to another sphere of government. No other State has found the need for heavy-handed intervention by the government. The arguments against the current system of rate pegging range beyond the immediate scope of this bill, so I will not elaborate on them all. However, rate pegging is at the heart of the problem of unfunded mandates. As many honourable members would be aware, rate pegging limits the annual increase of council's general revenue, which is largely rate revenue. Unfunded mandates must be funded from general revenue. Obviously this means that while councils are forced to incur costs imposed through government legislation they do not have the option of recouping those costs through rates.

Local government is, in effect, caught in a vice. Governments and their agencies may think this is a clever and cost-effective way of implementing legislation, but they are deluding themselves. At the end of the day something must give. Ultimately, the combined effects of rate pegging, unfunded mandates and other financial pressures on local government mean that infrastructure and service provision are compromised. I cannot accept that white-anting councils and their communities is a legitimate way of funding State Government policy agendas. The Minister for Local Government has said much about the financial viability of some councils. He would benefit by having a good look at the cause of financial stress.

This bill concerns only the costs and responsibilities imposed on local government as a consequence of New South Wales Government legislation. This is only one source of increased responsibility, but it is a major source over which local government has the least control because we are talking about State Government mandated impositions. However, it is one that the New South Wales Parliament can do something about. The Commonwealth also imposes unfunded mandates on local government and I would like a similar bill introduced into the Federal Parliament. This bill may serve as a model for appropriate Commonwealth legislation. It is true that the problem of unfunded mandates is not unique to New South Wales, although local government in this State is uniquely constrained in how it can fund the mandates. There will be more on this issue later.

Again, I would like other States to adopt similar legislation if they do not already have appropriate mechanisms. New South Wales legislation again could be the model. It is appropriate for New South Wales to set the precedent for good governance in Australia. This type of legislation is not without precedent outside Australia. For example, the United States Unfunded Mandates Reform Act of 1995 requires Congress and federal agencies to consider the costs and benefits to state, local and tribal governments and to the private sector before imposing federal requirements that necessitate spending by these governments or the private sector. The Act authorised an appropriation to carry out the provisions of the legislation. As I mentioned earlier, a raft of new legislation and regulations have been introduced during the term of this Government. Generally speaking, that is a credit to the Government and I compliment it on its impressive legislative record. However, the failure to explicitly and adequately recognise the cost implications to local government is not to the Government's credit; this deficiency could be easily remedied.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Yeadon.

COMMUNITY PROTECTION (ILLEGAL BROTHELS) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BROGDEN (Pittwater) [10.21 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Coalition introduced the Community Protection (Illegal Brothels) Bill because of enormous community concern about the explosion of illegal brothels in New South Wales. Since 1995, when the Carr Government decriminalised brothels in New South Wales, there has been an explosion in the number of illegal brothels operating in Sydney and in regional and rural New South Wales. Honourable members will recall that the Carr Government, upon election in 1995, decriminalised brothels by taking them out of the Disorderly Houses Act and placing them into the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. The general view was that brothels should be treated not as a law and order issue but as a planning issue. Obviously that flowed from years of police corruption and, in particular, as a result of the operation of illegal brothels and brothels in general.

The Government's approach, which was supported at the time by the Opposition, will effectively transfer responsibility for the approval of brothels as a land-use purpose from the State Government to local government in New South Wales. That approach differs considerably from the approach taken by other States in Australia. We do not licence brothels in New South Wales; we do not licence individuals to run brothels in New South Wales; and we do not restrict individuals to running only one brothel, which is the approach taken by the Victorian Government. The Government does not seek to inspect them from a health and safety perspective. It is best to describe this process as the decriminalisation or, more appropriately, the deregulation of the sex industry in New South Wales.

In the 6½ years since brothels were decriminalised in New South Wales there has been an explosion in the operation of illegal brothels. We need go no further than to look at the back pages of our local papers to see the increased number of sex workers offering their services on a daily basis. Probably one of the best examples of this is in the local paper of the honourable member for Vaucluse. The *Wentworth Courier* and most other local papers devote pages and pages to the advertising of sex workers. Some metropolitan newspapers also advertise in their back pages that these services are available. It is easy to establish an illegal brothel because it is hard to close one down.

Local government in New South Wales has been forced to spend much time and money on closing down illegal brothels. It is not unfamiliar for a local council, having identified that a premises is operating as an illegal brothel, to spend thousands—if not tens of thousands—of ratepayers' dollars, through legal and other fees, to close it down through the court process. The Opposition has been made aware that some councils—such as Parramatta council in Sydney—take more than 12 to 18 months through the court system to close down an illegal brothel. That process, which can cost tens of thousands of dollars, can involve a council employing a private detective to pay for sex on the premises, sit as a witness in court, and attest to the fact that the premises is operating as an illegal brothel.

Councils are forced to spend ratepayers' dollars to determine whether a premises is operating as an illegal brothel and to close it down. It has simply gone too far. This bill seeks to significantly amend the

Environmental Planning and Assessment Act to give local councils new and clear powers to close down illegal brothels within 48 hours of those premises being identified as operating as illegal brothels. By giving council officers the power to close down such premises once they have determined that it is operating as an illegal brothel, premises can be closed, not after a 12-month or 18-month period or after council has spent \$20,000, but after 48 hours and a minimum of expense.

Currently a council must prove that a premises is operating as an illegal brothel. This bill seeks to reverse that onus of proof. Once a premises has been identified as an illegal brothel a property owner must prove that it is not operating as an illegal brothel. Owners of these premises will have one of a few options. First, they could indicate to council that they already have development approval to operate as an illegal brothel. Second, they could indicate to council officers that they are not operating as an illegal brothel but that they provide other services in an attempt to satisfy council officers. Third, they could simply close down or seek an application to operate as a brothel under council rules and regulations. A failure to do that will give council or law enforcement officers the power to walk into the premises, lock up the property and secure it.

This bill will give back the streets to the community. Hundreds of illegal brothels across metropolitan Sydney are operating in suburban areas. One of the better examples in New South Wales is Harris Park. In recent years residents became concerned about the operation of eight to 10 illegal brothels in one street alone in the middle of a residential area—an area not zoned for any business purpose but simply for residential use. The introduction of illegal brothels into residential areas—and brothels operate long into the night and into the early hours of the morning—has changed the amenity of those streets. The Opposition wants to give councils the power to close down brothels quickly, to return that amenity to the community, and to expel illegal brothels and their customers and clients.

The Opposition calls on the Government to accept this bill. We call on the Government to make minor amendments to the legislation it introduced 6½ years ago—legislation which was supported by the Opposition—to regulate illegal brothels. The Opposition is not seeking in any sense to try to close down legal and operating brothels. Brothels that have sought and received approval from their local councils can continue to operate, as they are legitimate businesses. Whether we like it or not, brothels are now legal in this State. The Opposition wants to ensure that the Government has the power to quickly close down illegal brothels. That power does not exist at present. At present operators lodge a development application which is assessed and voted on by council officers at a council meeting. Why go through such a hassle when it is easy to open premises and to operate it illegally in the knowledge that it will be hard to close down?

Many councils simply do not have \$10,000, \$20,000 or \$30,000 to go through such a process; nor do they want to spend 12 or 18 months in court, at ratepayers' expense, to close down illegal brothels. Sadly, many councils turn a blind eye to this problem because they know what costs are involved. The Opposition, through this legislation, simply wants to give back the streets to communities and give back homes to families. Illegal brothels in New South Wales that are operating within sight of schools, churches and family homes should be closed down. The Opposition wants to give councils the power to close them down.

Control over the appropriate location of brothels has been an intractable problem for local governments across New South Wales. Many councils have developed planning policies in consultation with the community to establish guidelines for the appropriate location of brothels, only to have these policies disregarded by the Land and Environment Court in appeals brought by brothel operators. In other cases councils have been powerless to close down brothels operating without development consent. The Disorderly Houses Act 1995 made it legal to operate a brothel in New South Wales provided that development consent had first been obtained from local council.

The Act made the regulation of brothels a planning issue rather than a moral or policing issue, which is an appropriate attitude for a government to take. Although the decision to operate, patronise, support or close brothels is a matter of personal morality and choice, clearly the impact of brothels on the wider community is a planning issue and one worthy of consideration by this House. For this reason the Opposition supported the passage of the legislation in 1995. However, it is now clear that the legislation has failed to promote better planning outcomes in New South Wales.

Pursuant to sessional orders debate interrupted.

WILDERNESS AMENDMENT (PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS) BILL**Second Reading**

Debate resumed from 31 May.

Ms HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [10.30 a.m.]: Because it is more than three months since debate on this bill was interrupted it will take me a minute or two to get back on track. I remind the House of the Premier's announcement earlier this year to extend wilderness areas, and my opposition to that extension. As I said previously, there is a true lack of ability to manage wilderness areas. The National Parks and Wildlife Service cannot maintain its national parks and for that reason no wilderness zone should be extended. The National Parks and Wildlife Service has a dreadful reputation for managing feral animals and noxious weeds, although that is not entirely the fault of the service: the Carr Labor Government has eroded funds for such purposes. As the budget indicated, the National Parks and Wildlife Service is operating on a shoestring.

One of the major concerns about the extension of wilderness areas is the possible outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Australia. It is something that everyone is aware of and something that we take great precaution to avoid. I commend the Australian Customs Service and the Australian Quarantine Inspection Station for preventing Australia from becoming a victim of foot and mouth disease. However, we must do everything possible to ensure that if there were an outbreak of the disease in this country it would not spread rapidly. In view of the current problem with feral animals in wilderness areas the possible threat of foot and mouth disease, which could easily wipe out a massive part of this State and a huge amount of agricultural investment, must be seriously considered. Many feral animals in national parks and wilderness areas are out of control.

People in the Burrinjuck area, from the Monaro right up to the Abercrombie, and anywhere that has a national park or a wilderness area, report that wild dogs are a problem. Goats continue to roam around national parks, particularly up near the Abercrombie. Pigs, foxes, rabbits and feral cats, in particular, are also a problem. Feral animals are in plague proportions in the Monaro, the Southern Tablelands, the Southern Slopes and the Southern Highlands of New South Wales. I am sure feral animals are also in the Central Slopes. Traditional methods of controlling such animals, including shooting, should be reintroduced. At a firearms meeting in Goulburn during May it was put to me that responsible sporting shooters associations could provide some assistance. Obviously, we would need tight control over who would go into the areas, but it would be a step in the right direction.

It is one thing to allow people into national parks to control feral animals, but it will be an uphill battle to get people into wilderness areas. Bushies, particularly a fellow known as John living in the Brindabella about whom I hear wonderful reports, know how to look after feral animals, track them down, poison them and bait them. We should encourage more people like John, who have great skills, to foster their skills, pass them on and educate others about how to control feral animals in those areas. It is people like John who have been successful in controlling the number of lambs that have been killed on properties.

As I said previously, John Parka has had hundreds and hundreds of lambs killed by wild dogs that wander onto his property from the national park down in the Brindabella. He is extremely concerned that the extension of wilderness areas will have such an effect on the feral animal population that it will be impossible to eradicate them. I appreciate the opportunity to continue this debate today, and I wholeheartedly support the bill.

Mr STONER (Oxley) [10.36 a.m.]: I am delighted to support the Wilderness Amendment (Private Property Rights) Bill. It is a commonsense bill that provides a great deal of fair play and justice for New South Wales citizens who live outside metropolitan areas, particularly those in the vicinity of national parks and/or wilderness areas. The amendments proposed in the bill will modify the procedure of the Director-General of the National Parks and Wildlife Service when considering whether land should be identified as wilderness. Before the director-general assesses a proposal he will be required to obtain the consent of the owner, lessee, mortgagee or chargee, or any person having the benefit of a positive covenant over it. Consent under this bill will lapse after two years.

If the land has not been identified as wilderness by then, new consents will be required. These minor procedural changes to the existing system are significant in delivering a degree of fairness and equity for residents in country areas who are near to or surrounded by national parks or wilderness areas. Honourable members would be aware that the Oxley electorate, which I represent, has vast tracts of forest land, including

the Werrikimbe and Oxley Wild Rivers wilderness areas. They are world-class areas of pristine Australian bushland. I have no problem whatsoever with the declaration of wilderness areas. They are assets for the people of Australia; in fact they are drawcards for international tourism. We need national parks and wilderness areas to preserve the environment. However, in recent years huge areas of forest in country New South Wales have been converted from State forests to national parks.

The next step, certainly in my area, is the conversion of those national parks into wilderness areas. Many private land-holdings adjoin the national parks and/or wilderness areas. This often occurs on the upper Macleay, for example, Carrai Plateau, in the upper Hastings and in the upper Nambucca areas. This is valuable and productive land that provides timber from private forestry. The Minister for Forestry would know how important private forestry is to the State's overall timber production. It is also very valuable grazing country. Some very productive properties are producing beef cattle for export in the upper catchment areas of Oxley.

Their land adjoins national parks and wilderness areas, and in many cases these land-holders have been there for generations. They are old and well-established families, but under the current procedure of nominating, identifying and declaring wilderness areas they are rather worried and are getting resentful because the process puts them last. Anyone can walk in and say, "I like this area of land. I think it should be a wilderness area." That applies to the State forests, national parks and private lands. The first thing the property owners know about it is when the National Parks and Wildlife Service writes to them to tell them their land has been nominated as a wilderness area.

At that stage they are asked for their consent. Nobody forces them to consent; nobody requires them to consent—I acknowledge that the nomination for the declaration of a wilderness area cannot go ahead unless they do consent. The problem is that once the nomination is made there is effectively a blight on the value of the land. Should the land-holder want to sell his or her property, the immediate question is what is going to happen. Often a potential buyer will say, "Forget it, I am not interested in the property." Too many processes, including the forest management zones process, restrict what land-holders can and cannot do on their properties.

Mr Fraser: And LEPS.

Mr STONER: And LEPS. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour reminds us that the rights of private land-holders, graziers and people involved in private forestry have been eroded. There is a blight in the current process, and this very fair private member's bill introduced by the honourable member for Monaro addresses that blight without stopping the important process of looking at some of the areas that ought to be declared wilderness in New South Wales. The current process has caused country people some stress and resentment of what they see as a Big Brother government with no concern for their individual rights.

The current process for wilderness nomination and declaration puts the cart before the horse. Land-holders know nothing about an assessment taking place until the process is well down the track, after the nomination has been made and, in many cases, after the department has taken aerial or satellite photographs or even visited the property. It is at this stage that they become aware their property is being considered under the Wilderness Act. How would city dwellers feel if, unbeknown to them, various government agencies were assessing their homes for the purpose of turning the land into a park, at the suggestion of some passer-by? This simple analogy demonstrates what many country people feel about the current process. Surely the property owners, these country people, ought to be asked first before any proposal proceeds, and that procedural fairness is precisely what the Wilderness Amendment (Private Property Rights) Bill achieves. This is a fundamental issue of natural justice.

The other significant amendment that this bill proposes is that a two-year time limit apply on consents. If a department or agency is not truly interested in the land—perhaps it has been extensively cleared, as it is in many cases—the consents will lapse. So, this notion of any blight that may be hanging over the head of the property owner will disappear. Once again I think that is essentially a fair thing. Asking land-holders first would obviate much of the unnecessary process followed by various departments when, at the end of the day, a land-holder does not consent. Avoiding unnecessary satellite photographs, visits to the property and lots and lots of paperwork would save enormous amounts of taxpayers' dollars. Any efficiency aligned with fairness for citizens ought to be pursued.

The bill will also amend the definition of "self-reliant recreation", which is a purpose for which people can visit wilderness areas. We should not be locking the citizens of Australia or New South Wales out of national parks or wilderness areas. The wilderness areas I have visited in the Oxley Wild Rivers and

Werrikimbe areas have very imposing gates, padlocks and fences. They almost look like prison camps in this pristine and beautiful bushland that we are trying to preserve for the Australian people. When people have been using these areas for recreation, sometimes for generations, this creates resentment and an adversarial approach between government, government agencies and individual citizens, particularly country people.

The bill does not propose to willy-nilly open up these areas to environmental vandals. It proposes under certain permits and conditions that legitimate recreation use, such as horseback riding, four-wheel driving and mountain bike riding, be allowed in some of these areas, obviously monitored and controlled by the agencies concerned. In some cases more and greater use of these areas is better for them. Most country members would know that when we lock up these areas they fill with feral animals. The wild dog, dingo and fox problem in my electorate is almost out of control. The areas become full of noxious weeds and quite often they become serious bushfire hazards. In September last year enormous bushfires raced through the whole area from Walcha down towards Kempsey, through the Kunderang area and the Carrai area.

Those bushfires would do much more damage to wildlife than people would. People who use these areas identify the hazards and report them to the agencies concerned. In some cases we should have more access to these wilderness areas, not less. This is what the bill proposes. It is a very sensible, commonsense amendment to the current bureaucratic and unfair legislation. This private member's bill will maintain controls. Legitimate areas can still be nominated and processed, but it will give those private citizens the rights they ought to have—that is, to be asked first instead of last. I believe that would save the taxpayer money and, in that case, everyone would be a winner. In short, the Wilderness Amendment (Private Property Rights) Bill is an intelligent, sensible, fair and balanced bill. In my view the Government can advance no valid reason to justify its opposition to the bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [10.50 a.m.]: I support the bill. As honourable members would be aware, this is not the first occasion on which this type of legislation has been introduced into this Chamber. This bill will provide for equity and fairness. It will provide people with an opportunity to say no when a third party—be it a government department or an individual—nominates their land for wilderness. A situation has developed on the New South Wales North Coast as a result of the release by the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Northern Wilderness Assessment Report. That report identified 241,579 hectares of wilderness on the North Coast. Included in that figure is 159,550 hectares of National Parks Estate, 185 hectares of National Parks and Wildlife Service "not gazetted" land, and 2,244 hectares from the National Parks and Wildlife Service Crown Reserve. I remind honourable members that a Regional Forest Agreement [RFA] applies on the North Coast, but the service went ahead and identified land. During that process they introduced some new categories not previously heard of. I note that the Minister is nodding his head in agreement.

Mr Yeadon: No.

Mr FRASER: Those categories were proposed wilderness areas and bits and pieces that really bore no relevance to the RFA process, but the Government pushed them through and left them in there. After the RFA process, State Forests had a large amount of its estate left to provide for sustainable wood supply to industry on the North Coast. The Minister agreed to it. It was the main plank of the agreement. It was the one thing that was going to give loggers, sawmillers and the timber industry generally a guaranteed wood supply. That supply is compensatable. It is interesting to note here that the identified wilderness set out in the Northern Wilderness Assessment Report 2001 includes 11,301 hectares of State forests—land set aside as State forest under the RFA that has now been grabbed and identified as wilderness—17,944 hectares of State Forests lease and 16,101 hectares of Crown lease. So far as I am concerned, the Crown lease has a freehold right. The State Forests lease and State Forests Estate were set aside under the RFA to ensure a guaranteed supply of timber. In addition, 833 hectares of Aboriginal land claim has been included.

Those areas should not have been included in wilderness. We all know there is a lock-up mentality associated with wilderness. As the honourable member for Oxley said, you cannot do anything in there. No real programs have been established by the National Parks and Wildlife Service for the control of feral animals or noxious weeds. Those areas become bushfire hazards; nothing more, nothing less. Recently I passed a photograph of an area of Dorrigo National Park to a Coffs Harbour newspaper. Honourable members need to be aware that when this land was identified and declared wilderness it came under the control of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Motorists who drive up the Waterfall Way towards Dorrigo see a wonderful sign that states "Dorrigo National Park, World Heritage Area". To give honourable members an idea of the lack of management by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and its lack of funds, this sign is surrounded by a halo of lantana—absolutely surrounded by it!

This world heritage area contains lantana, a noxious weed. It is on the edge of the road, in the national park. The National Parks and Wildlife Service obviously does not have the funds available to remove the lantana which covers the sign that proclaims it as a world heritage area. That situation is absolutely unacceptable to me and somewhat ironic. Probably the worst aspect of the Northern Wilderness Assessment Report is the reference to 28,531 hectares of freehold land that has been identified as wilderness. In its media release promoting the launch of the report, the National Parks and Wildlife Service said that, while it had attempted to contact the large number of land-holders who are involved in that process, it had been unable to contact 120 of them.

In the report the Director-General of the National Parks and Wildlife Service did not declare wilderness over those areas, but stated, "We formally identify wilderness." The National Parks and Wildlife Service has indicated to land-holders, in a report, that their freehold land has been formally identified—with or without consent, because 283 submissions were lodged in respect of this issue. Of a total of 521 submissions, 488 objected to a declaration of wilderness. The National Parks and Wildlife Service was unable to contact 120 freehold landowners, yet a total of 28,531 hectares of private freehold land, be it a lease or total freehold ownership, has been identified as wilderness.

I submit to honourable members opposite that the value of that land has been severely degraded. The National Parks and Wildlife Service would have us believe that, wilderness having been declared, nothing can happen. If honourable members examine the draft vegetation management plan for the Clarence catchment they will realise that land-holders cannot cut down a tree or remove a tree from any property; that anyone who wants to utilise these properties for legitimate forestry or farming purposes, or who wishes to take trees down for fencing, yards or bridges, or purely for their timber valuing—as was intended by the RFA—will not be able to do so. The National Parks and Wildlife Service would immediately object on the basis of its wilderness assessment report and declare the area as wilderness.

Land-holders will not be able to touch the land—and I am talking about freehold land—that is, 28,531 hectares of private land and a total of 19,245 hectares of State Forests land. A large percentage of that land has been identified under the RFA. A situation has arisen whereby the rights of these people—the forest estate and their own rights—have been abrogated. In fact, by allowing this to happen, the Government has compromised its own position under the RFA in respect of the guarantees of wood supply that it gave to loggers on the North Coast. The Government will now have to compensate them and that compensation will have to be paid by the taxpayers.

It is relevant to note that the National Parks and Wildlife Service rejected 283 submissions because it regarded the objections as generic. It believed that people had signed their submissions on the basis that the process could not proceed until economic and social impact statements had been prepared. It is interesting that the Government rejected the submissions dealing with the social and economic impacts on a very poor community on the North Coast on the basis of 283 to one. I wonder how many of the submissions by the green movement, which identify and nominate wilderness on private property, are generic. How many submissions were put forward by organisations such as the North East Forest Alliance [NEFA]? We have been unable to get a list of members of NEFA. To my knowledge, only three people belong to that organisation, which arranges for university students, out-of-work Greens, people on the dole and others to turn up and complain bitterly in areas where logging is taking place.

The Minister for Forestry knows what is happening in Chaelundi at the moment. Forest land adjoining wilderness—I do not believe that wilderness should have been declared as wilderness in the first place—has been identified for declaration as wilderness. The Minister has said that we need the timber from that forest land. The Greens are in Chaelundi—I suggest that they are backed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service—protesting, tying themselves to bulldozers to stop legitimate logging in a State forest. All of this is meshed together. The Wilderness Act should be amended to ensure that land—be it State land or private land—is not tied up unnecessarily, as will happen under the proposal in the report on wilderness in the north-east. Neither the State Government nor private individuals can afford to have land tied up unnecessarily. They manage that land. Honourable members must understand that areas identified and/or declared as wilderness do not have rates attached to them. Rates are not imposed on national parks and wilderness areas, and local councils suffer as a result. Also, as the honourable member for Oxley suggested, the land simply attracts feral animals and noxious weeds.

