

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 15 November 2001

The Clerk announced the absence of Mr Speaker.

Mr Deputy-Speaker (Mr John Charles Price) took the chair at 10.00 a.m.

Mr Deputy-Speaker offered the Prayer.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

WOY WOY PENINSULA COMMUNITY SAFETY SEMINARS

Ms ANDREWS (Peats) [10.00 a.m.]: During the past month I have hosted a series of community safety seminars on the Woy Woy Peninsula. The first of those was at Pearl Beach on 5 October, then at Patonga on 9 October, Woy Woy on 15 October, Umina Beach on 29 October and Ettalong Beach on 31 October. With the co-operation of the acting commander, representatives of the Brisbane Water Local Area Command addressed the meetings and outlined the command system of operation. Local residents were then allowed to raise any questions or concerns regarding local policing.

Superintendent Greg Ashurst, Acting Commander, Brisbane Water Local Area Command, attended all of the sessions. He was accompanied on each occasion by at least one other police officer, and often two police officers, from the local area command. I would like to acknowledge Acting Inspector Mark Hutchings, Crime Manager; Senior Sergeant Irene Juergens, Crime Prevention Officer; Sergeant Bruce Moore, Intelligence; Inspector Darren Cox, Duty Officer; and Acting Sergeant Steven Fishpool, Licensing. Anne Sullivan, a former tutor at the Trade Union Training Authority, and a person with a vast wealth of experience in a number of other very demanding areas, facilitated each of the information sessions. I place on record my appreciation of Anne Sullivan.

A number of local residents who attended the sessions were surprised to learn that a lot of the time of police officers from the Brisbane Water Local Area Command, and indeed from the Central Coast, is spent responding to domestic violence. Sadly, the Central Coast has the third highest number of recorded domestic violence incidents within the entire State. This is nothing to be proud of. I am pleased to be able to report to the House that the Brisbane Water Local Area Command is taking this matter very seriously. The Crime Manager, Acting Inspector Mark Hutchings, reported on the actions of the Domestic Violence Intervention Response Team [DVIRT]. This team has proven to be very effective in helping to reduce the number of call-outs to domestic violence incidents.

This is how the system works. On being called out to a domestic violence incident, the police officers in attendance ask whether the victim wishes to speak with DVIRT workers. If the answer is yes, the victim is asked to sign a form giving permission for personal details to be provided to DVIRT workers. If the victim wishes to have DVIRT workers attend and enter the premises to discuss domestic violence issues, the victim again is asked to sign a form giving permission for workers to attend and enter the premises. The risk assessment criteria are as follows:

- The victim has signed the relevant authority requesting DVIRT workers to attend the premises.
- The exact whereabouts of the offender is known and is not in a position to return to the premises, in most cases should be in custody.
- The victim is not violent, intoxicated or affected by drugs...
- There are no weapons or firearms left on the premises.
- There are no other persons present who are intoxicated, violent or affected by drugs.
- The victim is not suffering an injury or obvious mental illness.
- Another location other than the victim's premises is not available, i.e. closest police station.
- Full circumstances of the incident are correctly recorded.
- A duty officer is contacted personally prior to contacting DVIRT.
- Duty officer is informed prior to the offender being released from police custody. The duty officer will contact DVIRT with this information.

- Investigating police are responsible for taking into account all the circumstances and information available to ensure the safety of DVIRT counsellors and support workers while they are assisting police in domestic violence matters.
- The duty officer is responsible and accountable for ensuring all available information is taken into account before deploying DVIRT to a domestic situation. A low risk rating should be determined prior to deployment.

The counsellors participating in the scheme are State government department or agency employees and/or employees of a number of non-government agencies. The success rate to date has been outstanding. In fact, of the approximately 120 to 130 victims of domestic violence who have agreed to participate in the scheme, not one has called upon the police for further protection. [*Time expired.*]

Mr WHELAN (Strathfield—Minister for Police) [10.05 a.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Peats for relating that information to the House. She delivered it with such feeling and conviction that she did not notice that her speaking time had expired. The honourable member raised two issues. One was the work done by the Brisbane Water Local Area Command. I thank the honourable member for taking the opportunity to convey thanks to those who have worked very assiduously in the difficult area of domestic violence on the Central Coast.

Domestic violence is a problem not only on the Central Coast but in all of our communities. The Government has strengthened the law in relation to domestic violence to enable the community to protect women who live in domestic violence circumstances. Domestic violence is a crime under the Crimes Act. Whilst the primary concern is to bring a state of healing to domestic relationships, police are empowered to intervene in cases of domestic violence.

The Government regards domestic violence as not only a crime involving policing issues but a matter involving a number of other government instrumentalities, including the Department of Health and the Department of Community Services, in dealing with socio-economic and other problems that lead to domestic violence. Following the very tragic death of a lady named Andrea Patrick in Manly in 1993, the Labor Opposition forced the Coalition Government to introduce anti-stalking laws. From that day the Police Service has taken on a new and profound role. I thank the honourable member for her contribution.

MERIMBULA PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr R. H. L. SMITH (Bega) [10.07 a.m.]: I wish to relay to the House the absolute disappointment and sense of betrayal felt by the people of Merimbula regarding the redevelopment of the Merimbula Public School. Merimbula desperately needs a new public school. After many years of lobbying and planning by school councils, teachers and parents, plans to build a school on a seven- hectare site at Tura Beach, which is a few kilometres north of Merimbula, was announced some time ago. The land at Tura Beach was purchased a number of years ago by the Liberal New South Wales Government when Virginia Chadwick was Minister for Education and Training. The site was purchased at that time for a future Merimbula High School.

The site, being seven hectares, was far in excess of the size required for a high school and would also accommodate a primary school, with adequate area for both schools. In April this year the plans to build on the site were quashed when the Department of Education and Training and the National Parks and Wildlife Service disallowed the development of the land at Tura Beach as a primary school and a high school, because of their selective interpretation of the Native Vegetation Conservation Act. This left the parents, school committee and 450 pupils of Merimbula Public School wondering whether they will ever receive their much-needed facility.

However, in this year's budget, \$228,000 was allocated to begin the planning of the redevelopment of the existing school, with promises of an additional \$4.5 million for the building works. At last there was a spark of encouragement for a school committee that has slogged away for so many years on this project. Footprint plans for the new school were placed on display, giving the option of a single-storey or double-storey school. Hundreds of people inspected the plans, and the double-storey classrooms were promoted and approved because of the severe lack of playground space on the existing site.

But once again the parents and citizens and the school council have had their illusions shattered. The project team has now recommended that the four existing single-storey classrooms should be retained and built around, in the interests of economic rationalisation! Three concept plans for the proposed development of the school were then presented to a meeting. None of them were based on the footprint plans that hundreds of people had perused and 100 per cent of the school community had approved. We are now told that the footprint plan is deemed too expensive, although no costings have been done at this stage. This is a very small site and, should the single-storey redevelopment of the existing school take place, the children will lose out on playground space, which was the main reason for the double-storey proposal.

The children need this space. Who has heard of a new school these days having such a little space for recreational activities? If the single-storey plan goes ahead, the 450 plus students will have only one playground for active sports such as football, cricket, et cetera, and very little space for those who do not or cannot participate in vigorous activities to sit and play quieter games. The preferred plan of the double-storey building would retain an area for the less-active children to relax in. On how many more occasions will this project be held up because of the cost-cutting methods of the Minister for Education and Training?

The public, the teachers, the parents and the students are totally disappointed and disillusioned with this Labor Government's failure to deliver the goods. Merimbula needs this school, and it needs it as quickly as possible. The children of Merimbula need a new public school that all 450 of them can attend without being crammed in like sardines; they also need space to allow them to enhance their social skills as they learn to play alongside their fellow classmates. With the diverse number of sporting activities that children can participate in these days, surely it is not too much to ask that they have the space to be able to learn, exercise, and enjoy the sports they have chosen without being crammed into one sports field.

NRMA CHAIRMAN Mr NICHOLAS WHITLAM

Mr E. T. PAGE (Coogee) [10.12 a.m.]: Numerous articles have been published on the grounds of public interest about the controversial and challenged demutualisation of NRMA Insurance last year, based on a 160-page information memorandum that even had lawyers scratching their heads. Many of the articles assisted NRMA members to navigate their way through the legalese and experts' reports on what the split and demutualisation meant for NRMA members. None of the articles have been found to be inaccurate and, as testament to this, the NRMA, always keen to litigate, has not mounted a single defamation action against the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Had there been any inaccuracy grounds, the NRMA would not have hesitated to have the paper in court answering defamation proceedings. Instead, the only court actions taken by the NRMA are injunctions preventing the *Sydney Morning Herald* from reporting what occurred at the August board meeting, notably the board's position on motions to be put to NRMA members at the annual general meeting later this month, and which way it would vote on its 2 per cent shareholding in NRMA Insurance. The NRMA also sought to gag the *Sydney Morning Herald* from reporting that a director, Stuart Geeson, moved a motion that the Chairman, Nick Whitlam, stand down from the chair while he faces civil proceedings brought against him by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission [ASIC] over alleged breaches of his directors' duties.

Instead of allowing discussion on this issue or for the motion to be seconded, Nick Whitlam just shut down the meeting. He also sought an undertaking from directors present that they would not disclose the discussion about his chairmanship. The NRMA also sought injunctions against Mr Geeson and two other directors, Ms Anne Keating and Ms Jane Singleton. The NRMA did not get its injunction. It appealed and the Court of Appeal refused to uphold it. The NRMA had to pay its own considerable costs as well as those of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The total bill for that court foray is said to be well over \$300,000. In his decision refusing the injunction, Justice Bryson said that the NRMA had a huge membership and was part of the general organisation of society. He thought the NRMA's interests would be served by making public the events at a board meeting concerning the occupation of the chair while ASIC proceedings are pending against Nick Whitlam.

Not satisfied with that, the NRMA is now pursuing a breach of confidentiality action to force an Australian Associated Press [AAP] journalist and two *Sydney Morning Herald* journalists to reveal their sources of information that formed part of an article published mid year. That action will be heard next march. The NRMA is particularly keen to explore how information was leaked that an amendment to the directors' expense policy enables directors to be indemnified for legal actions, without guidelines on what sort of legal actions could be mounted, whether they were justified, how much those legal actions may cost, or indeed, whether they were personal legal actions.

I would have thought that, given the fact that eight legal actions have been commenced by either the NRMA or its Chairman, Nick Whitlam, against various parties, including media organisations, it must be costing NRMA members a bomb. NRMA members would be entitled to that information, but the NRMA wants to keep secret the expenditure of members' money on this legal picnic. What is interesting is that while Nick Whitlam was also the chair of NRMA Insurance until earlier this year, the complaint letters flowed freely from that organisation, too. When he left, the complaint letters suddenly stopped and now flow exclusively from the road services group. Can we draw a conclusion from this and would that conclusion have something to do with the way that Nick Whitlam conducts business at the NRMA and the divisive influence he has on the board and management of that company?

Interestingly, at the Fairfax annual general meeting [AGM] no members of the NRMA asked questions about the *Sydney Morning Herald's* reporting of NRMA matters, as Carter, the chief executive officer, forecast in his letter would happen. Carter's salary package is of the order of \$1 million and should be revealed at the forthcoming annual general meeting, as was done with the salary package of the chief executive officer at the insurance company's AGM. If he denies that he is earning \$1 million, let that be stated at the AGM. A new cost impost on members is the \$7.70 charge for the previously free accommodation guide, and this will affect many small tourist operators throughout New South Wales.

What is not so well known is that under the terms of the demutualisation it now costs the NRMA road service \$30 million for administration charges for the privatised insurance group. This is more than double the value of the \$14 million loss for the year and equates to \$15.00 per member per year. Carter would be better off giving members their money's worth from his almost \$1 million salary by ensuring that the group spends its money, instead of trying to give them the mushroom treatment. He should also make sure that NRMA money is not spent on funnelling fees to Corrs because he and Nick Whitlam are not winning the public relations battle.

LIVE AT HOME GOULBURN AND DISTRICT COMMUNITY OPTIONS

Ms HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [10.17 a.m.]: I support the excellent work done by the organisation known as Live at Home Goulburn and District Community Options. That organisation is run by a volunteer management committee and employs a full-time administrator and care manager. Live at Home Goulburn and District Community Options assists the frail-aged, the disabled and those with dementia, who have special or high needs, to remain at home by increasing their independence and quality of life. The organisation does that in two ways. First, it acts as a referral and co-ordination agency to ensure that the right mix of support services are provided to those in need. Second, it also employs workers who can provide assistance with cleaning, at-home respice care or just the companionship that many of our elderly and disabled citizens need.

Live at Home Goulburn and District Community Options is also active in delivering innovative solutions to difficult care situations, but it has fallen foul of the bureaucratic inertia and lack of vision that sometimes characterise the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. Despite this organisation's excellent work I have been informed by the management committee that between 1990 and 1998 it received little support from the department's community project officers. When their titles were changed in 1998 to service support development officers, this level of assistance improved somewhat to a level now characterised by the organisation as "not so regular contact". In a recent letter to me, the manager of the service wrote:

It is this organisation's feeling that they (the Department) are certainly not here to support and develop us but to police us. They are quick to inform us of what we are doing wrong and have overlooked our excellent history in flexible service provision in our community for over ten years.

An example of this is the development of policy and procedure manuals. When the requirement to produce those manuals was introduced, Live at Home Goulburn and District Community Options networked with several other local service providers to develop a standard document that would be acceptable to the department. While the virtually identical manuals were readily accepted for the other services, the Live at Home Goulburn and District Community Options manuals were returned for adjustment and addition—a clear case of inconsistency in the department's monitoring process.

Since 1993, Live at Home Goulburn and District Community Options has participated in the post-school options program, which was designed to bridge the gap for young people with disabilities and assist them to make their transition from secondary school to the broader community. This program was superseded by the Adult Training Learning Assistance Scheme in 1998. Currently, Live at Home Goulburn and District Community Options provides programs for 12 young adults in the Southern Highlands and Southern Tablelands area. I know many of the parents of those young adults. Three of those young adults require accommodation in Goulburn to access this program.

Live at Home Goulburn and District Community Options, through a major fund-raising effort that did not draw on government finances, raised sufficient funds to make its premises in Bourke Street, Goulburn, suitable to accommodate these clients. However, this accommodation service operates at a loss of about \$400 a fortnight, which places a severe strain on its voluntary fund-raising efforts. Discussions with departmental officers revealed that finding alternative accommodation options, such as a group house in Goulburn, were not viewed as urgent by the department because of the existence of the Live at Home Goulburn and District Community Options service.

In an attempt to resolve this catch-22 situation, Live at Home Goulburn and District Community Options, after fully discussing this quandary with the families of residents, told the department that it might have

to close the accommodation service in March next year. The department responded with a letter that has been described to me as offensive. Live at Home Goulburn and District Community Options was accused of manufacturing a crisis and acting without appropriate consultation and ongoing support planning. This is strongly refuted by the management committee. It says that although it has been providing a service for seven years that no other organisation was willing to take on, it now feels as though it has been slapped in the face by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, which is portraying it as a delinquent service. The management committee executive stated:

We provided young people opportunities to enhance their quality of life and access to the community in accordance with the Post School Options Program.

To date, this organisation has received no financial support from the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, in respect to running the Residential Centre. Nor do we get any positive reinforcement for our achievements in service delivery. Instead we are accused of failing to consult and failing to appropriately plan. Without the initiative of the Residential Centre in the first place our PSO Service Users programs would have been severely compromised, and their respective families unduly stressed.

Surely an organisation which, for over 10 years, has provided a valuable, affordable and efficient service to so many disadvantaged elderly and disabled people, deserves better treatment than it has received. The Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care and its predecessor, the Ageing and Disability Department, have not lived up to their charter to support Live at Home Goulburn and District Community Options. I am aware, further, that this is not an isolated incident and that that organisation is not the only organisation in my electorate to have had trouble with this department. The Minister should provide a bit of sorely-needed leadership and ensure that community-based, volunteer-run service organisations are supported by her department, and not persecuted.

SOUTHERN ILLAWARRA BUSINESS AND TOURISM AWARDS

Mr BROWN (Kiama) [10.22 a.m.]: I refer today to the Southern Illawarra Business and Tourism Awards night, which I attended last Friday 9 November. It gives me great pleasure to announce that those awards were presented in my home town of Kiama. It was great to see businesses and workers who are doing so well in the Kiama electorate being properly recognised. I draw to the attention of honourable members the excellent work done by the hosts of those awards—Mr Bruce Pullford of Prime Television and Barry Wilson, a committed and proud Kiama resident from *Kiama Independent* and *Lake Times*. In addition to the outstanding achievements of businesses in the area, artistic performances on that night were exceptional. I place on the record the contribution made by Luke Brown, Penny Hartgrink and the Kiama High School Stage Band. When I attended Kiama High School I used to play for that band, and it is now sounding better than ever. The band leader, Mr Graham Deans, could not attend, and the students deserve credit for running the whole show themselves.

I should like to give the names of the winners and those who were highly commended. The winner of the apprentice and trainee category was Sarah Gillard of Seven Mile Beach Caravan Park, Gerroa. Alana Heath from Steel Family Real Estate and Janet Rowe from Warrigal Care were highly commended. Jorg Bethke from Bunnings Warehouse, Warrawong, was the customer service winner. I have not seen a recipient of an award so delighted to be recognised for his dedication to his work and the customers he serves. Shelley McCarthy from McInerney's Soul Pattinson Chemist, Kiama, Justine Lang from City Coast Credit Union, Kiama, and Robyn Gawne from Warrigal Care Group, Albion Park, were highly commended.

The winner of the business manager service award was Terry Frost from Warilla Sports Club. Tuyen Tran from the Warrigal Care Group and Kim Morris from Horizon Credit Union were highly commended. Spring Creek Retreat, which is run by Sue and Jack Stoertz of Kiama, won the tourism and hospitality award. These retreats are popular business enterprises for many people in the Kiama area. The Illawarra Folk Festival won the tourism event award. Illawarra Folk Festival is a huge festival that attracts thousands of visitors to the area. I had the great pleasure of presenting that award, which was accepted by Perla Fefey.

Albion Park Pharmacy was the winner of the business service award and Albion Park Physiotherapy and Shane Dowell's Swim School were highly commended. The winner of the retail general award was Happy Talk from Shellharbour Square. Phil Haworth from Haworth Guitars, Kiama Downs, was highly commended. The winner of the manufacturing, construction and industry award was Camarda and Cantrill Pty Ltd. Colleen Camarda runs this large construction and maintenance company. It was great that Colleen and her company were recognised.

The winner of the retail franchise national award was Bakers Delight. The award was accepted on its behalf by Raymond Pedro. Brumbys from Shellharbour Square was highly commended. The winner of the new business award was Zumo Taste Australia, and Jenny Timmer accepted that award on behalf of her husband,

Kees Timmer. South Coast Hand Therapy was highly commended. Bark Busters won the *Kiama Independent* and *Lake Times* readers choice for most popular business award. Black Rock Cafe won the *Kiama Independent* achievement award. It was a great night. [*Time expired.*]

ALBURY-WODONGA AIR SERVICES

Mr GLACHAN (Albury) [10.27 a.m.]: Everyone realises that good, reliable air services are important in our modern economy, particularly for country centres. Until recently Albury-Wodonga had a very good and reliable air service that was a great advantage to businesspeople and, of course, many others in our community. Just a short time ago we had real concerns about threats to locate regional services at Bankstown airport rather than Kingsford Smith Airport. The concerns in this regard were nothing compared with the present problems. For a long time Ansett provided a good, reliable air service to Albury-Wodonga that suited our needs well. During the pilots strike a few years ago when Ansett was not able to fly into Albury, Hazelton began Albury services with twin-engine nine-seater aircraft. Although that service could not fully fill the gap, it was very helpful. I used that service for travelling to and from Sydney on many occasions and was grateful for it.

Later Hazelton used twin-engine Saab aircraft on the route, providing a good, reliable and regular service to Albury-Wodonga. Later Kendell came on the scene, also with twin-engine Saab aircraft. Those two airlines provided a good, comprehensive service that suited us very well, and we were delighted with the service we were getting. Not so long ago when deregulation came along Qantas, through Eastern Australian Airlines, began flying into Albury-Wodonga. So Albury-Wodonga was serviced by three airlines to Sydney. The Kendell service went on to Melbourne and Hazelton, Kendell and Qantas all operated on the Sydney to Albury route.

Following the collapse of Ansett we, fortunately, still have the Qantas service. Hazelton dropped out of the system soon after the Qantas service started because there just was no room for three operators. We are grateful for the remaining Qantas service but it does not provide all the seats we need. Kendell has started flying again but the great difficulty is that seats on Kendell have to be booked through the Internet using a credit card. That does not suit everyone. The limited Kendell services we now have are not fully utilised: there are empty seats. And it is almost impossible to get on the Qantas service.

The situation should be changed and changed quickly so that people can book on Kendell services as easily as they can book with Qantas—through travel agents and any other method they choose to use—so that people can get access to the services and the empty seats on the Kendell flights can be filled. The tragedy about the collapse of Ansett and the loss of Kendell involves jobs. A number of Kendell pilots and flight attendants were based in Albury, and they are out of work. Other people in the area had developed a very successful business providing the refreshments that were served on the Kendell flights between Albury and Sydney.

Now their services are not needed and their business has collapsed, with the loss of a number of jobs. This is a very sad circumstance for people who built up a very successful service business. I stress the importance of good, reliable, frequent air services between regional centres and Sydney. They are absolutely vital to business and people with an urgent need to get to Sydney. People should be able to book on Kendell flights as conveniently and easily as they can book on Qantas flights. I hope that the matter can be sorted out very soon so that the Kendell service can begin to prosper and extra services can be provided to meet the needs of our people.

OAK FLATS HIGH SCHOOL VANDALISM

Ms SALIBA (Illawarra) [10.32 a.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House ongoing problems with vandalism at Oak Flats High School. More than 147 windows were smashed in one weekend. The object is not theft; it is outright vandalism and destruction. The situation was so bad that security guards were based at the school to protect the school on weekends. The principal, Dr Graham Wagner, along with teachers association representative Jim Bradley and Tony Purdon, the secretary of the parents and citizens association at Oak Flats High School, approached me about fencing the school. A community meeting with school representatives and families from around the school and the parents of students at the school decided to approach the Minister for Education and Training to fence the entire school boundaries.

Unfortunately, Balarang Public School sits right behind Oak Flats High School, and it was felt that fencing off only Oak Flats High School would just move the problem to Balarang Public School. So the Minister was approached to fence off the entire area of Balarang Public School, Oak Flats High School and the

Workers Educational Association Centre, which is also attached. The fencing will cost more than \$200,000, but I am happy to say that the work has begun. The fencing is aesthetically pleasing to the community and provides security for students, teachers and the community of Oak Flats.

The buildings at the school form a square and people within the square can get up to mischief without being visible to the public. Recently young people set fire to a garbage bin using an accelerant and threw the bin through a window of the English teachers department. More than 30 years of work was destroyed. Teachers collect their work and have their units sorted out, and all the work they had been collecting for many years was destroyed. The destruction included the work of students, artwork and student certificates of achievement. Such incidents are devastating for the school. It is demoralising for teachers and students when they turn up on a Monday to find that their school has been trashed again. It is pure vandalism for the sake of destruction and for no other reason. When police respond to reports of young people vandalising the school the offenders scatter into the surrounding paddocks and parks, making it difficult for the police to catch them.

A new type of fencing is being used at the school. I call it knuckle fencing. If people try to climb over it the fence collapses at the top, preventing them from getting over the fence. This prevents people getting into the school and, if they are inside the grounds, prevents them getting out. This type of fencing has been an asset in preventing access to other schools and causing the kind of damage done in the Illawarra. I again thank Dr Wagner, Jim Bradley and Tony Purdon, who worked hard to ensure that the appropriate fencing for the school was erected. It does not make the school look like a prison; it is in keeping with the theme of the school in providing a good educational institution and a good environment for the students to learn in. I also thank the Minister for taking notice of the school's needs and providing the type of security the school requires.

PUBLIC LIABILITY INSURANCE

Mr WEBB (Monaro) [10.37 a.m.]: Other members of the House have spoken about insurance for small community groups. I believe that we face a real cultural problem, not only in New South Wales but elsewhere in Australia. The role played by community groups in our society over the past couple of centuries has been well documented. It is the fundamental role of carrying out operations and doing chores that are beyond governments at all levels. Unfortunately, these community groups and the jobs they do are threatened by them being unable to procure at a reasonable price insurance cover for their operations, whether they are ongoing events or annual events that may be cultural icons.

The Hoskinstown War Memorial Hall Trust president, Kevin Austin, has called on insurers to introduce a social responsibility charter, similar to the charter for banks. I call on the New South Wales Government to talk with local government, the Federal Government and insurers to bring about some reasonable outcome so that community groups can, first, get insurance—because some groups cannot get insurance—and, second, get insurance at a reasonable price. The president of the Hoskinstown War Memorial Hall Trust is reported in a recent newspaper article to have said that insurers were turning their backs on community associations, but he acknowledges that communities cannot operate properly without community associations. I support that view, particularly this year, the International Year of Volunteers.

This trust is one of three local groups facing closure or rises in fees to cover a blow-out in insurance. That premium increase has been blamed somewhat on the HIH collapse, as well as on other recent events, but I feel it will be exacerbated by claims on insurance companies following the recent aircraft losses and terrorist activities. Generous court awards have been affecting the groups' viability and their ability to renew public liability insurance. Public liability insurance claims have risen by more than 50 per cent between 1998 and 2000. That is a massive increase, and the premiums reflect that. Increased premiums have left the Hoskinstown war memorial hall, a community asset, unused for three months. The Hoskinstown War Memorial Hall Trust, a New South Wales Government-appointed community group that runs the hall, recommended at a recent meeting to transfer the Crown land and building to Yarrawlumla Shire Council. The council would therefore be able to cover the hall through its own insurance, although it would be a cost on the community.

Rising premiums have also affected the Hoskinstown Regional Community Association, which represents 120 families and participates regularly in events such as Clean up Australia. So, even that event is in jeopardy. This year the association, despite a no-claim record, has been unable to obtain public liability cover through its broker. It is expected that premiums will double, from \$460 to \$750 in some cases. The Bungendore swimming pool kiosk management committee chairman, Keith Foulds, said that premiums for public liability and products insurance had increased from \$280 in 1999 to \$440 last year. Cover costing \$907 was eventually obtained for the privately leased kiosk through the council's broker.

This problem affects councils as well as community groups. Recently the Insurance Council of Australia said that the industry recognised the affordability and availability of public liability insurance as an important issue. It is absolutely vital that these volunteer community groups are able to get the cover they need and can get on with their jobs. Insurers are attempting to be socially responsible by setting up a national task force in conjunction with government and community groups. Again, I call on the New South Wales Government to get involved with this and to provide cover. The cultural problem that faces us must be solved urgently so that volunteers and community groups can continue their valuable role. [*Time expired.*]

WOLLONGONG CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC

Mr CAMPBELL (Keira) [10.42 a.m.]: The Wollongong Conservatorium of Music is located in the Botanic Gardens in the Keira electorate. The Wollongong Conservatorium of Music was established in 1972 as a branch of the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music. It was opened to cater for the needs of the Illawarra community and has been responsible for the practical development of advanced students enrolled in New South Wales Conservatorium of Music courses. The Wollongong Conservatorium of Music was originally based in a church hall in the centre of the city but in 1980 it moved to Gleniffer Brae, part of the Botanic Gardens adjacent to the Wollongong university. In 1984 it amalgamated with the University of Wollongong and assumed the title of Wollongong University Conservatorium of Music. In 1997-98 the Wollongong Conservatorium of Music Ltd was incorporated as a separate not-for-profit company. For many years the Wollongong conservatorium has had an annual enrolment of between 1,200 and 1,500 students.

Its childhood music education program has developed over 20 years and continues to make a significant contribution to around 600 students and their families across the Illawarra and the South Coast. A parent or a caregiver must attend all these lessons with the student. The Wollongong conservatorium now stages and supports a wide range of performances and special events in the community. Some of the notable performers who have graduated from the Wollongong Conservatorium of Music include Richard Tognetti, a violinist and artistic director with the Australian Chamber Orchestra; Anthony Warlow, a well-known vocalist, who had leading roles in the *Phantom of the Opera* and *Annie*; Merion Powell, who is an operatic conductor in Belgium and France; Emma Hayes, a violinist with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra; David Piper, a conductor, who has conducted *Annie* and *Mamma Mia*; and Graeme Wilson and Scott Radburn, guitarists with the Mo Award-winning group The Four Kinsmen. They are just some of the many notable graduates from the conservatorium.

The conservatorium has a number of current sponsors. Wollongong City Council, as the landlord, offers significant rent reductions. The University of Wollongong contributes approximately \$125,000 each year. BHP Steel contributes \$30,000 per annum for the BHP Youth Orchestra. The New South Wales State Government has traditionally given a grant of about \$52,000 a year and the IMB Foundation recently contributed \$50,000 per annum over two years for the childhood music education program. A range of other minor sponsors and supporters contribute about \$8,000 per annum. I am delighted that on 31 October the Minister for Education and Training visited the conservatorium and announced that the State Government contribution will rise to \$245,000 for program development, scholarships and bursaries, property improvement, salaries and operating costs. This is a significant contribution to the cultural activities in the area I represent.

I am delighted that I have been able to work with my colleagues the honourable member for Wollongong, the honourable member for Illawarra and the honourable member for Kiama to ensure that the Government provided this additional support. It is another example of the way Labor governments deliver for areas that vote for the Labor Party and return Labor members to Parliament. I made that comment at the function at the conservatorium on 31 October, and I repeat it here because it is an important and logical message. The conservatorium is concerned at the way the GST has impacted on all its programs. There has been a slight reduction in activity and involvement because of the GST.

I acknowledge the work of Dr Brian Gillett, the chairman of the board, the members of the board and the former chair, Professor John Stienke, as well as the principal, Graham Drayton, and all the staff. It is always dangerous to single out people but most people would accept my mentioning Tanya Phillips, who is involved with the BHP Youth Orchestra. The staff generally do a great job under the leadership of Graham Drayton. At the ceremony at our conservatorium on 31 October, when the Minister made the significant announcement for our conservatorium, two students of the conservatorium performed. Halina Leung, a Year 6 student, actually played two recorders at once, which I found particularly interesting. I acknowledge that Sonia Sozio also performed on the piano on that occasion.

EMERGENCY CALLS

Mr DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [10.47 a.m.]: Today I raise, again, life-threatening problems with 000 emergency calls and ambulance response times. Yesterday afternoon, a few hundred metres from this place, at the corner of Phillip and Hunter streets, a woman was hit by a car. She suffered severe head injuries. I did not see the accident but I certainly heard it as she hit the windscreen. Who was at fault, I do not know. I wish her well in her recovery. I am concerned about the 000 calls and ambulance response times. At 1.36 p.m. I rang 000 and it seemed like hours but must have been at least two minutes to connect with the Ambulance Service, and that was after several attempts by the Telstra operator.

At 1.52 p.m.—16 minutes after my call—the ambulance arrived. At 1.54 p.m.—18 minutes after my call—the police arrived. In the meantime the traffic in that area was in chaos. Those circumstances raise questions about the use of the Roads and Traffic Authority's camera control centre in the city, and whether anyone was aware that there was a problem in Hunter Street at that time. Certainly there was no police presence in the area within 18 minutes. When police officers turned up I got the impression that they were not impressed at having to attend the incident at that time. Clearly our emergency services are stretched too tightly. I made two calls to 000. The first call took between one minute and two minutes to get through to the Ambulance Service, after the Telstra operator had tried two or three different numbers. My second call, 14 minutes later, was to simply check whether the ambulance was on its way. I was assured that it was, and the ambulance arrived two minutes after that. In this House on 28 February I spoke about emergency calls arrangements and an attempted bag snatch at Rose Bay. I said:

Every member of this House would be aware of a number of media stories and constituents concerns about the 000 line and the delays inherent in the system ...

Clearly, there are real problems in the interface between Telstra and the emergency service. I do not know what the problem is or whether the emergency services were having particular difficulties on the afternoon of Sunday 18 February. It is time we had a good look at the emergency calls and the arrangements for them. I call on the Minister for Police to urgently review the call centre arrangements and the interface between Telstra and emergency services for all calls in New South Wales. As I said at the outset, there are continual problems with emergency calls to the Ambulance Service. I am not sure how many calls to the fire brigade result in problems, but there are certainly problems with calls to police. It is time to fix the problem, because a loss of life could result.

After that incident, I visited the Telstra call centre and discussed with its representatives the interface problems. I suggest that every member of this House take the opportunity to ring Telstra, look at the call centre in Darling Harbour and talk through this problem, because it concerns all of our constituents across New South Wales. Many months later, nothing has changed. It is disturbing to think that there was no excuse for the emergency services response times, such as the remote location of the accident. This accident occurred in the heart of the central business district, and the ambulance took 16 minutes to get there. The woman had severe head injuries and a number of us tried to comfort the woman. We were mindful that the minutes were ticking away as we waited for the ambulance.

It is absolutely unacceptable to the people of New South Wales to have to put up with problems in the interface between the Telstra call centre and the emergency services. I call on the Minister for Police and the Minister for Health to go and look at the system. Do not just talk to their staff, but actually go and look at the system, talk to the Telstra staff, listen to the phone calls—about 14 million each year in New South Wales—and try to understand the difficulties. I say to the Premier that if his Minister for Health and his Minister for Police cannot sort out this problem, then, for goodness sake, he should take charge. Life-threatening situations affect many people in New South Wales and they need those services. Clearly, the Premier's Department needs to look into this problem. I have made that point in several speeches in the past few months. In New South Wales our emergency services are stretched as tight as a drum.

Mr MOSS (Canterbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.52 a.m.]: I accept the argument put forward about the delays by Telstra. There may have been good reasons why it took 16 minutes for the ambulance to arrive and 18 minutes for the police to arrive. There may have been other priorities or traffic congestion may have caused the delay. The argument by the honourable member for Vaucluse about Telstra's service is a good one. It should not take two minutes to be connected to the Ambulance Service through Telstra. I am sure that the Premier, the Minister for Police and the Minister for Health will look into this matter and do whatever they can. However, I remind the honourable member for Vaucluse that Telstra is not a State Government responsibility. What is left of Telstra is a Federal Government responsibility. I suggest he also approach the Prime Minister to see what he can do about the inefficiency of Telstra.

CABRAMATTA COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.53 a.m.]: Today I address comments made by the President of the Cabramatta Chamber of Commerce that appeared in this week's local paper. The President of the Cabramatta Chamber of Commerce, Ross Treyvaud, and Tim Priest announced that they are a team and will be lobbying State members of Parliament about community feeling in Cabramatta. I take this opportunity to issue an open invitation to both of them to meet with me. My door is always open to anyone who has genuine concerns about the Cabramatta local community and about crime in the local community. I am sure that members of this House would be aware that in the past Tim and I have had our differences. But that is behind us; we have met, had a cup of tea together and thrashed through a few issues of concern to us both. I do not intend to rehash the details of that conversation here: I think it is fair to say that we both agreed that solid lines of communication are vital to winning the war against drugs in our local community.

I say here and now: Tim, if you have information about crime in Cabramatta, call; if you have any concerns about police management at the local patrol, pick up the phone, I want to meet with you and talk with you; I want to sort things out with you. The President of the Chamber of Commerce also made a number of other accusations that I would like to address. First, he maintained that the improvements in Cabramatta are solely attributable to the heroin drought and that any suggestion that police are making headway is purely Government spin doctoring. In a report issued recently by the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, this State's foremost analyst of crime trends concluded:

There are good reasons for believing that the heroin drought was at least partly caused by increased heroin seizures and the arrest of major heroin suppliers. In Cabramatta these factors have combined with more active street-level drug law enforcement to produce a dramatic fall in heroin use, heroin overdoses and expenditure on heroin.

That is not spin doctoring; those are the findings of an independent umpire. While I am encouraged by the findings of the Weatherburn report I have always maintained a position of cautious optimism and I have always maintained that there is more work to be done. I am working with the local police to make sure that work is done. In this week's local newspaper, Mr Treyvaud maintained that CityWatch has failed to deliver the openness or build channels of communication with the local community and police. Well, Mr Treyvaud would not know, because although he assured the community relations commission secretary that he would attend the last two meetings of CityWatch, on both occasions he failed to attend, and failed to send another representative of the Chamber of Commerce.

I am concerned at his failure to attend. He has acknowledged that CityWatch is a good forum for building channels of communication, but it needs his participation and his commitment to rebuild that dialogue within the local community and to ensure that the concerns of the business community of Cabramatta, which are genuine and valid, are built into that process in an appropriate manner. I say to the President of the Cabramatta Chamber of Commerce: It is time to adjust your campaign, it is time to take a responsible approach and help develop solutions to the issues of concern in our local community, and that can be achieved only by genuine participation, a genuine dialogue.

Another issue that Mr Treyvaud raised in this week's local paper, which I should like to address, is a little bit of scaremongering on his part. Basically Mr Treyvaud said that if the improvements are all because of the heroin drought, when it is over we will be plunged back to where we were 12 months ago. That is not true. I assure my community that I have met with the region commander, Clive Small, and the patrol commander, Frank Hansen, and I have demanded a contingency plan from them. When there is an increase in heroin in our community, when the so-called drought has ended, I want to know what the police will do to address the issue on the streets at the coalface. I have been assured that they are ready for any increase in the availability of heroin in the Cabramatta community. There are improvements. Let us acknowledge them. The police are doing a fantastic job. Of course, there is more that can be done.

COUNTRY RAIL FREIGHT SERVICES

Mr ARMSTRONG (Lachlan) [10.58 a.m.]: Before I refer to country rail freight services, I shall take a little licence and support the honourable member for Vacluse because I also saw the accident in Hunter Street yesterday. I did not actually see it happen, but I saw the woman lying in the street and the traffic chaos. Indeed, the honourable member for Vacluse directed traffic for a while until the police got there. It is ridiculous—we are only 120 metres from Sydney Hospital. The woman lay in the street in the middle of the lunch hour. It is absurd that that occurred in a modern city like this.

Today I want to talk about country rail freight services and some of the problems emanating from the sale of the Rail Freight Corporation. To put it simply, the Treasurer in another place was asked a question the

day before yesterday, and the honourable member for Barwon asked the Minister for Transport in this place yesterday, about the Government's program and whether it will support the continuity of above-rail payments to FreightCorp and other rail operators to carry goods or operate trains pursuant to the Freight Rail Corporation sale. I shall put on the record an extract of the Treasurer's speech of 27 June. He said in part:

First, there are below-rail payments to the Rail Infrastructure Corporation to maintain the rail infrastructure. Second, there are above-rail payments to FreightCorp or other rail operators to carry goods or operate trains. Between 2000-01 and 2005-06, the Government will provide at least \$1,400 million of community service payments to support rural and regional rail freight services. This is an increase of \$100 million on the community service payments to 2005-06 that were planned before the Government decided to sell FreightCorp.

The Treasurer further said:

There will be a reduction in above-rail payments of \$160 million over the six years—

this is the important point—

This will give a total of around \$235 million to above-rail in the six years to 2005-06. As part of the changes to above-rail payments, existing FreightCorp services on grain branch lines will be guaranteed under a contract with the new owner through to 2005-06.

I understand that New South Wales grain growers and representatives of Graincorp and the Australian Wheat Board met with the chief of staff of Treasury last Friday. Indeed, I understand that the Treasurer was in the room for part of the time. The chief of staff, in front of the Treasurer, would not give a guarantee that those above-rail subsidies would continue. In answer to the questions I referred to earlier, neither the Treasurer nor the Minister supported the statement made by the Treasurer on 27 June this year. I have a simple question for the Minister and the Premier: Will you or will you not stand by the commitments you made to the New South Wales grain industry that the above-rail funding of \$235 million will be maintained in the six years to 2005-06? It is a clear yes or no answer.

FreightCorp has already increased by \$30 a tonne the price of grain cartage on the Coonamble branch line. To put it simply, if the subsidies are removed there will barely be a branch line operating in New South Wales by 2005. If this is some plot to see the closure of branch lines across the State, it will work unless that subsidy, as promised to the industry and to the Parliament on 27 June, is put into place. I would like to think that the Government may respond. I intend to raise this matter in another forum today, and I intend to seek a meeting with the Treasurer. The matter is urgent because we are just coming into the harvest. There is considerable concern in the grain industry about the cost imposition. Will the Government back off from its word, or will it support its statement? If the Government supports its statement of 27 June, the agreement it made with the industry, then it will have my support and that of the industry. However, if the Government does not support the statement, at least it should be honest and not hide behind a rather vague staff statement. This is not a complex question at all. Either the Government is prepared to stick to its commitment or else it will welsh.

NORTH COAST SUGAR MILL INDUSTRIAL DISPUTE

Mr NEWELL (Tweed) [11.03 a.m.]: In response to the speech made by the honourable member for Lachlan, I am sure that Country Labor has already taken up the initiative. I ask the honourable member to consider the role of the Australian Wheat Board in the issue he outlined this morning. I shall outline to the House a situation in my electorate that is causing a great deal of concern to workers in the sugar industry, which is a primary industry, at present. I refer to the situation pertaining to three sugar mills on the North Coast: the mill at Condong in my electorate of Tweed, the mill at Harwood in the Ballina electorate and the mill at Broadwater in the Clarence electorate. I understand that the workers at those three mills and at the sugar refinery in Harwood have been locked out of their workplaces by the management of the New South Wales sugar industry. This has led to sugar cane, which must be crushed within 24 hours of being picked, being left in the field to rot. That is a cost to the farmers and to the North Coast economy.

An impasse has arisen because of management's inability to negotiate with the workers an enterprise agreement for the next three years. The present agreement is due to expire at the end of this year. Management made certain offers which the workers indicated for several months were unacceptable. They have been attempting to negotiate conditions. Amongst them was the offer of a pay rise of some 8.5 per cent over three years, which I understand is slightly less than the consumer price index is expected to be over the same period. Management also wants to change a gentleman's agreement with the workers that has existed for a number of years. The agreement relates to employees in the southern mills working on public holidays, particularly Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

In the past management has been able to round up enough volunteers to keep the mills operating during the holiday period, but it now wants to make it compulsory for employees to work during the holidays. That is not acceptable to the workers; they consider it unnecessary to make it compulsory. I understand that those two contentious issues have led to the impasse and the lockout. This is the biggest industrial relations dispute in New South Wales this year. It involves some 350 workers at the mills, cane cutters, drivers, and the families of the workers who are all facing a very bleak Christmas if they are not allowed to return to work. The sugar industry on the North Coast is worth in excess of \$50 million. By and large, it is the largest single primary industry on the North Coast and it contributes substantially to the North Coast economy.

Over the years the sugar industry has received considerable support from State Labor governments. For example, when CSR Ltd walked away from the New South Wales industry and was prepared to let it go to the dogs the New South Wales Government stepped in with financial assistance to ensure that a refinery was established. In addition, the New South Wales Government stepped in when the National Party wanted to build a tollway through the major industries in the area. Farmers came to me—I was the then Federal Labor member for Richmond on the North Coast—and asked for my support against the tollway. Labor governments negotiated with cane farmers to ensure that the tollway was not built through the cane fields. The Labor Government has also contributed money to the new and exciting project of cogeneration of electricity by burning cane waste. The New South Wales Labor Government has indicated its support for the industry in the past.

FLYING FOX PLAGUE

Mr ROZZOLI (Hawkesbury) [11.08 a.m.]: I raise a matter of great concern to farmers in my area. It will be a great challenge to Country Labor if it wants to get its teeth into something worthwhile. I draw the attention of the House to the current situation of flying foxes in the Hawkesbury area and areas far beyond. This year flying foxes are in plague proportions. Contrary to the findings of the Scientific Committee, which has listed flying foxes as a threatened and endangered species, there is no indication that there is any threat or danger to the species in my area—indeed, they are flourishing. It is not uncommon for farmers to lose up to \$10,000 a night from damage inflicted to their crops by flying foxes.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service has given permission for farmers to shoot 50 flying foxes per season. That is an absolute joke. It is important that the Government reconsider this matter. However, to give credit where it is due, I have spoken to the Minister for the Environment, who has agreed to undertake a quick investigation to see what relief can be given to farmers and I acknowledge his assistance in that regard. Unfortunately, a species is regarded as threatened and endangered across the whole of the State and no differentiation is made between different areas. It is quite clear from the report of the Scientific Committee on flying foxes that any threat to the species anywhere in the State is caused by loss of habitat, not by farmers or others shooting them. The numbers per year disposed of in that way are quite minimal.

As with all species, whether fauna or flora, the greatest cause of destruction of habitat is development. Indeed, worldwide it has been noted that draining of important wetlands or forest habitats that are feeding areas for birds or staging areas for migratory birds has the capacity to wipe out millions of birds with far greater effectiveness than all the hunters of the world put together. I am not here to provide a brief for shooters, but I make the point that this matter should be put into perspective. It is essential that the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Scientific Committee re-examine this problem as a matter of urgency. Crop losses to stone fruit growers, in particular, are enormous at this time of the year. Farmers are already burdened with tremendous costs. Those of us who enjoy the fruits of their labours—in a literal sense—should remember that it is only available because of the hard work of those farmers. Magnificent produce is available to the citizens of this State.