The 1994 bushfire in Ebor devastated national parks and State forests, including Guy Fawkes River National Park. It was an absolute barbecue. People flying from Dorrigo through almost to Armidale saw only

scorched earth. That tells me that that area, especially the Guy Fawkes River National Park, was not properly managed. The land, on which cattle had grazed previously, had been allowed to grow over. The National Parks and Wildlife Service did not have any management practices in place, first, because it could not afford them and, second, because the land was wilderness. Roads were closed and tracks were blocked. It is acknowledged that the bushfire started with a lightning strike and spread rapidly through the area. I guarantee that a very small percentage of wildlife in the area survived the fire. It was one of the hottest fires I have ever seen. It killed young plantation trees in the State forests and few timber resources came out of the area. In a submission to Gary Davey, Manager of the Conservation Programs and Planning Division of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, I stated:

I also note in your media release promoting the launch of this report that you admit that approximately 120 landholders have not been contacted in your process. I would point out to you that on Page 1 of the report it is stated that Section 7 of the Wilderness Act requires that the Director-General must notify any landholders whose land is within our proposed wilderness.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service is ignoring the Act. The amendment proposed by the honourable member for Monaro would mean that the National Parks and Wildlife Service cannot declare land as wilderness without first obtaining the permission of the land-holder. The resources wasted by the service not on declaring wilderness—the report clearly states "identifying", which I believe is outside the terms of the Act—but on identifying private land or any other land for declaration as wilderness could be used to clean the lantana off the sign on Dorrigo mountain that declares Dorrigo National Park as a world heritage area.

The resources could be used for feral animal control programs and noxious weed removal programs across all national parks on the North Coast. National parks have heritage and cultural value, but the National Parks and Wildlife Service has insufficient resources to manage them. If the Government used those resources to control feral animals and noxious weeds, we would have national parks of which we could be proud. The bushfire problems would be solved, and land-holders would not be blighted by nominations for land that individuals have no right to nominate in the first place. I urge honourable members to support this extremely important bill for regional and rural New South Wales. I am sure the honourable member for Murray-Darling supports the bill.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Yeadon.

CROSS-BORDER COMMISSION BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 4 May 2000.

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.06 a.m.]: The Cross-Border Commission Bill would establish the Cross-Border Commission of New South Wales to inquire into matters affecting border communities and to report on these matters to the Premier and Parliament. The commission would be a declared authority of the New South Wales public sector and would invite members of a border community to make submissions to the commission in relation to matters affecting their community, conduct inquiries into matters affecting border communities that are referred to it by the Premier or as the commission considers appropriate, identify issues affecting border communities and make recommendations to the Premier regarding such issues, and prepare an annual report for tabling in Parliament in relation to the results of its inquiries into matters affecting border communities. The commission would consist of between five and nine members, including one chairperson, and between four and eight part-time members who must be New South Wales residents.

The Government opposes the bill because it would create an unnecessary and ineffective level of bureaucracy for little, if any, gain for border communities and because satisfactory arrangements for dealing with border problems are already in place. Two committees currently deal with cross-border problems: One each for the New South Wales-Queensland border and the New South Wales-Victoria border. These committees are jointly chaired by central agencies in each State. The New South Wales-Queensland committee also has local government representation, while the New South Wales-Victorian committee has previously had representation from the Albury-Wodonga Development Corporation. There are insufficient anomalies in relation to the New South Wales-South Australian border and the New South Wales-Australian Capital Territory border to warrant the creation of formal committees at this stage.

The existing cross-border committees have focused on identifying and resolving anomalies affecting cross-border communities. Their strength lies in their ability to tap local knowledge about border problems and

to resolve them by involving the relevant government officials and community representatives. In contrast to current arrangements, the bill does not require the cross-border commission to directly resolve border problems. Its functions would be limited to inquiring into and reporting on matters affecting border communities. A further weakness is that the proposed commission would not have cross-jurisdictional representation. This fact alone may render the commission impotent in identifying cross-border problems and recommending concrete solutions.

In addition to the existing cross-border committees, there are other mechanisms for resolving problems affecting border communities. For example, the introduction of mutual recognition arrangements has made it easier for many people to ply their craft on both sides of the border. In closing, the Government is not willing to support the creation of new layers of bureaucracy unless it is clear that it will deliver offsetting benefits to communities. This has not been demonstrated to be the case in this instance.

Mr WEBB (Monaro) [11.10 a.m.]: I support the Cross-Border Commission Bill, which was introduced by the honourable member for Ballina. The objects of the bill are to put in place a commission similar to one that operated successfully previously, and to make other amendments to resolve some of the anomalies within the Public Sector Management Act 1998. Regardless of comments by the honourable member for Cabramatta or the Premier earlier in the year about the Government's current mechanisms to resolve cross-border anomalies, they still exist. People going about their day-to-day business, seeking health and education resources, and contemplating operating businesses in areas close to borders have to overcome major invisible infrastructure difficulties. The Monaro electorate borders Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory. People coming to New South Wales from Victoria encounter the requirement for fishing licences. Victorians are not aware of the rules and regulations in New South Wales concerning bush areas, vehicle registration, what is permitted, shooters licences, firearms registration and transportation of firearms from one State to the other.

The Australian Capital Territory does not require fishing licences and has different vehicle registration and firearms registration and licensing regimes. These days people are very mobile and it is difficult for people going about recreational or business activities to deal with cross-border anomalies. A small bus operator in the Australian Capital Territory wanted to conduct tours of what are today called the Canberra wineries. In fact, most of the wineries and vineyards are in New South Wales in the electorates of Monaro and Burrinjuck to the north and east of the Australian Capital Territory. This chap advertised the tours but was prevented from running them because of the rules and regulations. Regulations for taxi operations in the Australian Capital Territory and Queanbeyan have recently been amended after years of lobbying. A Queanbeyan taxi operator was not allowed to stand on a rank in the Australian Capital Territory after taking a fare to the Australian Capital Territory. He also was not allowed to stand on a rank at Canberra airport. A cross-border commission such as that proposed by the bill would have gone a long way toward identifying problems and overcoming them much earlier.

Similar problems exist near the South Australian and Queensland borders with little things such as daylight saving and funding for school bus services that travel from one State or Territory jurisdiction to another. They must be resolved so that people can go about their intended business. We have discussed previously the differences in workers compensation insurance among the States and Territories. Regrettably, many businesses have been poached from New South Wales to the Australian Capital Territory. Toorallie, a woollen mill and fabric designer and manufacturer of some note, started in the Bombala area but has moved a large proportion of its business to the Australian Capital Territory, largely as a result of the lower workers compensation and payroll tax regimes in the Australian Capital Territory. The Australian Capital Territory Development Council promotes a regional view but it is very difficult for businesses in New South Wales to compete against the Australian Capital Territory when substantial discounts are offered to business operations.

Payroll tax differences are another example. The New South Wales Government should be condemned for not honouring its commitment about a year ago to reduce payroll tax to 4 per cent or 5 per cent, depending on which report one reads. Statements were made in the House recently that the Government would try to get it down to 6 per cent by next year or the year after. In the Australian Capital Territory the threshold at which payroll tax is imposed is about twice the level it is in New South Wales. Obviously, that is a further disadvantage to New South Wales businesses. The Premier and Treasurer gave commitments to abolish stamp duties upon the introduction of the GST yet the New South Wales Government continues to impose a tax on a tax with home stamp duties and stamp duties on insurance policies and indemnity policies. If imposing a State stamp duty on the final amount after GST is not a tax on a tax I do not know what is.

The projection is that New South Wales will receive \$7 billion annually in GST payments from the Federal Government. So it should, first, take off this stamp duty tax on a tax, second, make this State's workers

compensation premiums comparable with those in other States and, third, live up to its commitment to reduce payroll tax to levels that it promised the people of New South Wales earlier and bring payroll tax thresholds into line. That is not to say that New South Wales cannot provide other incentives or mechanisms to differentiate New South Wales from the Australian Capital Territory and Queensland. One of the beauties of our Federation is that under the Constitution Territory, State and Federal jurisdictions have been allowed autonomy to experiment. That is one of the fundamental aspects of our Federation. This advantage would be lost if we had only one or two tiers of government as some people have proposed.

Of course, society is an experiment in the first place but Federal, State, Territory and local governments are all allowed autonomy and flexibility to experiment with taxation regimes, transport methods and ideas for health and education. The result is arguably the best country in the world, and New South Wales is probably the best State in the best country in the world. That is a direct result of Federation and it is a direct result of the differences between jurisdictions. But when those differences become anomalies that affect people's lives to the extent that those people decide to exercise their rights and move to Queensland, South Australia, Victoria or the Australian Capital Territory, that is a loss to New South Wales. It results in a loss of experience, a loss of taxation revenue, and a loss of business revenue to the State of New South Wales.

The Cross-Border Commission referred to in the bill is a fairly simple mechanism. A chairperson will be appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of the Premier after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition or, if the Opposition comprises two or more recognised political parties, the leaders of those parties. There is also provision in the bill for the appointment of an acting chairperson during the illness or absence of the chairperson. In addition, there is provision for members of border communities to make submissions to the commission in relation to matters affecting their communities, which is the very nub of the bill. Existing mechanisms do not allow for that type of input because of the partisanship of a government when dealing with issues that centre on and around cross-border areas under its jurisdiction. Governments deal with issues in the way they feel they should be promoting their policies rather than by identifying anomalies, engaging in consultation with communities that are affected by the problems, and making recommendations to the Premier on a regular basis through reporting mechanisms and an annual report.

The bill provides for an open and consultative process which will be overseen by a commissioner. The commission will be empowered to deal with anomalies that can affect people's lives quite substantially. If this relatively small commission is adequately resourced, it will be able to undertake consultation, report and give people who live in close proximity to each other on either side of a State or territorial border the tools with which to quite quickly address the anomalies. I have already given details of some of those anomalies and I am sure that more anomalies will emerge from time to time. The establishment of the commission will provide the Government with an early reporting mechanism, a body with which to address the anomalies that have been identified, and the means by which to resolve their anomalies and satisfy people who are severely affected by them.

Mr WINDSOR (Tamworth) [11.22 a.m.]: I support the bill and, in doing so, I congratulate the honourable member for Ballina on introducing it. I hope the Government will support it. My interest in cross-border issues is longstanding. As most honourable members know, my electorate does not suffer from some of the issues mentioned by the honourable member for Monaro and by many other speakers, including the honourable member for Ballina, who introduced the bill. I was the convener of two country summits—one in Tamworth in 1996 and one in Wagga Wagga in 1998. I refer to resolution 31, which was passed at the 1998 country summit and which revolves around this issue. The resolution stated:

That the ... Government ... establish as a matter of urgency a high level working party to investigate and report recommendations for specific action to remedy cross border anomalies currently affecting country businesses and communities.

The bill embraces the very spirit of that resolution. To highlight the urgency for a resolution of the House in terms of the motion, I will provide background information on the people who formulated resolution 31 at the 1998 country summit. The meeting was attended by 185 country groups and it was the first time that a meeting of that magnitude had taken place. The idea behind the gathering was to bring all the country groups together from the aviation, local government, tourism and meat industries, as well as from the country women's associations and farmers associations. On that occasion 185 separate country representative groups gathered to discuss issues of concern and, rather than apprising governments of the problems—most lobby groups and most people go to governments with complaints and ask governments to fix them—the summit actually provided governments with the solutions.

This bill deals with problems arising from cross-border anomalies in procedures such as the registration of trucks, variation in local government rates, differences in council charges between areas separated by borders, petrol pricing, designation of zones and daylight saving. They are the types of issues that present real problems to people who live in areas situated on the northern or southern borders of this State. Historically councils representing border areas have consulted governments or individual representatives in relation to the effects of these issues, but that approach has suffered from a lack of support because areas in the middle of the State were not involved in the process. The summit was interesting because representative groups of all the country areas of the State of New South Wales joined together to support their colleagues from the northern and southern border areas. That is significant because the approach was without precedent.

The bill is supported not only by the honourable member for Ballina but also by a whole range of groups. In fact, it has the total support of all rural organisations in country New South Wales. As I said, that groundswell of support emerged from the country summit that took place in 1998. The process consisted of bringing together 185 country groups whereas the usual political process is to focus on the issues that divide people. The summit was all about finding issues on which a united approach could be adopted to the resolution of problems. A total of 39 resolutions were passed at both country summits. I am pleased to report that over a period the acceptance rate of the resolutions by the Government, which is indicated by some action being taken on the issues, has been 70 per cent. I thank the Government for the action it has taken but, obviously, 30 per cent of the issues still await attention.

The country summits experience shows that a process of identifying not only the problem but also the solution and conveying those to government can result in country people having some effect on the sorts of issues that affect them. Although the country summit issues impacted most on people who live in areas surrounding our northern and southern State borders, support for resolution of the problems was given by the entirety of country New South Wales through the summit process. I congratulate the honourable member for Ballina on the introduction of this bill. As recently as yesterday I held meetings with people in my office in relation to this issue. I am pleased that the Parliamentary Secretary, the honourable member for Cabramatta, is at the table. She has been involved in transport issues that involve not so much a cross-border anomaly but more of a State-to-State anomaly concerning the length of trucks and parts of a vehicle that can be attached to the front or the rear of trucks.

Occupational health problems are beginning to emerge because one way in which the transport industry can overcome length restrictions on vehicles is to shorten the cabs. That has resulted in a reduction in occupational health and safety comforts for drivers and a diminution in standards that perhaps should be preserved. While the honourable member for Cabramatta is in the Chamber, I take this opportunity to ask her to examine that anomaly that exists between the States. I am aware that the National Road Transport Commission [NRTC] is examining the issue with a view to adopting a national standard.

Queenslanders have taken the lead to a certain degree and I urge members of the New South Wales Government to take note of what is happening in Queensland with a view to removing the anomaly on an interim basis, pending the formulation of a national policy. I urge the honourable member for Cabramatta to look closely at the occupational health and safety aspects of cramping in the cabin of a truck. Maybe we need to rethink the length of vehicles, excluding the nose of the cabin and the accommodation. I know that the honourable member is extremely concerned about fatigue in the road transport industry. Having said that, I support the bill.

Pursuant to sessional orders debate interrupted.

CRIMES (FORENSIC PROCEDURES) LEGISLATION

Debate called on, and adjourned on motion by Mr Fraser.

FUEL PRICES

Debate resumed from 5 April.

Mr FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [11.31 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the honourable member for Murrumbidgee. The cost of fuel is a real problem for people in rural and regional New South Wales in terms of on-farm costs and the cost to the community. It is a matter of concern also for tourists on the North Coast. A zoning system is in place whereby fuel prices are reduced as one gets closer to the Queensland border. The

system attempts to address the anomaly between low-cost Queensland fuel prices and New South Wales fuel prices. My electorate of Coffs Harbour is in a zone in which—and far be it from me to suggest collusion by the oil companies—fuel prices are the dearest. In the past couple of years the Minister for Fair Trading has travelled up and down the coast, making a lot of noise about how the State Government will do something about fuel prices. In that time he has refused to acknowledge that because of the overseas barrel price of oil, because the countries that supply the oil are probably drip-feeding us so the price stays high, and because of the low exchange rate of the Australian dollar, fuel prices have increased.

On numerous occasions the Minister and his Country Labor colleagues have tried to lay the blame on the GST. On one occasion when the Australian dollar took a dive and the world barrel price of oil went up, consequently the price of fuel in Coffs Harbour rose to more than \$1, to almost \$1.10. The Government said that the price increased by 10 per cent because of the GST. That was a lie and has been proved to be a lie. When prices have come down there is still a great anomaly in the price of fuel paid by country people and Sydney people. Currently people in Coffs Harbour pay 92¢ a litre. About a week ago the price of fuel in Newcastle was 86¢, in Sydney it was down to about 80¢. It has been suggested that the difference is because of transport costs. I am afraid I cannot accept that. Regularly the State Government blames the Federal Government for the high price of fuel in country areas. The motion states:

... the reported comments by the Minister for Agriculture in the *Griffith Area News* prior to the 1995 election that: "Country petrol prices would be brought down by a reactivated New South Wales Prices Commission if a Labor Government was elected" and "the Fahey Government had not utilised the Commission to regulate petrol prices and instead wiped its hands of it by passing it off as a Federal matter."

What has the current Minister for Agriculture done? Has he reactivated the commission? No. Have petrol prices come down under a Carr Labor Government? No. In fact, they have gone up. Can we believe the Minister? No. In 1995 he gave a guarantee; but it was merely one of a number of fibs spread by Labor to win government. When Labor came into office he did nothing. He sat on his hands. He is awaiting an opportunity—as all Ministers of the Carr Labor Government do—to blame the Federal Government. Labor members who represent country electorates—they are now called Country Labor members—have done absolutely nothing to put pressure on the Minister for Agriculture or the Premier to take action which would see fuel prices reduced.

The Opposition knows that the State collects a levy and that that levy is not fully homologated for road spending. We challenge Country Labor members to urge the Minister for Roads and the Treasurer to put all that money back into roads. They are certainly not doing that at the moment. They hide behind the levy and try to blame the Federal Government for the price of fuel. Again this week the Government did not deliver. Labor members, including the honourable member for Bathurst, who whinges and whines regularly, do nothing; they do not make representations to the State Government to reduce fuel prices.

Mr MARTIN (Bathurst) [11.36 p.m.]: I support the comments of the Minister for Fair Trading on this motion and I debunk the motion moved by the honourable member for Murrumbidgee. Once again we have the typical National Party response: rhetoric, full stop! Everyone knows that petrol prices are a Federal responsibility. In recent years there have been a number of inquiries to that end. The motion contains a false assertion. In fact, in 1995 the Government did fulfil its election commitment. The Government indicated that the New South Wales prices commission would investigate complaints of excessive retail petrol pricing. A comprehensive inquiry conducted by Professor Tom Parry produced a report that, in a nutshell, stated:

Given the Commonwealth's involvement in regulating the petroleum industry, and in view of the industry re-structuring forum operating under the aegis of Senator Chris Schacht, it is appropriate that the recommendations in this Report that are accepted by the State Government be referred to the Commonwealth ... it is widely agreed by the major parties involved in the Inquiry that the Commonwealth is the appropriate jurisdiction.

We have seen what has happened with excises in recent years. The High Court has ruled that excise is a Federal responsibility. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour and the honourable member for Murrumbidgee have asserted that the Government has done nothing about petrol prices. Since I became a member of this House in 1999, the Minister for Fair Trading and Country Labor members have actively raised this issue and have even travelled to Melbourne to discuss our concerns with Allan Fels and other members of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission.

We all agree that basically this is a Commonwealth responsibility. I regularly commute from my electorate to Sydney, and I can state with accuracy the amounts being charged for petrol at different stages along the route from Bathurst to Sydney. A week ago the prices ranged from 79.7¢ at Woodford in the Blue Mountains to 90¢ in Bathurst, although this week in Bathurst there are places where petrol prices are in the high

80s. The thrust of the argument on this side of the House has been that the disparity between fuel prices in the city and the country is not justified. It all comes back to the pricing mechanism. It is very difficult to ascertain from petrol companies in detail how the system works. However, freight costs are not the major problem. The freight cost differential between Sydney and Bathurst for a litre of fuel would be a fraction of a dollar.

The real problem, in my opinion, is that the people in country New South Wales, and indeed those in country Australia, are being forced to pay for the heavy discounting laws of the capital cities. That is simply the strategy of the oil companies. The Federal Government has the regulatory power to do something about that. John Howard and John Anderson need to do something there. We saw the debacle of the GST, which certainly had an impact on petrol prices. We also saw the retreat after the massive public campaign to do away with the indexation part of the excise—one of the numerous backflips we have seen from the Federal Government on this issue.

The real issue is that we need to continue to address the matter. We will do that from this side of the House, as we have done continually over the past 2½ years, and the Minister for Fair Trading in particular has led the debate on that issue. We are extremely restricted in what we can do. But the pressure should go back where it belongs, that is, to the Federal Government, which rakes something like \$12 million out of the petrol industry, either in excises or out of the pockets of motorists. Let us see the Federal Government back up the rhetoric that we hear from the National Party. The National Party should ask John Anderson, Warren Truss and company to put that money back into the pockets of motorists, instead of going on with the hypocrisy it has been going on with in this debate.

Mr PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee) [11.41 a.m.], in reply: This motion is obviously about fuel prices, but, equally important, it is also about broken promises. The promise made by the current Minister for Agriculture was a significant promise made in my electorate in an attempt to curry favour with the electorate. We just heard the honourable member for Bathurst say, in effect—

Mr Debnam: He whinged and whined.

Mr PICCOLI: He whinged and whined, and said that everyone knows it is a matter for the Federal Government. However, obviously the Minister for Agriculture did not know that, because in 1995 he said that country petrol prices would be brought down by a reactivated New South Wales Prices Commission if a Labor Government were elected. The Minister also said that the New South Wales Fahey Government had not utilised the commission to regulate petrol prices, but instead wiped its hands of it by passing it off as a Federal matter.

What the Minister for Agriculture accused the Fahey Government of at that time is exactly what the honourable member for Bathurst and Minister Watkins have just accused the current Federal Government of doing. It is hypocrisy in the extreme. It is also another example of a broken promise—one of a number of wonderful promises the Labor Party made, particularly prior to the 1995 election. Other glaring examples of broken promises include the removal of the tolls on the expressways in western Sydney. Rather than removing the tolls, the Government increased them. Another example—the honourable member for Vaucluse may be able to assist me—was the halving of hospital lists. I note that the honourable member for North Shore is in the Chamber. She may be able to tell me the exact words of the Premier and the former Minister for Health when they said that if hospital waiting lists were not halved—

Mr Campbell: Point of order: I have not examined the standing orders, but I am sure the honourable member is contravening at least one of them, and I have absolute confidence that you will draw my attention to it. The House is supposed to be hearing a contribution to this debate from the honourable member for Murrumbidgee, not a contribution to this debate by prompt from either the honourable member for Vaucluse or the honourable member for North Shore. I ask you to direct the honourable member for Murrumbidgee to address his motion in his own words, rather than words from the mouths of his colleagues.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lynch): Order! I suggest that in future the honourable member for Murrumbidgee should prepare his contribution before he begins to speak rather than rely on assistance from those on the Opposition back bench.

Mr PICCOLI: Let me suggest that the last thing we need is a contribution from the honourable member for Keira. The promise was made that if hospital waiting lists were not halved within the first 12 months of the Carr Government's term of office, both the Premier and the Deputy Premier would resign. We know that that promise was not kept, that in fact there was a blow-out in hospital waiting lists, and today we see

the New South Wales health system in a state of chaos. It is a litany of broken promises that will come back to haunt the Government, and the promise with regard to fuel prices is just another example of the hypocrisy of the Carr Government.

Whilst members, including the honourable member for Bathurst, continue to wash their hands of the problem and lay blame on everyone else—which seems to be the common thread amongst Government members at present, whether we are talking about hospitals, police, or any other matter that the Government is having difficulty with—the people of New South Wales can see through that, and I am sure that the people of Auburn will see through it this Saturday when voting in the by-election. The Carr Government stands condemned for its complete and utter hypocrisy.

Question—That the amendment be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 47

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

Noes, 36

Mr Armstrong	Mr Maguire	Mr Souris
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	
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Rozzoli	
Mr Humpherson	Ms Seaton	<i>Tellers,</i>
Dr Kernohan	Mrs Skinner	Mr Fraser
Mr Kerr	Mr Slack-Smith	Mr R. H. L. Smith

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Question—That the motion as amended be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 46

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

Noes, 36

Mr Armstrong	Mr Maguire	Mr Souris
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	
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Rozzoli	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Humpherson	Ms Seaton	Mr Fraser
Dr Kernohan	Mrs Skinner	Mr R. H. L. Smith
Mr Kerr	Mr Slack-Smith	

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion as amended agreed to.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

Mr SPEAKER: I draw the attention of the House to the presence in the gallery of the newly appointed United States of America Consul General to Australia, Eileen Malloy. I welcome her to the New South Wales Parliament.

CATTLE IDENTIFICATION

Mr SLACK-SMITH (Barwon) [11.57 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes:
 - (a) the urgent need for the Government to enact legislation for the use of traceable radio frequency tags for cattle;
 - (b) the European Union's December deadline for the overhaul of the Australia's cattle identification system;
 - (c) the enormous impact to regional New South Wales and the Australian economy should the European Union restrict the importation of beef into member countries.
- (2) calls on the Minister for Agriculture to explain the delay in introducing and enacting the appropriate legislation.

Livestock identification is long overdue for Australia generally and for New South Wales specifically. The Minister for Agriculture continues to try to blame the Federal Government for not taking the lead in this regard. I contend, however, that New South Wales is the leading State in Australia and, therefore, the Minister for Agriculture should take positive action and allow cattle producers in New South Wales to implement a virtually foolproof system of livestock identification. At present New South Wales does not have legislation that requires farmers to tag, earmark, fire brand, freeze brand or identify their livestock in any way.

Stock theft in New South Wales is a multimillion-dollar industry and for that reason we need a livestock identification system. In Queensland and Victoria, where compulsory identification is required, we are a laughing stock because of the level of stock theft in this State. New South Wales can claim only two convictions this year, whereas last year Queensland's clean-up rate resulted in successful convictions in more than 40 per cent of cases there. In 1998 New South Wales had 766 stock theft cases compared with 234 in Queensland. I believe that in 1998 \$1.5 million worth of livestock went missing in New South Wales. In the past 12 months cattle and sheep prices have almost doubled. The livestock theft industry in New South Wales is worth millions of dollars.

Another reason for establishing an identification system in New South Wales is that Australia is the largest beef exporting country in the world. Australia is not the world's biggest producer of beef—many countries have far more livestock than we have—but it is one of the largest meat exporting countries. Australia is the world's largest exporter of camels, particularly of racing camels to the Arab states. Apparently camels bred in Australia have a speedy gait and are in top demand in Saudi Arabia and other countries.

Before long our competitors, particularly Asia and the United States of America, who are targeting our markets, will insist that Australia uses an identification system to enable our produce to be traced. Identification is required from the time an animal is born to the time it is placed on a plate in Tokyo or Korea. Establishment of an identification system is the first step to enable us to meet that requirement, and for that purpose we must have a tamper proof radiofrequency or microchip system. The chip implanted in the animal can be scanned and the complete breeding record and details of its sale and purchase history can appear on a screen. Next year that will be the only way we will be able to export beef with confidence. Another advantage of an identification system is that it will enable diseases to be traced. Recently I had the good fortune to re-enter Australia through the quarantine barriers at Sydney airport.

Mr Amery: They let you through?

Mr SLACK-SMITH: Yes, they let me through. I declared on my entry document that I had visited a farm overseas in the past 30 days, and I congratulate the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service [AQIS] on its excellent job at points of entry in our country. Today foot and mouth disease is common in England and Europe. Everyone who comes to this country from overseas is told unequivocally that if they do not admit that they have been on a farm or in contact with animals or if they have items of foodstuff on their person they can be imprisoned or a significant fine can be imposed. I congratulate AQIS on its work in that respect. If there is an outbreak of an exotic disease in this country Australia must be able to trace the history of an animal as fast as possible and that is another reason why livestock identification must occur as a matter of urgency. Foot and mouth disease is not abating in the United Kingdom. It is only a matter of time before Australia has to act very quickly to eradicate an exotic disease. Australia is an exporting country. If foot and mouth disease came to Australia that would bust our economy because we are so dependent on overseas trade for the export of our produce.

I urge the Minister for Agriculture to support the motion because it is vitally important for this State and the whole of Australia. New South Wales will take a leading role in encouraging livestock producers to adopt an identification system that will not only assist stock management, reduce stock theft and obtain more convictions, but will also help our exports. Our consumers overseas will have the advantage of knowing full well that the history of our animals can be traced back from the plate to the gate. Our clients overseas must have confidence in our industry so that they continue to use our markets and so that our markets are not poached by other countries and competitors.

Mr AMERY (Mount Druitt—Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Land and Water Conservation) [12.07 p.m.]: I acknowledge that the notice of the motion moved by the shadow Minister for Agriculture, the honourable member for Barwon, was given on 20 October 1999 and that some events occurred before this debate was brought on. It is not my intention to oppose or seek a division on this motion because I think I should be able to explain certain aspects of the legislation and the process to establish a national livestock identification system. Hopefully my contribution will give an explanation from the Government's point of view and therefore I do not see a need to divide the House or oppose the motion.

I am pleased to advise that an effective, national lifetime identification scheme [NLIS] for cattle has been developed by the industry in consultation with the State and Commonwealth governments. The scheme is a multimillion-dollar investment by the cattle industry aimed at improving product integrity and market access. Involvement in the scheme is voluntary. The scheme provides individual identification of cattle with radiofrequency devices. It enhances the current transaction tagging system for the monitoring and trace-back of both stock diseases and chemical residues. It also provides an opportunity to give feedback to producers about carcase quality in order to facilitate genetic improvements in herds and assist in the transfer of other commercial information between industry members. The scheme is widely accepted and radiofrequency device readers have been installed in most saleyards and abattoirs. So events have progressed since the honourable member for Barwon gave notice of his intention to move this motion.

The scheme will also give cattle producers improved stock security by providing a means of tracing stolen cattle and a deterrent to stock theft. I refer honourable members to comments by the Minister for Police about working to improve stock security nationally. Another aspect of stock identification and theft is law enforcement—an issue that the honourable member for Barwon has raised several times in this place. The Agricultural Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand [ARMCANZ]—which is basically a ministerial council comprising agriculture Ministers, including Federal Ministers—has strongly supported the introduction of the National Livestock Identification Scheme and has implemented a national system of property identification codes as the basis for the scheme. In 1999 the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service determined that cattle producers who wish to sell cattle to the European Union [EU] market must adopt the scheme and identify all their cattle with the radiofrequency devices.

At its meeting on 9 May 2001—the matter has been progressing—ARMCANZ discussed measures designed to maximise Australia's defence against bovine spongiform encephalopathy [BSE] and foot and mouth disease. Honourable members may recall my answer earlier this week to a question on that subject. The shadow Minister for Agriculture, the honourable member for Barwon, has been invited to forum to be held in the Parliament building tomorrow to discuss the action that we are taking as a State to complement the Federal Government's quarantine work that is designed to enhance our defences against diseases such as BSE and foot and mouth and other exotic diseases. At the ARMCANZ meeting it was agreed to refer the issue to the Council of Australian Governments [COAG] on 8 June and to seek approval for a national strategy to respond to any foot and mouth disease outbreak. The strategy recognises that the identification scheme is a valuable mechanism for improving the traceability of Australian livestock and recommends the development of a mandatory livestock identification scheme for foot and mouth disease-susceptible animals to enable easier tracking. The strategy recognises that the cattle industry's scheme is likely to be a good model for other livestock industries and recognises that the cost of implementing mandatory identification will be a problem. At the Standing Committee on Resource Management meeting in August, State and Territory agriculture chief executive officers agreed to progress a series of actions designed to advance the compulsory use of stock identification—an issue that has been mentioned already.

As a result, Safemeat will work with industry to develop an implementation plan for the general introduction of a National Livestock Identification Scheme for cattle. Safemeat will also work with the sheep industry and other foot and mouth disease-susceptible species to develop a timetable for introducing identification and transaction recording. Safemeat is due to report progress to COAG by 31 December 2001. The issue of introducing mandatory livestock identification at a national level will be considered at the whole-of-government level by COAG in mid-September 2001. The Stock Diseases Act 1923 was amended in November 1999 to conform to the National Livestock Identification Scheme requirements.

The honourable member for Barwon refers in his motion to "the urgent need for Government to enact legislation for the use of traceable radiofrequency tags for cattle". If we are working at cross-purposes with these legislative changes, I would like to hear from the honourable member for Barwon either in this place later today or privately after the debate. The legislation was amended in late November 1999 to facilitate some aspects of the NLIS requirements, and I acknowledge that the honourable member gave notice of his intention to move this motion in October 1999. The supporting regulation was gazetted on 2 August 2000. I hope that satisfies the first part of the honourable member's motion.

Under the new legislation all transaction tags and National Livestock Identification Scheme permanent identifiers will carry particulars of the property on which the cattle were grazing when the identification was attached. The honourable member and I debated that point when we considered the legislation. Rural lands protection boards are responsible for allocating the property identification codes in New South Wales. As at 10 August 2001 more than 1,481 New South Wales beef cattle producers had joined the National Livestock

Identification Scheme. This represented 23 per cent of all Australian participants in the scheme. Use of the NLIS identification devices is mandatory for access to the EU hormonal growth promotants-free market—as I know the honourable member for Barwon is aware. As a result, 972, or 66 per cent, of New South Wales producers participating in the National Livestock Identification Scheme joined so that they could supply cattle to the EU. New South Wales has by far the largest number of EU-accredited producers of any State and about 40 per cent of all Australia's accredited suppliers.

I encourage—as I am sure do all honourable members—more New South Wales cattle producers to use National Livestock Identification Scheme devices to identify their cattle. In addition to the benefits that I have described, the scheme has the potential to help counter the increasing levels of stock theft. I know that the Police Service has been working conscientiously to that end, and the Minister for Police has answered several questions in Parliament about this issue. Meat and Livestock Australia's NLIS business plan includes a strategy to subsidise installation of NLIS readers in key saleyards and processing works, and I have asked to be kept informed of developments in this regard.

The honourable member for Barwon also mentioned the importance of disease surveillance and traceability. International trade is making the world much smaller and the need to trace animals for disease management purposes is only too obvious. I agree with the honourable member who stressed that Australian agencies and authorities must be able to manage diseases—we have good experience of this already—such as foot and mouth, BSE or some other horrible disease that has afflicted countries overseas. I think the Government has responded to most of the points raised by the honourable member for Barwon. Several things have happened since the honourable member gave notice of his motion, and I hope that my response today has satisfied the Opposition's concerns in this area. The Government will not oppose the motion.

Mr WEBB (Monaro) [12.17 p.m.]: I thank the Minister for the explanation he gave the House this morning. Though the honourable member for Barwon gave notice of this motion in October 1999, the comments made by the Minister prove the effectiveness of giving notices of motions in this House. Even though the House has some 480 notices of motions on its books, it is still an effective way of prompting action. The Minister said also that the Government supports the motion and referred to actions being taken to bring about a national livestock identification scheme, which has been promoted by the cattle industry and has the support of State and Federal governments. Despite high cattle prices at the moment, I raise the question of subsidies similar to those granted in Victoria to assist farmers with the implementation of traceable radio frequency tags to enable proper stock identification.

I have been involved with the stock industry for more than 30 years. My memory goes back to the tuberculosis and brucellosis testing program of the early 1970s, when metal tags were placed in the ears of cattle when blood samples were taken, so that individual animals could be identified as positive or negative to those diseases. That assisted the industry and Australia in their efforts to eradicate those diseases. It is amazing that today there is no formal requirement for stock identification, whether that be by branding, ear or tail tags, or earmarking. As a stock manager and breeder, I believe it is basically impossible, without proper identification, to be an efficient producer of animal products. The importance of disease control, especially for animal product exported to European markets in particular but also to Asia, Japan and the United States of America, dictates that quality assurance programs be in place.

The expanding organically produced meat industry will require formal identification of stock. The traceable radio frequency tag system seems to be the only way to input formal information about treatment of an animal, so that that information will be available throughout the animal's life and at its slaughter. Chemical residue tracing is another issue requiring a proper identification system. The honourable member for Barwon, the mover of this motion, spoke about the great threat of the introduction to Australia of stock diseases such as bovine spongiform encephalitis, foot and mouth disease, bovine and ovine John's disease, and even foot rot, and the fact that an effective trace-back system is probably one of the most effective control and treatment measures, apart from quarantine, that we could put in place to address those diseases.

The increased value of livestock has led to stock theft becoming a major issue. The New South Wales Police Service needs to employ more people with skills and knowledge relative to identification and tracing of stock, including a knowledge of saleyard procedures. Almost daily we hear of large numbers of animals being stolen. For those who do not understand the value of livestock, could I give the example of a farmer who was selling his six and seven-year-old ewes. He noticed that one of them was a bit "fat" and was struggling to go up the ramp on its way to the abattoir. He thought, "I can't send that one, she will go down in the truck, so I will keep her." I do not know what that old ewe would have brought at the abattoir, maybe not much, but it had

triplets shortly after that. Only recently, the farmer sold the last of those triplets for \$100; they averaged \$100 each. So that old ewe returned \$300 to the farmer. The ability of people to steal stock quickly is very real. There are many instances of farmers going around their paddocks of a morning, finding a cut fence and 100 sheep and cattle missing. I support this important motion. We must come up with systems that complement those in other States to help stock managers carry on their businesses, safeguard this country from stock diseases and promote the export industry.

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [12.22 p.m.]: I strongly support the motion. Whilst I realise that debate on it is long overdue, I appreciate the comments made by the Minister for Agriculture regarding what has happened since October 1999. This industry needs a system of stock identification not only to prevent stock theft but to give feedback to producers and to provide an unquestionable traceback system that will enhance our export markets. The whole industry must adopt the system. I, for one, remember the anxiety caused to the industry by the use of hormone growth promotants and organochlorines. That led to the introduction of the vendor declaration form, a mechanism that made producers more responsible and accountable. I confirm my strong support for measures to prevent stock theft, which is a major problem to the industry throughout Australia but especially in New South Wales. Rural crime and stock theft need to be addressed. Most important is stock identification that is indisputable, making it easier for police to catch criminals. My belief is that the only effective and universal system of stock identification is the Rumen Bolus. Ear tags or other identification on the outside of the animal can be easily tampered with.

I had the pleasure of being an observer at a recent meeting in Brisbane of Queensland meat industries. I would like to make the Minister aware of a concern raised at that meeting. Though I have been involved in the meat industry for a considerable time, I had not heard this comment prior to the meeting. The meat industries expressed grave concern that the use of the Rumen Bolus created problems at abattoirs. As an industry, we need to work with those in the meat industry to establish any problems that the use of the Rumen Bolus poses for them. I believe it is the best means of identification, but we must have the whole of the industry on side to make the system work. I raise that concern with the Minister so that he might inquire at the next Agricultural Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand [ARMCANZ] meeting what needs to be done to get the meat industry on side. I ask the Minister to urge ARMCANZ to adopt a uniform identification scheme throughout Australia, so that New South Wales will not have a system that is different from that in Victoria, or Queensland will not have a system that is different from the New South Wales system.

I strongly recommend a phase-in period of three to five years. Yes, there will be objections from producers relating to the cost of implementing such a system, but for the future of the industry we must all work together—from the producer level through to the end of the chain at the meat works—to devise a national scheme that cannot be tampered with. I have been told by the Federal Minister for Agriculture that it is the responsibility of each State to introduce the system. I encourage the New South Wales Minister to work towards finalising the national system to enable the introduction of a proper mechanism in New South Wales to control theft of livestock and to properly identify an effective trace back system.

Mr SLACK-SMITH (Barwon) [12.27 p.m.], in reply: I thank the Minister for his contribution and for acknowledging that I gave notice of this motion in October 1999. Even now I am frustrated that the progress of this issue has been too slow. Though I agree with the Minister that everyone has been talking about a proper identification system and seems to agree on the need for it, they appear to be going around in circles. As I said in October 1999, I believe the Minister should have taken the lead. If he had, he would have had the total support of the Coalition and the entire livestock industry in New South Wales. The Minister said that some organisations that had been discussing the system are worried about the cost of implementing it. For my part \$3 for the Rumen Bolus, which is probably the most expensive one, is a pretty good investment for \$1,000 worth of beast, especially knowing that the beast could be sold with confidence at a premium price because it is listed on a national identification scheme. Quite a few meat works now are paying more money for stock on the national identification scheme than they did previously.

We must bear in mind also that at the moment although our prices are not great, they are more realistic. With prices being realistic, now is the time to take the initiative and introduce a national identification system. The proposal has progressed well since October 1999, but is still moving slowly. I thank the honourable member for Monaro, who mentioned the brucellosis and tuberculosis [TB] eradication schemes, and of course the Helix problem, which was a typical case of world market competitors benefiting from our misfortune of having traces of chlorfluazuron in beef cattle that had been fed cotton trash. I thank also the honourable member for Lismore. He undertook a tour of New South Wales for the National Party, which was virtually a stock theft tour, and met with stock agents and police.

Mr Amery: So long as he didn't take stock!

Mr SLACK-SMITH: He only took a car; he did not take a truck! I checked his boot, and it was empty. Our record in New South Wales speaks for itself; we need the reintroduction of the stock squad, but not the one that the Minister for Police has spoken about. The honourable member for Lismore told me that wherever he went on the tour—I accompanied him when he visited my electorate—there were cries for an identification system. He mentioned also that some processors had voiced concerns. Even when the brucellosis and TB eradication campaigns were instigated some sectors of the community opposed the idea. When the Sydney Harbour Bridge was built there were people who opposed it. In our society there is no such thing as complete agreement. People will object to an identification scheme, and most of those people will probably not have thought it through. The honourable member for Bega mentioned that the cattle rustlers would not like it! The industry wants the scheme, and I believe that support for it will be unanimous. I thank the Minister for supporting the motion. I believe he has been too slow in taking the lead, but he will have our total support.

Motion agreed to.

MEDICAL RESEARCH FUNDING

Mrs SKINNER (North Shore) [12.33 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes the Commonwealth Government's commitment of an additional \$600 million for medical research over the next six years;
- (2) expresses concern at the Government's failure to create a climate in New South Wales which strengthens the scientific basis for health care and fosters investment in the biotechnology industry; and
- (3) calls on the Government to follow the lead of the Commonwealth and other States and increase funding to provide necessary infrastructure support for key medical research establishments in New South Wales.

I gave notice of this motion on 21 October 1999. During debate on the previous motion the Minister commented about the delay in commencing debate on these types of motions. It is a disgrace that the Government does not allow this House more opportunity to discuss motions that have been placed on the notice paper because they are of great interest and importance to the people of this State. The fact that this motion is still relevant for debate two years after being placed on the notice paper speaks volumes for what is happening in New South Wales. Compared with other States, such as Victoria and Queensland, New South Wales has been very mean in providing infrastructure funding for research. The Carr Government has provided almost no growth funding until quite recently despite knowing that we need to catch up considerably to be able to compete with other States that are benefiting from the enormous growth potential of the biotechnology industry.

On 15 August the Government announced an allocation of \$68 million for biotech funding over the next five years. On that day I issued a press release which stated "Carr Government's Biotech Funding—Too Little, Too Late". That theme was picked up by the *Australian Financial Review* on 27 August in an article under the heading "Too little too late for NSW biotech lobby". The article referred to the authors of a 1999 report aimed at boosting the New South Wales biotechnology sector and stated:

[They] have attacked the Carr Government for failing to adopt many of their recommendations.

They said the NSW Government had been too slow in acting on the report, while Victoria and Queensland had pledged a combined \$600 million to biotech development.

Dr Robin Stanley, a management consultant who advised on the report, said:

The NSW Government has decided, belatedly, to act on various recommendations contained in the report on the status of biotechnology in NSW.

... much greater emphasis and support is required to fund biotechnology clusters and attract world-class scientists.

In that same article the report's chief author, Dr Mark Bradley, said he did not know why the Government had taken so long to act on the report. The report was commissioned in 1999 by the Department of State and Regional Development and, unlike Queensland and Victoria, the New South Wales Government has not created any funding initiatives to support growth and expansion of the industry, which may limit future growth and opportunities. I have been concerned for some time about this matter. I gave notice of this motion shortly after

the Commonwealth Government announced funding of an additional \$600 million for medical research and development over a six-year period. By 2004 this will have doubled existing research funding of the National Health and Medical Research Council [NHMRC], which is responsible for distributing this money to researchers around the country.

Instead of criticising the Howard Government, which is the usual practice of Labor members in this House, this motion provides them with an opportunity to say, "Well done. We applaud your foresight and look forward to the many benefits that will come from enhanced funding for medical research." The Commonwealth's additional funding acknowledges the tremendous importance of medical research in developing new treatment and procedures and in creating a climate that retains or reclaims our brightest young scientists. It acknowledges also the huge potential for Australia, which is one of the few countries with the capacity to harness the benefits of the revolution in biotechnology.

These were the findings of a Commonwealth-commissioned health and medical research strategic review into biotechnology in Australia conducted by Peter Wills, commonly known as the Wills report. It was one of the first reports in this area and is widely acclaimed in the scientific and biotech community. Its findings formed the basis of Coalition policy in this regard in 1999, and they are still regarded in the community as the foundation for investment that will enable Australia to compete in the international biotechnology revolution. That report found:

- technological and structural changes, particularly in the pharmaceutical industry, are opening opportunities for new players in early stages of the value chain;
- the opportunity for biotechnology firms is shown in the world wide trend of pharmaceutical companies being more willing to outsource research;
- the biotechnology industry provides an opportunity for significant wealth creation and has the potential to help reduce Australia's widening deficit in medical and pharmaceutical products;
- the biotechnology industry forms a key element of a virtuous cycle that mutually reinforces the contributions from the government and the research sector;
- a thriving biotechnology industry requires a number of factors to ensure success including:
 - a world class, well funded basic medical research sector—

That again points to the importance of this motion. The report concluded:

- management which supports entrepreneurship and the mobility of researchers between academia and industry,
- clustering of research and industry, which strengthens linkages, reduces career risk of talented employees and allows the formation of specialised supporting industries,
- flow of venture capital.

As I said earlier, those findings form the basis of the Coalition's election commitment prior to 1999. We recognise that New South Wales must do much more to ensure that we attract more funding for clinical research to keep our brilliant researchers at work in this State and to give us the capacity to compete for the biotechnology industry, which has such huge scope not only in relation to fantastic scientific advances—medical treatments and other technology—but also in relation to future employment and financial rewards for this State. I have visited many major research centres in the seven years that I have been shadow Minister for Health. Included in those centres are the Garvan Institute, the Centenary Institute, the Millennium Institute, centres at Royal North Shore and centres at other places. All those centres do incredible work.

If anyone needs to be inspired, I commend to them a visit to those research institutes. I refer also to individual researchers who work within our universities and hospitals who could all do so much more. It is important that we provide them and other medical research establishments with sufficient funds to enable them to compete with States such as Victoria and Queensland. Historically, Victoria has attracted the lion's share of research clinical grants largely because that State has such a well-established research infrastructure. In its last budget the Kennett Government provided \$310 million over five years for science engineering and technology initiatives. That is \$310 million compared with the \$68 million announcement by the Premier in this State. What a differential! When that money was allocated in Victoria the then Victorian Treasurer said in his Budget Speech:

These initiatives will provide maximum benefit where the Government, business and other research institutes work in partnership.

And in all cases, the Government's overriding priority will be to convert the outcomes of scientific advance into increased economic activity, new jobs and lifestyle benefits for all Victorians.

I call on the Carr Government to adopt a similar attitude; to really boost what is happening in this State. It is not good enough for the Minister and the Government to spin doctor and make claims that we have so many pharmaceutical companies and so on. The reality is that we are not doing as well as other States. This is an important industry potential for New South Wales. We are doing the wrong thing by people who could benefit not only from the outcomes of this clinical research but also from a huge boost to employment and income to this State—something which is presently being denied.

Mr McMANUS (Heathcote—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.43 p.m.]: I move:

That the motion be amended by leaving out all words after the word "That" with a view to inserting instead:

"this House commends the New South Wales Government for its commitment to medical research."

I state at the outset that the Commonwealth Government's increased expenditure on health and medical research is welcome but it is long overdue. Australia has for too long lagged behind in this important area of development. Federal public spending on health and medical research has been at a level that is less than half the weighted average of a group of our international peers. To our credit, despite this fact, this State continues to conduct research of international standing at a rate disproportionate to our comparatively small population. The increased funding from the Commonwealth Government will improve that situation but we should not become complacent and think that its support for health and medical research in Australia is equal to that of other countries.