During the peak season farmers work very long hours. They incur enormous costs in relation to maintaining their properties and levels of production, and they make huge investment in new stock varieties, machinery, irrigation, fertilisers, sprays and all the items necessary to produce a good product. Provided that farmers receive a reasonable return they will continue to farm. However, at present we are driving farmers off the land; we must help them in their desperate plight. It is essential that commonsense prevails, that a true evaluation of the numbers of fly fox species in New South Wales is carried out and that an assessment is made of the reasons for any diminution in species so that proper measures can be taken to control this plague.

BOTANY BAY CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

Mr THOMPSON (Rockdale) [11.13 a.m.]: I wish to talk about a matter that is crucially important to the people of my electorate. The electorate of Rockdale encompasses nearly all of Botany Bay and the lower reaches of the Cooks and Georges rivers. In recent years Botany Bay and its catchment have been subject to the

greatest scrutiny ever. Local councils around the bay—including Rockdale, Sutherland, Kogarah, Randwick, Botany and Hurstville—commissioned the "State of the Bay" report, which was published in July 1998. The report was followed up by the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils [SSROC], which commissioned a study and report entitled "The Botany Bay Program", headed by Jim Colman. SSROC has a strong track record in raising awareness of the bay's condition and related issues.

In October 1999 the Healthy Rivers Commission, under Dr Peter Crawford, issued a discussion paper calling for an inquiry into the Georges River-Botany Bay system. This was the first formal step in the commission's independent public inquiry into the health of the Georges River-Botany Bay system. The Healthy Rivers Commission issued a draft report 12 months later, and yesterday the final report was released by the Government. At the same time the Minister for the Environment, the Hon. Bob Debus, announced the Government's response to that report. I am pleased that the Government has decided to implement a single co-ordinated management plan for the Botany Bay catchment. This catchment takes in the Georges, Cooks and Woronora rivers, and the catchment area is the most populous in the State, with more than 1.2 million residents.

All these studies provide ample evidence that the Botany Bay region has suffered historically because of unco-ordinated ad hoc planning and management across all three levels of government. It has been under sustained pressure since the earliest days of white settlement and the legacy of the past is there for all to see. Quite frankly, some of it is pretty awful. The most dramatic changes and impositions on the bay have occurred over the past 50 years or so. The oil refinery at Kurnell on the southern side of the bay is something that, with the benefit of hindsight and a modicum of environmental and historical sensitivity, one would not locate on the shores of the bay, directly on the spot where in 1770 Cook and his crew were first confronted by Aborigines.

On the northern side of the bay are the petro-chemical works and storage tanks, together with the vast container handling facility of Port Botany. On the western rim of the bay is Sydney (Kingsford Smith) Airport, with its parallel runways extending into the bay. Each of these facilities has required extensive dredging over the years. Dredging was necessary to deepen the shipping lanes for the refinery and port. Botany Bay is naturally quite shallow, so to allow modern tankers and container ships to safely enter the bay a considerable amount of dredging has been carried out over the years. The dredging required for the runways was truly massive and, when taken in conjunction with the port and oil terminal dredging, the effect on the bay has been dramatic. In addition, there was considerable reclamation of parts of the bay associated with the port development.

Since white settlement the shoreline of Botany Bay has grown by 20 per cent, and more than 50 per cent of the bay's edge has been developed. Some of the byproducts of the dredging have been, and continue to be, extensive damage to the seabed and seagrasses. This has affected marine life in dramatic fashion. The bay's hydrology has been adversely affected, particularly its currents, and erosion of the beachfront is currently a major issue. The man-made changes and their effects have endangered the ecology of the area. At last, reform and relief appear to be in sight. Yesterday the ABC news reported the Minister's announcement in this way:

Botany Bay is to get a new lease on life.

The New South Wales Government has unveiled a new plan of management for the Bay.

More than four months ago, the Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils released a report into Botany Bay calling for urgent changes to the way the area is managed.

The waterway is under the jurisdiction of 42 federal, state and local governments as well as independent agencies.

Around 1.2 million people live around the Bay and its catchment - the Georges, Cooks and Woronora rivers.

The State Government has now decided to set up a committee to coordinate the management of the entire area, balancing the interests of developers, industry, residents and the environment.

A number of specific initiatives have also been approved to protect environmentally sensitive parts of the waterway.

That is good news not only for the people of the Rockdale electorate who have an obvious vested interest in the bay's welfare but also for the people of New South Wales and Australia. Action is being taken to protect a sensitive area and to enhance the most significant historical part of Australia.

TRESILLIAN FAMILY CARE CENTRES

Mr COLLINS (Willoughby) [11.18 a.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House a book entitled *How to Stay Sane in Your Baby's First Year*, which was launched in its revised edition in my electorate at 10.30 this

morning. While I regret that the sitting of this Parliament prevented me from attending the book launch, it gives me an opportunity to place on record, I am sure on behalf of all members of Parliament, appreciation of the Tresillian Family Care Centres for the work that they undertake, especially for new families. *How to Stay Sane in Your Baby's First Year* is produced by Simon and Schuster Australia. The book has been around for a while and is produced in its revised edition. It is an excellent text, which I can highly recommend to new families.

My exposure to the Tresillian movement came in a very dramatic form in 1988 when, as the father of a new child—one John Collins—some three weeks before the 1988 election, it became apparent to my wife, Dominique, and I that we needed all the help we could get. Tresillian has one of its centres in my electorate of Willoughby, which is where the revised edition of the book was being launched this morning. The Tresillian Family Care Centres were able to provide wonderful assistance to us as new parents, as they have been able to provide assistance to tens of thousands of parents in this State.

Some people are unaware of the work of the Tresillian centres and what they can do for new families, but it behoves people to understand precisely what Tresillian centres can offer and support those centres where they exist. My view is that we simply cannot have enough Tresillian centres in New South Wales. I was motivated by that thought while I was Minister for Health from 1988—approximately three weeks after the birth of my son, John—until 1991. I gave the Tresillian centres whatever assistance I could as the then Minister. I am sure that successive Ministers for Health, including the current Minister, would be eager to support the Tresillian centres in the same manner as I support them this morning.

In the lead-up to the 1998 election I, as the shadow Minister for Health, visited the Nepean Hospital. It struck me that new families in western Sydney, which is the epicentre of young families in New South Wales, needed assistance. On a visit to the Nepean Hospital in 1987 I discovered that it had only one ultrasound machine yet the hospital recorded more than 3,000 births per year. I instantly recognised the need to upgrade the Nepean Hospital to provide far greater assistance for young families. During my term as the Minister for Health I was able to establish within that hospital a neonatal intensive care unit and, within the grounds of the Nepean Hospital, a Tresillian Family Care Centre to serve the people of western Sydney. I am sure that during the 10 years that the Tresillian centre has been open many thousands of western Sydney families have been assisted by the centre, and would swear by the assistance that they have been given. The movement is extremely cost-effective, and brings immediate and practical benefits to young families.

The Tresillian centres should proliferate throughout the State wherever there are major birth centres—such as the Nepean Hospital—and at major teaching hospitals, which often include birth centres and neonatal intensive care units. I believe that Tresillian Family Care Centres help to make up an inventory of services that assist young families in a most practical way. In my case, my young son would not sleep at night and my wife and I needed to get on top of that issue. The Tresillian centres stepped in to provide immediate and practical assistance. I take this opportunity to commend to the House the fine efforts of the Tresillian movement. I salute the Tresillian Family Care Centres for their efforts.

WALLSEND PROPERTY DAMAGE CLAIMS

Mr MILLS (Wallsend) [11.23 a.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House a grave injustice that is being suffered by a small group of my constituents who live on top of cuttings above State Highway 23 on its western side in Jesmond and Shortland. Many pre-existing dwellings and domestic structures suffered damage after the highway was constructed between 1991 and 1993. Some claims for repair of damage have been settled by Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] insurers, but other claims have not been settled. It is this lack of settlement after seven years—much too long—that is the subject of my accusation of injustice and unfairness. I refer specifically to units at No. 6 Harvard Close, Jesmond, and a parallel case farther north on Sandgate Road, Shortland.

When the RTA constructs a road any third party damage is covered by insurance. The insurer is the Treasury Managed Fund, which takes advice from consulting engineers, loss assessors and builders. In most cases the system works to the reasonable satisfaction of adversely affected parties who make claims for repair of damage. However, whenever many people are adversely affected, inevitably there are some difficult cases. Usually there is a dispute or disagreement between consulting experts. In these cases, the system does not work well, and the affected parties suffer lengthy delays and consequent injustice. It seems to me that the fault lies in the kind of public service structure we inherited from Westminster democracy. The Government makes the policy decision, the implementation is carried out, and problems are solved by an impartial public service which takes expert advice. Difficult details are at long arm's length from the politicians and senior public servants. Sir Humphrey Appleby described aspects of the system in the *Yes Minister* television series.

It is my opinion that a minor change needs to be made to the structure of the RTA. There should be a complaints manager whose duty it is to ensure that the difficult cases are followed through to completion and to act as a champion for people whose cases at present linger on into injustice. Such an officer would treat my constituents with the respect they deserve, but respect is what they do not get from the arm's length disputing experts and the Treasury Managed Fund behaving like Scrooge. Today I request the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads and the Treasurer to appoint such a champion for my affected constituents to work within the system. It should not yet be necessary to use an external mediator of the likes of Sir Laurence Street. Like Sir Humphrey says, the system is not benign. There is a divide and conquer approach in existence.

Some people affected apparently arbitrarily will seem to be heard favourably and will seem to have their problems fixed. For example, a two-storey block of units at No. 8 Harvard Close has been repaired, has been underpinned with new foundations, and has had its damaged outer brick shell taken down and replaced. Yet next door at No. 6 similar extensive repairs cannot be achieved seven years after the claims were first made. The delay has caused owners and owner/occupiers to be trapped. They are suffering economic loss. The delay is wearing them down. They cannot get on with their lives. They cannot sell their properties until repairs are done, so they cannot afford to buy another property. Their treatment consequently is unfair and unjust. When the then member for Waratah, John Price, raised the matter of repairs to the units at 6 Harvard Close, Jesmond in this House on 18 September 1996, five years ago, the Minister then at the table, the Minister for Community Services, who replied on behalf of the former Minister for Roads, said:

I am advised by the Minister that I can say that the matter should be resolved quickly.

Mr Price told the House in 1996:

Last weekend I inspected these units. In one case I found that the back wall of a unit rocked with the pressure of my hand on it ...

I inspected a couple of the units on Monday this week and the same back wall still rocks under the pressure of one's hand. I have made representations on behalf of many unit owners. I am in the middle of representations regarding unit 1, which is unoccupied and considered to be uninhabitable. Representations regarding unit 6 are ongoing. As recently as September this year the Parliamentary Secretary for Roads said that repairs had been delayed due to a lack of agreement regarding the scope of works and delay in securing quotations from builders willing to undertake the work. In response to representations regarding unit 2, in June last year the Minister replied:

... there was evidence that the cutting of the natural water table and the planting of black wattle trees in the construction of by-pass road known as State Highway 23, may have substantially affected the premises.

Account also had to be made of the fact that the sub-soil at the site comprises reactive clay which responds to changes in surface moisture and weather conditions.

I am advised that the trees were cut back a couple of years ago and that an underground irrigation system was installed to wet the ground and stop the tree roots drying out the soil under the units. Residents believe the irrigation system was not switched on. Craig and Anne Mitchell showed me around their unit, No. 3, on Monday. It has extensive damage, including large cracks, unattached bricks and so on. They need urgent help. These people need a champion inside the RTA and a sustainable solution.

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.28 a.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Wallsend for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. He is certainly his constituents' champion in this place, and I place on record my recognition of the hard work that he has done in relation to this matter. I also thank him for bringing his constituents' frustration to my personal attention. Regrettably, negotiations about compensation matters take place at arm's length from the Government.

However, I will discuss this case with the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads. I will take on board the honourable member's suggestion about appointing a complaints-style manager within the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA]. I think there is broad acknowledgment that bureaucracies are sometimes slow and we therefore require people who are outcome driven. I will ensure that the Minister is fully aware of the honourable member's suggestion and considers the practicalities of establishing such a position within the RTA. I assure the honourable member that we will examine these issues closely and try to come to a speedy conclusion.

MID NORTH COAST DENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr OAKESHOTT (Port Macquarie) [11.30 a.m.]: On 30 May 2001 the people of the mid North Coast reacted positively to an announcement in this place by the Minister for Health and to a media statement entitled

"Private Dentists to Treat Extra Patients". This was a potential lifeline for residents on the mid North Coast, where waiting times extend to five and seven years for preventive dental and denture work in the public health sector. However, almost six months later, and despite the allocation of about \$380,000 in growth funding for dental services on the mid North Coast this financial year—that money is very welcome—patients are still waiting to receive dental treatment. In fact, there is growing concern that the voucher system and the Oral Health Fee for Service Scheme are nothing more than smoke and mirrors.

Dental services may be divided into pain management, preventive work and denture work. Pain management is being dealt with adequately—anyone in pain receives treatment within two weeks. Unfortunately, the voucher system is targeted directly at those who are not treated within that two-week period, so few, if any, vouchers have been issued in the past six months. Preventive dental and denture work are the main problems for public dental health on the mid North Coast and throughout the State as a whole, and that situation is not being addressed by the Oral Health Fee for Service Scheme, the voucher scheme or the State Government, which is responsible for public dental health in New South Wales.

The hallmark of this Government has been a tendency to hide behind non-existent Commonwealth dental health schemes and to blame others. However, some people in this State may not receive any public dental health treatment because of the growing waiting list for pain management and the declining number of dentists performing public health work. There is an oral health crisis in New South Wales, particularly in areas such as the mid North Coast and the North Coast, where there is a high retiree population who are in need of preventive dental work. If that work can be done as quickly as possible, it will prevent the need for pain management and other emergency treatment down the track. Unfortunately, under the current scheme people receive treatment in the public dental health system only when pain kicks in.

I plead with the Minister and the Government, through the Parliamentary Secretary for Roads, to spend more money on public dental health in New South Wales and not to hide behind the voucher system and the Oral Health Fee for Service Scheme, which is doing nothing to address this problem. I have some case studies from the mid North Coast area. A lady at Wingham was told that she would have to wait six weeks simply for an assessment despite the fact that she had a painful toothache. Other patients have been told that the dental clinic is presently seeing only those people with swelling or those who have been in an accident. The state of the dental system on the mid North Coast is worsening. New South Wales Health has told staff that if they do not like the new system they should find a new job. If that is the way staff are treated and pressured by the New South Wales health regime, I fear for the future of the public dental health system. In a letter to me the chief executive officer of the area health service said:

The lists still exist but no people from the lists are currently being seen due to the pressure of seeing urgent cases, which fully occupies clinic staff time.

The voucher system is not working because the pain management regime, which seeks to assess patients within two weeks, was already in place. The New South Wales Government and the Minister for Health must ensure that urgent work is done in the preventive and denture areas of dental health because waiting lists for such work are beginning to grow—and even extend to seven years in some areas.

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.35 a.m.]: The honourable member for Port Macquarie has a hide to come into the Chamber today and call on the Government to spend more money. It is simply astounding. His mates in Canberra slashed the guts out of the Commonwealth dental program by cutting it by more than \$30 million in the 1996 budget. The honourable member's electorate is not the only area where dental health clinics are facing delays because his mates control the purse strings too tightly. The honourable member claims that the New South Wales Government should simply spend more money. I suggest that he get on the telephone to his newly elected mates who are responsible for funding the program and tell them that he wants more money for his area. When he has made that call he will have some integrity and can return to the House to talk about the dental program.

DUNDAS PUBLIC SCHOOL AWARDS

Ms HARRISON (Parramatta) [11.36 a.m.]: I wish to congratulate Dundas Public School, a primary school that was included in my electorate following the redistribution prior to the 1999 State election. I am pleased that the school is in my electorate because it is a terrific little school, and I have been delighted to have an association with it over the past few years. The teachers, the students and the parents have a terrific school spirit and are extremely hard-working. In particular, I congratulate Dundas Public School on an awards scheme that was instigated in about 1994 whereby the highest award a student can win is a banner.

Under the scheme, a student must win 10 teacher awards to receive a gold ribbon. The student must then win five gold ribbons to receive a gold Dundas certificate. A student who receives five gold certificates is then awarded one banner. In other words, in order for a student to win a banner he or she would have to receive more than 250 separate awards. I am pleased that the school has maintained its standards for this award. The award is very hard to win, and few students have done so. Those who have won it have achieved particularly highly, and their parents should be very proud of them.

The first student to be awarded a banner was Chantal Milauro, who received the award in 1999 when she was in year 6. When Chantal was presented with her banner, I thought she might be the only student to win the award for a number of years. However, the following year a banner was awarded to Mitchell Senior, who was only in year 4. So Mitchell had achieved 250 awards in only a few years, which was a great credit to him. It is very exciting for the school community. This year three students received a banner. They are Hayden Valle, who is in year 6, Catherine Allen, who is in year 5, and James Silbey, who is also in year 6. I extend my personal congratulations to each of those students on a job well done.

When students win this award a special ceremony is held at the school. Following the ceremony, the students and their parents are treated to a morning tea with the principal and the deputy principal. I congratulate the principal of the school, Toni Simms, and the deputy principal, Laurie Van Ryn, on instigating the awards scheme, following it through so diligently, and making it so important for the children who win the award. The children were extremely proud on the day, as were their parents, and rightly so. I congratulate each of those families on their achievements in helping their children to win this award.

At the morning tea that was held following this year's award presentations, it was interesting to observe that the students who won awards are also talented in other areas. One of the boys is a dancer, the other is a swimmer, and the young lady plays a musical instrument. The awards are not given for students who are potentially bright or particularly good at sport. They are given across the board, and that was reflected in the three students who attended the morning tea. The awards are given for improved school work, projects, good behaviour, citizenship and sporting achievement. On every occasion on which I have presented these awards at the school I have been particularly impressed with the level of the school spirit. I do not think any other school I visit sings the national anthem and its school song as robustly and with as much obvious enjoyment.

The parents are extremely involved with their children. Every time an election is held the school holds a fete as a major fundraiser. I know that the school community particularly hated politicians when three elections were held in the one year. This year the school also held a fete on the day of the election. Local members attend many fetes, but the fetes held at Dundas Public School are particularly well patronised and the parents put in an enormous amount of work, and I congratulate them on their involvement. At the morning tea one of the parents—I believe it was Hayden's father—told me that as part of the fete to be held on the day of the Federal election the school was going to have a dunking pool.

The deputy principal, Laurie Van Ryn, who is a really good sport, had said he would sit on the dunking machine, people would pay their \$2, hit the target, and the deputy principal would fall into the water. He challenged me to do the same. So I left my polling booth, where I was handing out how-to-vote cards for our local Labor candidate, and went to the fete and became a celebrity dunkee. I place on record my appreciation to the deputy principal, Laurie Van Ryn, who was in charge of amusement on that day, for cheating extensively when I was sitting on the dunking chair. I took notice of how close everyone was allowed to stand when I was on the chair. I was dunked again and again. I assure Laurie that that event will go down in history. I will remember it, and I am sure there will come a time when I can get even with him.

THE HILLS ELECTORATE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Mr RICHARDSON (The Hills) [11.41 a.m.]: I wish to champion the cause of improved public transport for my electorate. The Hills is one of only two electorates in the whole of Sydney that has no government-run public transport whatsoever, even though it is the most populous electorate in the State, with explosive growth in the western part of the electorate. Our lifeline with the city is the Westbus Hills-city express bus service, which was launched under the Fahey Government and now carries more than 1.3 million passenger a year. In the recent past the service has been a victim of its own success, running into a storm of criticism because of Westbus' inability to keep up with passenger demand.

Last week the Minister for Transport said that the proposed Lane Cove tunnel under Epping Road would provide two new bus lanes connecting the M2 to the Warringah Expressway. That announcement clearly

showed his understanding of the need for bus priority if buses are to keep to schedule. If buses have to share the roads with private vehicles, they will be subject to the same congestion and hold-ups as those other vehicles. The greatest bottleneck on The Hills-city express bus route occurs on the M2 between Beecroft Road, at the entrance to the tunnel, and Epping Road. The dedicated bus lanes end at Beecroft Road, and during the morning peak hour traffic is often banked back for more than a kilometre from the tollgates to the tunnel. In these circumstances it is impossible for bus drivers to keep to the timetable.

The solution to the problem is very straightforward and inexpensive. The breakdown lanes between this point and Epping Road should be made into peak hour bus-only lanes. It is a simple and cost-effective way to improve the bus service. I have written to the Minister about this matter but, through the Parliamentary Secretary for Roads, he has rejected my suggestion. About 24 cyclists ride along those breakdown lanes during peak hour. The Minister believes that those cyclists are more important than the thousands of commuters who use the bus service daily. One bus can carry more than twice the total number of cyclists who use those breakdown lanes to get to work, and Westbus is about to put on articulated buses that can carry up to 80 seated passengers.

The M2 is not just a road, it is a public transport facility—perhaps the most underutilised public transport facility in Sydney. Best of all, unlike the Minister's pie-in-the-sky railway lines and the proposed Lane Cove tunnel, it is already established. I again ask the Minister to examine this proposal, which could deliver improved public transport for my electorate next week if the Government so wished. Other improvements could be made to direct bus services from The Hills to the city. One suggestion, which was made by one of my constituents, is that, as well as buses running south-west from Castle Hill down Old Northern Road to Baulkham Hills, Windsor Road and the M2, buses could also run south-east along Castle Hill Road through the Thompsons Comer underpass onto Pennant Hills Road and the M2.

Not only would this route be marginally quicker, but stops along Castle Hill Road would allow it to service Cherrybrook. Cherrybrook has its own particular set of problems. It is landlocked, the only way in and out is via New Line Road, and in the mornings there are horrendous traffic jams along Boundary Road going to Pennant Hills railway station. The proposal I have put forward presents a huge opportunity to get some of those cars off the road and get commuters onto public transport. But there is more to this proposal than simply buying a couple of buses and putting them into service. The route goes through Glenorie Bus Company's contract area. It may be that that company would have to run the service, or perhaps it could be operated as a joint venture between Westbus and Glenorie Bus Company.

Glenorie Bus Company does not believe the service would be viable unless each bus could make two return trips during peak hour, which is why improved bus priority along the M2 is so important. I urge the Minister to consider a further improvement: a direct bus-only connection from West Pennant Hills valley to the M2. With appropriate bus priority measures in place into town, such a connection could mean that commuters could get from Castle Hill to Wynyard in about 45 minutes, compared with the current one hour to one hour and 10 minutes.

These are extremely cost-effective public transport improvements that can be provided in a comparatively short time. Taken collectively, they have the potential to increase exponentially the number of people using public transport to commute to work. All it requires is a commitment by the Minister to make it happen. Last week the Minister described the proposed Lane Cove tunnel as "a big win for public transport". Why not make it an even bigger win, Minister? The package of measures I have proposed has the potential to make The Hills one of the most accessible parts of Sydney by public transport, even in the absence of a dedicated government-run service. Best of all, it is achievable, affordable and deliverable.