Even with the increase proposed by the Commonwealth Government, spending in Australia will be only a fraction of what is spent per head of population in the United States of America. The Commonwealth has a long way to go to provide the support that our health and medical research sector deserves. New South Wales has a strong health and medical research sector which receives significant support from this Government. That support, which is broad ranging, encompasses investigator-initiated biomedical research through to priority-driven research and the development of our biotechnology industry. Honourable members might recall that in April last year the Minister announced extra funding for infrastructure and medical research organisations. Over the following three years the Government will have committed \$57.5 million to this budget.

Support for world-class medical research work which is being done right here in New South Wales is a commitment of this Government. It is a great investment in the health of our community. The money we put in now will reap huge benefits in later years. These are not just advances in treating disease and improving public health; they are terrific economic gains for New South Wales. These grants are integral to the Carr Government's efforts to make the New South Wales health and medical research industry a major player on the world stage. I turn now to an important initiative. Last year the Minister announced the establishment of a new Cabinet standing committee on biotechnology. This was followed by the establishment of the Ministerial Advisory Council for Biotechnology to support the Minister's role as chairman of the Cabinet committee.

That council comprises a group of highly qualified, high-powered individuals with expertise in research, business biotechnology and ethics. The task of that group has been to identify opportunities, funding models, governance structures and how best this State can lead the national agenda. The chair of the advisory council is Lucy Turnbull. The hard work of that group has culminated in the BioFirst strategy. Three weeks ago the Premier launched the BioFirst strategy, which will provide \$68 million over five years. That funding is to be leveraged for similar amounts from both the Commonwealth Government and the private sector. At the heart of the strategy are two fundamental themes: first, to build on our research base, to attract and retain the biggest brains possible, to give them state-of-the-art facilities to work in, to encourage them to share and improve their ideas, and to create and support dynamic biotechnology hubs.

The second theme follows the first: to help turn those bright ideas into dynamic businesses that can provide our children with skilled jobs and the kind of future that we would want them to have. The BioFirst strategy is special because it seeks to marry those two important objectives. A biounit that will answer directly to the Premier will promote those objectives. It will also be charged with a bioethics component. This important part of the strategy will involve the community and address the sensitive ethical issues raised in this field. Biotechnology offers enormous benefits, both in relation to living healthier and longer lives and in relation to

economic prosperity. The competition in biotechnology is ferocious. The landscape changes constantly and relentlessly. Idea after idea is patented, fresh technologies emerge and are developed, and new drugs, vaccines and diagnostic tools constantly enter the market.

One of the key messages of the BioFirst strategy is co-operation. It is about working together. Australia is a small country if we have regard to its population and capital. We cannot afford to engage in the kind of parochial jostling that has characterised much of the past. We have much bigger fish to fry. Our competition is international; our vision must be global. If we are to compare ourselves with anyone it should be with Boston, or Singapore. This co-operation begins at a laboratory and it grows into a relationship between research hubs. It is no longer appropriate to think in geographic and territorial terms. The Government and, ultimately, the market, will reward those who work together. That same co-operation must also extend to our attitude as a nation. Most people to whom I speak do not care much for interstate posturing. However, they do care about the fact that Australia, as a whole, is positioned to be a world leader. Let me now convey to the House some of the comments made by leading researchers about BioFirst. Professor Tony Cunningham from the Millennium Institute, Westmead, said:

This strategy will bring focus and energy to biomedical research and the commercialisation of life science technology in New South Wales. It represents a significant leap forward for researchers and the biotechnology industry.

Professor John Rostas from Hunter Medical Research Institute said:

This strategy is the culmination of an extensive process of consultation with the research community of New South Wales. We now have an unprecedented opportunity to harness the potential of regional communities for research and development, particularly in the areas of health and agriculture.

Professor John Shine from the Garvan Institute of Medical Research had this to say:

Biotechnology offers enormous promise for our community. With the initiatives contained in BioFirst, the State Government has demonstrated leadership and commitment to the promotion of New South Wales as a world player in biomedical research.

I turn now to other initiatives. The New South Wales Government has provided substantial support for the establishment of the Australian Technology Park, which is a major centre for biotechnology research. The Government also supports research through the New South Wales-based co-operative research centres [CRCs]. More than half of the 63 CRCs are located in New South Wales, or have partners in New South Wales. New South Wales CRCs have been successful in developing commercial products and spawning new companies. A climate that will continue to strengthen the scientific basis for health care in New South Wales already exists. Initiatives at a clinical level are providing the data needed to strengthen the scientific basis for the delivery of health care.

A large number of publications in peer-reviewed medical journals are submitted by people employed by the New South Wales health system. To improve the provision of clinical care, clinicians and health service managers are being trained in methods of evaluating safety and quality in health care. New South Wales Health, through its research and development strategy, has already implemented a number of initiatives that featured in the Wills review recommendations. Wills recommended that each State health authority should appoint a research director. New South Wales was well ahead of other jurisdictions. New South Wales appointed its first Director of Research and Development and established a specific Research and Development Branch of the Health Department. Subsequently, the role of the branch was broadened to include clinical policy in recognition of the important nexus between research and the application of research results through clinical policy.

Wills recommended that State health authorities increase communication between researchers and decision makers. New South Wales Health established the Research and Development Advisory Committee in early 1996. The committee has representatives from the university and from industry and government sectors in addition to researchers, health professionals and government. Communication between researchers and decision makers has been greatly facilitated through this committee. Fostering investment in the biotechnology industry has been a major initiative of the Carr Labor Government. Sydney is one of the most cost-competitive research locations in the Asia-Pacific region. The majority of pharmaceutical-related companies choose Sydney for their head office. Sydney is home to a range of world-class research and development facilities that are linked to leading-edge developments worldwide.

The New South Wales Government is actively promoting our State as a site for biotechnology investment. At present it is estimated that 41 per cent of Australian biotechnology companies are located in New South Wales. This Government takes the development of our biotechnology industry very seriously, and we are

proud of our achievements to date. In 1999 the State was host to a G8 delegation that came to New South Wales specifically to see our telemedicine program in action. This program is at the leading edge of health communication technology. This summary highlights the many initiatives undertaken in New South Wales to continue to create a climate that strengthens the scientific basis for health care and fosters investment in the biotechnology industry. I commend my amendment to the House.

Mr DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [12.53 p.m.]: I congratulate the shadow Minister for Health on not only raising this issue two years ago but making it happen by continually putting pressure on the Carr Government, dragging it kicking and screaming to finally get some small amount of funding out of Treasury for this issue. But I emphasise that it took two years of the shadow Minister's dragging the Government forward to get some action. I congratulate also the Parliamentary Secretary on managing to cram into his 10 minutes an extraordinary amount of rhetoric about what the Carr Government would really like to do if it were interested in its job in New South Wales. But it is not. It was 10 minutes of rhetoric and 10 minutes of, "I have a dream. I am going to do something about it," as we heard earlier.

Mr McManus: I have a vision.

Mr DEBNAM: The Parliamentary Secretary says he has a vision. One day it may turn into a dream for him and maybe, with a new government, something will happen in New South Wales. But nothing is happening under this Government. Let us talk about governments that have done something—the Commonwealth and the Victorian governments. In his 1999-2000 speech the Victorian Treasurer said, "...developing our capacity to develop new ideas and ultimately to realise those ideas as commercial opportunities".

Mrs Skinner: How long ago was that?

Mr DEBNAM: That was a couple of years ago.

Mrs Skinner: Way ahead of us.

Mr DEBNAM: The New South Wales shadow Minister for Health and the Victorian Government were years ahead of this Government in pushing this issue as a priority. The Victorian Government is light years ahead of the New South Wales Government in doing something about it, other than delivering rhetoric. New South Wales has not learned from the Victorian experience. Victoria had a can-do government. Perhaps the Bracks Government has a sense of can-do that was left over from the Kennett Government. I hope that New South Wales eventually picks up some ideas from Victoria and makes use of them. About a month ago when I was in Israel I noted that the community has a vision for the future of its country. Israel invests in research and entrepreneurship. It makes things happen.

Israel turns visions into reality, whereas in New South Wales we turn vision into rhetoric. The Parliamentary Secretary has given a wonderful example of that today. A press release from the Treasurer of New South Wales dated August this year announced an allocation of \$68 million for research and development, but as any number of commentators said, that is a mere pittance for New South Wales. But the last paragraph of the press release refers to this State's unique whole-of-government strategy to deal with this issue. I can assure honourable members that the New South Wales Government does not have a whole-of-government approach for anything in New South Wales. It simply adopts a knee-jerk reaction. The Minister for Police has just entered the Chamber—that is a wonderful example of a knee-jerk reaction. A whole-of-government strategy on policing would be magnificent for the people of New South Wales, especially people in Auburn for the next 48 hours.

But instead we have witnessed knee-jerk reactions, depending on which electorate the Minister for Police is in. New South Wales needs a good strategy, not rhetoric, to deal with this matter. On 13 April 2000, when the Minister for Health was under some pressure, in response to a question without notice he said that it was terrific to do this, this was a terrific initiative, that was a terrific thing to do, and it was a great response. He said that the Government had massively increased funds, and that it was good news. That is rubbish! It is rhetoric. The Government is full of rhetoric. Time and again that rhetoric unravels. The shadow Minister for Health pointed out that the \$68 million referred to by the Government was a pittance when compared to the contributions made by the Commonwealth and other States and the potential in this area.

It is clear that the New South Wales Government does not understand the magnitude of the challenge. It was very well covered in an article in the *Australian Financial Review* which the shadow Minister referred to earlier. The authors of the 1999 report attacked the Carr Government for its failure to act on the report. When

the Government did act, the authors said that it was too little too late. The actions of the Government indicate that it is asleep at the wheel on this issue, on policing and on any other issues in New South Wales. Its priorities are wrong. It has been all headlines and spin, but it has reached the point where the spin cycle is running dry. We need to get back to basics; we need to get back to first principles; we need to do it right. This is a major issue for New South Wales. The Government should make a major investment and encourage the private sector.

Pursuant to sessional orders debate interrupted.

[Madam Acting-Speaker (Ms Beamer) left the chair at 1.00 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

MINISTRY

Mr CARR: In the absence of the Minister for Health, who is not healthy, I will take questions on his behalf.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF POLICE CONTRACT TERMINATION

Ministerial Statement

Mr WHELAN (Strathfield—Minister for Police) [2.18 p.m.]: Late yesterday I received Commissioner Ryan's recommendation to terminate the contract of Deputy Commissioner Jeff Jarratt. I have accepted the commissioner's recommendation. The commissioner advised me that he made his decision on the ground of his dissatisfaction with Mr Jarratt's performance. The commissioner stated that his dissatisfaction stemmed from a number of issues about which he had spoken to Mr Jarratt over the past month in relation to the execution of his managerial responsibilities. The commissioner has advised me that he told Mr Jarratt of his decision yesterday at approximately 4.00 p.m. on the telephone. The Government has given the commissioner the power to choose his own senior management team.

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

Mr WHELAN: I respect the commissioner's decision. Jeff Jarratt has made a valuable contribution to policing in this State over 36 years.

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI (Lane Cove—Leader of the Opposition) [2.20 p.m.]: In the past couple of days the Premier has made ministerial statements about this State needing new and tougher laws to address the rising crime rate. The dismissal of Mr Jarratt last night highlights one underlying factor in the problem we have in this State: the Police Service is in crisis. Members of the service no longer have confidence.

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

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: Morale is worse than it was at the height of the royal commission. People are leaving because they no longer have faith in the promotion system. The complaints system is tearing the service apart. The Minister knows we cannot get crime under control because the Police Service is in crisis. That is confirmed by what happened last night.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I place the Minister for Police on two calls to order. I call the honourable member for Epping to order. I call the honourable member for Epping to order for the second time.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Routine of Business

[During notices of motions]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Coffs Harbour knows that the Chair will rule his notice of motion out of order because it is too lengthy. I will hand the notice of motion to the Clerks and the honourable member for Coffs Harbour should liaise with them in relation to the form of the motion. I will make a decision at the conclusion of question time as to whether the revised motion is in order.

PETITIONS

Centennial Park and Moore Park Commercial Use

Petition praying that the Centennial Park and Moore Park Trust Act be amended to provide for effective public consultation and full public disclosure of all commercial activities and leases, received from **Ms Moore**.

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**.

McDonald's Moore Park Restaurant

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

Keira Electorate Policing

Petition requesting an increased weekend police presence in the Northern Illawarra, Corrimal and Helensburgh areas, received from **Mr Campbell**.

Beat Policing

Petition calling on the Government to focus policing strategies and resources on beat policing, received from **Mr Debnam**.

Frenchs Forest Policing

Petition praying for increased police resources in the Frenchs Forest area, the re-establishment of the Frenchs Forest patrol and a review of police powers, received from **Mr Humpherson**.

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**.

Inner East Sydney Police Local Area Commands

Petition praying that the amalgamation of local police commands in the inner east be opposed, that Redfern, Kings Cross, Surry Hills and Paddington police stations be upgraded, and that an effective police recruitment drive be developed to properly resource community policing, including uniformed foot patrols, received from **Ms Moore**.

Surry Hills Policing

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

Inner East Sydney Policing

Petition praying that the House prevents the closure of Woolloomooloo, Paddington, Redfern and four other inner eastern suburbs police stations and praying for adequate police resources, including uniformed foot patrols, in the inner east area, received from **Ms Moore**.

Eastern Suburbs Police and Community Youth Club Closure

Petition praying that the House stops the Board of the Police and Community Youth Club New South Wales Ltd from closing and selling the Eastern Suburbs Police and Community Youth Club, received from **Ms Moore**.

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**.

Genetically Engineered Food

Petition praying that the House suspends the commercial release and trials of genetically engineered crops, supports the implementation of mandatory labelling of food derived from genetic engineering and funds independent scientific research to investigate the potential risks to health and the environment, received from **Ms Moore**.

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**.

Non-government Schools Funding

Petition praying that the Government reimburse the \$5 million in funding that has been withdrawn from non-government schools and reverse its decision to withdraw a further \$13.5 million in funding in 2001, received from **Mr Richardson**.

Kapooka Bridge

Petition praying that capital works funding be made available for the construction of a new Kapooka bridge, received from **Mr Maguire**.

Windsor Road Upgrading

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

Animal Experimentation

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

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**.

Brothel Regulation

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

White City Site Rezoning Proposal

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

Bega Valley Shire Council

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF POLICE CONTRACT TERMINATION

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: My question is directed to the Premier. In light of the Premier's statement today that he has absolute confidence in Commissioner Peter Ryan and whatever decisions he makes in dismissing senior officers, how does the Premier respond to comments by Deputy Police Commissioner Jeff Jarratt that he has been sacked as a result of political pressure?

Mr CARR: As the Minister for Police made clear, there was no political component in the decision of the police commissioner. Let it be said—I have been saying it all morning—that the New South Wales Commissioner of Police is entitled to pick his senior management team.

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

Mr CARR: How else would a senior public sector manager manage an organisation for the taxpayers?

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

Mr CARR: The Leader of the Opposition maintains the proposition that the police commissioner cannot change his senior team. That is not the position she has taken when it comes to her senior team.

Mr Tink: Point of order: under section 51 of the Police Service Act, the approval comes from the Premier.

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

Mr CARR: Honourable members will recall that the honourable member for Vacluse was once the shadow Treasurer. There he sits, alone and palely loitering. He once proudly occupied a seat on the front bench. Overnight, without any opportunity to appeal or to argue a case for compensation or unfair dismissal, he was axed.

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

Mr CARR: What did the chief executive officer say when asked to justify her decision? She said:

The decision was not taken lightly. I knew the consequences but sometimes when you are leader you have to take tough decisions.

So goodbye, Peter. But he is not the only Peter to be sacked by the leader opposite. In December 1998 the honourable member for Willoughby was hosting a fundraising lunch.

Mrs Chikarovski: Point of order: The Premier might think that the dismissal of the deputy police commissioner is a matter of great humour. However, the people of New South Wales have a right to know whether the deputy police commissioner was sacked as a result of political pressure. I ask you to direct the Premier to answer the question: was political pressure brought to bear to sack the deputy police commissioner, Jeff Jarratt. That question must be answered. If the Premier is not prepared to answer the question, you should direct him to sit down.

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

Mr CARR: The answer is apparent to anyone: No. Do not assert in this House that a senior manager of a public sector organisation cannot choose his team! The fact is that we gave Peter Ryan a job to do on behalf of the people of New South Wales, and he is entitled to pick his team.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Premier is answering the first question of the day and several members have been called to order a number of times. I remind members that Thursday is an inappropriate day to be removed from the Chamber.

Mr CARR: The Minister has reported to the House that he received the commissioner's recommendation to terminate Deputy Commissioner Jeff Jarratt's contract yesterday and the Minister accepted the commissioner's recommendation. The people of New South Wales have given Peter Ryan the job of running New South Wales policing. He is entitled to pick his senior management team.

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

SEXUAL ASSAULT SENTENCING GUIDELINE JUDGMENT

Mr MOSS: My question is to the Premier. What is the latest information on the Government's request for a guideline judgment on sexual assault?

Mr CARR: I can report to the House today that the Crown Advocate has finalised his advice to the Attorney General for a guideline judgment application on sections 61I and 61J of the Crimes Act relating to the offences of aggravated sexual intercourse without consent and sexual intercourse without consent. The Attorney General today instructed the Crown Advocate to commence proceedings in the Court of Criminal Appeal.

The application for a guideline judgment is the people's way of getting judges to do what we all want, that is, impose longer sentences on people who commit rape and pack rape. In making a guideline judgment the Court of Criminal Appeal considers four factors: first, the prevalence of the offence in question; second, inconsistency in the sentences imposed; third, the trend in sentences for the offences; and, fourth, the deterrent effect of the sentences being handed down.

The Court of Criminal Appeal considers these criteria and then makes a ruling for the other courts to follow. The ruling is a guideline judgment. Guideline judgments work; they are resulting in criminals being sent to prison for longer. For example, before the 1988 guideline judgment in the Jurisic case, in relation to the offence of dangerous driving causing grievous bodily harm only 33 per cent of offenders went to gaol, 40 per cent of offenders were placed on periodic detention and the rest received bonds or community service orders. Since the guideline judgment 67 per cent of offenders have gone to gaol and 33 per cent have been sentenced to periodic or home detention.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will cease conversing in a loud manner.

Mr CARR: In other words, since the guideline judgment, 100 per cent of offenders have received custodial sentences. Before the guideline judgment, if the victim died as a result of the offence 83 per cent of offenders went to gaol. Since the judgment, 100 per cent of offenders have gone to gaol. Guideline judgments work. In the Court of Criminal Appeal the Attorney General will argue that there is a trend towards judicial leniency in the cases of rape and gang rape, that sentences being handed down are not a sufficient deterrent, that the community is concerned about the prevalence of the crimes of rape and gang rape, and that there is a growing discrepancy between the legislative maximum of 20 years and the sentences being handed out.

The Attorney General will argue that the decision of the Parliament on behalf of the community to increase the maximum penalty to life must be taken into account by the courts. The decision was made in this Chamber last night to increase the maximum penalty in the Crimes Act to life. That is a powerful message to the courts. This is a valid argument because of the comments made by Chief Justice Spigelman in the Jurisic case. He said:

The seriousness with which society regards offences—reflected in the maximum permissible penalties, as amended from time to time—is an important consideration in sentencing decisions. Significant disparity between public opinion and judicial sentencing will eventually lead to a reduction in the perceived legitimacy of the legal system.

They are serious words coming from the Chief Justice. It has long been my opinion that if there is a serious gap between what the community wants and what the judges bring down, faith in the system will be corroded. All of

these arguments to be made in the court will be made on the facts. While the maximum penalty in legislation has been 20 years, 57 per cent of offenders have received total sentences of six years or less. The average term is six years. The range of average terms is between five and seven years. Only 3 per cent of offenders have received the maximum penalty for aggravated sexual assault. We will argue that the public demands tougher sentences from the courts.

I can also advise the House of information just made available to the Government. The Director of Public Prosecutions intends to lodge an appeal in the matter heard before Judge Latham on 23 August. The DPP will appeal against the sentences handed down in the matter of sexual assault perpetrated at Villawood on 5 September 2000. The Government's view is that these sentences were lenient.

I am also advised that the DPP intends to use the Attorney General's sentencing guideline application as a vehicle for the appeal in the Villawood matter. That means both matters will be heard by the Court of Criminal Appeal at the earliest possible time. This news is welcomed by the Government. A serious cautionary note to this House: thank goodness the DPP's appeal was not placed in jeopardy by the Opposition's calls for a direct appeal by the Attorney General. Thank goodness the Government's application for a guideline judgment was not placed in jeopardy by the foolish amendments moved by the Opposition in this Chamber last night.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF POLICE CONTRACT TERMINATION

Mr SOURIS: My question is directed to the Minister for Police. Given that under his legislation Jeff Jarratt could not be sacked without his agreement, can he tell the House what specific management problems did Commissioner Ryan tell him about when he recommended that the Deputy Commissioner be sacked, and did he seek any other advice before signing the pink slip?

Mr WHELAN: I refer the honourable member to the long and detailed ministerial statement I made. If he had listened he would have heard the answer in that statement.

CABRAMATTA DRUG HOUSES

Ms MEAGHER: My question is to the Minister for Police. What is the latest information on the Government's laws targeting drug houses?

Mr WHELAN: I thank the honourable member for Cabramatta for her question and I welcome members of the Cabramatta Bowling Club to Parliament today. The honourable member has just advised me, and I knew from police sources, that after consultation with the Police Service the club demolished a property—I am sure at great cost and inconvenience—that it owned which was being used as a drug house. The club acted very decisively and quickly with great civic responsibility to remove the drug house from the Cabramatta community. We thank the club.

Shortly before dawn today police attached to the Greater Hume Target Action Group [TAG] swooped on a unit in McBurney Road, Cabramatta. This was no ordinary premises. An intensive police intelligence and surveillance operation had revealed that by night this property was in fact a fortified drug house, a haven for dealers buying and selling deadly drugs. I am advised that just before 5.00 a.m., as part of the controlled operation Strathroy, undercover officers entered the drug house and purchased prohibited drugs.

An hour later, using the tough new powers to shut down illegal drug houses, the Greater Hume TAG team officers moved in. Armed with a drug house search warrant and sledgehammers, the officers smashed down the heavily fortified front door and raided the property. Five people, including two women, were arrested. Four people were inside the premises. One man, whom police believe had just made a drug purchase, was downstairs and outside as drugs were thrown to him from an upstairs window. As well as the arrests, police advised that they recovered at least 40 foils of a suspected prohibited drug, \$5,000 in cash, and other suspected stolen goods.

Police are still finalising today's operation in Cabramatta but so far a 31-year-old St Marys man has been charged with serious offences of supply and possession of a prohibited drug and of being on drug premises. This man has been refused bail and is due to appear in Liverpool court late today. The four others who were arrested are expected to be charged variously with drug house offences such as being on drug house premises, possessing drugs and having goods in custody. These arrests and charges were made possible because this Government has given police the powers they need to tackle drug dealers.

On 1 July new laws that have been designed to shut down drug houses and crack down on illegal hand guns came into force. They came into force because this Government listened to police and because we recognised that there are drug houses and new powers were needed. I am pleased to inform the House and the honourable member for Cabramatta of the success of police using these laws. Thus far, police in the Cabramatta area alone have executed 11 search warrants on drug houses, arrested and charged 60 people using drug premises powers, laid more than 130 charges associated with drug premises, and issued 370 move-on directions under the increased move-on powers by which police can target suspected drug suppliers or buyers.

I take this opportunity to congratulate all police officers who were involved in this morning's Operation Strathroy. It was a difficult operation, involving night-time surveillance and dangerous undercover work. I also inform the House of some of the very positive feedback I have received from police officers on the ground who are using to great effect the drug house powers that this Parliament gave them. According to the Commander of the Greater Hume TAG, Chief Inspector Mark Hiron, these laws not only enable police to identify drug houses and charge people who previously would have got off scot-free but also enable police to identify the drug suppliers and dealers—the Mr Bigs—and charge them with the more serious offences, such as the ongoing supply of an illegal drug, which carries a longer gaol sentence than does possession, for example.

Thanks to the successful use of these new powers today, there is now one less fortified drug house in Cabramatta, which means that there is one less haven for criminals who make a living off the deadly drug trade. It also means that there will be a safer community at Cabramatta. When describing today's operation, the officer in charge of the Greater Hume TAG operation, Senior Sergeant John Rhodes, said:

This is a successful operation—an excellent result, judged by the arrests and what we have seized. It is part of an ongoing campaign.

His next comments are important to show what operational police are saying:

We have got the drug house legislation, which makes things easier, and we will continue to do more of these.

CHILD PROTECTION

Mr HAZZARD: My question is directed to the Minister for Community Services. Following her director-general's denial of allegations by the Public Service Association of New South Wales that six babies have died in the care of the Department of Community Services [DOCS] recently, what does she say to Kelly Luke, who is present in the gallery—the mother of 23-month of Jayden Luke, who apparently died of shaken baby syndrome—after her department placed him with carers who previously had been rejected by Queensland welfare authorities and who had not yet completed New South Wales foster care training?

Mrs LO PO': This matter is subject to investigation. Because it is under investigation, I intend to canvass it no further.

ILLEGAL HAND GUNS IMPORTATION

Mr LYNCH: My question without notice is to the Minister for Police. What is the Government's response to the impact in New South Wales of the importation to Victoria of 2,000 hand guns?

Mr WHELAN: I thank the honourable member for his question. This morning I was alerted to a massive consignment of hand guns awaiting customs clearance in Victoria that could have a devastating effect on the streets of this State and, indeed, Australia. New South Wales police fear that the shipment of 1,604 nine millimetre Norengo hand guns will be released imminently and will be diverted onto the black market in Sydney. The Commissioner of Police and I believe that whatever steps are necessary must be taken to stop the distribution of these weapons. Concerns that this shipment will be diverted to the black market are very real and the implications are terrifying. To allow these weapons into the country would be a deadly mistake.

Police intelligence has revealed that the low cost of Norengo hand guns, even on the black market, makes them the weapon of choice among criminals and gangs. These are the very weapons that are reaching young criminals on the streets of Sydney. When one considers that just one weapon can be used to commit multiple crimes, the clearance of this consignment would be a huge backwards step after all that has been done in this State to crack down on illegal firearms. To its credit, the Australian Customs Service intercepted the shipment in Victoria in May 2000. I am advised that the customs service suspects that the consignment was originally sent to Queensland on behalf of a firearms dealer there. At that time, the dealer was suspended and before the courts on charges relating to the importation of another batch of Norengo hand guns which had been de-activated and sold on the black market.

Those charges, fortuitously, allowed Queensland authorities to stop the entry of the current consignment. However, the weapons were then diverted to a different dealer in Victoria. The Customs Service has so far delayed the importation of illegal hand guns by using its powers of safety testing firearms being brought into this country, but the safety testing cannot be stretched out forever. The Government has continually and successfully campaigned to tighten firearms importation laws. In June 2000 I suggested to the Australasian Police Ministers Council that urgent action was needed to reduce hand gun importations and bolster import controls. The ministerial council's efforts brought about tougher Commonwealth regulation in August 2000 and in April this year, restricting firearms importation to 10, unless special approval had been given by the customs service based on a dealer's sales records and other evidence.

However, the Customs Service is powerless to stop these weapons from entering the country because those controls are not retrospective and the restrictions do not apply to this shipment. In desperation, the Customs Service is consulting with the New South Wales Police Service and with other law enforcement bodies to prevent the release of this shipment. The verdict should be unanimous: the release of these weapons is not consistent with the safety and security of the people of Australia. This morning I wrote to the Federal Minister for Justice and Customs, urging him to act swiftly and decisively to stop the release of these firearms onto the market. I urge the Federal Minister to uphold the principles of tougher importation controls on hand guns. The only foolproof option is a retrospective amendment of the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956. I have alerted my Victorian counterpart to this, and this Government remains committed to taking illegal guns off New South Wales streets. We want Commonwealth Government support.

BEVERLY HILLS SEXUAL ASSAULTS

Mr J. H. TURNER: My question is directed to the Attorney General. Has the head of his department advised him of a formal complaint from the parents of one of the girls who was gang-raped at Beverly Hills that in plea bargaining discussions, the Director of Public Prosecutions [DPP] left their 16-year-old daughter, who was not accompanied by her parents, with the clear impression that the offenders would be charged with kidnapping as well as rape? Why did the DPP not proceed in the manner indicated? Will the DPP include the charge of kidnapping in any appeal process?

Mr DEBUS: A detailed report is being prepared on exactly what occurred in every step in the grave case that has exercised all of our minds in recent weeks. I expect advice from the Director of Public Prosecutions [DPP] imminently. My discussions with him make it very clear that he is treating the matter with extreme seriousness, and obviously that is reinforced by the information just given to the House by the Premier that the DPP is appealing that whole matter. However, in the context of the honourable member's question, the underlying philosophy of the practice of charge bargaining, made explicit in the guidelines, is to spare victims the ordeal of cross-examination and the uncertainty as to whether a conviction will be obtained at the end of the process.

Mr J. H. Turner: Why did you allow a 16-year-old-girl, by herself, to be subjected to that?

Mr DEBUS: The honourable member seems not to understand that modest principle called the separation of powers. It is not I who allows it; he asked what did the DPP do, and I am answering his question.

RUGBY LEAGUE GRAND FINAL HOSPITALITY ARRANGEMENTS

Miss BURTON: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Gaming and Racing. Has the Government made a decision on the hospitality regulations associated with this year's National Rugby League grand final?

Mr FACE: As most honourable members would know, the National Rugby League grand final will be held at Stadium Australia on Sunday 30 September. In the past, grand final matches have been held during the afternoon. However, this year's grand final will be held on a Sunday evening, commencing at 8.00 o'clock. It is expected that many people throughout New South Wales, in the hope of their team winning, will watch the live telecast on Channel 9 at their local hotel, because hotels are popular venues for viewing sport and many have large screens.

Under the Liquor Act the current standard Sunday hotel trading hours will cause problems for many hotels that want to televise the grand final match, because they will be required to cease trading at 10.00 p.m. As a result, patrons of some hotels will be required to vacate the premises almost immediately after the match is

completed, assuming that the match does not go into extra time. If the match runs over time, a decision will have to be made at 10.00 p.m. It is expected that hotel licensees and police may have considerable difficulties in enforcing that closing time.

The forced exit of thousands of hotel patrons onto the streets at 10.00 p.m. would place a significant strain on local transport and security. That flies in the face of what the Government is trying to do with the responsible service of alcohol and liquor accords. I can imagine the frustration that would be felt by people if the Newcastle Knights were to play in the grand final against, say, the Parramatta Eels, or the St George Illawarra Dragons, and their supporters had to disperse immediately after the game, or even before the end of the game.

The Government decided it is reasonable that patrons viewing the grand final at their local hotel should be able to spend some time after the match celebrating or commiserating. It will assist local authorities, transport operators and especially the police if patrons are able to leave hotels at staggered times, rather than all at once. Therefore, with the Opposition's support, the Government has agreed to allow a one-off extension of hotel trading until midnight on Sunday 30 September.

The proposal is to apply to hotels only. Registered clubs, generally, unless they have special conditions placed on their licence by the court, have no restrictions on their trading hours. Clubs will be able to trade during and after the rugby league grand final. This extension of trading will stop people congregating on the streets at 10.00 p.m. and seeking out other licensed premises. I am sure that this extension will make for an enjoyable evening for the many sports lovers in the State, including the Premier.

CITY EAST POLICE LOCAL AREA COMMANDS

Ms MOORE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Police. What is the outcome of the Minister's discussions with the Commissioner of Police about a green paper proposing the amalgamation of local area commands in inner-eastern Sydney, a proposal consistently rejected by the local community? When will the green paper be released?

Mr WHELAN: I assure the honourable member for Bligh that no decision has been made on the proposed restructure, and I will reiterate the hurdles that have to be overcome. The community has to consult with Police Service officers. The officers involved in the city-east region would have to agree to the amalgamation. Until all those arrangements, and the massive community consultation that I expect to take place—

Mr Tink: Massive?

Mr WHELAN: Yes, it is massive. This is a very serious issue and the principal reason that the Government was entertaining it was that there was a prospect that we could put more police on the streets in the city-east region; and it was suggested that almost 100 additional police would be provided. The Government did not want to reject that proposition out of hand. When I receive the commissioner's advice I will certainly inform the honourable member.

FINANCIAL COUNSELLING SERVICES

Mr HUNTER: My question without notice is to the Minister for Fair Trading. Minister, how is the Government helping New South Wales families that are in financial difficulties?

Mr WATKINS: Australians today face a record level of household debt, and that means hardship in many homes. Members on both sides of the House know that people in their electorates are suffering real financial difficulty. This impacts, often silently, on families and their children. Parents and single people are in financial difficulty and cannot cope. Often people cannot get out of that debt spiral. The Government, through the Department of Fair Trading, is helping families that are in debt by providing funding to front-line financial counselling services. Today I inform the House that, continuing the Government's proud record of help, \$4.5 million will be provided over the next three years. This allocation is yet another round of record funding. The department provides funding through two programs, the Credit Counselling program and the Financial Counselling Trust Fund program.

The front-line services receiving support provide advice and advocacy for people who are encountering financial hardship. Priority is given to the most disadvantaged in our community, including those with literacy

problems and those where the first language spoken in the home is not English. Financial counsellors play an essential role in our communities. They help families in crisis and families that are often desperate. Sometimes the debt spiral means that simply putting food on the table is a luxury that cannot be afforded. Financial counsellors will contact creditors on behalf of those in financial crisis to negotiate reasonable repayment systems for families in debt. Financial counselling works; the advice of these financial counsellors is worthwhile.

Families in debt who use the counsellors often have that debt problem resolved in a way that they can manage. The counsellors also educate consumers on sensible budgeting practices so once they get out of their financial mess, they are less likely to be caught again. They are also a very useful early warning system for the Department of Fair Trading in pointing out emerging shonky practices in the financial services industry. This year, the first year of this three-year program, more than \$1.5 million will be spent on financial counselling services in New South Wales. This represents an increase of just over \$100,000 on the previous highest level of funding.

Of the money allocated, about \$450,000 will be provided to people living in regional New South Wales. There is special recognition of the unique difficulties faced by people living in the major regional centres of New South Wales. The grants will go to 26 different organisations to provide 44 financial counselling services across the State, with increased funding provided in areas of real need. For instances, Bankstown will receive increased funding of \$30,000, up \$12,000 on last year. That means that more face-to-face counselling can be provided. Broken Bay will receive an extra \$12,000 and Lake Macquarie will receive an increase of \$6,000. Other areas such as Quakers Hill and Blacktown will receive an additional \$4,000.

This program also funds Credit Help Line. Almost \$2.3 million has been provided since 1995. Most honourable members would be aware of the great service provided by Credit Help Line. It provides free, expert advice to both consumers facing financial difficulties and financial counsellors who may have complex or unique financial problems brought to them. Credit Help Line is a wonderful service provided for the people of New South Wales. I can also inform the House that I have approved \$210,000 for credit and debt legal advice services, which are provided by four community legal centres. Also, \$14,000 has been approved for the Ryde-Eastwood Counselling Service—and I am shameless in that. Although it provides services in my electorate out to Parramatta up into Epping and beyond, this excellent service also provides an enormous service for people living in the northern part of Sydney. As well, \$17,500 has been approved for Credit Line for two courses to train extra financial counsellors.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank financial counsellors around the State and those who live and work in electorates that we represent. Their hard work often goes unrecognised. They are helping families and individuals in crisis every day. The Government recognises that some people in our communities need support in effectively managing their personal finances. It is extremely gratifying to be able to provide assistance. Australia is facing a crisis in credit, with \$17 billion owed on credit, an increase of 15 per cent in the last 12 months. That increase will continue. It means that more and more Australian families are caught in the credit debt crisis. The Department of Fair Trading has received reports that some individuals have 30 to 40 credit cards. They use one credit card to pay off another.

Reports have been received of increasing bankruptcy. Bankruptcy has increased by 50 per cent over the last 10 years. Indeed, 10 years ago bankruptcies were generally related to business debt. Financial counsellors will tell you that today more than half the bankruptcies relate to credit card debt and personal debt. There is a real shift in the financial practices occurring in Australia and to a large extent that is due to the marketing practices of banks, financial institutions and stores. Irresponsible financial practices are leading to a dramatic increase in the work by financial counsellors. Therefore, our financial counsellors are under an excessive burden in dealing with these problems.

However, the banks refuse to admit this problem. Earlier this year we drew the many areas of credit together. We held a credit roundtable in Governor Macquarie Tower with representatives from the banks, the financial institutions and the main stores, who are all responsible for the provision of credit. At that meeting there was a very disturbing lack of responsibility shown by the financial institutions in that they would not recognise the increase in credit card debt as a problem they had anything to do with. We need to address several major problems such as the irresponsible marketing of credit debt. Last year I drew attention to a major bank in this State that was the sponsor of the New South Wales Waratahs. After watching a game at the Sydney Football Stadium people left the stadium flushed with the victory of the Waratahs—

Mr Hartcher: Point of order: Mr Speaker, you said that the Minister would not be allowed to talk for 12 minutes. He is now talking about a football match, which is totally irrelevant to the question. He is deliberately trying to spin out the time and he should be asked to draw his answer to a close.

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

Mr WATKINS: To the point of order—

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

POLICE SERVICE SENIOR PERSONNEL

Mr TINK: My question is to the Minister for Police. Now that Christine Nixon, Jeff Jarratt, Geoff Schuberg and Mal Brammer have all departed police headquarters, when will you be gone?

Mr WHELAN: Today's edition of the *Daily Telegraph* carries the headline "Smashing down a gang's drug den".

Mr Tink: Who's next?

Mr WHELAN: You.

NEW MARKET EXPANSION PROGRAM

Mr BROWN: I direct my question to the Minister for Regional Development. What is the Government doing to assist regional firms to enter new markets?

Mr WOODS: Many innovative country firms in this State are seeking to enter new markets with unique, quality products. The Government is assisting those country businesses to open their doors to new markets. We have developed the New Market Expansion Program, which will dedicate \$1.8 million over three years to help equip country businesses with the skills necessary to compete at a new level. As part of this program the Government is actively encouraging regional firms that want to break into new markets to use trade shows as part of their overall marketing strategy. Trade shows give regional firms a great opportunity to promote their products to new markets. I am pleased to report that this approach has proved successful. Just last week I attended the Fine Foods Australia exhibition at Darling Harbour. Mr Speaker, as one who appreciates good food you will be aware that it is the country's premium food and beverage exhibition.

I assure those honourable members who did not get to that exhibition that they missed a great event. Apart from the many products from country New South Wales that I think have a great future. By far the best stand—I say this without bias—was the regional flavours stand. That stand, established under the New Market Expansion Program, brought together 18 of the most exciting food and beverage producers in country New South Wales. Those companies were exposed to about 20,000 domestic and international buyers. The event organisers were so impressed with the Flavours of Country New South Wales stand that it was named the best group stand of the exhibition.

Special mention must also go to the Central Coast's own B-Fresh Foods, which was awarded the prize for the best retail product. B-Fresh is a Gosford-based company that supplies pre-cut, ready-to-cook or chilled vegetables and fruit products to the food processing and food service industries. Another company of particular interest to me was Green Grove Organics—a family company based in the Riverina that makes natural licorice with carefully chosen organic ingredients. As I am sure other honourable members will be aware—I learned this after spending some time at the Green Grove stand—liquorice is good for us.

Ms Megarrity: They don't understand that.

Mr WOODS: No, they do not. I think those opposite would understand some of the effects of licorice but not all. Licorice is an ancient medicinal herb that aids digestion, heals the liver and increases endurance. I can vouch for that personally because I was presented with a beautiful package of licorice last weekend on Father's Day. Green Grove was also a presenter on the most recent regional business investment tour—another program that is run through the Department of State and Regional Development. The owners advised me that they managed to secure new investments as a result of the work they did for that tour.

Also on show was Mudgee Mustard's range of gourmet mustards. The company has 24 varieties of mustard, ranging from mild to extra hot, including the Sizzler. Another popular exhibitor was Young's JD Jam. Anyone who travels to Young should not neglect to visit the JD Jam factory. The company has cultivated a thriving tourism business. Last season more than 500 group coaches and 111,000 visitors toured the factory and visited the tea rooms. Its jams are sold in supermarkets throughout New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland.

They are just three examples of 18 great producers from country New South Wales. Other good products were also displayed in the exhibition, which brought home to me the enormous opportunities that exist in the regions. The Government wants to tap into those opportunities. We cannot make them happen, but those involved in developing products are doing a great job and, wherever possible, we will assist them. I take this opportunity to congratulate all those involved with the regional flavours stand, particularly the Department of State and Regional Development and the 18 companies that attracted so much attention at the exhibition.

Questions without notice concluded.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL VACANCY

Joint Sitting

At 3.30 p.m. the House proceeded to the Legislative Council to attend a joint sitting to elect a member to fill a seat in the Legislative Council vacated by the Hon. John Richard Johnson, resigned.

[The House reassembled at 3.38 p.m.]

Mr SPEAKER: I report that the House met with the Legislative Council in the Legislative Council Chamber to elect a member to fill the seat in the Legislative Council vacated by the Hon. John Richard Johnson and that Michael Costa was duly elected.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

Hunter Valley Wine Industry

Mr HICKEY (Cessnock) [3.38 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because the wine industry is one of the most prominent emerging industries in New South Wales. We should consider this matter today because the people of this State should be aware of the size and prominence of the industry. We should urgently debate this matter for the sake of the 1,700 employees and associated employers and industries that rely on the wine industry for their livelihood. This matter is of immense importance to my home town and to the Hunter generally, as well as to people in rural and regional New South Wales.

Deputy Commissioner of Police Contract Termination

Mr TINK (Epping) [3.39 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because it goes to the heart of the appointment and sacking of senior police in New South Wales. The motion is urgent because it poses the key question: What were the precise reasons that Deputy Commissioner of Police, Mr Jarratt, was removed from office? The motion is urgent because many people want to know the answer to that question, not least of which is Mr Jarratt. More importantly, 11,000 uniform front-line police who, until yesterday, were under the command of Mr Jarratt, and the wider public of New South Wales, are entitled also to know the reasons.

The motion is urgent because, contrary to what the Premier said today, the role of the Minister for Police in the removal of Mr Jarratt is absolutely central. The matter is urgent because the Premier is incorrect when he says that the matter is for Mr Ryan. The matter is urgent because the Police Service Act, which was extensively redrafted as a result of the Wood royal commission, makes it quite plain that the Commissioner of Police simply does not have the power to sack Mr Jarratt or anybody of that rank or, indeed, any assistant commissioner.

The matter is urgent because any such recommendation by the commissioner for the dismissal of such a senior officer must be approved by the Minister for Police. The matter is urgent because the Parliament and the public through the Parliament are entitled to know the precise reasons under section 51 (1) (a) of the Police Service Act why the Minister approved the recommendation of the police commissioner. The matter is urgent because the most the commissioner can do is make recommendations for termination of employment. It must

have been the case—I assume it was the case; in law it must be the case—that reasons for this recommendation were provided to the Minister. To act under the law the Minister must have taken those reasons into account to give his approval for the termination under section 51. The motion is urgent because these matters simply cannot remain secret between the Minister and the commissioner. The motion is urgent because, if the rumours are right, this will not be the last sacking of a senior police officer of the rank of Deputy Commissioner or Assistant Commissioner. It is vitally important that the public and the police are made aware of the reasons for these dismissals.

Mr Martin: Read today's Herald and you'll find out.

Mr TINK: Today's *Sydney Morning Herald* is not at all enlightening on the reasons for the sacking because, like everybody else, it does not know. Only two people know: the Minister and the commissioner. It is time everybody else is let in on the secret. As I understand it, more senior police will be sacked. The public is entitled to know the reasons in each case. At the end of the day this ultimately goes to the accountability of the commissioner and his performance agreement with the Minister, and, through the Minister, the commissioner's ultimate accountability to the Parliament. It also goes to the performance of the Minister, who is delegated by this Parliament under the Police Service Act to approve such sackings.

The Parliament is entitled to know the reasons for the Minister giving his approval as delegated to him by this Parliament. If more sackings are to come—I believe many more will come—we need to know what is going on in the Police Service. These days it is commonplace for people to say that the Police Service is in crisis. Unless the reasons for the dismissals are made clear, the Police Service will be in a much greater crisis. Today most front-line police, regardless of what they might think about Mr Jarratt in relation to particular matters, are openly speculating about what has happened. That is not good for policing, it is not good for their jobs and it is not good for morale in the service.

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

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL VACANCY

Joint Sitting

Mr SPEAKER: I table the minutes of proceedings of the joint sitting held this day to choose a person to fill the vacancy in the Legislative Council caused by the resignation of the Hon. John Richard Johnson.

Ordered to be printed.

HUNTER VALLEY WINE INDUSTRY

Urgent Motion

Mr HICKEY (Cessnock) [3.44 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates the Brokenwood Vineyard of the Hunter on winning gold at the International Wine Challenge in London;
- (2) notes the New South Wales wine industry has an annual turnover of \$700 million and provides direct employment for some 1,700 people, mainly in regional New South Wales and many thousands in associated industries; and
- (3) supports the continuing efforts of our winemakers to break into new markets and create economic growth in country Wales.

The wine industry in New South Wales is second to none around the world. We proved that yesterday when wine made in the Hunter Valley took out the trophy for the best Red at the most prestigious wine competition in the world. Brokenwood wines, which, I am proud to say, is based in my electorate, took on the best of what the rest of the world had to offer and won. Brokenwood's 1999 Rayner Vineyard Shiraz brought home the gold for New South Wales and the Hunter, defeating around 10,000 for the honour. The London Wine Challenge is one of the top three wine competitions in the world. According to the Managing Director of Brokenwood, Mr Iain Riggs, the win signifies the strength of the wine industry in Australia. In today's *Daily Telegraph* Mr Riggs said:

It is a good win for Australia because we have taken over the No. 1 mantle of selling wine into the UK.

What started as a weekend venture has become a worldwide success. Since 1970 Brokenwood has grown from a hobby farm into one of Australia's most reputable winemakers. They have maintained a consistent quality of wine, adding to their reputation around world. I know that my colleagues on both sides of this House join with me in congratulating Brokenwood wines on its fantastic achievement. The New South Wales Government has long supported the wine industry in this State. We recognise that emerging industries, like the wine industry, need support to develop to their full potential. Only recently the Minister for the Hunter announced State Government assistance for the Hunter Country Wine Centre.

The centre, which will be based in a prime location near Cessnock airport and which will employ 30 people, is expected to be open by the end of the year. The construction phase of the centre has already generated at least 150 jobs. The centre will be the first stop for tourists on their way to the Cessnock or Pokolbin vineyards. The Hunter Country Wine Centre will house a restaurant and an exhibition centre. It will be an important addition to the growing wine industry, particularly in the Cessnock area where it has created quite a considerable number of jobs. I welcome the Minister's announcement of State Government assistance to get the ball rolling. No-one could deny how important the wine industry has become to the economy of the Hunter Valley.

The wine industry attracts more than 1.5 million visitors to the Hunter each year. It generates at least \$300 million annually for the Hunter economy and provides jobs for almost 6,000 people. However, it is not only the Hunter Valley that is benefiting from the growing popularity of the Australian wine industry across the world. In New South Wales alone the industry has a turnover of a staggering \$700 million. I know that the Minister for State and Regional Development has been travelling around country areas of New South Wales and that he has seen the growing importance of the wine industry in areas like the Central West and the South Coast.