WERRINGTON ATHLETICS TRACK

Mr ANDERSON (Londonderry) [11.46 a.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House an event that took place in my electorate last Sunday. The disappointment of Saturday's Federal election results was quickly overcome when I attended the opening of a new athletics track at Werrington. The opening of the track was the culmination of co-operation and participation by a considerable number of people from different groups who co-operated to produce a proposal that has been an outstanding success for our community. Harold Corr Reserve in Werrington is a sporting facility that has been available to the community for many years. A number of groups compete for the use of this facility. We got them to sit down and work out a plan of management for its use over the next few years. The plan is a \$250,000 investment.

The local soccer association, Werrington Little Athletics Association, Penrith Gaels Gaelic Football Club and Penrith Gaels Irish Dancing and Cultural Group will use this sporting facility, which has been

available for many years but certainly needed to be upgraded. Penrith City Council, to its great credit, worked with the community by facilitating the meeting so that everyone could get together to put in a bid to use the facility and outline what upgrading work was needed and how that would be funded. Penrith council supplied the greater bulk of the funds by providing, initially, an amount of \$209,000.

This Government, to its credit, through the Minister for Sport and Recreation, provided a grant of \$45,000. The Penrith Gaels sporting and cultural groups contributed approximately \$90,000 and, through the work-in-kind program that it proposed, will take responsibility for building the amenities and other facilities such as outdoor seating areas and covered awnings. With all of the participants getting together we have achieved something much sooner than we had ever hoped. Last Sunday was the first stage of the development of Harold Corr Reserve. The council had installed a running track for Little As, which was used for the first time on Sunday and was an outstanding success. All competitors from visiting clubs commented on the high quality of this track and said that we were lucky to have such facilities in our area.

Only a week ago I spoke about the excellent Werrington Lake area, which is a godsend to the people within our community. This new athletics facility is second to none in Western Sydney, perhaps in all of Sydney. I thank again Penrith council, and in particular Raphael Collins, manager of parks, gardens and reserves, who put a great deal of his time and effort into making this proposal a success. The Penrith Gaels clubs and Little Athletics must be thanked for their contributions because if they had not followed through on their commitment of 18 months ago it would not have succeeded. We are now looking forward to the second and third stages of the development, which will assist many other sporting groups within our community to participate at all levels of sport at a facility that can only be described as outstanding. Again I offer my congratulations to everyone and to the Minister for Sport and Recreation on his contribution to making this a reality sooner than we expected.

COBBITTY PUBLIC SCHOOL NATIONAL ANZAC DAY COMPETITION AWARD

Dr KERNOHAN (Camden) [11.51 a.m.]: On Monday 4 November at 3.00 p.m. a very special assembly was held at Cobbitty Public School: it was for the presentation ceremony of awards for the National Anzac Day Competition run by the Department of Veterans' Affairs and the History Teachers Association. Cobbitty primary school's entry, a book entitled *Child Anzacs*, won the New South Wales State award of a certificate and a \$500 cheque, presented by Senator Marise Payne. Moreover, *Child Anzacs* was the runner-up in the national competition and received a framed poster from Mrs Cameron, President of the History Teachers Association. Parents, the Deputy Mayor of Camden Council, Councillor Shirley Winn, Federal candidates for Macarthur, Pat Farmer and Meg Oates, and I were honoured to attend the ceremony.

To appreciate the magnificence of the effort of this small country school with its 225 pupils it must be understood that this competition was open to every school in Australia—State and private, primary and secondary. The irony was that *Child Anzacs* was not prepared with the competition in mind. Susan and Vaughan McInnes decided to take their Cobbitty schoolchildren, Lachlan, Kelsey and Sian, to France for the traditional Anzac Day service at Villers-Bretonneux, which this year was held on 28 April. The children's great grandfather, private Albert McFarlane, was a stretcher bearer at Villers-Bretonneux in World War I. His brother Joseph, the children's great-great-uncle, also fought in France.

The McInneses suggested to Craig Angel, Cobbitty school principal, that the schoolchildren produce a book on the men from Cobbitty who fought in France during World War I with a view to presenting it to the Mayor of Villers-Bretonneux, Dr Lelieur, during the Anzac Day ceremony. The book included not only details of Cobbitty men who had attended the school but also of relatives of current staff. It was discovered that other Cobbitty schoolchildren were direct descendants of those who had fought at Villers-Bretonneux and other areas of France. Simple family histories were given of each Cobbitty soldier on his return from France and the schoolchildren indicated their feelings on what Anzac Day really meant to them.

The staff and children at Cobbitty school were so enthused that a magnificent book was created. The book included greetings to the Mayor of Villers-Bretonneux from the then Camden mayor, Eva Campbell, and me. When the Anzac Day competition invited entries Mr Angel thought, and rightly so, that *Child Anzacs* would be a good entry. I do not believe that anyone involved in its production would have thought it could win the statewide competition, let alone be runner-up in Australia. Indeed, it was a magnificent effort from this little country school in which everybody—teachers, children and parents—was involved. I congratulate them all on putting this magnificent publication together.

MANLY HIGH-SPEED FERRY SERVICES

Mr BARR (Manly) [11.56 a.m.]: Last year there was considerable turmoil with high-speed ferry services on the Manly to Circular Quay route. The unreliability of JetCats and the disastrous introduction and withdrawal of the SuperCats have left the people of Manly not much further ahead than they were a year ago. At present we have three 10-year-old JetCats providing the fast ferry service between Manly and the city. Those vessels are not only notoriously unreliable but also expensive to run and poor environmental performers. All of this is provided for a premium fare despite the fact that with the operation of the new SuperCats many other parts of the harbour now have access to a high-speed service at a standard price.

The Minister has made commitment to refurbish the JetCats with new engines to extend their operational life. That might improve the situation in the short to medium term, but in the long term there is still a big question mark over this vital service. The JetCats, even with new engines, are a five-year proposition—they may perhaps last a little longer. Now is the time for the Government to seek out new contracts for a fast ferry that can handle the unique conditions of the Manly run. Manly commuters need certainty on this matter. I note the Opposition has raised this issue several times but has not offered a solution. If it achieves government, I fear it will not invest in new fast ferries for Manly because it wants to privatise the ferry service. The shadow Minister for Transport made that clear at the Shore Regional Organisation of Councils transport conference earlier this year, and I challenge him to repeat that intention in Parliament.

We have all seen again and again that the privatisation of public transport is highly problematic. Invariably fares go up, services go down and the less profitable routes are cut out completely unless they are propped up with government subsidies. One has only to look at Sydney's private bus services or the debacle of the airport rail link to see that. There is no reason that the public should feel confident about a privatised ferry service. This is not a ringing endorsement of Sydney Ferries; it has severe shortcomings and its public relations are largely modelled on the 1950s. We pay taxes so that we can have improved amenities, including safe and effective public transport, which is cross-subsidised to provide services to those who need them. It is the responsibility of this Government to provide a viable replacement for the JetCats so that the long-term future of the Manly high-speed run is assured.

In the short term, faced with temperamental vessels, Sydney Ferries is looking for some way to reduce the wear and tear on the JetCats. It has announced that it intends to do that by replacing JetCats with Freshwater class ferries, the large Manly ferries, during the evenings. The idea is to extend the life of the JetCats as a stopgap measure. Currently, passengers travelling between Manly and Circular Quay after about 7.00 p.m. can catch a JetCat for the price of a ferry. That service is greatly valued by the many commuters who travel between the city and Manly after 7.00 p.m. Under the Sydney Ferries proposal the dual JetCat and Freshwater service would end at 7.00 p.m., with only the Freshwater ferries continuing into the night. If that proposal is adopted the travelling time of late-night commuters will be increased. That inconvenience has to be balanced against the need to extend the life of the JetCats while a long-term solution is being reached.

While the travelling public may accept in principle the notion of using Freshwater ferries outside peak commuter times so that the useful life of the JetCats may be prolonged, stopping fast services at 7.00 p.m. in peak commuter times is simply too early. In today's employment market it is more and more common for people to work longer and later hours, in which case they may well return home after 7.00 p.m. The JetCat commuter service must extend beyond 7.00 p.m. Sydney Ferries is consulting on this proposal by asking people to phone 131 500 and register their opinion in an ongoing poll.

That may be a useful technique for some decisions, but I do not believe a phone poll alone is adequate for a decision of this sort. I would like to see a combined survey of late-night commuters on the JetCats and ferries and bus passengers who might otherwise use the ferries, and an examination of patronage levels and the ticketing implications. I have publicised this proposal through my electronic Ferries Feedback Forum, and will hold a public meeting to give people a chance to respond. This issue will not be resolved until there is a long-term solution to replace the JetCats and to give Manly a guaranteed long-term high-speed all-hours ferry service.

Private members' statements noted.

Pursuant to resolution business interrupted.

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

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 31 May.

Mr HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [12.00 p.m.]: The Government has already heard some of the Opposition's concerns about what it has done to the Community Services Commission. On each of the two previous occasions I have spoken in relation to this bill the debate has had to be adjourned. I remind the House, and other honourable members who may not be as familiar with this matter as I am, of what has happened. In 1993 the Community Services Commission was established. It was an initiative of the Liberal and National parties. There had been a long history of concern about the activities of the Department of Community Services [DOCS] in the delivery of services, particularly to children who needed protection and assistance. The Coalition believed it was necessary to establish an independent watchdog.

The Community Services Commission was designed to ensure that people who were dissatisfied with or concerned about the Department of Community Services would have somewhere to go, beyond government, to have the process reviewed independently. Between 1993 and October 1999 the Community Services Commission did an amazing amount of work. Although it has still done a lot of work since October 1999 it has had its teeth pulled. Since that time people who have been concerned about the delivery by the Department of Community Services of children's protection services have had a limited capacity to seek an independent review. The Community Services Commission received a letter from the Minister for Community Services which referred to a review conducted by the Law Reform Commission. That review found that there were technical difficulties with the legislation that set up the Community Services Commission.

The law reform commissioner told the Government that a review of the legislation was needed to ensure that the commission had the appropriate powers to do what everyone wanted it to do, and to do what it had been doing for the preceding six years. The Government sat on the Law Reform Commission report until approximately October 1999. In the 12 months following the receipt of the recommendations of the Law Reform Commission by the Government the Community Services Commission issued a number of reports under the direction of the commissioner, Robert Fitzgerald. Each of those reports was a valuable chart for the way forward for the Department of Community Services, particularly in relation to the protection of children.

Following those reports, the Government took the opportunity to seize on the prior recommendation of the Law Reform Commission and, instead of amending the original legislation which had been shown to be problematic, the Government wrote to Commissioner Fitzgerald and said that the commission could not continue to investigate particular cases—as it happens some of those cases were very serious—because it would be acting outside the powers it was given under the original legislation. The Government did to the Community Services Commission what it has done to so many other watchdogs, and it should be ashamed of that action. Earlier this week honourable members heard that the Auditor-General, Bob Sendt, released his latest report, which contained four headings under which no material appeared. It is significant that the Auditor-General said that the Government had deliberately limited his capacity to present details of matters that he should be allowed to present if he is to be an effective Auditor-General.

Unfortunately, the hallmark of the Carr Government is its total preoccupation with the manipulation or obfuscation of information. It has become so arrogant that it shuts down information that should be in the public arena—it does not matter whether it is about a little child dying or other broader issues. When major watchdogs such as the Auditor-General are critical of the Carr Government and when members of the Government who have some sense of what is right—unlike Mr Carr, who has no sense of what is right or wrong—are privately critical of the shutdown of information it is time for those members to push the issue in caucus. The Premier is not doing the right thing by the State.

The attitude of the Carr Government to the Community Services Commission is even more shameful. We are talking about little children dying and being abused, but there is no way to scrutinise what went wrong when those children die. I have spoken in this House previously about a number of cases, but I will remind the House particularly about one or two that the Community Services Commission was unable to continue investigating. The first is the case of Jessica Gallagher, a four-year-old girl from the Central Coast who died on 26 January last year. Last week Jessica's aunt, Gabriella Virtu, came to this House to express her frustration and concern that 20 months after Jessica died neither she nor Jessica's grandparents are any wiser as to how or why the DOCS ignored the number of reports to its Corrimal and Gosford offices.

William McGarrity, the alleged murderer, who had moved in with Jessica's mother, committed vile and atrocious acts upon that little girl before she died. Even to this day that horror has not been spoken of publicly. The vileness of his acts upon that little girl cry out for an investigation. Why was he not investigated properly by the various government agencies? The Department of Community Services team should have been at the forefront of the investigation. The mental health team, which was at Jessica's house only three days before her death, failed by not responding appropriately to the warnings they were given by Jessica's grandmother and her aunt. The police were there too, but they did nothing.

To make honourable members think about it when they go back into their party rooms and to caucus I will relate to the House some, not all, of the detail of the vile acts committed upon Jessica. She was boiled in a bath. Other atrocities were committed, which I will not detail. Ultimately, she was killed by a sword. Today the mother of that little girl still does not understand why she did not get help in her time of need. Neither Jessica's aunt nor grandmother knows why DOCS failed to respond to their reports. Last week in this House we saw an example of the need for the commission. Unfortunately, we cannot trust either the Government or, regrettably, the Minister to provide a transparent account of what went wrong. Last week when the Minister was asked a question about that case she replied that there had been five separate inquiries. That is a lie.

The Minister said the Community Services Commission had investigated the matter. The Community Services Commission tried to investigate the matter, but the Minister stopped it from doing so. She wrote to the commission and said it could not investigate such matters. The Ombudsman completed a formal type of review, which went nowhere and revealed nothing. The coroner did not intend to hold a hearing into the matter because Mr McGarrity was charged with murder. If a coroner's inquest is under way and a criminal charge is laid, the coroner quite properly stops the hearing so that the person who is to stand trial will not be prejudiced. As shadow Minister for Community Services I have discovered that that translates into not investigating cases that should be investigated.

The coroner has been good enough to respond to call from the Opposition and Jessica's family to hold a hearing. That hearing will commence tomorrow. I welcome that. I hope that decent members on both sides of the House welcome the fact that, finally, an opportunity will be provided for transparency. Jessica's family does not have the money to be represented at the hearing. At this stage the DOCS officers will be represented at the hearing by lawyers paid for by the Carr Government, police officers will be represented by lawyers paid for by the taxpayer, and the Department of Health will be represented by lawyers paid for by the taxpayer. It will be an interesting little party of three separate groups of lawyers.

The coroner, with his limited capacity, and the police officer assisting the coroner will have to conduct the inquiry. Unless we can find a group willing to represent Jessica's family, the family will remain unrepresented. The Opposition is doing its best to ensure that the family gets that assistance. The Government has offered the family no assistance whatsoever. If the Premier and the Minister for Community Services have one iota of decency left they should get on the phone today and offer legal aid to Jessica's family. They may believe that the coronial inquiry, which will lift the lid on what went wrong, is a negative for the Government. But so far as the community is concerned it will be a positive. If we can get to the bottom of what went wrong in Jessica's case, we can right those wrongs.

If we can rectify the problems we will not have the spectre we had two weeks ago of the Child Death Review Team reporting that 21 children died in New South Wales after some involvement with DOCS, and eight of them died while DOCS was directly supervising them. We need transparency; we need to lift the lid. I welcome tomorrow's coronial investigation. I wish the coroner the best of luck in trying to determine what went wrong. If he is successful he will be able to make substantive recommendations for the benefit of all children in New South Wales. Jessica is not the only little child who has died in horrific circumstances and whose family is still waiting for answers.

As I have stated on a number of occasions in this House, Tahlia Brockmann died three years ago last month. Her family is still waiting for answers. They are none the wiser as to why their cries for help to DOCS went unheard and unanswered. A trial was held in relation to her death. Unfortunately, it is not a matter that is currently before the coroner. The matter has not been resolved and there has been no closure for the family. Nothing has been said to the family about how or why DOCS failed, again, to respond. That little girl died in awful circumstances, allegedly as a result of peritonitis, but the coroner's report showed far more than that.

This would appear to be a case involving constant neglect, with Tahlia's aunt and other relatives trying to get help from the Department of Community Services. It is shameful that neither the Premier nor the Minister

for Community Services had the decency to initiate any serious investigation of this case. Rather, they curtailed the investigation. Tahlia Brockmann was yet another person whose case was being investigated by the Community Services Commission but the investigation was curtailed by the Government's actions.

Where are we in relation to the Community Services Commission? This bill, introduced by the Coalition, has the unanimous support of all of the Independents in the upper House, including the members of the Christian Democratic Party, the Greens, the Democrats and Pauline Hanson's One Nation. That is, everyone in the upper House apart from Government members feels that this bill is crucial. It seeks to reinstate to the Community Services Commission powers that had been taken from the commission by the Carr Government and the Minister for Community Services. The Minister, unfortunately, is into cover-up, not fix-up. This bill, in effect, will reinstate the fix-up powers of the commission; that is, to find out what the problem is and then tried to fix it.

I do not know whether the House is aware that the Carr Government currently has under way a review into a proposal to merge the Community Services Commission with the Office of the Ombudsman. The Government argues that its proposal will result in better scrutiny of the types of cases to which I have referred than has been brought to bear by the Committee Services Commission. That is probably right, because at the moment the Community Services Commission is a body without adequate teeth. However, a look at the way in which the Committee Services Commission functioned before its powers were pulled by the Minister makes it patently obvious that the Government is wrong in saying that the commission will be better scrutinised following its merger into the Office of the Ombudsman.

I do not question the capacity, talent and expertise within the Office of the Ombudsman to do certain review work regarding child deaths, but I seriously question its culture. I have seen correspondence from the Office of the Ombudsman regarding little children who have died and I know that the Office of the Ombudsman does not regard itself as having a personal advocacy role in the support of families. Rather, the Office of the Ombudsman says that it will look at systemic issues. It does not provide any answers or give any satisfaction to families who have lost little children. I say to the Government and to the House that not only will crossbench members in this House support this bill—which I expect will happen in this place—but Labor members who have some decency, and there are many of them, should be trying to get the Premier and the Minister to back away from an appalling step by the Carr Government.

This bill is the only hope, at this stage, for the reinstatement of the powers of the Community Services Commission to carry out the job that the community expects it will do. Of course, not all in the community know about the Community Services Commission. Those families lucky enough not to have had a young child die as a result of neglect or abuse, or lucky enough not to have had occasion to seek the help of DOCS, probably would not even know about the Community Services Commission. But one day, if a child in your family is seriously at risk or dies, you may seek the assistance of the DOCS. If you do, you may not get the assistance you need. You might get that assistance, because there are many excellent officers working in the department

Unfortunately, the system that currently operates, the way the department is run and its lack of resources are not conducive to the best outcomes for children. This was reflected in the child death review team report produced just two weeks ago, and as has been reflected many times in various reports of the Community Services Commission—reports which brought the commission under the unfortunate glare of the Government. Commissioner Robert Fitzgerald appears, at least publicly, to be supportive of the changes proposed by the bill. I do not know what the commissioner's private view is, but I do know that commission staff feel that the Government's merger proposal is the wrong action. I know that many within the child welfare sector believe that that is a wrong move. It is a good move for the Government to shut down scrutiny, but it is not a good move for children.

The Association of Child Welfare Agencies and the Council of Social Service of New South Wales [NCOSS] are finding it difficult to make overt public comment, essentially I believe because the Government has threatened and intimidated those organisations, in the same way that it has threatened and intimidated the Community Services Commission. The Government has commission staff believing that the Government proposal is their only hope of continuing to function in any form. They have been led to believe that if this merger with the Office of the Ombudsman does not go ahead the commission will be destroyed.

The media has failed in this matter. The Opposition has raised the issue on many occasions in this Parliament, yet the media—unless an incident involves a dead child—will not report what is being done by the Government. I call on the media to take an interest in this issue. I call on the media to support the families who

are crying out for help. I call on the media to support the Association of Child Welfare Agencies and NCOSS and those who would like to be able to speak up but are terrified that if they do their funding will be withdrawn or they will be excluded from consultation on future legislation. This proposal is a hallmark of a Government that has gone off the rails. The media provides the only opportunity to take up the call on behalf of those oppressed by the Government, and particularly on behalf of the children who are at risk. The media would then be doing a good job on behalf of the people of New South Wales.

I would be happy to speak from now until the next election to give more detail of my criticisms of the Government, because what it has done has increased the risk for children rather than improved services for children at risk. But other members of this Chamber have a right to raise matters relating to the bill. For that reason, I will now terminate my speech on this bill. I ask the Premier to rethink the Government's proposal. The Premier might like to play his political games, but he should not play games with the lives of children.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Moss.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES (BROTHELS—FLEXIBLE ZONING) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [12.28 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to introduce the bill. The bill has been drafted following considerable work by the former member for Tamworth, Mr Tony Windsor, who resigned as a member of this House and was subsequently elected to represent the Federal seat of New England. Of course, that denied him the opportunity to introduce the bill. I have undertaken responsibility for carriage of the bill. I pay credit to the former member for Tamworth for its drafting. The legislation has come about because of concerns that have been expressed in local communities about brothels generally, and about the lack of opportunity for communities to have their views heard. I will refer to some of the clauses in detail but, generally speaking, the bill merely seeks to allow councils the flexibility to establish brothel-free zones in local government areas.

In short, that is the purpose of the bill. There has been some debate, even this week, about brothels and the legislation that allows them to function, and also about initiation of corrective action when illegal brothels have been established. I commend the honourable member for Pittwater, the shadow Minister, for having introduced the Community Protection (Illegal Brothels) Bill, which I believe will complement this bill if both are passed by this House. I refer honourable members to the overview of the bill, which states that the object of the bill is to allow councils to establish brothel-free zones in local government areas. It further states that an occupier of premises in a brothel-free zone who uses the premises or allows the premises to be used for the purpose of a brothel will be guilty of an offence.

Pursuant to resolution business interrupted.

WILDERNESS AMENDMENT (PRIVATE PROPERTY RIGHTS) BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 18 October.

Mr WEBB (Monaro) [12.30 p.m.]: I would like to close the debate by again reaffirming that these minor amendments do not reduce the concept of wilderness or jeopardise conservation of wilderness or other areas in any way. In fact, I believe that by freeing up limited financial and human resources this bill, through its enactment, will allow for better management of dedicated wilderness areas, parks and reserves. I draw the attention of honourable members to the recent experiences in the United States of America in regard to that country's management of wilderness areas, and also to a documentary by David Attenborough, entitled *The Secret Life of Plants*, which screened on Channel 10 on 22 October.