The Minister recently visited Orange in the State's central west to launch the Orange Region Vignerons Association business and marketing plan. The industry already contributes \$57 million to the Orange economy. The new business plan aims to sell Orange wines to new international and domestic markets. The State Government has also assisted the largest commercial winery on the South Coast. Based at Gerringong, Willow Valley Estate is expanding its operations to employ an additional 11 people. This is great news for the South Coast, with Willow Vale producing up to 200,000 bottles of premium quality wines each year.

I know that the honourable member for South Coast will have more to say about the growing interest in wine on the South Coast. As honourable members will see, the wine industry is an important part of the economy of regional New South Wales. New South Wales makes up one-third of the \$2.6 billion Australian wine industry, and it is growing. Wine grape production in New South Wales is set to grow by 44 per cent or 100,000 tonnes over the next five years. That is equivalent to 77 million litres of wine. There are 250 wine companies in New South Wales exporting more than \$330 million worth of wine each year. Increased concentration on producing quality premium wines such as the Brokenwood Shiraz will help to promote our great wines to the world. I think the editorial in today's *Daily Telegraph* sums it up with this statement:

... an international wine show has confirmed what most red drinkers have always known—Australia makes the best wine in the world.

Wine drinkers all over the world are united in their appreciation of Australian wines. Some 425,000 international tourists visit our wineries every year. Tourists from the United Kingdom, Europe and North America are coming in droves to experience our wines. These days wineries do more than just sell wine. They are cultural attractions, with restaurants, shops and tours making them a great day out for the visitors. In fact, a recent study has shown that visiting Australian wineries is one of the most favoured activities for international tourists.

Clearly, the New South Wales Government wants to continue to work with the industry to build on its achievements. We need to take advantage of the explosion of interest there has been in the Australian wine industry of recent times. Only by working in partnership with the industry, local government and communities can we really capitalise on the growth in the wine industry across New South Wales. These are exciting times for wineries in New South Wales. A growing international interest means that new markets are opening up and are ripe for the picking.

I hope honourable members from both sides of the House will join together to support this important motion. The wine industry provide jobs and economic growth to country towns throughout the whole of New South Wales. It is vital that all levels of government work together to help this industry take advantage of these new opportunities as they present themselves. The New South Wales Government is always keen to work with

industries that will provide jobs for country people. The wine industry is emerging as a strong win for New South Wales. Once again, I congratulate Brokenwood on leading the way for Australian wines. I am always pleased to see success in Hunter companies and to see this company get the recognition it deserves.

Mr J. H. TURNER (Myall Lakes—Deputy Leader of the National Party) [3.53 p.m.]: The Opposition supports the motion and formally places on the record our congratulations to Brokenwood Vineyards on winning the International Wine Challenge in London. I have always had a strong affinity with the vineyards in the Hunter Valley because I grew up in the valley. My father was friendly with some of the traditional families—the Tyrrells, the Draytons and the Tullochs, particularly the Tullochs. I recall many happy days playing around in the Tullochs' shed while my father was enjoying some good red wine. I like to think I learned about wine at my father's knee.

I also lived in the vineyards before I was elected to Parliament. One of the greatest sacrifices I made was to move out of the vineyards to take on this job, although I must say I enjoy the job. I also got married in the vineyards, at Brokenback. Unknown to me, my prospective father-in-law, who was at that time a journalist, arranged for some people to come and take photographs to be featured in the *Australian Women's Weekly*. Unfortunately they went to Brokenwood instead of Brokenback.

This is not the first time that Australia—the Hunter Valley, in fact—has won this prestigious wine award. It is a prestigious award and is recognised as the best wine award in the world. Phillip Shaw, the winemaker at Rosemount, won the award some years ago for his red wine and Murray Tyrrell also won the award in the past for a Coonawarra red. There is a very strong contingent of people producing very good wines. I am not seeking to take the credit from other wine growing areas in New South Wales when I say this. I am merely being parochial and no doubt my colleague the honourable member for Lachlan will talk about wineries in the southern area of the State. We are very proud that the Hunter Valley has always been renowned not so much for producing large quantities of wine but for producing very good quality wine. That has always been its catchcry. That has been confirmed by the conferring of this outstanding award.

I pay tribute to Fay and Brian McGuigan. Fay McGuigan, from Wyndham Estate, now McGuigan Wines, was probably the pioneer of our export industry. She, almost single-handedly, got Australian wines onto tables. She flew around the world continually, opening up new markets. She got into Sweden, Asia and Canada in particular. She travelled tremendous distances to do it and at considerable expense, because there was not a lot of assistance for the industry at that time. I believe we have a huge indebtedness to her because she was the one who led the charge to break into the export markets.

As I think the honourable member for Cessnock mentioned, Australia is now the biggest importer of wine into Britain. We are also the biggest importer of wine into the Asian market, particularly Japan, Singapore and Malaysia. Those areas are not an easy market to open up because they are not a traditional market for wine, but we have been able to get a foothold there. This augurs extremely well for the wine industry, which employs many people, and also for the tourism industry. I remember that in the old days people would drink Seppelt Moyston as they progressed from drinking white wine to drinking red wine. Our palates are becoming more educated and more people want to taste our wine. The tourism industry is booming.

I was back in the Hunter Valley about six or eight weeks ago. I had extra time so I decided to wander around and have a look at the vineyards. They have grown tremendously in recent years. There is a new vineyard next door to my property—I must admit my grapes did not work too well but everyone else's grapes seemed to go all right. A successful tourist industry brings employment with it, creating jobs for young people not only in the Hunter Valley but right across New South Wales and indeed throughout Australia. Young people are benefiting from the expansion of the wine industry. We have always thought of the Riverina and the Hunter Valley as the traditional areas for wine growing, but wineries have been established at Quirindi, Orange, Cowra and Nelson Bay. In my electorate the Great Lakes Winery is well established and producing very good quality wines. Once again, the tourism industry is opening up for them.

The establishment of the tourism industry in the Hunter Valley was not an easy matter. There was division between the people of Cessnock and the vineyards. I recall that when I served on Cessnock City Council many years ago we had great difficulty getting the tourist officer to meet with people from the vineyards. We viewed that as a drawcard. Without wishing to play politics, because this motion does not deserve that treatment, it was the Labor faction on the council that voted against the initiative, but we managed to get it through. The following year the Independent bloc sought increased funding and one of the Labor councillors who had been so opposed to the proposal in fact seconded the motion. I asked him afterwards,

"What was that all about?" He replied, "Tourism is great. My daughter now works in the tourism industry. I did not appreciate how much better tourism would be for our area." There has been a significant change of attitude from the days when wine was regarded as plonk.

I note the wine export figures given by the honourable member for Cessnock in his contribution to the debate. I am pleased that, as well as the new companies, the older wineries such as Drayton, Tyrrell and Tulloch are also flourishing. Tulloch's winery has been taken over a number of times. A number of family vineyards are intermingling and producing quality wine. As a decentralised product it has contributed greatly to regional and rural New South Wales. We are happy to support the motion commending the award to Brokenwood vineyard. I wish Brokenwood all the best and even more success with its premium wines.

Mr FACE (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [4.01 p.m.]: I thank my colleague the honourable member for Cessnock for bringing this matter to the attention of the House this afternoon, and I thank the honourable member for Myall Lakes for his constructive comments. It is indeed great news to see another hunter winemaker receiving a trophy at the International Wine Challenge, the most prestigious wine competition in the world. Brokenwood is one of the many vineyards of the Hunter Valley, and Hunter residents are very proud of their achievements and the way they have made their way in the marketplace in recent years. I was elected to Parliament in 1972 when Newcastle and the Hunter Valley were quite different. Newcastle was an industrial city. It was well known for its traditional industries such as steelmaking and manufacturing. The valley had coalmining and there were rural areas such as Singleton with virtually no coalmining. The wine industry was present but had not expanded to its present state and become internationally famous. The Hunter has diversified a lot since that time.

In 2001 the Hunter, after years of closures and downsizing of traditional industries, has emerged with a new economy and a new identity. This success is part of it. Closure of the BHP works proved to be a watershed for the region. That closure provided an opportunity—it had been going on for some years—to repackage the area and to shed its smokestack image. In the Upper Hunter and the Lower Hunter there has been a transformation, with new industrial land opening up for major development. A strong equine industry has burgeoned in recent years. There is a commitment to diversify the agricultural base by experimenting with new crops that would not have been thought of some years ago and that produce a high yield on money invested.

The region is emerging as a world leader in agribusiness and wine production. As the House is probably aware, the Hunter Valley is Australia's oldest winemaking area. Hunter wines are recognised around the world, as my colleague has pointed out. The Hunter is even more well-known than Newcastle, because of what has been achieved there with wine. I remember Alex Young, then Chairman of the Hunter Development Board, and Cyril Renwick, Chairman of the Hunter Valley Research Foundation, back in the early 1970s emphasising the importance of the Hunter as a region. Twenty-five years later people know where the Hunter region is and it is known internationally.

Domestically, Hunter vineyards produce about 39 million litres of wine valued at \$300 million. As recently as yesterday direct flights between the Hunter region and New Zealand were announced. The wine country will see more and more visitors tasting and buying gold medal wines. At a licensing conference in Sydney the other day when I was telling the delegates what was about to happen with the discount airlines a lady from New Zealand said, "That will be great. We can go to the wine country for a holiday. While we love Sydney, we will see another dimension." The Hunter wineries have infinite opportunities to export wine into Asia and beyond.

As the honourable member for Myall Lakes said, the United States, Canada and United Kingdom are already large export markets for Hunter wines. We owe a debt of gratitude to the McGuigan family for pioneering the industry. Years ago everyone thought they were crazy. The Hunter Export Centre, with the support of the State Government through the New South Wales Department of State and Regional Development, has planned trade missions to China and other parts of Asia, which I have had the opportunity to lead. Further trade missions are planned for Vietnam and Malaysia and New Zealand later this year. I have witnessed the benefits that companies have obtained from the hard work they put in to become mission-ready to exploit trade opportunities.

A visit to China in February this year showcased Hunter wine to the management of China Southern Airlines and the Friendship supermarket chain. As a result China Southern Airlines has agreed to conduct a trial of Hunter wine on its Australian flights. It already has Australian wines on its flights as a consequence of that visit. If the trial is successful a delegation will be sent to the Hunter to investigate purchasing wine for the

airline's other international flights. The manager of Friendship supermarket chain has also agreed to visit the Hunter with a view to buying Hunter wine direct to sell in its supermarkets. The Friendship chain has 1,000 supermarkets across China, with individual supermarkets having a turnover of \$3 million a day. Another meeting hosted by Mr Chau, Director of the Kingold group of companies, has led to another Hunter winemaker, Monarch Wines, signing a memorandum of understanding with the Kingold group to supply wine for sale in hotels and restaurants across China. [*Time expired.*]

Mr ARMSTRONG (Lachlan) [4.06 p.m.]: I join with the honourable member for Cessnock and other members who have spoken in the debate in offering my warm congratulations to the family that owns the Brokenwood company for producing the world's top red wine, the Brokenwood 1999 Rayner Vineyard Shiraz. I might add that shiraz is my favourite drop. Iain Riggs, a great Australian winemaker, is well known for his successes with Brokenwood but also as one of the leading Australian and international wine judges. Iain Riggs is one of the younger generation of great promoters of Australian wines. There are many reasons why Australia has been so successful with its wines in recent years, not the least of which is our climate. We are also able to produce wines of international standard at a very acceptable price. This is a tribute to our growers, processors and exporters. It is also a tribute to our national economy. It has been achieved through efficiencies in production.

The wine industry has pioneered many technologies, including the introduction of Israeli drip irrigation systems. Drip irrigation has resulted in enormous water use efficiency, and the wine industry led the way. Drip irrigation is now being employed in cereal cropping experiments and is used extensively with other horticultural products including some of the brassica crops. It has resulted in a major reduction in water use, therefore containing costs and increasing efficiency. Most importantly, the savings in water from direct application to the plants is environmentally sound. Land that in bushman's terms would be called light country and would not normally be considered for irrigation has been made efficient, effective and highly productive through the use of drip irrigation. This has enhanced the environment.

Any discussion of Hunter pioneers without mention of the late Murray Tyrrell would be deficient. Murray Tyrrell died during the past year. He was a great pioneer of wines in the Hunter Valley and was an enormous character. The wine industry is full of characters, people with personality, people who were game to put up their reputation, money and sometimes their homes to stake their judgment that the Australian wine industry would be a great industry. The Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development mentioned Brian and Fay McGuigan. They virtually walked backwards and forwards across North America in winter and summer opening up markets for Australian wines.

Brian and Fay went into small wine shops and wine bars. I have heard many a tale about their physical strength and their tenacity during an American summer. Those who know Brian McGuigan know that he is a big man; it would have required a deal of effort for him to do that, but he did it. I give them credit for their efforts. The increase in tourism in the area has attracted investment. Bill and Imelda Roche have invested \$70 million in a new resort in the Hunter. Other people have made large investments in the tourism industry in the area.

I turn now to the Cowra region in the Central West. In the past six weeks Cowra held its successful annual wine show, which is now in its twentieth year. The show drew entries from all States, previous shows having received entries from South Africa and New Zealand. The show's only problem is containing the number of entries—this year there were 2,400. The show provides a wonderful opportunity for grape growers and winemakers to benchmark their wines. The wine show system that has developed in Australia in recent years has led to excellent wines, such as Brokenwood and others, receiving international awards. Cowra wines were first exported to Singapore in 1991. It was a novelty in those days to be able to buy Australian wines at Jurong's new supermarket. From that day on the Cowra wines have sold particularly well. We should respect the fact that our winemakers are recognised worldwide for their experience with terra rossa soils. We have an excellent wine growing climate and good markets. I have much pleasure in supporting the motion.

Mr W. D. SMITH (South Coast) [4.11 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to support the motion moved by the honourable member for Cessnock. The contribution of the honourable member for Myall Lakes was most interesting and knowledgeable, as was the contribution of the honourable member for Lachlan, who is always good to listen to despite his occasional derogatory comments about my ties. The South Coast is one of the new and expanding winemaking regions in New South Wales. Nationally, over the past 15 years this rapidly expanding industry has experienced a doubling in plantings and a huge increase in exports. In 1999 the industry had its most successful export year ever, gaining more than \$1 billion in exports. In Australia there are now more than 1,000 wineries, with about 280 in New South Wales, that generate an annual turnover of \$700 million

and directly employ 1,700 people, with thousands of spin-off jobs in related industries across the State. One of the most successful export industries in recent years, grape growing and winemaking is experiencing a resurgence in popularity in Australia and overseas.

The European Union is Australia's biggest market. Today consumers are turning to quality Australian bottled wines rather than the cask wines that were so popular in the 1980s and early 1990s. The significance of grape growing and winemaking in Australia is such that more than 16,000 people are employed directly in the industry, with more than 13,000 others in the wholesale and retail sectors. The major wineries continue to attract broad interest and remain leaders in the industry. However, the smaller boutique wineries are doing very well, also attracting tourists and specialising in relatively new types of red and white wines. That is where the South Coast wineries fit into the big picture. South Coast wine is among the up and comers, and fits within the burgeoning grape-growing industry. South Coast wine has earned a good reputation among Australia's viticulturists and selective consumers alike. Although it is a small part of a 50-region industry and a relative newcomer, it is reasonable to say that South Coast wines carry a unique fascination for connoisseurs and are finding their place in the \$1 billion a year export market.

In my electorate, the grape-growing industry began seriously in about 1976 with Jasper Valley Wines. The region's wine history goes back to the 1800s with a small vineyard at Alexander Berry's Coolangatta settlement. The South Coast has always had a good potential for the wine industry, but has taken off only in the last 25 years or so. However, grape-growing regions such as the Hunter Valley certainly set a precedent for taste and quality, based on traditional methods of grape growing, soil quality, climate and manufacturing. The climate on the South Coast is viewed as perhaps a little hardy and the soils were questionable in those early days. That curtailed interest for nearly 70 years. Today there are at least 10 registered commercial wineries in the South Coast region including Jasper Valley Wines, Coolangatta Estate, Fern Galley Winery, Silos Estate, Cambewarra Estate, Eling Forest Vineyard, Bundewallah Estate Winery and Grevillea Estate, which is in the electorate of the honourable member for Bega.

The two major wineries on the South Coast are Coolangatta Estate and Cambewarra Estate, which have won accolades around the country with their prize-winning wines. Jasper Valley Winery and Silos Estate basically initiated the current industry with their boutique wine varieties. Coolangatta Estate is one of the largest vineyards in the Shoalhaven and has been extremely successful over a number of years since its first issue of sauvignon blanc went on the market in 1990. Since then the estate's wines have won more than 170 awards at national and regional wine shows. The estate has also been named as the New South Wales Tourism winery of the decade and won a trophy at the Australian Winemakers Show for the most successful exhibitor. It has been owned by the Bishop family since the 1940s, and the family has done a terrific job in reinvigorating the complex. They provide accommodation units and have a wonderful restaurant. I congratulate the Brokenwood vineyard on winning the award. [*Time expired.*]

Mr HICKEY (Cessnock) [4.16 p.m.], in reply: It is great to hear honourable members continue to support the wine industry in New South Wales. Brokenwood's 1999 Rayners Shiraz was acknowledged as the best red wine in the world. The honourable member for Myall Lakes said that the Hunter has received many tributes for its wines. The wine pioneer of that vineyard area, Murray Tyrrell, should be acknowledged in every speech about wine for his contributions to the industry in this State. Fay and Brian McGuigan should be acknowledged for their contributions to winemaking. They have done extremely well in creating a market for their wines. Tourism in the Cessnock vineyard area has created 6,000 jobs. Cessnock council is currently considering \$5 million worth of development applications, which is an indication of the benefits derived from tourism. The Minister for Gaming and Racing has clearly acknowledged the renown of the vineyards. Tourists in New South Wales know about vineyards, but they do not know about Newcastle. It was a great day when I read headlines in the newspapers about great wines coming from the Hunter.

Motion agreed to.

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr Face agreed to:

That this House at its rising this day do adjourn until Tuesday 18 September 2001 at 2.15 p.m.

Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Beamer): Order! It being shortly after 4.15 p.m. business is interrupted pursuant to sessional orders for the taking of private members' statements.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

BISHOP CHRIS TOOHEY INSTALLATION

Mr GREENE (Georges River) [4.21 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to speak today about the installation last Thursday, 30 August, at the Holy Family Parish Church, Parkes, of Chris Toohey to the Wilcannia-Forbes diocese. The installation was attended by 24 bishops under the auspices of the Archbishop of Sydney, the Right Reverend George Pell. Also in attendance were 100 priests. The parish church, which seats 792, was full to the brim. I am pleased also to advise that there were well in excess of 50 parishioners from the Peakhurst and Penshurst parishes. As I give a history of Chris Toohey's ministry in the priesthood honourable members will understand why those parishes showed such strong support.

Chris Toohey is a Balmain boy born and bred. He went to Christian Brothers Lewisham. At one special function it was pointed out that he did not have a distinguished academic career but he was obviously enthusiastic and hard working. He left school with the School Certificate and became a waterside worker at the docks. After studying part time he gained his Higher School Certificate. He eventually moved into the seminary, where he studied for the priesthood. He was ordained on 21 August 1982 and his first parish was at Cabramatta. In 1986 he went to Revesby and then Lane Cove in 1989. At the end of 1990 he went to Rome where he studied intensely to become a licentiate in theology. He then came to the parishes of Penshurst and Peakhurst in 1992. At that time I had the pleasure and privilege of forming a friendship with him.

In the mid-1990s, while retaining his position as assistant priest in those two parishes, he was appointed in charge of Catholic Adult Education for the Archdiocese of Sydney. That position was originally based at Revesby but in recent times it has been moved to Lidcombe. Chris undertook enormous work for Catholic Adult Education, particularly with the *Inform* magazine. He also undertook many programs throughout the Catholic parishes of the archdiocese. He was well known for his scripture study groups and his presentation of adult programs. He was given responsibility for the Great Jubilee, which occurred in 2000. He was given that responsibility also for the Archdiocese of Sydney. The jubilee celebrations, which were many and diverse throughout the diocese, culminated in the magnificent celebration in November last year that was scheduled to be held in the forecourt of St Mary's Cathedral. However, because of rain it was held in the cathedral itself. Chris worked extremely hard for those celebrations and did a magnificent job.

To celebrate Chris' contribution to the parishes of Peakhurst and Penshurst the communities in those parishes organised a special function at the Illawarra Catholic Club to honour his appointment as bishop. More than 320 people attended. Present at the function were the former parish priest of Peakhurst and Penshurst, Father Paul Jacobs, the current parish priest, Father John Crothers, and the current assistant priest, Maurice Thompson. Speeches were made by Mr Brian Roberts from the Peakhurst parish and Dr Louis McGuigan of St Declans parish, who both highlighted the fact that Chris was an excellent communicator. Through his homilies and masses on the weekends Chris was certainly able to get his message across in a vibrant manner to the parish community. People came together at this wonderful function. They were pleased for Chris and proud of him, even though they were sad that he was moving away from the area. However, there is no doubt that he will make an enormous contribution to the Wilcannia-Forbes diocese, which comprises almost one-third of New South Wales. I would particularly like to thank Carmel Fisher and Bernie Holdsworth, who, along with Father John Crothers, helped to organise the function. It was a wonderful community night and a great celebration of Bishop Chris Toohey's ministry. I wish him well as he takes on this important responsibility in the Catholic Church.

MANLY AND MONA VALE HOSPITALS CLOSURE

Mr BROGDEN (Pittwater) [4.26 p.m.]: Discussion regarding the future of health services on the northern beaches has now raged in the community for more than two years after the Government's announcement that it intends to close Manly and Mona Vale hospitals and build a new hospital on a yet-to-be-indicated site. On 28 August the honourable member for Wakehurst and the honourable member for Davidson joined me in writing a letter to the Minister for Health asking to meet with him on this matter. The letter stated:

We understand you have agreed to meet with the Member for Manly on 19 September, 2001 to discuss the future of health services on the Northern Beaches.

In view of your willingness to meet with the Member for Manly, we request a meeting with you in order to represent the views of the majority of residents on the Northern Beaches on this important issue.

We seek your agreement to meet with you on 19 September.

We are yet to receive a reply from the Minister indicating his willingness to meet with us. We sought the meeting because we became aware that the Minister had agreed to meet with the honourable member for Manly and the mayors of Manly and Warringah to discuss the community's concerns regarding health care. We thought it only appropriate that the Minister should listen to the broad range of concerns of all the representatives at both State and local government level on the northern beaches. As I said, we sought an undertaking that the Minister would also agree to meet with the honourable member for Wakehurst, the honourable member for Davidson and me. Today we have written a further joint letter to the honourable member for Manly in the following terms:

We understand that you have a scheduled meeting on 19th September, 2001 with the Minister for Health in relation to future planning of health service on the Northern Beaches in the company of the Mayors of Manly and Warringah.

The other three State MPs responsible for the Northern Beaches have sought to have a meeting with the Minister to ascertain his intentions. This request, a copy of which is attached, has been ignored as have previous requests.

Your support is sought to ensure that all State MPs and Mayors are included in this meeting. A collaborative approach is essential to ascertain whether or not the Government is genuine about proposals to develop a new hospital.

We presume the Mayors of Manly and Warringah would have no objection and trust that you will decline to meet with the Minister unless and until he agrees to meet with all relevant elected representatives.

Your support in ensuring multi-partisan progress in maximising quality health care and facilities on the Northern Beaches is sought.

Please advise of your agreement.