That documentary identified some key concerns that I, and many others, have in relation to the present management of our wilderness and park areas. The bill will allow for the protection of private property rights for

those landowners who do not wish to have their land assessed, identified and provisionally declared as wilderness at a significant cost to the public by giving them the right to decline the nomination at the beginning of the process rather than at the end, as is now the case. I commend the bill to the House.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 31

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

Noes, 46

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

Pairs

Mr Collins	Mr Aquilina
Dr Kernohan	Mr McManus
Ms Seaton	Mr Markham

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AMENDMENT
(OPEN AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNMENT) BILL**

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 8 November.

Mr R. W. TURNER (Orange) [12.45 p.m.]: I support the Freedom of Information Amendment (Open and Accountable Government) Bill, which was introduced in this House by the Leader of the Opposition. For

the benefit of honourable members, I will reiterate some of the points I made when the bill was last debated. The aim of the Coalition's Freedom of Information Amendment (Open and Accountable Government) Bill is to restore the public's right to information by peeling back Labor's culture of secrecy. This bill is based on the Jeffersonian principle that an informed citizenry is the cornerstone of democracy. The New South Wales Coalition shares that view.

Honourable members would be aware that in 1989 the Greiner Coalition Government introduced the New South Wales Freedom of Information Act, believing that public access to information was a fundamental tenet of a liberal democratic society. Unfortunately for the people of New South Wales, successive Labor governments have never shared that belief. The Wran and Unsworth governments continually blocked attempts to introduce freedom of information legislation throughout their 13 years in office. In an unauthorised biography of Neville Wran in 1986, Milton Cockburn and Michael Steketee stated that, under the Wran Government, there was no "enthusiasm for greater scrutiny of government decision making".

Similarly, Professor Peter Wilenski, the original proponent of freedom of information legislation in New South Wales, described the then Labor Government as a bastion of secrecy. The Carr Government, of course, has continued the Labor tradition of secrecy. The Government has systematically abused the exemption provisions in the Freedom of Information Act by denying public access to information that it deems could damage the Government politically. By doing this, the Carr Government has turned the Freedom of Information Act into the freedom from information Act. This bill is supported by a number of bodies.

In February and March 1999 the *Sydney Morning Herald* published a number of "Secret State" articles. One article, entitled "30 things they won't tell us", listed some of the information to which the Government has blocked access, including funding allocations and expenditures for area health services and comparisons of individual school results for the Higher School Certificate, School Certificate and basic skills tests. Why would the Government withhold information that supports the public education system? If the Government is not attempting to hide something, it should make that information available.

The Government blocked access to a Department of Community Services report into allegations of assault and rape at the Royal Place group homes for the disabled—information to which everyone should have access, with the exception, of course, of private and highly sensitive material. Generally, however, this sort of information should be made available. The Government blocked access to a Department of Education and Training report detailing an increase in drug use by TAFE students. If there were no increase in drug use by TAFE students or any other students, one would have expected the Government to release that information to dispel any misconceptions that were held by the general public.

The Government also blocked access to a Department of Transport report into expanding to private buses the pension excursion ticket scheme. That report is relevant to me, as a country member of Parliament. People living in regional areas and in outlying metropolitan areas do not receive the same bus subsidies as do the people who are living in cities. Why did the Government withhold that information if it had nothing to hide? The Government withheld information relating to Olympic Co-ordination Authority contracts for the construction of Olympic facilities. At the time of the Olympic Games some secrecy might have been needed in relation to the confidentiality of contracts, but the Olympic Games were the people's Olympics and people should have been able to obtain as much information as possible about them.

A request was made for Department of Community Services [DOCS] data on child safety notifications. That department is one of the most controversial departments under this Government. Again, if it has nothing to hide it should release as much information as possible. The Government preaches for more accountability and has forced local government to be more accountable and more open to scrutiny. Yet the Government is not practising what it is preaching. As a member of local government I know that the State Government is continually giving local government directives about making more open processes with council meetings, council procedures, development applications—a whole range of local government operations.

The Leader of the Opposition, Kerry Chikarovski, said that new figures show that many agencies had refused in full or in part more than half of all applications for documents. For the Olympic Co-ordination Authority the refusal figure is 100 per cent, Treasury 87.5 per cent, the Department of Community Services 77 per cent, and the Department Gaming and Racing 69 per cent. Even the Premier's Department has rejected in full or in part 37.5 per cent of applications received. In many cases when only part of the information requested is released it may as well not be released because it serves no purpose. The Coalition would appoint the New South Wales Ombudsman as the State's freedom of information commissioner and would grant the commissioner wide powers to access documents, hear appeals or complaints from individuals, and make determinations.

We would have open board meetings of all government agencies or corporations, with provision for staffing and certain commercial matters to be discussed in private. We would entrench a presumption in favour of access to information. In other words, we would try to give as much information as possible rather than look for excuses to withhold information. Government must be seen to be accountable. Whilst in some cases information should be withheld, the impression must be given that government will release information wherever possible. We would require agencies to make file lists available with the legal requirement that files be numbered sequentially and that all relevant notes and papers be kept on file.

We propose to give the freedom of information commissioner power to require agencies, rather than individuals, to bear the cost of excessive charges. Whilst I have nothing against individuals being required to pay for information, in complex matters the cost of getting the information is beyond the means of some individuals. The Government claims to be for the workers, for the people, but often it makes information so expensive that the people or organisations the Government supposedly represents cannot afford to get the information. In some instances the Government should subsidise the making of information available. We would also ensure that agencies work within the spirit as well as the letter of the legislation. As I said, the Government must be seen to have a desire to make information available rather than adhering to strict interpretations of what can be made available.

If the Government is perceived to have a desire to make information available, members of the general public will then accept that when information cannot be made available it is for good reason. In many cases requiring local government to be more accountable is appropriate. Councillors who have an interest in a sensitive matter before the council now have to state the nature of the interest rather than merely declare that there is an interest. Councils must give reasons for withholding information from the general public. Councils may not wish to release information on sensitive commercial matters involving competitive tendering or other commercial or legal issues. But the councils must state their reasons for not providing information. The Government should practise what it preaches. I call on the Government to support the bill.

Mr BARR (Manly) [12.56 p.m.]: I support the Freedom of Information Amendment (Open and Accountable Government) Bill and congratulate the Leader of the Opposition on introducing it. A little later I will talk about an amendment that I foreshadow. The democratic system depends on a free flow of ideas, and for that we need a free flow of information. Modern government is becoming increasingly more complicated, and when governments deal with outside private bodies and contract out, matters are complicated further. This has allowed governments to try to evade their obligations to provide necessary information under freedom of information legislation. Information basically is the oil that keeps the wheels of the democratic system moving. Without it we are that much the poorer, and government can get away with things that it otherwise would not be able to get away with. The hallmark of less democratic regimes is that there is not a free flow of information. Access to information is a basic right of people in our society. That should be the starting point.

The bill proposes a number of initiatives, all of which I support. It provides for the appointment of a freedom of information commissioner. One of the problems we face is that we do not have an overview of all the government departments and what they are doing. There may be an examination of a particular department and its obfuscations on a case-by-case basis but there is not a picture of how departments overall are performing: in other words, are there significant variations in the way different government departments deal with this issue? I certainly believe there are. Therefore, we need consistency across the board. To achieve that we need someone with an overview of all these matters, not someone dealing with issues on a case-by-case basis—getting lost in the trees and not being able to see the wood for the trees, so to speak. We need an overview and to have an overview we need a commissioner.

My foreshadowed amendment deals with the role of the commissioner. I understand that a similar bill in the upper House was brought forward by the Hon. Michael Gallacher. It has slight variations from this bill. I mention that because I had a discussion with the staff of the Leader of the Opposition sometime ago on the issue of the powers of the commissioner. I believe there are ambiguities in the drafting of this bill. It provides for the Ombudsman to be the commissioner. However, proposed section 12C provides that the commissioner may exercise powers of entry and inspection. The Ombudsman already has those powers as well as other powers. It is not clear: there could be an inference that the commissioner does not then have other powers, which I think he should have. The essence of my amendment is for the commissioner to exercise Ombudsman powers.

Pursuant to sessional orders debate interrupted.

[Mr Deputy-Speaker left the chair at 1.00 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

PETITIONS

Centennial Park Dogs Off-leash Area

Petition requesting that Federation Valley, Centennial Park, be reinstated as an off-leash area for dogs, received from **Ms Moore**.

Wallsend Policing

Petition praying that Wallsend police station be staffed 24 hours a day and that extensive community consultation take place prior to any changes being made to policing, received from **Mr Mills**.

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**.

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**.

Inner East Sydney Police Resources

Petition praying that there be an immediate increase in police resources in the inner east, that there be an increase in the uniformed police foot patrols to deter crime and that an effective police recruitment drive be developed to properly resource community policing, received from **Ms Moore**.

Dapto Policing

Petition praying that Dapto police station be manned for 24 hours each day, received from **Ms Saliba**.

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**.

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**.

Moore Park Passive Recreation

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

Surry Hills Bus Services

Petition praying for an urgent increase in the reliability and adequacy of Surry Hills bus services, received from **Ms Moore**.

Old-growth Forests Protection

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

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**.

Wilderness Access

Petition praying that the Government allow continued access to public lands, abandon plans to declare the south-east wilderness study area wilderness, and repeal the Wilderness Act 1987, received from **Mr Webb**.

White City Site Rezoning Proposal

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

REGULATION REVIEW COMMITTEE**Reports**

Mr Martin, as Chairman, tabled the following reports:

Report on the Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) (Road Rules) Regulation 1999, dated September 2001.

Proceedings of the International Conference on Regulation Reform Management and Scrutiny of Legislation, dated September 2001.

Comparisons with International Practice: Regulatory Scrutiny and Reform in England, Regulatory Impact Assessment in the Netherlands, Regulatory and Public Sector Reform in Ontario Canada, Legislative Oversight and Sunsetting In The United States, and a Case Study on Boxing Regulation in North America, dated September 2001.

Ordered to be printed.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

DEATH OF TAHLIA BROCKMANN

Mrs CHIKAROVSKI: My question is directed to the Minister for Community Services. Three years after the horrific death of Tahlia Brockmann, will she explain why she has neither investigated nor explained her department's absolute failure to respond to numerous pleas from Tahlia's aunt—who has come all the way from Orange today to be in the gallery—that the 16-month-old infant was being physically abused, and that her life was at risk?

Mrs LO PO': The Department of Community Services [DOCS] is one of the most scrutinised areas of government, with independent watchdogs examining all areas of our operation. This case was referred to the child death review team and the Coroner, and was also subject to an internal review. The Local Court ruled that there was not sufficient evidence to charge the natural mother with the manslaughter of this child. Given that the court also came to these conclusions, how does anybody expect that DOCS assessments would be any different? In fact, in an interview on ABC 2CR radio earlier this year the shadow Minister, the honourable member for Wakehurst, said, "I am not suggesting the DOCS office itself has done anything inappropriate. In fact DOCS officers work under extreme stress." The death of this child was a tragedy and I will not be part of the honourable member for Wakehurst's manipulation of grieving and distressed people and parading them before Parliament for his own political advantage.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY CHANGES

Mr E. T. PAGE: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Local Government. What is the latest information on local councils in inner Sydney and the eastern suburbs?

Mr WOODS: Sydney is Australia's premier city. Icons such as the Harbour Bridge, the Opera House, Circular Quay and The Rocks are images that are at the very core of our identity, but there are other landmarks such as Kings Cross, the University of Sydney and the foreshores of the harbour which are places that people immediately associate with this great city. They are the heart and soul of Sydney.

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

Mr WOODS: Therefore we need a vision for the city of Sydney to make sure that we continue to present Sydney as a global city to the rest of the world—a vision that reflects the diversity of Sydney. It makes sense to have the boundaries of the city of Sydney reflect that view. Sydney has a great past and it deserves an even greater future. An expanded city will create a homogenous community, combining city precincts that are far more representative of this great city and its patterns of living, shopping, working, learning and the arts. Honourable members will recall that late last year I announced an independent inquiry into the local government structure of inner Sydney and the eastern suburbs. This was the first major review of its kind undertaken into the structure of local government in this area for over a quarter of a century. Obviously much has changed in this region over the past 25 years. Population densities in the area in some parts are equal to that of Singapore.

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

Mr WOODS: The inquiry was undertaken by Professor Kevin Sproats and involved eight councils—Botany, Leichhardt, Marrickville, Randwick, City of Sydney, South Sydney, Waverley and Woollahra. The Sproats inquiry was well received, with more than 450 submissions and many of those having been lodged by individual ratepayers. As honourable members will recall, one of the recommendations was the recasting of eight councils into four new entities. Although the Government saw merit in that recommendation, we said at the time that we would not proceed without the support of the eight councils involved. That position has not changed and without the support of all the councils, the Government will not be pursuing that option.

However, I announce today that the State Government has accepted some of the other recommendations of the report. They are the transfer of Glebe and Forest Lodge from Leichhardt Municipal Council to the City of Sydney Council, the transfer of Woollloomooloo, Kings Cross, Potts Point, Rushcutters Bay, Elizabeth Bay and Darlinghurst from South Sydney City Council to the City of Sydney Council, and the transfer to Waverley Council of Bondi Junction, which is currently divided between the Waverley and Woollahra councils. In addition, the University of Sydney, the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and Chippendale will move from the South Sydney City Council to the City of Sydney Council.

Expansion of the boundaries of the city of Sydney is consistent with Professor Sproats' views that the boundaries should reflect the changes which have occurred in the city in recent years. Not only Sproats, but two previous reports in 1987 and 1998 also recommended an expanded city of Sydney council. The proposed boundary change will provide a greater mix of residential and commercial occupants, which is essential for a vibrant city and a city that is the gateway to Australia. It will give an expanded city of Sydney the capacity to undertake major improvements as well as to provide cost effective and efficient services to ratepayers.

Of course, as Professor Sproats concluded, most people have an affinity with their suburb rather than with the council of the area in which they live. Glebe, Bondi Junction, Ultimo, Kings Cross, Rushcutters Bay

and Potts Point will retain their unique characters and identities. Glebe stays Glebe, just as Bondi Junction stays Bondi Junction. In the case of Bondi Junction, the important commercial and social precinct will come under the effective control of one council. The proposed changes will be referred to the Local Government Boundaries Commission shortly. It is anticipated that following that examination, negotiations of the transfer will take place between the affected councils.

The new boundaries are scheduled to take effect from early next year. Council employees will be protected in any boundary change by the proclamation provisions used in voluntary council mergers. I can inform the House that we will also undertake a series of regional impact assessments of the other Sproats recommendations, to begin early next year. The key issues for those studies are economic analysis of the impact of existing and proposed structures, community of interest and social impacts, emergency management impacts, and environmental impacts. Security issues involving local government are an important area to be examined, especially in and around Sydney airport and Port Botany. A key outcome from these impact assessments will be the development of a model that could be used for any future assessments for other councils in New South Wales. I believe these changes do much to enhance the view of Sydney as a truly international city representing its diversity.

NEW ENGLAND AREA HEALTH SERVICE

Mr SOURIS: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Health. Does the extensive drain of senior and experienced doctors from the New England Area Health Service, which has resulted in three obstetricians and one anaesthetist leaving the district recently, indicate a crisis of confidence in the management of the service? Has this affected the provision of essential medical services to the area?

Mr KNOWLES: No.

INNER CITY SCHOOL ENROLMENTS

Mr GREENE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Education and Training. What is the latest information on enrolments for 2002 from schools in the inner-city area?

Mr AQUILINA: Government school enrolments in the inner city have been falling for 20 years. The changes in the Building the Future initiative have been difficult and hard decisions have had to be made. But a responsible government would not sit back. That is what the former Coalition Government did. It sat back and let public school enrolments in inner city schools decline and did absolutely nothing about it. The Leader of the Opposition played a crucial role in education at that time, and she failed. And she is continuing to fail the schools now.

Mrs Chikarovski: Point of order: If the Minister would like me to table—

[*Interruption*]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will direct his remarks through the Chair.

Mr AQUILINA: The Leader of the Opposition is still advocating the failed policies of the former Coalition Government. Building the Future has required difficult decisions to be made, but I am pleased to say that the results are now coming in. It should be borne in mind that over the past 15 years total year 7 enrolments have fallen by almost 900 students. That is 34 per cent.

Mrs Chikarovski: How many have gone to non-government schools?

Mr AQUILINA: I am talking about the past 15 years. The flow-on effects over six years of secondary schooling have been devastating. This has resulted in a loss of nearly 5,000 students to inner-city public education.

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

Mr AQUILINA: As a result of Building the Future, the signs are that this catastrophic trend has now been turned around.

Mrs Chikarovski: You are kidding!

Mr AQUILINA: I will tell you what the figures are, and I hope you will then apologise and say that the Government got it right. I can reveal to the House today some very encouraging figures. I take the applications to enrol for next year for year 7 students. These are schools covered by Building the Future. The early figures show that enrolments for year 7 for 2002 are expected to increase by 300 students. In school after school there are increased enrolments. The figures appear to show that in the first year of Building the Future we have made up more than half of the decline of the past decade. We will know the exact position next year. At this stage, however, this is the biggest increase in enrolments in year 7 in these schools for the last 20 years.

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

Mr AQUILINA: The figures are here. They are written applications. If this number is maintained, by the time these students have reached year 12, in six years time, we will have clawed back 1,800 students to government schools in the inner city. And the Leader of the Opposition wants to make a joke of that.

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

Mr AQUILINA: The Leader of the Opposition is embarrassed by the fact that the Government has got this right. We will have created more than 100 teaching positions—15 additional teaching positions for next year alone—and more than 20 ancillary staff positions.

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

Mr AQUILINA: Let me give a few specific examples. At Balmain High School in 2001, there were 34 enrolments in year 7. As of this week, actual written applications for 2002 for year 7 at Balmain High School total 180. This is more than a fourfold increase. At Leichhardt High School there were 107 enrolments in 2001, and anticipated enrolments for 2002 total 175. At Ryde Secondary College, formerly Malvina High School, enrolments for year 7 have increased from 48 this year to 160 next year. What is more, the new school structures are attracting significant interest from parents who send their children to non-government primary schools. The experience of Associate Professor Dr Jill Blackmore of the Faculty of Education at Deacon University is enlightening. Dr Blackmore is a respected teacher educator and the president of her local school council. She is a parent who has gone through the process of selecting a high school for her child. Dr Blackmore says about Building the Future—

Mr Hartcher: Point of order: The Minister is reading from a document, which is quite appropriate. However, under the standing orders we would like him to identify the document and table it in the House.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! It is reasonable to ask for the source of the document. It is a matter for the Minister whether he tables the document.

Mr AQUILINA: I will provide the source of the document; that will be easily done. However, can I say this—

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

Mr AQUILINA: If members of the Opposition do not want to hear the enlightening comments of a teacher educator, I am quite happy not to refer to them. It does not in any way detract from the factual written applications of the increased enrolments for the schools covered by Building the Future—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister should identify the source of the document.

Mr AQUILINA: I am quite happy to leave that out of my—

Mrs Chikarovski: Point of order: Mr Speaker, we couldn't hear.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! If the colleagues of the Leader of the Opposition yell and shout and she is unable to hear the Minister, that is her problem.

Mr AQUILINA: Throughout this process critics have questioned the viability of Building the Future.

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

Mr AQUILINA: We have listened patiently to the criticisms and comments and, where appropriate, we have taken them on board.

Mr Fraser: Point of order: Mr Speaker, you instructed the Minister to source the document. He has not yet sourced the document and I would suggest that he is canvassing your ruling.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister is not required to identify the source of the document at this stage. The Minister has not completed his answer; he is entitled to continue.

Mr AQUILINA: I have indicated that if the Opposition does not want to accept Dr Blackmore's statements I am quite happy to delete them from my statement. Whilst they add substantial comment, reinforcing the benefits of Building the Future, they are not vital to the glowing reports of increased enrolments in schools in the inner city next year.

Mrs Chikarovski: No, applications. Get your language right. They are applications, not enrolments.

Mr AQUILINA: The Leader of the Opposition wants to bury her head in the sand and pretend it does not exist, but these are real enrolments. These are students flocking back to public education in the inner city.

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

Mr AQUILINA: This is evidence of the Government having got it right.

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

Mr AQUILINA: The enrolment figures say that parents of students feel that we are getting it right. They tell us that parents are sitting down and looking at a vastly expanded curriculum choice. They are looking at improved facilities in Building the Future schools. These improvements are still planned improvements—we actually have not started the building program—and already we have made up half the decline in enrolments of the past decade. They are considering partially selective schools and committing their children to be a part of it. These school communities are working very hard to provide the best possible public education.

Mr Hartcher: Point of order: I draw your attention to a ruling by Speaker Rozzoli in relation to the very issue on which you have just ruled:

When a Member refers to specific quotes from documents, the House is entitled to have the source of that material identified.

As you have so directed. It continues:

If a Minister chooses to withhold its identity [as he has] it is a wiser course of action to paraphrase or draw an inference, rather than quote extracts.

At the present time the Minister is quoting extracts. In accordance with rulings of previous Speakers, he is entitled to paraphrase, but not quote from a document.

Mr Whelan: To the point of order: This is a time-wasting effort by the honourable member for Gosford because the ruling in 1990 by Speaker Rozzoli states:

If a Minister chooses to withhold its identity it is a wiser course of action to paraphrase or draw an inference, rather than quote extracts.

There is nothing to stop any Minister identifying and making passing reference to a document in his or her possession. There is nothing in the standing orders, sessional orders or rulings that prohibits a Minister from making passing reference to documents. The Minister has identified the document, and passing reference is permitted.

Mr O'Farrell: To the point of order: I will add a more learned reference. Speaker Murray ruled germanely to the point originally raised by the honourable member for Gosford in relation to tabling and citing the source of a document. On 28 October 1998 a Minister tabled a copy of a letter, after being asked to do so, on a point of order that the Minister was waving the document and intending to quote from it. On that occasion you required the document to be tabled.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! It is a matter for the Minister whether he tables the document.

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will wear herself out if she keeps interjecting. For the edification of honourable members, the Minister has not quoted the whole of the document; he has made only passing reference to it. He is complying with the standing orders and with the rulings of former Speakers of this House.

Mr AQUILINA: I do not know why the Opposition is so embarrassed because kids are coming back to schools in the inner city. Why are they so embarrassed about it? I do not have the document at hand, but for the edification of honourable members the comments were made in a presentation by Dr Blackmore on 20 October at an open forum on the Central Coast organised by the *Daily Telegraph*. Those public comments are there for everybody to see. I do not see why the Opposition has any reason to want to hide the positive comments of Dr Blackmore.

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

Mrs Chikarovski: Point of order: If the document is such a public document then we would request most politely that the Minister table the figures so that we can all have the benefit of them.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! That is a matter for the Minister.

Mr AQUILINA: I will be pleased to take the Leader of the Opposition through the figures if she wants to go through the figures on how we have increased education in public schools. This year: Vaucluse High School 76 enrolments, next year 128—

Mrs Chikarovski: Does that include Dover Heights High School enrolments?

Mr AQUILINA: Yes, Dover Heights has gone down by 60, but the total is 128.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Vaucluse will cease interjecting. I call the honourable member for Vaucluse to order for the second time. I call the honourable member for Vaucluse to order for the third time.

Mr AQUILINA: South Sydney High School enrolments have gone up from 154 to 166. Matraville High School has gone from 41 to 69. Randwick Boys High School has increased from 125 to 153. J. J. Cahill Memorial High School 70 to 90. Balmain High School 34 to 180. Leichhardt High School 107 to 173. Tempe High Languages School 69 to 87. Ryde Secondary College 48 to 160. Riverside Girls High School 179 to 204. Chatswood High School 88 to 128—and the honourable member for Willoughby is nodding his head. Overall a total year 7 enrolment increase from 1,436 to 1,772 for next year. The figures speak for themselves.

Mr Carr: Even before the new buildings.

Mr AQUILINA: As the Premier said, even before the new buildings. Well may the Opposition want to restrict these figures being released but they speak for themselves. Parents are embracing the Building the Future concept and children are once again returning to public schools in the inner city.

TAMWORTH BASE HOSPITAL BREAST SCREENING UNIT

Mr GEORGE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. What is the Minister doing to alleviate the problem at Tamworth Base Hospital breast screening unit, which processes 9,200 women a year but is unable to cope with the demand for essential follow-up screening appointments for patients who have been diagnosed and treated for breast cancer?

Mr KNOWLES: As the honourable member for Lismore knows, the New South Wales Government absolutely fulfils its obligations under the Commonwealth-State arrangements regarding breast screening. Indeed, we do more than is required. We would happily enhance our efforts in this area if the Commonwealth Government would honour its obligations under the Australian Health Care Agreement.

STERLING PULP CHEMICALS

Mr HICKEY: My question is to the Deputy Premier, and Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning. What is the latest information on the plans of a Canadian company, Sterling Pulp Chemicals, to develop a new industry in the upper Hunter?

Dr REFSHAUGE: That is a very timely question, and I thank the honourable member for asking it. The Government's record on job creation is pretty impressive. While I have been Minister for Planning I have approved projects worth some \$6.1 billion to the State.

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

Dr REFSHAUGE: Those projects have created some 23,600 jobs. Some of the examples include the Visy pulp and paper mill at Tumut, the Cadia Ridgeway goldmine at Orange, the Peel Valley abattoir at Tamworth, the Park Foods processing plant at Griffith and the Mount Arthur North coalmine at Muswellbrook. Today I am pleased to announce the approval of a new industry for the Upper Hunter. I am sure this will please the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. Sterling Pulp Chemicals, a Canadian company, has been granted approval to establish a sodium chlorate facility in the Macquarie Generation Industrial Development area near the Bayswater power station in the Muswellbrook local government area.

Earlier this year I established a special State environmental planning policy—SEPP 67—to facilitate environmentally sustainable development on this 9,000-hectare site. SEPP 67 was supported by both Singleton and Muswellbrook councils. The land is located within a buffer area of the Bayswater power station and presents a unique opportunity for industries with high energy requirements. The project for which I have given approval is a \$95 million investment in New South Wales, creating more than 150 jobs, some 35 of them permanent jobs. Importantly, it broadens the employment base in the Upper Hunter from traditional agriculture, mining and electricity generation industries.

Construction is expected to commence once the company has successfully completed financing and third party negotiations. Sodium chlorate is used in the paper industry as a feed material in the bleaching process. It is an environmentally preferable way of bleaching paper as it reduces the level of compounds such as dioxins produced using traditional bleaching technology. The development is expected to produce up to 60,000 tonnes of sodium chlorate per annum. It will provide a vital raw material for our paper production industries, facilitating many jobs in those industries. The development was the subject of an environmental impact study, which was exhibited for public comment.

Issues considered by the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning include air quality, water quality and transport impacts. Following a rigorous assessment, the department concluded that these issues could be adequately managed. In approving the development I have imposed more than 70 conditions to ensure that the environment is protected. These include limiting discharges to the atmosphere and requiring air quality monitoring, control of site run-off, requiring the employment of an environmental officer, and requiring Sterling Pulp Chemicals to establish a community consultative committee. In a first, I am also requiring the company to investigate the use of the hydrogen gas produced at the sodium chlorate plant as a clean, renewable fuel for the Bayswater power station.

Muswellbrook Shire Council has expressed strong support for the development, and it is to be congratulated for working so co-operatively with the department. This is yet another jobs and investment producing development. It builds on the \$6.1 billion worth of investment and 23,600 jobs created in New South Wales since 1999. It is one that broadens the employment base in the Hunter region of our State. It is one that we have assessed in close co-operation with Muswellbrook council and its community. I look forward to informing the House of further jobs initiatives into the future.

PHUONG NGO AREA HEALTH SERVICE APPOINTMENT

Mr O'FARRELL: I direct a question to the Deputy Premier. Given that in November 1996 the former Labor powerbroker Phuong Ngo was already under investigation over his involvement in the controversial Mekong Club in Cabramatta, why did the Minister recommend to Cabinet that he be appointed a director of the South-Western Sydney Area Health Service board?

Dr REFSHAUGE: There is no requirement against people being appointed to area health service boards until there is proof that they are not fit and proper. Allegations do not stop people being appointed.

PHUONG NGO MEKONG CLUB DIRECTORSHIP

Mr HARTCHER: I direct a question to the Minister for Gaming and Racing. When Cabinet approved the appointment of Labor powerbroker Phuong Ngo to a senior Government board position in November 1996, did the Minister make his fellow Ministers aware that the Licensing Court had already recommended that Phuong Ngo be banned from his directorship of the controversial Mekong Club in Parramatta because he was an unfit person?

Mr FACE: I understand that in the period of time when that occurred he had not been an unfit person.

Mr HARTCHER: I ask a supplementary question.

[Interruption]

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

NATIVE VEGETATION CONSERVATION CLEARING EXEMPTIONS

Mr MARTIN: My question without notice is to the Minister for Land and Water Conservation. What is the latest information on clearing exemptions under the Native Vegetation Conservation Act?

Mr AMERY: I thank Country Labor for again being on the ball on such rural issues. Opposition members should interject regarding Country Labor because I can advise the House that Bill Bott is still hanging in there because he is getting preferences from the Country Labor candidate. That is what I call a big party! Government members do not want to see the sudden demise of this once great rural party, the National Party, so they are directing preferences to Bill Bott to keep him hanging in there.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Burrinjuck will cease interjecting. The honourable member for Lachlan will remain silent.

Mr AMERY: The Leader of the National Party withdraws, so Bill Bott is hanging in there, and Country Labor is doing its best to have him hang on. The honourable member for Bathurst is having a very busy day—bringing up reports, putting forward an urgency motion on American tariffs, and now dealing with natural resource issues. Quite obviously, this is why people in rural New South Wales are seeking out Country Labor members to get their points across with the Government. In relation to native vegetation clearing, I would have thought some members of the National Party would have shown an interest in this issue, which is a very important issue for New South Wales farmers and regional communities.

As honourable members would be aware, I announced in the House—and the Premier announced at the Farmers Association annual general meeting—several reviews into aspects of the native vegetation conservation legislation of 1997. Those included a review of offsets that could be used in native vegetation management, consideration of fast-tracking native vegetation management plans, and a review of the current system of exemptions. The Government appointed a community reference panel to conduct those reviews. The panel comprised an independent chair—

Mr Piccoli: More community consultation!

Mr AMERY: Country Labor tells me that native vegetation is a big issue in the bush. Would that be right?

Mr Martin: Yes.

Mr AMERY: Have we heard from the National Party about its policy on native vegetation? What about its policy on endangered species? This week the House has taken two notices of motions on endangered species, one from the honourable member for Murrumbidgee stating that endangered species legislation is wrecking rural economies, and one today from the honourable member for Southern Highlands, who is worried about a process which threatens endangered species. Rural communities want to know what is the Coalition policy on endangered species. Is that the one espoused by the honourable member for Murrumbidgee in his motion, or is it the one espoused by the honourable member for Southern Highlands? Come on! Get together and give us one policy. We all know that no policy is the Coalition's policy. The panel comprised an

independent chair, Lorraine Cairnes, representatives from the New South Wales Farmers Association and the Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales, and government agency representatives.

[Interruption]

The honourable member for North Shore is known as something of a treasure. I just want to know who dug her up. The honourable member for Willoughby was given the choice of getting either a stab in the back or a stab in the heart. He chose a stab in the back. The first two reviews were completed by the community reference panel earlier this year. The third—on the exemptions—was completed only a few weeks ago. The review examined the 34 current exemptions, their social and economic implications, their scientific base and how they are to be measured. The exemptions are derived from three different sources: the Soil Conservation Act 1938, schedule 4 of the Western Lands Regulation 1997 and former State environmental planning policy 46.

As a result there have been some confusing and conflicting interpretations that do not all rely on scientific fact. Some can also have a cumulative impact on native vegetation clearing controls. In preparing its final report, the community reference panel received information from an independent scientific group, including a representative from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, and it also consulted with the Native Vegetation Advisory Council and the network of regional vegetation committees.

Mr Slack-Smith: All bureaucrats.

Mr AMERY: Is the honourable member suggesting that the members of these non-government organisations are all bureaucrats? I will make sure that they and New South Wales farmers are made aware of the honourable member's interjection. The panel's final report was presented to me last month. I have now reviewed the recommendations contained within it. I inform the House and the honourable member for Bathurst that I am accepting all the recommendations that have been put forward. The key outcomes of this review have been to allow for current productive land uses to continue, to reduce the cumulative impacts on native vegetation arising from the current two-hectare exemptions and not to delay or impose extra or unnecessary costs on farmers or the department.

The panel also declared that exemptions should be practical, workable, clear, enforceable and understandable and they should also apply in areas where no regional vegetation plans are in place, as regional vegetation committees can develop their own exemptions—an interesting point. A major change to the current process is to develop a general exemption to enable farmers to continue their ongoing land maintenance works. This will include work such as clearing land to build fences and maintain roads. It will also enable farmers to build rural structures such as sheds and airstrips without permission to clear, although that could still require appropriate approvals from other authorities such as councils.

Another key part of this general exemption is that farmers will no longer have to apply to the department for approval under the Act to clear paddocks which have been untouched for 10 years or more. In future they will be able to clear those paddocks for normal farming practices without permission, but they will not be able to clear land at risk of salinity or other sensitive areas, and they will need to notify the department at least 30 days prior to their work. As part of this process, farmers will have to develop a property plan and declare an intention to conserve some native vegetation on the property. The general exemption provision is strongly supported by both the New South Wales Farmers Association and the Nature Conservation Council in this State.

Another issue is to remove the exemption whereby land-holders can clear up to two hectares of native vegetation without the need for a clearing consent. This can have a cumulative impact as small pockets of two hectares can invariably lead to more ongoing pockets of clearing across a wider landscape. Minimal clearing will, however, be allowed under the new general exemptions clauses which will enable ongoing farm management and maintenance to continue. The department will also develop a new woody weed code of practice for the Western Division—something in which the honourable member for Murray-Darling would be interested. That will create more flexibility for farmers who wish to clear such things as broad-leaved hopbush, turpentine and silver cassia.

Under the current system, farmers can burn off woody weeds where they dominate the landscape, but they must avoid clearing incidental native vegetation. Under a new code of practice farmers will be able to control woody weeds before they dominate the landscape, which will help to keep the land productive. It will also mean that farmers can control woody weeds without needing to worry about their legal liability in relation

to incidental vegetation. That will invariably help to keep the land productive. The community reference panel also recommended keeping a number of existing exemptions to enable the effective management of land.

[Interruption]

I thought that Opposition members would have been interested in native vegetation reforms. These exemptions will include allowing farmers to continue carrying out burning activities to prevent the spread of fire, for example, to clear firebreaks; to continue to clear noxious weeds; to continue to use native vegetation as stock feed in times of drought; and to continue to clear the native species mistletoe if it is strangling other native vegetation around it.

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

Mr AMERY: New exemptions will also be developed for private native forestry operations to better clarify the sustainability of those operations. The Government will now commit the outcomes of this community reference panel review to a new regulation under the Native Vegetation Conservation Act. A draft of this regulation will be exhibited for public comment in the new year before it is finalised and gazetted by July 2002. I thank the honourable member for Bathurst for his question and for his continued interest in natural resource management in this State.

BLESSING OF THE FLEET FESTIVAL

Mr W. D. SMITH: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Tourism. What is the latest information on the Ulladulla Blessing of the Fleet Festival?

Ms NORI: Honourable members will recall that last week, on 7 November, the honourable member for Bega claimed in this House that next year's Ulladulla Blessing of the Fleet Festival had been cancelled. He was wrong.

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

Ms NORI: He claimed it was because of a \$40,000 charge for traffic control. He was wrong. Unfortunately, his claim that the festival was cancelled was repeated by the *Sydney Morning Herald* two days later—an issue which I will address later. The festival has not been cancelled; it will go ahead and the traffic control charges are nowhere near \$40,000. In fact, according to the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA], neither the RTA nor Shoalhaven council have placed any new requirements on the organisers of this year's parade. The Shoalhaven council traffic committee minutes confirm that fact.

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

Ms NORI: This year, as in other years, one traffic controller has been required to be at each end of the closed section of the Princess Highway and at any cross streets to direct traffic while the highway is closed for the parade. To quote the Roads and Traffic Authority, the costs to run the parade are expected to be no more than \$5,000.

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

Ms NORI: The ill-conceived, negligent and downright stupid approach of the honourable member for Bega has led to all of New South Wales being informed by a newspaper of record—

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

Ms NORI: The *Sydney Morning Herald* informed all of New South Wales that that event is off—an event that attracts over 60,000 visitors to the South Coast and pumps \$18 million into the region's economy. The honourable member for Bega has done well! He single-handedly managed to convey to consumers in the largest potential market, that is, Sydney, that they should not bother making plans to go to the South Coast next year for the festival because it has been cancelled. He is so different from the other Smith in this place. The honourable member for South Coast, Wayne Smith, actually takes seriously and cares about the economic development of the South Coast.

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

Ms NORI: Let us undertake an exercise in what the Premier would call compare and contrast.

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

Ms NORI: Let us see what is the difference between the two Smiths.

Mr R. H. L. Smith: There is no comparison.

Ms NORI: The honourable member for Bega is dead right about that.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Bega to order. I place the honourable member for Oxley on three calls to order. I remind the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the honourable member for Myall Lakes and the honourable member for Coffs Harbour that they are on two calls to order. The honourable member for Vaucluse, the honourable member for Hornsby, the honourable member for Pittwater are on three calls to order.

Ms NORI: Last week the honourable member for South Coast approached me, saying that he was aware—

Mr O'Doherty: Point of order: I draw your attention to Standing Order 82, which provides that personal reflections on members are disorderly unless they are made by way of substantive motion. The Minister is obviously free, within the leave of the question, to talk about the Ulladulla festival, but she cannot make personal reflections, of either a positive or a negative nature. She has made negative reflections against the honourable member for Bega. She is making other reflections on the honourable member for South Coast. The House is entitled to debate this matter by way of substantive motion, but I ask you to uphold Standing Order 82.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! What the honourable member says is perfectly correct. However, the Minister is entitled to respond to interjections, and that is what she was doing.

Ms NORI: Last week the honourable member for South Coast approached me to say that he was aware that there was some confusion among organisers of the festival about safety requirements. I told him that we should work together to clear up the confusion so the organisers could get on with the job of planning and promoting the event. The blessing of the fleet is the beneficiary of the highest level of funding that we give to regional events, that is, \$30,000 a year for three years. The electorates of a number of members receive that funding, and they are almost all electorates of National Party members. I know that the honourable member for Ballina would not do that to his equivalent events and the honourable member for Murrumbidgee would not to it to his equivalent event in Deniliquin, but the honourable member for Bega would do it to his event. You used the energy you have to—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will address her remarks through the Chair.

Ms NORI: The \$90,000 over three years that is provided by Tourism New South Wales is a lot of money. That money can make a difference in the early stages to establish an event and to bring more people and their dollars into the town each year. I would have been pretty keen to find out whether there was a problem and, if so, to solve it quickly. There was nothing stop the honourable member for Bega taking the same approach, but he could not wait. On 7 November he gave notice of his motion. There was no research and his facts were wrong. He made no attempt to ascertain the facts.

Mr O'Doherty: Point of order: Once again I remind you of Standing Order 82. The Minister has clearly transgressed the ruling you gave a moment ago. The House can debate this matter if she moves a substantive motion.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Minister is entitled to deal with a matter that is before the House.

Mr O'Doherty: She is not entitled to reflect on a member.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister is dealing to a notice of motion that has been given by the honourable member for Bega.

Ms NORI: There was no concern about the impact that the statement might have on the success of the festival. The honourable member wanted to score a base political point. I will be very happy if residents of nearby Milton or nearby Mollymook go to the festival and have a great time, but that is not the real point. The real success of an event like this depends on how many people from outside the area—people from Sydney—attend it.

Mr Hartcher: Point of order: I draw your attention to notice of motion No. 548, which has been given by the honourable member for Bega, in relation to the annual blessing of the fleet at Ulladulla. I also draw your attention to the standing orders which, as you know, do not allow questions and answers to anticipate debate. The only exception you have allowed to that and which can be canvassed are budget matters. The answer is out of order.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister is in order. She is entitled to make passing reference to the Blessing of the Fleet Festival.

Ms NORI: I am not sure whether tourism operators and small businesses on the South Coast or the 7,800 people who are directly employed in the tourism industry on the South Coast will thank the honourable member for Bega for making sure this article appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. I hope the honourable member has the decency to apologise to every shopkeeper, every tourism operator and every resident of the South Coast for his irresponsible behaviour. No wonder the word around town is that the honourable member should run.

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

PHUONG NGO MEKONG CLUB DIRECTORSHIP

Mr FACE: The honourable member for Gosford asked me a question concerning the Mekong Club at Cabramatta. I indicated to the House that I was not aware at the time whether Phuong Ngo had been declared ineligible. I understand that Phuong Ngo was declared ineligible to be a director of a club for a period of 10 years. That declaration was made in December 1996 and reported in the annual report.

Mr Hartcher: It was 1 November.

Mr FACE: In December. It was reported in my annual report.

Questions without notice concluded.

BLESSING OF THE FLEET FESTIVAL

Personal Explanation

Mr R. H. L. SMITH, by leave: The Minister for Tourism accused me of damaging the blessing of the fleet parade, which takes place in Ulladulla each Easter. I informed the Minister for Tourism that my information came from the president of the Blessing of the Fleet Festival in Ulladulla. The blessing of the fleet parade had already been cancelled—not by me but by the committee. To say that I damaged it in any way is totally wrong. The information I was given came from the committee. It has been in all the newspapers in the area, and the honourable member for South Coast did not do one thing to try to save the parade.

Mr Hartcher: Mr Speaker—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister for Public Works and Services will dispose of the article he is waving around. He is totally out of order. The remainder of the House will remain silent while the honourable member for Gosford takes a point of order.

Mr Hartcher: My point of order was about the Minister for Public Works and Services, but with your eagle eye you had already detected it.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

United States Primary Produce Tariffs and Subsidies

Mr MARTIN (Bathurst) [3.27 p.m.]: The matter I raise in the House today is urgent because just hours ago United States President, George Bush, signed a proclamation renewing punitive United States tariffs on

Australian lamb. At the same time, it is doubly urgent because the new Farm Bill, HR2464, is currently before the United States Congress. If this bill is enacted it will affect Australian, and particularly New South Wales, primary producers as it increases subsidies by \$70 billion. It further tilts the playing field against Australian producers. We need to send a united message from this Parliament and from Federal Parliament today, not tomorrow.

Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Emergency Department

Mrs SKINNER (North Shore) [3.28 p.m.]: The State Government's primary responsibility is to deliver services for the people of New South Wales. That includes health and education services and policing. Whilst the motion of the honourable member for Bathurst may be of great interest, it has nothing to do with the critical issue of service delivery in this State. For that reason, the motion of which I have given notice today is of utmost importance and should be treated with urgency. After all, it is about respected senior nurses and doctors saying that the emergency department at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital is unsafe. They are saying that lives are being put at risk because there is a critical shortage of hospital beds. They are talking about patients being resuscitated in acute areas, patients sharing monitors and 27 patients sharing one shower and toilet. I would like Government members to imagine that one of those patients is one of their relatives.

Mr Martin: Talk about urgency, not the argument.

Mrs SKINNER: I am talking about the urgency of this matter. The honourable member should imagine that one of these patients is his mother and the doctors and nurses at this hospital have told him that her life is at risk. Is that not urgent? The Government, with its capacity to vote to debate my motion this afternoon, has an opportunity to make a difference to the lives of the people of this State. That is the Government's primary responsibility. Honourable members can, in heated agreement, discuss the motion of the honourable member for Bathurst. However, we should be focusing on the State Government's primary responsibilities, such as the provision of health care.

This morning the Australian College of Midwives claimed that shortfalls in the care of women during childbirth could lead to the death of babies and mothers. If Government members believe that the death of babies and mothers, which could be prevented by the Government taking action, is not an urgent matter and should not take priority, then their priorities are very different to my priorities and those of other Opposition members. My motion calls on the Minister for Health to provide additional real funding increases as identified during the recent Federal election campaign. I remind honourable members that Jenny Macklin, the then Federal shadow health Minister, on the *Insight* program on SBS television on 25 October, said:

We have an agreement with each of the States that not only will the Commonwealth money flow from a future Labor Government but also the State Labor Governments have committed to make additional real funding increases as well.

Honourable members should pull together and call on the Minister for Health to make that real additional funding increase available.

Mr Martin: Look in the budget papers.

Mrs SKINNER: I draw the attention of the honourable member for Bathurst to the budget paper which indicates that 22 per cent of total government spending in this financial year goes to health, whereas it was 25 per cent four years ago. That funding difference of 3 per cent would deal with the issues I have identified today. It would fund improved conditions for nurses', attract more nurses and midwives back to hospitals and enable more hospital beds to be opened. Honourable members should remember that the Labor Government was elected on a promise to open 500 additional hospital beds. What has it done? It has closed 3,500 hospital beds since it came to office.

With all our major teaching hospitals having difficulty in meeting benchmarks in waiting times for patients being seen in emergency departments, it is no wonder senior hospital staff are saying that we have a crisis. The information contained in my motion comes from a memorandum signed by 11 members of staff of the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital emergency department. In their words, the emergency department has become unsafe. Patients are sharing monitors, methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus patients are kept in the open ward area and the resuscitation of patients is taking place in the acute area. The resuscitation bays are often occupied for many hours because of unavailability of intensive care unit or high dependency unit beds. My motion should have priority. [Time expired.]