The letter was signed by the honourable member for Wakehurst, the honourable member for Davidson and me. We believe it is incumbent on the Minister to meet with all elected representatives at the State and local level on the northern beaches. The Minister has refused to meet with the honourable member for Wakehurst, the honourable member for Davidson and me on many occasions when we have sought opportunities to meet with him. As recently as six months ago I sought a meeting with the Minister after a large public meeting at Pittwater Rugby Park, attended by some 6,000 people, in support of Mona Vale Hospital, but he refused to meet with me. Instead he offered me a meeting with the Director-General of the Department of Health, Mr Reid. I refused that meeting. The Minister must meet with all the elected representatives of the northern beaches electorates. I congratulate the honourable member for Manly on having succeeded in arranging a meeting with the Minister, but I ask him to take the opportunity, on behalf of all members of Parliament and all mayors on the northern beaches, to gauge and provide views across the community regarding the future of health services.

The Minister must agree to meet with other members of Parliament who represent electorates on the northern beaches, so that he is aware of the views of the majority of residents. We are concerned that the Minister has declined to meet with the Liberal members of Parliament but has accepted a request for a meeting with the Independent member from Manly. We simply request that the Minister be fair and open with the residents of the northern beaches and that he meet with all of their elected representatives. We implore the honourable member for Manly to include us in the meeting with the Minister in an open, honest and fair manner and to give us an opportunity to speak with the Minister and our respective mayors, including the Mayor of Pittwater. If the Minister is unwilling to do this, we ask that the honourable member for Manly refuse to meet with him and reject any partisan or private deals that may be on offer.

MONTROSE HOUSE SITE REDEVELOPMENT

Mr MOSS (Canterbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.31 p.m.]: Tonight I speak on behalf of members of the Sukkar family, many of whom reside in my electorate. The Sukkars are anxious to have the New South Wales Heritage Office sign off on a proposal to redevelop a site in Croydon Avenue, Croydon Park. The site in question accommodates a former reception house known as Montrose House. The entire site, including Montrose House, was purchased by the Sukkar family in December last year. At the outset I emphasise that the Sukkar family are not developers in the strict sense of the word. Although they had initially planned to build nine townhouses on the site, members of the family intended to occupy five of those townhouses. The application to redevelop the site, which was lodged with Canterbury City Council, sparked off a good deal of opposition to the demolition of Montrose House, so much so that eventually the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning announced that an interim heritage order would be placed on the property for between six and 12 months.

The heritage order was placed on the property for two reasons. First, it would give Canterbury council the opportunity to list the house by way of a local environmental plan and, second, it would enable the Heritage Office to work co-operatively with the owners, the Sukkar family, to see whether a compromise could be

reached regarding conservation and redevelopment of the site. I do not wish to argue the pros and cons of that this evening. However, I believe that Canterbury council has a lot to answer for in this whole debacle. In 1988, when Montrose House contained more of its original features, Canterbury council conducted a heritage study throughout the municipality and at that time had the opportunity to list Montrose House as an historic house but chose not to consider the matter. The Sukkar family purchased the property in good faith. When the property was purchased, the previous owners of Montrose House handed the Sukkar family a copy of a letter presented to them by Canterbury council in July 2000 stating that council intended to take no action to list Montrose House as a heritage item.

Clearly, those who wanted to redevelop the site believed they were entitled to do so without any heritage obstacles. However, because of community concern—and the Minister has decided, rightly, to intervene to try to resolve the matter—the family now finds itself in a difficult situation. The Sukkar family has asked me to request that negotiations between the family and the Heritage Office be expedited. The family is fearful that because a heritage order has been placed on the property for between six and 12 months they might have to wait for another nine or 10 months before they receive the concurrence from the Heritage Office.

I am aware that in an effort to expedite the redevelopment the family has produced development plans that retain the essence of Montrose House. I believe that both Canterbury council and the Heritage Office are amenable to this proposition. However, nothing has yet been formalised. My comments tonight are in support of the family, and I request that the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning approach the Heritage Office to see if the matter can be accelerated so that the Sukkar family can proceed with the redevelopment and, at the same time, Montrose House can be retained.

INCORPORATED ORGANISATIONS INSURANCE

Mr ROZZOLI (Hawkesbury) [4.36 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House a problem that is extremely relevant to many organisations in my electorate and also, I am sure, in other electorates. I refer to the great difficulty that is currently being experienced by incorporated associations in gaining the necessary insurance to maintain their incorporation, and, indeed, in even gaining incorporation in the first instance. A number of organisations which have approached me in the past few weeks have indicated that the forms of insurance previously available to them are now not available, following the collapse of HII in particular and also because of rising levels of litigation. The insurance companies are either withdrawing from the insurance field entirely or becoming risk-averse and requiring all sorts of indemnities and clearances that are extremely oppressive to the organisations.

In addition, insurance companies that are prepared to insure organisations and take on whatever they perceive to be the risks involved are now charging very high premiums. Some of the premiums that were previously as low as \$80—a premium that most organisations were able to afford—have now been increased to \$700 or \$800 a year. If a small organisation is able to find an insurance company that is prepared to offer it insurance, it is difficult for such an organisation to meet that sort of commitment. When such organisations approach the Department of Fair Trading to seek its assistance in obtaining insurance on the basis that they cannot remain incorporated unless they have insurance, the department gives them a list of insurers. If one looks through that list, one finds that the majority of insurance companies listed have vacated the field. As I have said, organisations have difficulty negotiating with the remaining insurance companies an appropriate contract to clear the way for incorporation or to continue their registration as incorporated organisations.

A further problem relates to associations organising sporting events. The insurance cover necessary to conduct such events and to give reasonable indemnity to the organisers has now become an absolute nightmare, to the extent that many organisations have to cancel events that traditionally have been run in their particular field of activity. This is a sad state of affairs. Many of the organisations that are perceived as the highest risk organisations are organisations in which young people with bags of energy have the opportunity to work off that energy in some sort of useful, proactive and socially responsible manner.

If young people do not have the chance to burn off their excess energy legitimately through organised activities, they will find unstructured, less satisfactory ways to occupy their time—which could cause trouble in our community. When I hear reports of violence by young people I often wonder whether it is the result of a series of unforeseen commercial disasters that have occurred in the past few years. I place this matter on the parliamentary record on behalf of organisations in my area. I ask the Department of Fair Trading, and particularly the Minister, to give earnest consideration to resolving the requirement for insurance for legal indemnity when it has become almost impossible, first, to secure that insurance and, secondly, to do so economically depending on the nature of the organisation.

COPPER BUTTERFLY EDUCATION KIT

Mr MARTIN (Bathurst) [4.41 p.m.]: An exciting event will be held in Lithgow tomorrow in conjunction with Threatened Species Week. Tomorrow is Threatened Species Day and Lithgow will concentrate on the plight of the copper butterfly. That may not sound very significant in the overall scheme of things, but the butterfly, which is unique to the central west—particularly the Lithgow-Bathurst region—was thought to be extinct until this rare species was rediscovered some years ago when the Lithgow City Council was considering a development application. Ever since then the council has specified that environmental impact statements take account of the butterfly. The National Parks and Wildlife Service, through Xuela Sledge at the Blackheath office, has organised the launch tomorrow in Lithgow—I was pleased to be asked to participate—of the Copper Butterfly Education Kit. The kit will commemorate the threatened copper butterfly and emphasise the involvement of primary schoolchildren, particularly, from the Lithgow area.

There will be a demonstration in the morning when schoolchildren will be taught how to recognise the butterfly, where to find its habitat, how to protect it and so on. It will be a day of learning. The new environmental education policy released recently by the Department of Education and Training describes environmental education as "our way to the future". I will be proud to announce tomorrow the launch of the Copper Butterfly Education Kit. The kit, which is designed for primary school students, will be released in stages to form a draft working copy for schools to trial until the end of semester two 2002. It is then envisaged that a final copy, endorsed by the Department of Education and Training, will be produced and made available to schools statewide. The first part of the working copy of the Copper Butterfly Education Kit will be available to teachers in Lithgow tomorrow.

I think it is an excellent idea to direct this project through the school system in light of the success of programs such as Streamwatch, which involves both primary and secondary schoolchildren in their local environments by encouraging them to take an active interest in streams and waterways. This kit will take that approach one step further by focusing on a threatened species. I urge anyone who has the time to tune in to the television program *Totally Wild* tomorrow at 4 p.m. It will focus on the action day at Lithgow and feature the copper butterfly—the city's flagship species. Students from the lovely and historic Zig Zag Primary School will appear on the show. The school is renowned for appearing last on the alphabetical lists of schools released by the Department of Education and Training.

Tomorrow we will also honour two people who exemplify the community involvement in this project. Ray Mjadwesch surveyed much of the Bathurst-Lithgow district for copper butterflies and the kits have been prepared using his results. Ray will receive a reward from the community for that work. The other award recipient is Jenny Radloff, who until recently ran Bellissimo Cafe in Lithgow. She came up with the unique idea of selling copper butterfly cupcakes in her cafe to raise money for the project. The proceeds from that venture went to a local environmental group that works to protect this threatened species. I commend all those who have been involved in this project, and look forward to an exciting day tomorrow.

DENTAL HEALTH CARE WAITING LISTS

Mr J. H. TURNER (Myall Lakes—Deputy Leader of the National Party) [4.46 p.m.]: Dental waiting lists are a source of great concern in my electorate, and indeed throughout New South Wales. These lists are outrageously long in my area. I am heartily sick of raising dental health issues in this place and receiving in response letters from the Minister claiming that it is John Howard's responsibility because he cut Federal funding. I put on record at the outset the fact that the State Government has always been responsible for dental health. However, because State waiting lists were so long, Prime Minister Keating provided extra money through a three-year package with the understanding that the States would bring their health care practices into line and continue the treatment. Mr Howard extended that scheme by one year when he came to power. Regrettably, this New South Wales Government has not managed the lists properly—even with the extra money from the Commonwealth, which was clearly limited funding distributed through a limited program.

More than 15,500 people in the area covered by the Mid North Coast Area Health Service are waiting for dental health care. Some 12,197 people are on the adult general waiting list, and the longest waiting time is 98 months. Some 1,520 children are awaiting dental work, and the longest waiting time is 26 months. Some 1,995 people are waiting for dentures and the maximum wait is 70 months, and 76 people are waiting for orthodontic work, with a maximum wait of 36 months. This means that 15,768 people are waiting for dental work. That is totally outrageous. I received a ludicrous report last week from the daughter of a 98-year-old woman who has been waiting four years for dental health care. When she inquired when that work might be

done she was told that she would have to wait another three years—by which time she will be 101. That is just not on in a modern society. Some 2,000 people are waiting for dentures, with a maximum waiting period of 70 months. Imagine their quality of life in the interim. I was also visited by a man who had lived outside my electorate and had waited eight years for dental health care. When he moved to my area and inquired about dental work he was told that he would have to wait another eight years—or 16 years in total.

There are 270,000 people on waiting lists throughout New South Wales, and the Government has introduced a new system that categorises those requiring assistance. That is fine; it may be a legitimate way of addressing the problem of long lists as it seeks to send people to the private sector. However, because of the fees paid, the private sector does not want to participate in the scheme. No dentists from Taree are participating in the scheme and only one from Forster is a member. This is one of the most common issues raised in my electorate office. We are endeavouring to help many people receive service through either the public sector or the private sector, but the Government will not provide information about how the categories work.

Categories 1, 2 and 3 are broken into subcategories and the department will not tell me if people in the front line can be catered for in the system. It is beyond me why there is secrecy in the public health system. I am simply trying to provide service to my constituents. Some people who have been waiting up to eight years for the service think that the new system might give them some relief, but I cannot get information. It is time this service was brought into line. In our modern society we cannot allow people, often the elderly, to wait for the service for eight or nine years. Some people may get an appointment to have work done and if something happens in, say, the next six to 12 months, they may have to wait another seven or eight years. I do not understand why people have to put up with such an outrageous waiting list.

HUNTER GROUP TRAINING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FACILITY

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.51 p.m.]: On Wednesday 22 August I had the pleasure of announcing the information technology training initiative for the Newcastle waterfront and of opening Hunter Group Training's new IT training facility at the New South Wales Centre for Seafood, Fisheries and Maritime Studies, in the Commercial Fishermen's Co-operative building in Hannell Street, Wickham. That facility demonstrates to the community the tremendous co-operation in the city of Newcastle between the trade union movement, employers, providers of training and the Government in recognising the need to upgrade the information technology skills of the work force.

In September 2000, Hunter Group Training, through its maritime division, was approached by the northern New South Wales branch of the Maritime Union of Australia [MUA] to develop an IT training strategy for its members. They understood the changes that were occurring across the industry. Honourable members know that during the past 10 years the maritime industry has undergone significant changes to its structure, work force composition and resources. There has been a consistent reduction of employment opportunities for new and existing workers, including casualisation of the work force. With the introduction of new technology and equipment on the waterfront, it is obvious that there is an ongoing need to upgrade the skills of workers.

The Maritime Union in Newcastle has demonstrated its concern and action on behalf of its work force in relation to occupational health and safety, upgrading of skills and understanding the need for ongoing training. The union wanted to bring opportunities to its members to access low-cost IT training in order to further their professional and personal lives. The union is aware that on the ACTU web site there is an opportunity for union members to purchase computer equipment at a reasonable cost through its virtual community's web page in order to encourage the use of such technology.

HGT Australia Ltd, a training and education provider that operates in our region, was successful in receiving funding from the Department of Education and Training to provide two IT pilot training programs for regional members of the MUA. It is possible that the MUA's 10,000 members may apply that program across the work force. The Hunter Development Board very quickly supported that initiative by providing financial support to assist in the establishment of a new training facility. Industries that operate in the port of Newcastle also quickly came on board. I pay tribute to Coal Operations Australia, the Newcastle Port Corporation and GrainCorp, all of which took advantage of this great opportunity to upskill not only their MUA members but others within their businesses. They have all come to the party.

At the opening Mr John Russell, the Chairman of Hunter Group Training and a member of the Hunter Development Board, and Alex Young on behalf of the Hunter Development Board, paid a strong tribute to the MUA for its development of this initiative. Jim Boyle, the northern organiser for the Maritime Union of

Australia, made it clear that young and older members of the union were very keen to improve their skills level under this initiative. At the opening I saw the first group of workers take up either the Getting Started program, which introduces the individual to basic computer environments, or the Taking the Next Step program, which uses advanced Microsoft Office applications, word processing, spreadsheets, et cetera. I congratulate Hunter Group Training Australia, the MUA and Newcastle employers on another demonstration of the co-operation in Newcastle and the Hunter.

Mr FACE (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [4.56 p.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Newcastle on raising this important matter this afternoon. It has always been difficult in the Newcastle region to provide skills—mainly because apprenticeships and traineeships became unviable for employers. Hunter Group Training has successfully taken up that void in certain trade areas where there would have been a deficiency of skilled people. Newcastle and the Hunter region have a history of highs and lows. This training system is similar to but is not exactly modelled on the British pool system. When the late Pat Hills introduced the system most people thought it was a dream. Despite the passage of time since the previous Labor Government the facility has maintained its place and has made a significant contribution to the region. It has liaised with other agencies, such as the Department of Education and Training.

The honourable member for Newcastle referred to information technology, which is so important to our city. Technology has caught up with the trades and manufacturing industries. Manual trades have become extremely sophisticated, unlike when I served my apprenticeship. If we did not have organisations such as Hunter Group Training we would not have been able to keep up with the times. Employers, and importantly the unions and the community generally, have been extremely co-operative. I congratulate the honourable member for Newcastle on bringing this matter to our attention this afternoon.

CAMDEN HAVEN MEDICAL SERVICES

Mr OAKESHOTT (Port Macquarie) [4.58 p.m.]: This evening I draw the attention of honourable members to the shortage of general practitioners in the Camden Haven area, which is a part of the Port Macquarie electorate. Camden Haven is situated 35 kilometres south of Port Macquarie on the mid North Coast, which includes areas such as Laurieton, North Haven, Dunbogan and surrounding areas such as Bonny Hills, Lake Cathie, Kew, Kendall, Lorne, Johns River and Herrons Creek, and is serviced by medical services in Laurieton. In the last census figures, Laurieton was identified as having the lowest male average income anywhere in Australia. The demographics of not only Camden Haven but of much of the North Coast is an elderly population. Combined with the entrenched long-term unemployment issues on the mid North Coast, as well as significant growth in our area, those variables are putting extreme pressure on medical services in our local area.

As of 1 October only five general practitioners [GPs] will be servicing this area, which services a population of approximately 14,000. That represents a ratio of 1:2,800 people, which obviously is inadequate. Dr Alain Mackie, who has been practising at North Haven, will leave the Port Macquarie area on 30 September; Dr Younathin, who has been practising in the Camden Haven Medical Centre, left at the end of last month; and Dr Saltau, who was practising in the Lake Cathie area, passed away at the beginning of August. This has resulted in serious demands being placed on the remaining GPs in the area. As well, these local GPs are expected to service the needs of patients in local nursing homes, hostels and the dementia unit. As I said earlier, the area has a high percentage of elderly patients and as part of the Hastings-Port Macquarie area we are the fastest-growing region in New South Wales.

The community is obviously concerned about what is happening in the local area. For example, about a fortnight ago 450 people attended a local meeting to try to get extra GP services in the area. The reason I bring this problem to the attention of the House is that one role of State Government is to allow for area-of-need status to enable the division of GPs, the rural doctors network and everyone in the broader community to chase adequately qualified overseas doctors as part of a campaign to get more GPs in the local area. I understand that a doctor from Vanuatu is interested in practising in the local area and has the support of the local medical centre and the division of GPs, but the State Government must approve the paperwork to obtain area-of-need status.

The Federal Government is working on a couple of issues in regard to the rural remote metropolitan areas [RMMA] scales. The Federal member for the area, Mark Vaile, agrees that the scales contain huge inconsistencies. For example, Camden Haven is classified as RMMA 3, whereas areas such as Taree and Coffs Harbour are classified further up the scale as RMMA 4, and Noosa has been classified as RMMA 7. As areas

climb the scales they are able to access more medical benefits, such as incentive packages to attract GPs. The RMMA classification contains inconsistencies and the Federal Government has been approached by Mark Vaile to address those inconsistencies. I put to the State Government, and in particular the Minister for Health, that Camden Haven desperately needs area-of-need status to chase suitably qualified overseas doctors. The Federal Government is addressing the RMMA legislation. I would encourage everyone, including the division of GPs and the rural doctors network, to help to recruit much-needed GPs for the local area of Camden Haven.

SOLID WASTE ENERGY RECYCLING FACILITY

Mr CAMPBELL (Keira) [5.03 p.m.]: One of the significant environmental challenges faced by local communities is the disposal of household refuse. When I was Lord Mayor of Wollongong I was associated with the introduction of a fortnightly kerbside recycling system and collection of green waste from households. Prior to completing my term as Lord Mayor of Wollongong I had the opportunity to work with a company called Bright Star Environmental to consider a process called a solid waste energy recycling facility [SWERF]. This process basically seeks to separate organic matter from waste, convert that waste into a gas and subsequently convert that gas into electricity.

It is important to note that the first SWERF has been commercially tested in conjunction with the White's Gully garbage tip in Wollongong. The significant benefits are that the process reduces the amount of waste going to landfill, turns significant greenhouse gases into power, reduces dependence on fossil fuels and is a technology with export potential. SWERF is a development of three separate technologies brought together to produce a renewable energy source that results in the reduction of methane, a potent greenhouse gas that is often released into the atmosphere. Each year SWERF generates 120 gigawatts of green power, processes 150,000 tonnes of municipal waste, prevents more than 470,000 tonnes of CO₂ gas production, and employs 40 people.

This project has been supported by the New South Wales Government through the Sustainable Energy Development Authority [SEDA] and by the Federal Government through the Australian Greenhouse Office. Of course, Wollongong City Council, as a local government authority of excellence, has provided local leadership and strong local support for the project. I have had the opportunity to work on this project with a range of people but I particularly acknowledge Paul Whiteman, Chief Executive Officer of Bright Star Environmental, who has been a driving force in this process. As I said, the project is all about proving that commercially this can work. The SWERF has operated in Wollongong now for about six months, after much planning and investigation and after obtaining the important and appropriate licence from the Environment Protection Authority. After six months of operation it seems that the project is meeting the goals that were set, to provide new support to dispose of residential garbage in large urban environments.

The cost of holes in the ground for waste has become cumulative. We understand now the problems with leachate and wind-blown garbage from landfill sites. Past experiments have been conducted through the use of incinerators, which have proved to be an inappropriate way to dispose of waste. This project started out in Wollongong as an attempt to mine some methane gas from White's Gully garbage facility and convert it to electricity. I remain hopeful that this project will be able to remove methane gas from the White's Gully facility and mix it with artificial gas that is generated by the SWERF process to continue to generate green electricity. Honourable members may be aware that some electricity providers can choose to buy green electricity. Although it is a little more expensive, SWERF electricity is sold to the Integral energy network. It is an alternative source of energy that we have the opportunity to buy. As I have investigated and worked with this project I have been assured that it is not an incineration process; rather, it is a new way to dispose of waste. I look forward to seeing the continued success of the SWERF in Wollongong and beyond.

HOME WARRANTY INSURANCE

Mr MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [5.08 p.m.]: Earlier today I gave notice of a motion outlining my concern that builders in the Wagga Wagga electorate are experiencing problems obtaining home warranty insurance. Some 65 builders and suppliers attended a public meeting in Wagga Wagga on 18 August to express their extreme concern at delays in obtaining home warranty insurance. The Minister for Fair Trading, to his credit, responded in a radio interview as follows:

If there are individual builders who are having problems and cannot work because they don't have insurance they can contact my office and we will fast-track them in their contact with the insurers to see what we can do to help them get insured as quickly as possible.

The Minister expressed surprise that there were problems with home warranty insurance within my area. Those problems are affecting the building industry and the local economy. I highlighted the matter earlier this

afternoon, but I now want to bring to the attention of the House some of the drama and difficulty caused by this issue. Since the Minister made contact to say that he had instructed officers of the Office of Fair Trading to speak with the builders concerned, I have conducted a straw poll. That contact with the Office of Fair Trading was on 20 August. This morning I had my office ring around some builders to see what had happened.

One builder, Tom McMullan, had heard nothing since the telephone call from the department on the Monday or Tuesday after the meeting. He certainly had heard nothing from the Dexta Corporation since the morning following the meeting. Mr Steven Wakeling has not heard anything further since the telephone call made after the meeting. Faye Tennison has heard nothing further from the department since the telephone call after the meeting, and has heard nothing at all from the insurers with whom she has lodged an application.

Julie Spalding is another person who has not heard anything at all. She telephoned the Housing Industry Association in Canberra this morning. That organisation does not even have a record of receiving any of her papers, which she had to fax again. Les Mouat has not heard anything further, and is now having problems. He is making numerous telephone calls but is not getting a response. Mr Paul Baskerville had a telephone call from the Department of Fair Trading a couple of days after the meeting. In the same week he had a telephone call from Dexta. A chap at Dexta promised to ring back in a few days, but up until this morning Paul had heard nothing.

Builders as far away as Lockhart have sent me information about attempts they have made to obtain home warranty insurance. One builder, Terry Chandler, wrote to tell me that during June 2001 he had correspondence with the Dexta Corporation seeking advice for the completion of the home warranty insurance forms so that completing those papers would not cause delay. On the week commencing 9 July he spoke with Dexta, which assisted him in completing the forms, which he mailed to MasterCover on 12 July. Three weeks later he received a copy of his application form back for amendment along with a request for more information. He amended the form accordingly and returned it to MasterCover. A few days later, when he telephoned MasterCover to check on the progress of the form, he was told that the paperwork had been received and had been "sent downstairs for final checking", that it should be sent to Dexta within a few days and to ring them the following week for confirmation of this.