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

UNITED STATES PRIMARY PRODUCE TARIFFS AND SUBSIDIES**Urgent Motion**

Mr MARTIN (Bathurst) [3.34 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) welcomes the proclamation signed by the American Bush administration just hours ago to remove punitive American tariffs on Australian lamb;
- (2) expresses concern that the new Farm Bill H.R. 2646 before the United States Congress will affect Australian, particularly New South Wales, primary producers, as it increases subsidies by \$US70 billion; and
- (3) calls on the Prime Minister Mr John Howard to demand that United States President George Bush protect our farmers.

It is extremely important that my motion be debated because of the timing of the proclamation of the Bush administration. Despite the fantastic news that American tariffs on Australian lamb have been lifted—news that I am sure all honourable members welcome—local farmers still face major hurdles when it comes to farm subsidies. Our primary producers have always started behind the eight ball when it comes to trade with America. The subsidies have meant that Australian farmers must fight American producers who are able to offer lower prices as their Government supports their operating costs. Historically, the Americans and Europeans have distorted international markets to cushion their farmers in the market. For Australian farmers, this has meant only one thing: loss of income.

Now the American Government wants to tighten the screws even further. The new American Farm Bill, known as H.R. 2646, is currently under consideration by Congress. It has already passed successfully through the House of Representatives. If the bill becomes law it will take our primary producers from behind the eight ball to six feet underneath it. Any chance of ever having a level playing field will be lost for at least a decade. The bill, if passed, will remain in place for 10 years. Ten long years would mean the death knell for many local producers. The current Farm Bill will expire in September next year. The bill has seen more than one-third of farm income for some commodities being provided by the American Government, rather than from the market.

In the wake of the recent shocking terrorist attacks, many local farmers have expressed fears that the American farm lobby will move quickly so as not to lose its place in the line for further handouts. It is anticipated that the American Government will be in favour of increasing or introducing subsidies to various industries following the terrible events of 11 September. The new Farm Bill extends and intensifies the problems associated with the current bill. It would result in American Government support for farmers skyrocketing by more than \$US70 billion during the next 10 years. Let me put this into some perspective.

That \$US70 billion is twice Australia's annual export income from all rural commodities. The new bill also encourages production when prices are low. Of course, this depresses farm prices, exacerbates overproduction and perpetuates the problem of unsaleable stockpiles. H.R. 2646 favours the farmers who need the help the least. It is not only the small family farm that gets a lift. The American Office of Management and Budget Estimates has found that more than 50 per cent of Government aid goes to the largest 10 per cent of farms. That is, the wealthiest and least in need rake in the government cash. It is a subsidy equivalent of President Bush's tax cuts, which massively favoured the top 5 per cent of income earners. By massively subsidising its farmers, the American Government is crippling free trade and continuing to make a mockery of the notion of a level playing field. The American attitude may also encourage other countries to increase trade barriers. That would further undermine the next round of world trade negotiations.

The level of spending in the new bill will be a massive \$340 million. It has been widely reported as fiscally irresponsible, and it is miles ahead of recent expenditure, which is already running at record levels. The bill may undergo some moderations or major changes as Congress debates it. Let us hope so. However, whatever its final shape, unless there is some drastic change or last minute intervention, the result will be bad news for all Australian exporters of rural commodities. If primary producers think that it is difficult producing and exporting grains, cotton, beef, lamb, wool and sugar in 2001, just wait until the new bill comes into effect in October 2002! It will be a trade onslaught that many of our farmers will simply be unable to overcome.

In January this year Country Labor called on Prime Minister Howard to set aside his delight at the election of a Republican President in America and to stand up for Australian farming families. We did this because as soon as President Bush was elected American farm leaders began placing demands on his

administration. In January the leading United States farming representative body, the American Farm Bureau Federation [AFBF] called on the American President to double farm subsidies to \$US18 billion or \$A32.5 million. Mr Bob Stallman, AFBF chairman, demanded that the funding be doubled and said that the current funding allocation proposed by the United States Congress was woefully inadequate. Mr Stallman also said:

We look forward to working with the new administration and believe many items on President-elect Bush's agenda will, if Congress co-operates, benefit farmers adventures.

There may be one saving grace for Australian primary producers and that is Congress. Members of Congress see through this bill for what it is: a thank-you to the farming States from the Republicans for delivering George Bush an election victory. Last December, New South Wales Country Labor warned that George Bush would need American farm States to be re-elected in 2004. On 15 December, Country Labor member of the Legislative Council and Central West farmer, the Hon. Tony Kelly, stated:

We are already seeing US farmers throwing around their newfound influence. In fact, Mr Stallman is bragging that he expects a closer relationship with the new White House, saying the new Bush administration understands American agriculture.

Prime Minister Howard must be prepared to fight any plan to increase subsidies for United States farmers. We want him to take advantage of his apparently close relationship with President Bush. Mr Howard was quick to say that the election of George W. Bush was good news for Australian farmers. However, we are now seeing otherwise. The Howard-Anderson Government needs to protect Australian farmers and their interests in the face of the new George W. Bush administration, which owes its existence to United States farming families. George W. Bush won 30 States, including all mid-west and southern farming-belt areas. States such as Arkansas, which has voted Democrat for the past eight years, voted Republican by a proportion of 51 per cent to 45 per cent.

Six electoral college votes were crucial in getting George Bush over the line. Florida would not have mattered if the farmers of Arkansas had not turned to Bush. While Al Gore won the votes in the major cities such as New York, Los Angeles and Boston, George W. Bush won farming strongholds of Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and Kansas, and all with healthy majorities. Make no mistake: George W. Bush will be looking at ways to retain this critical rural support. In fact, his presidency depends on it. Enough is enough. For too long Australia's primary producers have suffered at the hands of anti-free trade United States governments. Just look at last year's United States sheep quota controversy when Australian producers were hit by the Americans who were looking after their own backyard. Thankfully, that problem has now been overcome.

Mr Howard is quick to tell Australians about his special relationship with the United States. He even wants to be the regional deputy in the Asia-Pacific area for the United States. Australian farmers do not want a deputy, someone who will dance to the United States tune. They want a Prime Minister and a Federal Government that will stand up and fight for them. It is time for Mr Howard to ensure that Australia's interests are heard in Washington. I believe that there is no better time than now to take that stand. In a spirit of bipartisanship, Australia supported the United States in its hour of need following the 11 September terrorist attacks and Australian troops will be the first to support the Americans in Afghanistan. Australia has demonstrated its commitment and I do not think it is unreasonable for us as Australians to ask our American allies to look at our track record in supporting the United States.

We are not asking for special favours in our trade relationship with the United States. We are just asking for a fair go, a level playing field and not to be disadvantaged by the extremely high levels of subsidy that are propping up American industries, especially as Australian rural industries in recent years have gone ahead in leaps and bounds and Australian dry land farmers have become the most efficient in the world. All we want is a fair go so that Australian farmers can compete and develop their industries. It is time to ask the Federal Government to intervene and call in a few IOUs.

Mr SLACK-SMITH (Barwon) [3.43 p.m.]: It is great news that after a great deal of hard work on the part of the Federal Minister for Trade, Mark Vaile, the United States Government has decided, after many years, to remove the tariffs from Australian and New Zealand lamb that is exported to American markets. I congratulate the Federal Minister for Trade.

Mr Martin: What about the subsidies?

Mr SLACK-SMITH: I agree with the concern of the honourable member for Bathurst about the \$US70 billion direct subsidy for United States agriculture. As a cotton grower from north-western New South

Wales, I am fully aware of what subsidies have done to the New South Wales cotton industry. I can provide the House with an illustration of the problem. Cotton farmers who sell today will receive approximately \$295 per bale.

Mr Black: Point of order: For how long will the honourable member for Barwon speak? The clock shows 10 minutes.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I direct the Clerk to reset the clock at nine minutes.

Mr SLACK-SMITH: Most of the time I make my point and sit down. An oversupply of cotton is imminent throughout the world, especially in China and United States. That has been caused partly by a reduction in consumption that has resulted from a worldwide recession. Because of subsidies, American cotton farmers are selling their cotton for \$600 per bale. That depresses prices received by farmers in Australia and, of course, we are not happy. It is important to note that the factor that beats any price for any commodity anywhere in the world is quality. There is no doubt that the lamb produced by Australian and New Zealand farmers is superior in quality to lamb produced in the United States. American lamb is tainted, tough and does not taste very nice. When Americans taste Australian or New Zealand lamb, they change their diet rapidly. I believe that that is what will happen. A lot of hard work has been done by Minister Mark Vaile to try to have the United States tariffs on lamb removed, and I believe he deserves to be congratulated.

It is a dirty trick to offer subsidies in agriculture. In the long term, no subsidy for any product is beneficial to the consumer or to the country of origin. There is no place for subsidies anywhere in the world for any product. Australia participates in a global market, and countries that are members of the European Union are just as much to blame as are the Americans. Subsidies create inefficiency. Eventually subsidies drive up the price of commodities to such an extent that products are priced out of the market altogether. The availability of subsidies does not promote quality or efficiency and we end up with people being involved in industries and they do not deserve to be there. Subsidies just do not work.

Moreover, subsidies drive down industries to the ultimate detriment of taxpayers and the country involved. Sometimes the effects are horrendous. A good example is the European Union and the cost of livestock in Europe and Britain. Huge costs are channelled to taxpayers, who have to pay for the product. That is what is happening in the United States of America. I believe that subsidies are totally counterproductive. Honourable members on both sides of this House are hoping that America will see the light. I do not know who wrote the speech made by the honourable member for Bathurst, but it was quite a good one.

Mr Martin: I wrote it.

Mr SLACK-SMITH: The honourable member should not mislead the House! The trouble is that American farmers have accepted subsidies. I believe that is totally political. On one hand I agree with what has been said by the honourable member for Bathurst, but on the other hand I suggest that the honourable member for Bathurst should take a deep breath and think about things for a while. Just imagine the situation if Al Gore was President of the United States. Apparently Al Gore cannot chew gum and walk in a straight line at the same time. I do not know how true that is, but someone also told me that he once made a complete mess of a two-car funeral.

The honourable member for Bathurst went off the subject a little when he spoke about world terrorism, so I will digress as well. All I can say is: if Al Gore were now the President of the United States, God help America and God help our free world! At least George Bush has the courage of his convictions. I believe he is doing a very good job both for the United States and in combating world terrorism. Australia was not the first country to actively support America in its terrorism campaign; Britain was the first country to take the lead. Australia stepped in after many other countries became involved. However, we are still there, and that is important.

I return to the motion. It is important that we realise there is a problem. I congratulate the honourable member for Bathurst on moving the motion. Mark Vaile has earned a great reputation overseas as an active Minister. He should get on a plane immediately and try to convince America that putting all this money into agricultural subsidies simply will not work. The reason the cotton industry started in Australia was because cotton growers in California could not hack the inefficiencies, subsidies and government control they were facing in America. They decided to choose a country in which they would be free to market their own cotton. They wanted to make their own decisions and grow the cotton where they believed it could be done sustainably. For that reason they chose Australia. They also chose Australia because of the huge subsidies being paid to American farmers.

In one way it worked to Australia's benefit. Indeed, I believe that at the moment cotton is the fourth largest agricultural export earner in Australia. I am proud to say that about 90 per cent of New South Wales cotton, at \$295 a bale, comes from my electorate. However, given the massive subsidies in the United States, cotton growers receive \$600 a bale. There is an inequity there that must be addressed. Mark Vaile should get on the plane and go and talk to the yanks—and he should take some lamb chops with him. He should tell them that their lamb stinks—and it does stink—and that its quality is lousy.

Once the Americans taste our lamb, I guarantee that they will take as much lamb as they possibly can, irrespective of the price. Australia has the best lamb in the world. We are the world's largest exporter of lamb meat, beef and live cattle. Compared with other countries we are not a big producer as far as numbers are concerned, but we are one of the largest exporters. As long as the Australian dollar stays at 51¢, we are in there with a big chance. I commend the honourable member for Bathurst for moving the motion.

Mr HICKEY (Cessnock) [3.53 p.m.]: I take pleasure in supporting the motion moved by the honourable member for Bathurst. It is pleasing that the shadow Minister for Agriculture, the honourable member for Barwon, also supports the motion. There are 15,000 lamb producers in New South Wales and they sustain 56,000 jobs. The comments of the honourable member for Barwon are a bit off the mark, given that the farm gate value is \$175 million. In total, the New South Wales lamb trade, in retail and free on-board export value, is worth about \$650 million. The lamb industry is vital to New South Wales—from Glen Innes and Armidale in the north to Oberon, Cowra and Dubbo in the centre of the State to the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, Wagga Wagga and Albury in the south. Fletcher's, which is based at Dubbo and also conducts operations in Western Australia, produces more lamb than all the American producers combined.

I am stating these facts because today is an historic day. It is a great day for Australian lamb producers and their workers. From today, the United States has agreed to remove its tariffs on Australian lamb. The announcement followed the decision of the World Trade Organisation appellate body in May, which confirmed its earlier ruling that United States import restrictions on Australian lamb in 1999 were unjustified. The United States tariffs were originally imposed after the United States International Trade Commission determined that imports of lamb meat from Australia and New Zealand were threatening to cause serious consequences for United States sheep farmers and the United States lamb meat industry. That happened for one simple reason: our product is better.

Our farmers have taken on the might of the United States Government and won, and today's decision will help us build on a solid United States base. Despite the imposition of the United States import restrictions, the amount and value of Australian lamb exports to the United States has increased. Exports to the United States jumped from less than 17,000 tonnes, or \$99 million, in 1998-99 to 27,000 tonnes or \$178 million in the 12 months to July. At the same time, domestic sales have also done well, following a \$3 million marketing campaign.

The Australian industry believes it can build the United States market into a major one, after making solid gains during the past two years despite the tariffs. Sheep Meat Council of Australia Executive Director Mr Scott Hansen said: "Market analysts are now saying the US is one of our best prospects." The challenge for us is to change United States consumer patterns, that is, from regarding lamb as purely a restaurant dish to a home-cooking product. Mr Hansen has warned, however, that Australia should keep the balance in its market approach and it should not put all its eggs in the one basket.

With regard to Australian lamb winning market share in the United States, Country Labor has always said that the number one priority was to get rid of the 23 per cent tariff impost. Thanks to the World Trade Organisation, that has happened. We are now left with one challenge: the overwhelming United States subsidies. Just look at the American lamb industry! The United States is faced with an industry that has been in long-term structural decline because of a range of home-grown factors rather than because of imports. For example, 90 per cent of United States farmers have fewer than 100 sheep. To continue to use subsidies to prop them up is no good for either the United States or its international competitors. But they live to fight another day, as do the remaining 10 per cent of farmers, those who own the largest and wealthiest farms and benefit the most from the subsidies.

Today Australian lamb producers have had a great win. If, in addition to that, the United States Government were forced to backtrack on its new farm bill, we would have had the most substantial of all victories. The ball is now in Howard's court. The Federal Government must do all it can to stop the new farm bill, or at least force change to it. Today the Federal Government claims it did everything it could for Australian lamb producers. If that is the case, it must also stand up for those who produce and export grains, cotton, beef, wool and sugar.

Mr Howard was at pains to tell us throughout the Federal election campaign about his rapport with President Bush. Barely a day went by without the words "President Bush" passing his lips. Mr Howard also did not miss a beat when it came to a photo opportunity. He should use that apparent access to President Bush to our farmers' advantage. His message is simple and straightforward. Australian primary producers should not be punished because President Bush feels he owes his election victory to the farm-belt States. As such, the policy of continuing and increasing United States subsidies must be stopped. Clearly, these tariffs need to be addressed. Now that the ball is in Howard's court, the Federal Government should address the issue, and ensure that our farmers do the right thing and that the United States does the right thing by them.

Mr R. W. TURNER (Orange) [3.58 p.m.]: I support the motion for urgent consideration moved by the honourable member for Bathurst. On the one hand I congratulate the United States Government on removing the tariffs, but on the other I condemn the same Government for increasing its farm subsidies by a further \$70 million. It is a punitive prop-up of American farmers. Despite that, American farmers are still complaining about a lack of profits. In August I went to an agricultural seminar in San Antonio, Texas. The main theme of that conference was that despite the subsidies they are getting, farmers are looking for further subsidies to prevent them leaving their farms.

Farmers in some areas of that country are totally inefficient and, as the honourable member for Cessnock said, their farms often are too small to be viable, yet they expect subsidies to continue—subsidies that Australia could not afford. I congratulate our farmers on their efficiency. Despite the subsidies in the United States of America and the continued subsidies in the European Economic Community [EEC], our exports of agricultural products continue to increase. I understand that our exports are worth about \$3 billion a year.

I congratulate our farmers. I congratulate our Prime Minister for supporting our farmers, our Deputy Prime Minister on his initiatives, and Mark Vaile, the Minister for Trade, and his predecessor, Tim Fischer, on helping our farmers increase their exports of wheat, grain, beef and dairy products. Australian wine exports are doing very well, including exports into the United States. Despite United States subsidies, if our farmers are given a fair go they can compete on that market. It is good that Australian wine companies are buying into the American market to enable them to consolidate. In restaurants in San Antonio, Texas, USA prime beef is being promoted but nearly every restaurant also has lamb and quite a few of them have Australian lamb. I was proud to eat a lamb meal in Texas, in the middle of beef country.

I recall earlier this year talking about the Americans eliminating tariffs on lamb. Whilst the Americans were procrastinating and lobbying whether they would or would not eliminate the tariffs, our farmers used their initiative and boned out many of cuts of lamb going to the United States. Whilst our lamb tonnage into the United States was restricted, we increased the number of lambs exported to the United States by getting rid of waste products such as skirt, breast and bone. Australian farmers have to use such initiatives when competing in an unfair market. I congratulate them. It is good that our lamb producers have been developing, more so in the past few years, lamb products that the export market wants.

Our farmers are producing fat-tailed awassi sheep, either for export to the Middle East or for the cheese market. They are producing younger suckers for our local market and larger lambs for the United States. We are increasing live exports to the Middle East. I congratulate Roger Fletcher from Dubbo—the largest exporter of lamb and lamb products in Australia—and others on their initiatives with lamb, cattle or grain. They go overseas and assess the market, find out what the markets want, then come back and, wherever possible, produce the products wanted by the overseas markets. Despite punitive subsidies in the United States and in the EEC, our farmers have increased their export potential.

Mr BLACK (Murray-Darling) [4.03 p.m.]: This is a good debate but once again I note that the Leader of the National Party is hiding perhaps in his cave on level 12 and is not willing to take part in an issue of vital concern to the bush, western New South Wales and Australia generally. I note also that the honourable member for Lachlan is not present. Reference was made to the Deputy Prime Minister—been and gone John. I was advised approximately one hour ago that the Liberal Party is about 500 votes in front in Farrer. That means that the National Party has lost three seats, given the loss in Queensland to Katter and the win by that marvellous Independent in Tamworth, New England. When people talk about the National Party having simpatico on this issue, one has to stretch the limits—

Mr Piccoli: Point of order: Clearly this urgent motion is about lamb exports: it is not about the Federal election last week. This motion was moved in a spirit of bipartisanship. On the basis of the vote in Farrer and the Riverina, the honourable member for Murray-Darling will lose his seat at the next election.

Mr Knowles: To the point of order: The honourable member for Murray-Darling was making the point that the National Party was going down the tubes like lambs to the slaughter.

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

Mr BLACK: Indeed. Minister, if you keep that up I will liken you to our Coalition colleagues just as I do the Minister for Agriculture. We have debated tariffs and quotas in this Chamber on at least two occasions this year. In March the United States Government crashed the market in Japan to \$US200 a tonne of rice from the previous \$US400 a tonne. The issue then was the \$267 a tonne subsidy in California. In July we debated the 23 per cent tariff on Australian lamb going into the United States. At that time we called upon our Federal colleagues—reflecting on what other honourable members have said—to do something about it.

We called on the Prime Minister to directly intervene. We have heard the comments of my colleagues with respect to the bush and the west of New South Wales. It is quite clear that the only bush that our Prime Minister cares about is George. What has George done? I will clear up some of the figures mentioned today. The Farm Bill deals with \$340 billion worth of subsidies in the United States—up \$70 billion. It is on the table waiting for George Bush to sign it off. Texas—the home State of George Bush—is the biggest lamb producing State in the United States of America. The carrot is \$42.7 million worth of subsidies against Australia.

There are a lot of good graziers in my electorate. Recently they got \$65 at the farm gate for live sheep going to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. That is much better price than they got several years ago. The United States Farm Bill will force European Union members and everybody else of like mind to forget about the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade Uruguay round. At that time the United States said it would get rid of some tariff barriers, and it did. This will force members of the European Union to go back to the bad old days when tariffs operated in European countries. I cannot stress enough the quantum of the United States Farm Bill—\$340 billion, up \$70 billion. In Australia people will be walking off the land and moving to the cities if we allow this situation to be perpetrated. [*Time expired.*]

Mr MARTIN (Bathurst) [4.08 p.m.], in reply: I thank colleagues on both sides of the House for their contributions to this important debate. Despite one or two little detours, it was conducted pretty much in a bipartisan spirit. It is important to note that this is the first Parliament in the world to welcome the United States of America decision on lamb tariffs. Though we congratulate President Bush on that decision, it should not be lost on us that Australia and Mark Vaile, the responsible Minister, had to drag the Americans to court to get the decision. In actual fact, the Americans would have been left with a very difficult decision if the President had not signed off on removing those punitive quotas because they would have been flying in the face of the appellate body on trade, the United Nations. So, although this decision was not taken as graciously as we would have liked, at least it has now been taken.

It has been made clear in this debate that the Americans have been taking with one hand and taking with the other in a never-ending battle with, in particular, our rural industries. The honourable member for Barwon spoke about the global market and said that Australia must be part of it. We all have our own views on the merits or otherwise of globalisation. It has some downsides. I am not a great fan of globalisation. We should be sending a message to the Americans that if we are to compete in the global market we want to do so on a level playing field. I wish the Leader of the National Party had been present to support this motion. Increasingly, he chooses not to talk on these matters.

There has never been a better time for us to have the ear of the President of the United States of America. The honourable member for Barwon argued whether it was Australia or the United Kingdom that was first in supporting America in its hour of need, in its fight against terrorism and in what it is doing in Afghanistan. By any measure, the Americans have recognised Australia's willingness to put its hand up and support the United States of America in combating terrorism. Our support was given without condition. I agree with that. We did not say that we would give practical help but that as a quid pro quo we wanted the United States to do something about its unfair tariff regime. No such conditions were placed on the support given by our Prime Minister or any of our leaders.