Terry Chandler telephoned MasterCover again on 2 August and was advised that the application had been processed and that it had been sent to Dexta overnight. On 4 September he was told that MasterCover had received the application on 8 August and that it had not yet been reviewed. Quite clearly, this system is in a mess. It is an absolute disaster. Builders cannot obtain home warranty insurance quickly enough. They are encountering enormous delays in obtaining that insurance. Builders with a million dollars worth of work on their books could only obtain home warranty insurance for \$500,000. Builders are sitting at home unemployed because of their inability to get home warranty insurance.

At the time of the meeting 33 applications had been made for the building of homes in Wagga Wagga, involving millions and millions of dollars, but the builders were unable to obtain insurance. This problem must be fixed. I said this afternoon in speaking to my motion that the Premier needs to take action, and that the Minister for Fair Trading needs to address this issue. This matter is causing great economic hardship to the people of my electorate, and it is causing unemployment among builders.

GOROKAN HIGH SCHOOL DEPUTY PRINCIPAL Mr DON RITCHIE

Mr CRITTENDEN (Wyang—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.13 p.m.]: It is my pleasant duty to draw to the attention of the House the retirement of the longstanding deputy principal of Gorokan High School Mr Don Ritchie. Don provided loyal and excellent service to the New South Wales Department of Education and Training for 42 years. He entered the Sydney Teachers College in 1958 and commenced his teaching career at what was then the Bass High School as a maths/science teacher in 1960. In 1968 Don spent one year at Cumberland High School. In 1969 he was promoted to science master at Temora High School. While at Temora he was successful in obtaining his third list, making him eligible to apply for the position of a deputy principal of a high school. In fact, in 1983 Don took a lateral transfer to be science head teacher at Berkeley Vale High School, within the Wyong electorate. He was the relieving deputy principal for one and a half of his five years of service at Berkeley Vale High School.

In 1988 Don transferred to Gorokan High School as deputy principal. He was somewhat of a legend in the northern part of the Wyong shire. He could meet anyone on their terms and on their own grounds, as well as having a way of communicating with children of all abilities. Between November 1995 and the commencement

of the 1997 school year Don Ritchie was the acting principal at Gorokan High School. It is fair to say that a deputy principal of a high school is in many ways the workhorse of the school. The deputy principal organises the administrative structures and systems of the school and its timetables, and usually is in charge of discipline. It is appropriate to acknowledge the contribution of Don Ritchie in this House because of the long service he gave as deputy principal.

The farewell for Don Ritchie was held on 3 August at the Tuggerah Lakes Golf Club. Some 200 people attended that function. Interestingly, those people came from all areas of education. Of course, there were Don's professional colleagues, that is other teachers, ancillary staff, parents and past and present students. It was great to see so many acknowledging the contribution made by Don Ritchie. As Don pointed out to me, perhaps the best acknowledgement of his professional service were the two assemblies held at the Gorokan High School on his last day of service, 27 July. To use Don's own words, it was something of an emotional occasion for him when he realised the esteem in which he was held by staff and students.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge that Don achieved his third list under the old system of promotions and that he had two inspectors, one from his professional area of science, looking over his shoulder for four days. That system no longer obtains. Minister Chadwick changed the system. Now, principals are appointed on the basis of perhaps a half-hour interview that is chaired by a superintendent who has perhaps never taught in a high school in his or her life. The whole approach to promoting teachers has changed. It is commendable that Don has provided sterling service in what have been changing times—in circumstances which, in other times, would have led to his being principal of a high school.

Don Ritchie is a strong Federationist. Every Teachers Federation delegation received at my electorate office, both delegates from the association and from Gorokan High School, has included Don Ritchie. It is fair to say that on occasions we agreed to disagree. Don was very polite yet forceful in putting his points of view. He accepted that on occasions I could not agree with his points of view, but I always respected Don as a person of integrity and sincerity and a man who looked to the betterment of public education in this State. I think public education is the worse for his leaving the system. I hope we can encourage others like Don Ritchie to aspire to continue in his fine tradition.

BALLINA ELECTORATE POLICE NUMBERS

Mr D. L. PAGE (Ballina) [5.18 p.m.]: I wish to refer to the inadequacy of the police strength in the electorate of Ballina. This electorate covers an area that includes parts of the Richmond local area command and the Tweed-Byron local area command. Whilst my remarks will concentrate on the Richmond local area command, the Tweed-Byron local area command has the same general problems. The Richmond command has an authorised strength of 172 officers, but approximately 35 of those officers, or 20 per cent, are not available for duty.

The real operational strength is around 137 officers. Why are these other officers not available for duty? There are three reasons. Some officers are on stress leave, some are on light duties and some of the vacant officer positions have not been filled. The break-up of these three categories is roughly 12 officers for each category. The difference between the authorised strength and the actual strength available is substantial: roughly 35 officers in this one local area command. This situation is replicated across the State. The effect of having so many officers unavailable for front-line duty is that more pressure is placed on those who are at work. Often the result is more short-term sick leave, which in turn puts even more pressure on those who are at work. Obviously, the number of officers available for duty will vary from command to command.

Local area commanders believe it is unfair to make no allowance for these differences. Surely the key management figure to be used when considering police strength is the number of front-line police who are available to the area command rather than the authorised strength, which bears little relation to reality and varies from command to command. Not only is there a large difference between the authorised strength and those available for duty in my electorate, but both the authorised strength and the number of police available are manifestly inadequate. The resignation rate for police officers is greater than the recruitment rate under this Government, so there appears to be little hope for significant improvement in the short term.

Another problem is that the police allocation formula for authorised strength has not been reviewed since 1985. Although the formula appears to be reasonable on the surface in that it allocates authorised police strength predominantly on the basis of crime rates, it discriminates against regional areas. If a city area command and a country area command have similar crime rates they will get the same authorised strength. Yet, obviously, the response time for police in country areas will be much longer because of the larger geographical

areas they must cover. Obviously, some allowance must be made to reduce response times in country areas, especially given this Government's policy of having more police resources in larger centres. Clearly, more police are required in country areas to improve response times. It is therefore high time that the police resource allocation formula, determined some 16 years ago, was reviewed to provide a more equitable outcome for regional communities.

Another problem is that the Department of Corrective Services will not transport juveniles between police stations and detention centres because juveniles are not prisoners under the Police Act. This places a further burden on front-line police, who are stretched to the limit in any case. Yesterday we heard from the shadow Minister that the number of part-time police in New South Wales has grown from 173 in 1995 to 529 this year, yet these part-time police officers are counted as full-time police officers. Clearly, the resourcing of the Police Service is totally inadequate, and nowhere more so than in my electorate. People deserve to be protected against crime and they deserve to enjoy a high level of personal safety. They are not getting that under the State Government. As a matter of urgency, the Government should address the police resourcing issues I have raised.

PEATS RIDGE PUBLIC SCHOOL SEVENTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Ms ANDREWS (Peats) [5.23 p.m.]: It is with great pleasure that I am able to report to the House that on 19 August I participated in the celebrations to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of Peats Ridge Public School. I take this opportunity to congratulate the school on providing a very high standard of education to the Peats Ridge community for the past 70 years. I also wish to congratulate Mr Gary Rowe, who has been the school's principal since 1990, the staff, students, members of the school council and the school community at large for the enjoyable and successful seventieth birthday celebrations. The large number in attendance were entertained during the day by highland dancers, a martial arts display, line dancing and a delightful presentation of bush dancing by the students of Peats Ridge Public School.

The celebrations coincided with the holding of the fete. As the school is located in a rural centre, locally grown fruit, especially oranges, and vegetables and plants were on sale throughout the day. All proceeds will go towards providing further improvements for the school. It was good to see a long-time resident and active Country Women's Association [CWA] member, Mrs Gwen Bolton, in attendance at the celebrations. Mrs Bolton was recently awarded an Order of Australia medal in recognition of her services to the community. The day finished with the planting of trees by the youngest student and the oldest former student of the school in attendance.

I had the pleasure of presenting Mrs Alison McLean, a teacher-librarian of long standing at Peats Ridge Public School, with a special certificate signed by the Director-General of the Department of Education and Training, Dr Ken Boston, in recognition of her many years of service to education in this State. It might be of interest to honourable members to learn that Peats Ridge and the electorate of Peats, which I am honoured to represent, were both named after George Peat, who was born in Sydney in 1792. He had his town residence at 247 Kent Street, Sydney. George Peat was a shipbuilder by trade and came to the Hawkesbury, where he combined that trade with the occupation of grazing. As the recipient of a grant of land by Governor Darling, George Peat established and launched Peats Ferry, which was later replaced by the Hawkesbury River Bridge.

Today Peats Ridge Public School has 88 students. When it commenced 70 years ago it was located in the local Peats Ridge clubroom, rented by the Education Department at 2/6d per week as temporary accommodation. The prospective enrolment was 10 students. In January 1936 the school occupied a new building at its current location. Over the years many improvements have been made to the school. The fact that the school has received funding in more recent times for upgrading is largely due to the strong support it receives from the local community. The CWA and local service clubs have always been to the fore in supporting the school. I will conclude my tribute to Peats Ridge Public School by quoting from the memories of Peter Fitzsimons, who is a former Wallaby player and the author of a biography of Kim Beazley, the Leader of the Federal Opposition:

To say that it is a wonderful school for a child to begin his or her education with, is only to state that which is already known to anyone that attended there. But let me say this anyway—even now, well over 20 years after leaving there, my mind often wanders back to the basically care-free days my classmates and I spent on those grounds.

I guess my most pleasant memories are of running around like a loon at play-lunch and lunch, bare-foot, if I recall correctly, on any one of three ovals we had at our disposal. Other kids at other schools, we were told, had only small areas of tarmac to play on, but we could scarcely believe it. Didn't everyone have this sort of acreage?

The children of farmers for the most part, there was a strong community among us which saw little barriers between the age groups. Other schools might have 50-60 to a class, but we had sometimes as few as 3 or 4. As such it meant that the predominant feeling was not "we are fifth class," so much as "we are the Peats Ridge Public", and eleven year olds and five year olds generally all mucked in together on most things.

Being such a small school, we did get a bit of a hammering at the annual school sports days in Gosford and personally, I have long been haunted by being the captain of the 1972 Peats Ridge Public soccer team which lost 13-0 to Kulnura Public. But all that was a small price to pay.

All up, it was a happy school, and we were happy Australian kids getting a good start in life.

EASTERN SUBURBS BUS SERVICES

Mr DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [5.28 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House bus services not only in my electorate but throughout the eastern suburbs. This week I was briefed by executives from State Transit, and I thank them for that. They told me about an upcoming major review of bus services. I understand it is the first time in 10 years that such a major review of bus services in the eastern suburbs has been undertaken. I understand that it will be publicised in local papers next week, and I commend State Transit for its effort. I would certainly encourage everyone in the community to take the opportunity to get a copy of the brochure that will be distributed in next week's local papers and fill in the survey form.

It is a wonderful opportunity for the community to comment not only on the bus routes but also on the schedules, the standard of service and any other aspect commuters can think of that would improve our public transport services. Obviously, commuters should identify any good points and any bad points of which they are aware. In discussions with executives from State Transit it was obvious that a number of contentious issues will arise as a result of the proposed rearrangement of services. One will be services to and from the Rose Bay ferry wharf. I am sure that the proposals of State Transit will encourage a lot of debate about whether the changes are appropriate. I expect that any changes to Watsons Bay services would result in a lot of debate over the need for improved services. Bondi Beach bus services and Bondi Road will again come up as major issues in any survey like this.

I also suggested to executives that one aspect they could look at—an issue that I have raised a number of times over the years—is a north-south hospital bus run through the eastern suburbs. That bus service, which would run a number of times during the day—perhaps once or twice in the morning and once or twice in the afternoon during non-peak periods—would provide access for a number of people to Prince of Wales Hospital, Prince Henry Hospital, Waverley War Memorial Hospital and medical services in Bondi Junction. I do not understand why, over the years, State Transit has not put this sort of service in place during non-peak hour periods as there is a need for it. A number of elderly people find it difficult to get to and from hospitals, especially when their spouses are in hospital.

The point I made to executives—and this is a point I will make to the local community—is that because the electorate is basically on a peninsula we have no option for the future other than to embrace public transport, make it far more attractive and encourage far more people to use it. One of the major issues which is not covered in this survey, and which is not covered in State Government funding, is on-ground infrastructure for bus services. Over the decades we have made the same mistake that has been made in recent years in relation to train services, that is, separating the operation of buses from that on-ground infrastructure. Apart from major infrastructure such as the Bondi Junction interchange or the Edgecliff interchange, bus stops, shelters, seats and so forth are left to councils. I believe that that is a serious mistake. If we are to encourage more people to use public transport we must ensure that the people who are running the buses are responsible for ensuring attractive, adequate infrastructure on the ground.

I note in my electorate that two councils—Waverley and Woollahra—are looking at the private provision of bus shelters, which is fine. I believe they work well and that advertising can be used to fund those bus shelters. However, at the majority of bus stops around the eastern suburbs little infrastructure is available and, by that, I simply mean seats. A simple walk by executives around Bondi Junction on any evening would show that a large number of people do not have access to the most basic facilities. New South Wales Treasury officials might like to get out of their ivory tower, assess the number of commuters who are waiting at bus stops around the city, and establish basic infrastructure requirements. I encourage every resident in my electorate and in surrounding areas in the eastern suburbs to obtain a copy of this proposal and the survey form, to respond to it and submit their ideas. If they do not have a copy they should ring me on 9369 3017.

ST PATRICK'S COLLEGE CAMPBELLTOWN SHOWCASE OF TALENT

Mr WEST (Campbelltown) [5.33 p.m.]: Campbelltown is a young area. The last census revealed that almost one-third of the people in Campbelltown are under 20. Campbelltown is also an area that is full of talent.

An example of this is the recent St Patrick's College, Campbelltown, Higher School Certificate showcase of talent. Recently I and my parliamentary colleagues the honourable member for Southern Highlands and the honourable member for Camden were fortunate enough to attend this event. We were all impressed with the quality of the students' performances. I am told by the Good Samaritans that St Patrick's College is the longest continuously operating school in Australia. St Patrick's College owes a great deal of debt to the Good Samaritan Sisters who pioneered education in our area.

Even though the Good Samaritans no longer have a principal at the school they continue their involvement with St Patrick's College and the community and their involvement with other schools in the area. The historic site of the old school, Quondong in Campbelltown, now takes pride of place as an award-winning museum and tourist information centre. It is a real eye opener to walk into the old building, to see what the earlier days of education were like and to see the cramped conditions. I imagine that the hot weather would have been unbearable because of the clothes that they used to wear, but they continued their pioneering efforts and delivered quality education for Campbelltown.

The showcase was a chance for the current generation of students to demonstrate some of the talent in our area. Industrial design projects such as the love seat sat alongside reports into gender roles and stereotypes. I mention that St Patrick's College is an all-female college. Many artistic works, computer skills and fashions all provided the backdrop to a night of performing arts. What struck me about the works performed—and I am sure that it struck all those honourable members who attended—was the level of maturity and willingness to confront serious issues. While all works were entertaining and many were comical, they focused on issues such as bipolar mood disorder, or manic depression; the perception of women in society; racism and abuse. Interestingly, all the topics were chosen by the students. They identified those issues as issues of concern and they performed them.

As we were watching the performance it occurred to me that their works and performances were having an impact on the audience far beyond the mere words that I or other honourable members could have said. We all agreed on the night to let the students' work speak for itself and we did not give any address, which is unusual for politicians. I congratulate John Green, Principal of St Patrick's College, the teachers and the parents on the support they gave the students. Further examples of this talent abound in Campbelltown. The St Gregory's art exhibition, which was held just recently, saw prizes awarded to students from many schools in the district. Sarah Redfern and Leumeah High School combined and did the region proud at the rock eisteddfod. Their work, which was inspired by a teacher who had bi-polar mood disorder, won an award of excellence for their stage crew.

Students in that area have no fear about confronting the big issues—stress, mental illness and other issues in society. It is no wonder that Campbelltown district is fostering such talent when one gets a chance to meet with teachers and principals in that area. Recently, the Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Minister for Education was in Campbelltown at my request to meet with a number of education groups from government and non-government sectors. He met with a number of groups from special schools right through to parents. I thank him for his time on that day. He was most impressed with the commitment to the region by the staff. All were dedicated to education and to Campbelltown and the region.

Unfortunately, this commitment to education in our region does not expand to the Federal level. I have spoken in this House about growth funding for TAFE, but I recently learned that over half the research positions for students at the University of Western Sydney are to be cut. Our schools are preparing the way for our students to achieve, but the Federal Government is letting them down at local universities. I urge the Federal Government to show its commitment to education in our region, to fund our universities and our schools. Our kids deserve better. They deserve the best start. The fostering of young people in arts in Campbelltown goes well beyond the formal education system.

The Campbelltown Theatre Group regularly puts on plays by young people. Recently it performed *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*. Many actors who perform in these plays continue on to older works. When my wife and I went and saw *Arsenic and Old Lace*—a quality production by the theatre group—we were pleased to see actors who had been fostered by earlier performances. We recognised a number from the youth group performance of the *Crucible*. Many other social aspects are provided by cultural organisations in Campbelltown. Girl Guides assist with netball and scouts provide assistance with citizenship. It all comes down to the commitment of volunteers, parents, friends or simply those with a bit of time to give. Campbelltown is a great area. I thank all those honourable members who participated at the showcase for the giving of their time. [Time expired.]

SOUTHERN AREA HEALTH SERVICES

Mr R. H. L. SMITH (Bega) [5.38 p.m.]: I speak tonight about an issue that has raised an enormous amount of ire and passion in my electorate—that is, the five-year clinical service plan of the Southern Area Health Service to restructure and, in some cases, to relocate medical services at four rural hospitals, namely, Pambula, Bega, Moruya and Batemans Bay. Over the years I have spoken many times about the fears that are held by my constituents whenever changes such as are currently proposed are implemented.

It is a constant battle to retain the services that we already have in these smaller hospitals. Many of the concerns that are held by people are well-founded, as has been the case on several occasions in the past. We had to fight to retain emergency surgery procedures and obstetrics at Pambula Hospital in March 2000. If it were not for the community outrage, Bega hospital would have lost its orthopaedic services earlier this year. This Government allowed the Bega blood bank to close in December last year, and lost more than 2,000 donations annually.

In June this year, and again this week, I tabled petitions containing more than 6,000 and 4,000 signatures respectively from the people of the Pambula and Narooma areas requesting that services in their hospitals remain constant and unaffected by the restructuring of the Southern Area Health Service. One ludicrous suggestion put forward by the Southern Area Health Service was that obstetrics services could be moved from Pambula to Bega Hospital, and that doctors from Eden and Pambula could drive to Bega to attend the delivery. This round trip would take at least two hours from Eden and a little less from Pambula, not to mention the time the doctor would be away from his own practice.

Bega Hospital does not have the extra beds or the staff to cope with the overflow of maternity cases that would otherwise go into Pambula Hospital. Pregnant women and their babies could have their lives endangered if they are forced to travel the extra kilometres to a hospital which is already full. The Medical Council of the Pambula Hospital, which is made up of the doctors from the area, have written to and telephoned me, worried about the implications of the five-year plan, and I know that they have sent letters to the Minister for Health, as have many concerned citizens. Pregnant women too are very worried. They are fearful that when this decision is put in place they will have to travel many kilometres while in labour to a hospital where a stranger will deliver their babies. Their families may not be able to be with them for support at this most critical time, due to the distance. Most of all they are fearful of complications arising because of the long trip to the hospital.

We have already lost the services of an obstetrician-gynaecologist from this area, and should the Pambula Hospital be further downgraded there is the fear that others too may follow. At Moruya Hospital the restructuring of the Southern Area Health Service has also sent a shiver of alarm through the community. It is not obstetrics that is the issue there, but the transference of services such as ophthalmology and other same-day services from Moruya Hospital to Batemans Bay Hospital. The Moruya Hospital, like Pambula, covers a wide area and a large population. Some people from as far away as Bega, Bermagui and Narooma attend the Moruya Hospital for ophthalmic surgery. Bega has a private day surgery that does not cater for public patients unless they can pay thousands of dollars up front, and the Bega District Hospital does not cater for ophthalmic surgery at all.

People from the Bega Valley area would have to travel a four-hour round trip if ophthalmic services were relocated to Batemans Bay. There is no public transport in these areas and I am sure that many people and their drivers would have to pay for overnight accommodation to stay in Batemans Bay following surgery, adding to the cost of the procedure. I urge the Minister for Health to take into consideration these concerns and the welfare of the people on the far South Coast who will be most affected should this plan be allowed to go ahead without further community consultation. The 10,000 signatures that I have tabled should be indication enough that the people are very concerned about the proposals outlined in the Southern Area Health Service's clinical plan.

WARRINGAH COUNCIL

Mr BARR (Manly) [5.43 p.m.]: I wish to speak about further developments in a matter that I have previously raised in this Chamber. It concerns the conduct of Warringah Council and certain Warringah councillors. I am referring to 701 Pittwater Road, Dee Why, which is owned by Songkal Pty Ltd, a family company of Deputy Mayor Darren Jones, and the issue of access via St David Avenue Park, a small area of public land which adjoins the Songkal property. The access way is worth megabucks to the developer. In 1999

council entered into a contract with Songkal to sell a strip of St David Avenue Park for a price to be determined while it was then still classified as community land. That contract was unlawful, a fact I pointed out in this Chamber, and was therefore a nullity. Songkal subsequently lodged a development application over 701 Pittwater Road which was rejected earlier this year after an audit showed that it was non-conforming in 10 different areas. The developers then appealed to the Land and Environment Court.

Since then the plot has thickened. On 24 July this year Councillor Jones moved a motion supporting a variation to the Benchmark building which was outside local environmental plan [LEP] guidelines. The Benchmark development is located at 645-647 Pittwater Road and is in close proximity to the Songkal development at number 701. The Benchmark development is being undertaken by Councillor John Caputo, a close colleague and sometime business associate of Councillor Jones. On the very next day, 25 July, Songkal's legal representatives tabled council's report of the previous night, as exhibit 3.3J, as precedent which would support the approval of the Songkal development. The council's Queen's Counsel asked a witness for Songkal whether he knew who moved the motion to approve the variation outside the LEP guidelines. Queen's Counsel for Songkal chimed in and asked: "What is the relevance of that? Does it matter? What's the relevance?"

Council's Queen's Counsel responded: "Of course it matters. A bit of self-interest involved." A bit of self-interest? That is, to say the least, something of an understatement—Councillor Jones moves to approve a variation to a fellow councillor's development application outside the LEP provisions, and the next day in the Land and Environment Court it is used as a precedent for his own development! Very cute. But the matter does not end there. The Land and Environment Court granted conditional consent to the development, subject to Songkal obtaining access via St David Avenue Park. The court did not grant a right-of-way over the park, but inadvertently included the access way in the plans it authorised.

The council's solicitors advised that the council serve a notice on the court to rectify this error. The legal advice stated that whilst the applicant would be bound by the judgement, successors in title could rely on the terms of the orders to assert that the consent permits the access. So it has the potential to be on-sold for a significantly increased value. In a confidential session, on the casting vote of the mayor, the old guard councillors voted not to pursue the matter and in so doing conferred an immediate and significant benefit on the deputy mayor to the detriment of Warringah ratepayers. This sucks! The old guard majority councillors are at it again, bestowing benefit on their councillor colleagues. Songkal is now attempting to enforce the original void contract to which I referred earlier. The mayor had reported to the council that the deposit on this illegal contract had been returned, but now it appears that this was not the case. The way things are heading this piece of public land will be sold for "mates rates" if indeed council is able to get any price for it. It is time the cleaner was put through this council. I call on the Minister to investigate these matters immediately.

Private members' statements noted.

House adjourned at 5.48 p.m. until Tuesday 18 September 2001 at 2.15 p.m.