But now we should be saying to America that the global market must be on a level playing field. We are not asking for gifts of assistance; we merely ask to be treated equally. Australia has a very efficient rural industry. It has gone through a lot of pain in recent years, and we never know what is around the corner, be it drought, fire or famine. Australian farmers, particularly dryland farmers, have shown that they can compete with the best in the world. It is fact that Australian lamb far outweighs anything that the Americans have. A few years ago, as mayor of Lithgow, I welcomed a group of Americans from the sister city in Broomfield, West Virginia. We took them to Hartley for a barbecue on the property of Bob Morris, brother of the late Barry Morris.

When we told the Americans that we had lamb on the spit, they became very circumspect, polite and backed away from our lamb. They just did not want to eat it because their perception of lamb was completely different from ours. Once they tasted Australian lamb that day they marvelled at it and said they had never tasted anything like it. There is no question that our product is the best in the world. We want the Americans, Europeans, Japanese and others to recognise that Australia is prepared to be a player in the world market, but we expect the rules of that market to be the same for Australia as they are for other countries. I commend the motion to the House.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF DOCUMENTS

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I refer to a point of order taken by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition today in which he quoted from a ruling that I had supposedly made on 28 October 1998 in reference to the tabling of a document that was quoted in debate. I have looked at the *Hansard* record of that exchange in 1998. I advise honourable members that my remarks on that occasion have not been interpreted correctly. I did not order the tabling of the document at that time. Rather, *Hansard* notes that a member had asked the Minister to table the document, which the Minister did on his own initiative.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Dr PETER MACDONALD ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Mr BROGDEN (Pittwater) [4.15 p.m.]: In today's *Sydney Morning Herald* is an article by Cynthia Banham entitled "Independent bags Abbott's election letter from the top". It relates to the contention of the Federal member for Blair of inappropriate usage of correspondence by the Prime Minister in support of the honourable member for Warringah. It seems that Independent members of Parliament, supporters and wannabes in New South Wales simply do not cope with losing elections. The fact is that the people of Warringah spoke loudly last weekend in re-electing Tony Abbott as the member for Warringah. I want to bring to the attention of the House a brochure distributed in the Warringah electorate last week by Dr Peter Macdonald, a former member of this House and the Independent candidate for Warringah in the recent Federal election. The brochure states:

Beware dirty politics...

Once again, as this campaign draws to an end, some people and parties have resorted to dirty politics. I have never done so and never will. I have always stood on a platform of clean politics in every election I have contested.

Watch out for last-minute letters or flyers that make outrageous allegations about my character, leaving me no time to respond with the truth. Also, beware of misleading how-to-vote cards.

The brochure then gives his contact information, and closes by stating:

I am committed to developing a new style of politics.

It is signed "Peter Macdonald". In very small type at the bottom of the brochure, which was authorised by Dr Macdonald, is the following:

Please do not become confused by the similarity between my name and that of another former Manly Councillor Ian MacDonald, campaign manager for Tony Abbott in 1998, who is now serving a gaol term for embezzlement of his legal practice.

Finally we have laid bare the real tactics of Independents in New South Wales. Candidate Dr Peter Macdonald, a former member of this place, is fully and totally supported by the present member for Manly, David Barr. David Barr actively campaigned for Dr Peter Macdonald. The vehicle that David Barr parks in this very building, as honourable members would have seen during the Federal campaign, had Dr Peter Macdonald propaganda attached to its roof. These Independents pretend to be white knights, but Dr Peter Macdonald is nothing more than the emperor in new clothes. His grubby politics are demonstrated by his attempt to drag down his opponent, Tony Abbott on this occasion, by associating Tony Abbott with a person who is in gaol on an embezzlement matter.

Just a few lines before that statement in fine print Dr Peter Macdonald claimed to be whiter than white and warned voters against any last-minute attacks on his character. His brochure is appalling. Dr Peter Macdonald was portraying to the people of the northern beaches an image that he is above those sorts of politics. Yet this was one of the nastiest things I have seen in politics. Dr Macdonald raised a matter that was not causing confusion in anyone's mind. No-one in the electorate of Warringah was genuinely confused about whether or not the candidate was Ian McDonald or Peter Macdonald. Everybody knew who Dr Peter Macdonald was. Though Ian McDonald is just a distant memory for most people, Dr Peter Macdonald raised Ian McDonald's name and dragged up the issue, putting the two together in an attempt to demean the character of Tony Abbott.

I am bitterly disappointed with these sorts of politics. They have no place on the northern beaches or anywhere else in a civil society. It is very disappointing that Dr Peter Macdonald, of all people, would tell the people of Warringah that he wanted a new style of politics, that he was opposed to dirty politics, and sought to warn constituents against dirty political tactics, then resorted to this despicable act. This is low, grubby and personal politics. At no stage had Tony Abbott sought to personally attack Dr Peter Macdonald or associate him with any scandal or any other individual of disrepute. I am extremely disappointed about these issues. More disappointing is the fact that the current member for Manly, who fully endorsed Peter Macdonald's actions, was active in Peter Macdonald's campaign. The honourable member for Manly should reconsider his alliance with Peter Macdonald and these sorts of politics in the future.

AUSTRALIAN SPECIALISED DEFENCE EQUIPMENT PTY LTD

Mr COLLIER (Miranda) [4.20 p.m.]: Honourable members will recall my speech in this House on 18 September regarding the plight of my constituent Mr Peter Pool of Kirrawee. Mr Pool is the managing director of Australian Specialised Defence Equipment Pty Ltd [ASDE]. This local family company provides specialist equipment, specialist boats and specialist defence consultancy services. Mr Pool, a maritime engineer, has designed more than 130 specialist boats and his expertise and competency are well-regarded, even by competitors such as Ken Brown of KBM International.

On 17 February this year ASDE was requested by the Olympic Security Command Centre to provide a specialised Seacat P30 vessel to support all underwater security operations at the Olympic Games. That request was accompanied by a purchase order from the Police Service. Mr Pool and his employees worked day and night for five months and the boat was delivered on time to the Olympic Security Command Centre in August 2000. It was trialled and used throughout the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Mr Pool's firm, ASDE, even made service engineers available for the vessel 24 hours a day, seven days a week, free of charge, throughout the Olympic period.

One would think that we, as a community, would be grateful for Mr Pool's and his company's efforts in helping to make our Olympics the best Games ever. But guess what? Mr Pool has not been paid in full. Fourteen months after the Olympics the Police Service still owes Mr Pool \$60,000 for the Seacat boat. In April this year I wrote to the Minister for Police. The Minister, in his reply, stated "the Police Service is attempting to finalise this matter as quickly as possible". That simply has not happened. Despite Mr Pool's solicitor indicating to the Police Service that company's willingness to finalise this matter, the Police Service has not entered into meaningful negotiations with Mr Pool's solicitor. That was spelled out to this House by me on 18 September.

At that stage the Police Service was arguing that there had been no delivery of the boat in a legal sense. That was a legal nonsense then, and I said so in this House. On 18 September I called on the Minister for Police to have this matter finalised as soon as possible. After all, Mr Pool has been owed \$60,000 for a year and he has had to lay off staff as a consequence of the failure of the Police Service to pay him. Mr Pool has not been able to pay himself a wage, his business is struggling and his health is suffering. What has happened since? Nothing. Has the matter been sorted out? No. He is still owed \$60,000 by the Police Service.

The latest excuse is contained in a letter dated 7 November, which was written to me by the Minister for Police. The Police Service has now advised the Minister that the Seacat P30 vessel was not built to specification. The Police Service alleges that the boat has "major defects and deficiencies leaving the vessel almost totally unfit for its intended purpose". It should be noted that the service no longer disputes the delivery of the boat. It now says that the boat is unfit and that it has defects. What an absolute farce! Let us look at the facts. First, I am advised that the vessel was built under the supervision of an inspector nominated by the Police Service. So that would make it difficult for the Police Service to say that it does not meet police specifications.

Second, the vessel was inspected and registered by the Waterways Authority. That would make it almost impossible for the Police Service to say that the vessel had major defects. Third, the vessel was trialled

before the Olympics. Why were these alleged defects not pointed out to Mr Pool then? I believe that, if they had been pointed out at that time, Mr Pool would have been able to rectify any defects. Fourth, the vessel was used by the Olympic Security Command Centre for at least 400 hours during the Olympic period. So how can the Police Service claim that the boat was unfit for its intended purpose? Clearly, that is a nonsense.

The Police Service is saying to Mr Pool that that boat, which has been built to its specifications, built under its supervision and used by it for more than 400 hours, is unfit for the purpose for which it was intended. That defies logic and commonsense. It is an example of a bureaucracy stonewalling and stringing out a dispute until a small businessman gives up and goes away because he cannot afford the legal bills associated with a lengthy arbitration or expensive court action. That must not happen to Mr Pool. He has done his bit. As my previous statement in this House demonstrates, he has gone the extra mile to make the Sydney Olympics the best and safest Games ever.

The attitude and obstinacy of the Police Service are disgraceful. Despite my letter to the Minister advising him of the service's willingness to finalise this issue, I have been told that the service is not engaging in meaningful negotiation with Mr Pool. The Police Service appears to be intent on forcing this matter into court. It wants to take action against a small businessman who can ill afford it. The file relating to this issue is now half an inch thick. I again call on the Minister for Police to take steps to finalise this matter and end this shameful episode—an episode that has caused considerable and unnecessary financial and emotional distress to my constituent at Kirrawee, Mr Peter Pool.

Mrs LO PO' (Penrith—Minister for Community Services, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Women) [4.25 p.m.]: As the Minister for Police is not able to be in the Chamber this evening he wants it to be known that he has agreed to investigate this matter.

NORTH COAST MARINE PARK

Mr D. L. PAGE (Ballina) [4.25 p.m.]: Last week the Minister for the Environment announced a proposal to create a marine park of some 23,000 hectares, stretching from Brunswick Heads in the north to Lennox Head in the south. This marine park will extend from the high-water mark to three nautical miles offshore. The proposed park, which will include a variety of estuaries such as Brunswick River estuary, Bolongil Creek, Tallow Creek, Taylors Lake and Lake Ainsworth, is a significant proposal as it will impact on a popular stretch of coastline from Brunswick Heads to Lennox Head, which, of course, includes Byron Bay. It also includes the Julian Rocks off Cape Byron and the moat at Lennox Head.

Many activities are carried out in these areas, including recreational fishing, commercial fishing, scuba diving, snorkelling, spear fishing, whale watching, boating, kayaking, windsurfing and beach-related activities such as swimming and surfing. Indigenous people also engage in fishing and shellfish collecting and other traditional activities. In other words, these beaches and the waters three nautical miles seaward are integral to our lifestyle as local residents and are a huge attraction for tourists. Many jobs depend on the activities that currently occur in the proposed marine park.

Because its potential implications are so significant, I believe it is not appropriate for the Minister for the Environment to place a 21 December deadline on all public submissions to this proposal. That is just over a month away. Of course, that is a particularly busy time of the year for most people as it is leading up to Christmas. I have received numerous phone calls from concerned citizens that the time allowed for public submissions is far too short, especially at this time of the year. I have also received letters from concerned groups. One of the letters I received was written by Chris Richards, Chairman of the Lennox Head Chamber of Commerce. I quote briefly from that letter:

This plan was only announced last week and our members have little information at hand on which to base any submissions.

Retailers are busy with the pre-Christmas rush, accommodation houses are busy finalising arrangements for the peak tourism holiday period, tourism operators are making final preparations for their biggest season, community members at large are getting ready for annual holidays and family visitations, and the Chamber executive are deeply involved in the preparation of the Strategic Plan for Future Development in Lennox Head.

For these reasons it is most unlikely that interested people will be able to make worthwhile submissions by the deadline.

Chris Clare, Chief Executive Officer of Ballina Business Shirewide, has written in similar terms. He states:

There is naturally a lot of community interest in this proposal at Lennox Head, being, as it is, dependent on activities so closely related to its coastal proximity.

Ballina Business Shirewide sees a definite need for the community to be given adequate time to prepare submissions on the proposal.

We are seriously concerned at the short time available to the community and the difficulties that will be faced in meeting the December 21st deadline.

We are firmly of the opinion the deadline should be extended in order to allow the gathering of further information so that the many questions being asked can be put into perspective.

The implications of the proposed marine park must be considered carefully. Many activities are simply not permitted in a marine park. For example, notwithstanding the decision to allow a section of the beach at Suffolk Park to be used by people walking their dogs, because of the recent creation of the Arakwal National Park, presumably the declaration of a marine park to the high-water mark would exclude these dogs from being allowed onto the beach. This provision, *prima facie*, would seem to apply between Brunswick Heads and Lennox Head to the high-water mark. Another issue is the question of accessing sand for beach nourishment at Byron Bay.

The Coastal Council of New South Wales has indicated that the sand nourishment of the beach at Byron Bay is its preferred option. However, that sand would have to be extracted off Cape Byron in the area covered by the proposed marine park. As sand extraction is forbidden in a marine park that option would go out the window. On reflection, a myriad of issues would inevitably arise as a result of this proposal. The implications of this proposal are serious and bear close scrutiny. Such scrutiny and public consultation cannot possibly occur in the short time frame proposed by the Carr Government. I call on the Government to extend the period for public submissions on this proposal until 30 April 2002. Only then will our community have had a reasonable chance to comment properly on the implications of this proposal. The Marine Parks Act has the following objectives:

- (a) to conserve marine biological diversity and marine habitats by declaring and providing for the management of a comprehensive system of marine parks,
- (b) to maintain ecological processes in marine parks,
- (c) where consistent with the preceding objects:
 - (i) to provide for ecologically sustainable use of fish (including commercial and recreational fishing) and marine vegetation in marine parks, and
 - (ii) to provide opportunities for public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of marine parks.

[Time expired.]

CENTRAL COAST BUSINESS AWARDS

Mr McBRIDE (The Entrance) [4.30 p.m.]: On Wednesday 7 November I attended at the Central Coast Leagues Club the 2001 Central Coast Business Awards. I have attended this event more than three times over the past 10 years. Unfortunately, on this occasion and on most other occasions the awards coincided with parliamentary sittings. That seems to be a problem that members of Parliament have. The Central Coast Business Awards have become one of the most prestigious events on the local calendar. Last week's presentation was the most successful in almost two decades of the event, with some 742 people in attendance.

The business awards demonstrate the important role that businesses and community groups play in Australian life. They generate employment, contribute to local communities and are the foundation of success for Australia. The major sponsor of the awards is the Central Coast Leagues Club. It is supported by Wyong Shire Council, Gosford District Chamber of Commerce, Gosford City Council, the *Central Coast Business Review*, the New South Wales Department of State and Regional Development and Novotel at Sydney Olympic Park. The event is an opportunity for all of us in the community to encourage, support and promote businesses from the area.

I acknowledge in particular Dee West, divisional manager of *Central Coast Express Advocate* and leader of the presenters of the event, and the events co-ordinator, Vicky-Kerry Santos, for their contribution in organising this outstanding event. Presenters on the evening included Dee West, divisional manager of *Central Coast Express Advocate*; Laurie Maher, deputy chairman of the Central Coast Leagues Club; Peter Brown, representing the Department of State and Regional Development; Novotel's Vanessa Paterson; Neil Rose, the mayor of Wyong Shire Council; Robert Bell, mayor of Gosford City Council; Edgar Adams, editor of the

Central Coast Business Review; and Matthew Wales, president of the Peninsula Chamber of Commerce. Other presenters included Louise De Martin, president of the Gosford Chamber of Commerce and David Humphries, chief executive officer; and Brad Cook, treasurer of the Central Coast Leagues Club, which has been a major sponsor of the event for almost two decades.

Those who are nominated for awards, as well as the winners, have tremendous spirit, which is characteristic of the people on the Central Coast. The awards presentation is a really good evening, which everyone enjoys. Most importantly, it gives businesses the opportunity to celebrate their success and the success of business on the Central Coast. There are 24 categories, and I will name some of them. The automotive dealership category was won by Orix Car Centre from Pacific Highway, Gosford West. The winner of the automotive service category was Robin Baldwin from York and Melbourne streets, Gosford East. The bakery/cake store winner was Bakers Delight from Erina Fair. The winning beautician was Aztec Beauty Concepts from Westfield Shoppingtown, which I understand my partner visits on the odd occasion. Someone suggested that I go there as well, but that is not true.

The winning butcher was Matty's Meat Chiller from Henry Parry Drive, Gosford, and the winner of the cafe category was Oscar's Cafe, a great little place in Gosford market centre. The winner of the clubs with more than 8,000 members was Wyong Leagues Club, which has had a total renewal. Munmorah United Bowling Club won the category of clubs with fewer than 8,000 members. It is a great little club at Late Munmorah. The winner of the fast food/takeaway category was Sandwiches at the Bay at Bay Village. The fruit and vegetable winner was Mega Fruits at Lake Haven Shopping Centre.

Mr Piccoli: Hear! Hear!

Mr McBRIDE: The honourable member for Murrumbidgee will appreciate that category, as a former grower himself. The winner of the hairdresser category—I do not know whether the honourable member will be able to use it—was Hair Rage at Bay Village Bateau Bay. The health and fitness winner was Inshape Health Club. My House at Erina Fair won the home furnishing category. The hotel/bottleshop category was won by The Entrance Hotel. George and his wife and son accepted the award on the evening. The jewellery/gift store winner was Vivians Jewellers at Erina Fair. The winning men's fashion store was Ed Harry Menswear—and the honourable member may visit them as well. The winning pharmacy was Terry White at Bay Village shopping centre.

The professional services category was won by Highland Grove Pre-school, and the real estate category by Ray Murray Real Estate. The restaurant category winner was The Palms Restaurant and the service and trade winner was Rax Printing and Typesetting. The specialised services winner was Camera House, where I have spent a lot of money over a number of years. It was good to see John and his staff win that award. It is a very specialised business and provides tremendous service to the Central Coast. I would recommend it to anyone who requires new camera or video equipment and other technology required nowadays. The tourism services winner was Crowne Plaza Terrigal and the winning women's fashion store was Just Jeans at Erina Fair. As I said earlier, it was a wonderful night to celebrate small business on the Central Coast. *[Time expired.]*

VAUCLUSE ELECTORATE SCHOOL MERGERS

Mr DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [4.35 p.m.]: Again I wish to talk about the merger of schools in my electorate. About an hour ago the Minister for Education and Training gave the House some figures that he claimed were increases in enrolments in various schools. I would like to show the House that the Minister for Education and Training has outrageously misled Parliament and should immediately return to the Chamber, apologise to the people of New South Wales and correct the record. The Minister for Education and Training said that year 7 enrolments at Vaucluse High School will go from 52 this year to 128 next year. Under some pressure during question time the Minister acknowledged that year 7 enrolments at Dover Heights High School had gone down by 60. Therefore, the figures for Vaucluse and Dover Heights, according to the Minister, had gone from 112 enrolments this year to 128 next year—not what he first tried to say, which was from 52 to 128.

My understanding is that year 7 enrolments this year at Vaucluse are of the order of 75 to 80. Let us say there are 75. Dover Heights year 7 enrolments this year are 70. Therefore Vaucluse and Dover Heights enrolments in year 7 this year are 145. The Minister has said that the enrolments next year will be 128. Therefore the enrolments for Vaucluse and Dover Heights high schools in year 7 have gone down by 17, despite the fact that about an hour ago the Minister was crowing in this Chamber about increased enrolments in the eastern suburbs of Sydney as a result of the merger of the two schools. This is clearly Cecil Hills High School all over again. This is the Premier and the Premier's staff manipulating facts and, worse, manipulating the Minister for Education and Training.

On the figures available to me this afternoon, the Minister for Education and Training has simply lied to this House about enrolment figures at the two schools. I do not know what figures he has for enrolments for next year, but I will use his figures—128. If that is the case, enrolments have gone down, not up. The Minister has frequently lied to the people of New South Wales, and under the rules of this House he has clearly misled Parliament this afternoon. I suggest to the Minister that he leaves his office, comes down to the Chamber, and apologises for what he is doing to the people of New South Wales and the students of the schools in my area. He should also apologise to the parents of the students in my area and explain where he got those figures from and why he was doing the Premier's dirty work this afternoon with another stunt to try to suggest that enrolments had gone up because of the Minister's attack on schools this year. We all know that the numbers are not going up. I have just read the figures, and they did not go up from this year to next year.

The Minister has returned to the Chamber, so hopefully we will find out where he got the figures from. For the Minister's benefit I will repeat them. The Minister said that enrolments for Vacluse would go from 52 to 128. This year, year 7 enrolments at Vacluse are in the vicinity of 75 to 80—let us say 75. He said that Dover Heights enrolments had gone down by 60 because he was combining the two figures. Let us accept that. His new figure is 128 next year. Dover Heights is 70, not 60.

Mr Aquilina: It is 76.

Mr DEBNAM: The figure is 76. Whichever way one looks at it, the Minister has misled the people of New South Wales and this House. He should resign today. He should have resigned six months ago. He is destroying one school after another. The Minister has attacked parents and teachers. Because the Government is gutless, the Minister is refusing to overrule the Teachers Federation on teacher selection. A school in my electorate is demanding that teachers be chosen on merit, but the Minister is refusing to do so. Once again the Minister is misleading the Parliament and lying to the people of New South Wales. What does the Minister have to say for himself?

Mr AQUILINA (Riverstone—Minister for Education and Training) [4.40 p.m.]: What does the honourable member for Vacluse have against his local schools? The honourable member has two high schools in his electorate: Dover Heights High School and Vacluse High School. For the record, the year 7 enrolments at Dover Heights for this year were 60. The honourable member claimed 70, but the figure was 60. In relation to Vacluse, the variation is 52. This year's enrolments is 76. That is 136 all up.

Mr Debnam: You said there were 52.

Mr AQUILINA: The variation is 52 at Vacluse.

Mr Debnam: You said there were 52.

Mr AQUILINA: The variation for Vacluse is 52, from 76. That makes a total of 128. That is 128 in one school, as opposed to 136 in two schools. That is what we are talking about.

Mr Debnam: So it has gone down, has it? You are the teacher—has it gone up or down?

Mr AQUILINA: The honourable member should not be a nitwit.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills): Order! The honourable member for Vacluse will cease interjecting or he will be removed from the Chamber. I place him on three calls to order.

Mr AQUILINA: With 60 students at Dover Heights High School and 76 students at Vacluse High School, we are talking about a total of 136. At this stage—we are still a fair way out from the start of the new school year—we are talking about an amalgamated school on one site with 128 applicants. I guarantee that the number of applications will go up, providing the local member stops rubbishing his local schools. That is exactly what is going on at the moment.

Mr Debnam: The Minister should resign.

Mr AQUILINA: The honourable member should not be an idiot. This is about bringing kids back to public education and, at this stage, an increase of more than 300 year 7 students. He should stop rubbishing his local schools! [*Time expired.*]

LIVERPOOL ELECTORATE INDIAN COMMUNITY

Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [4.42 p.m.]: I advise the House of a number of related functions that have occurred in my electorate. In particular, I refer to functions held within the Indian community in my electorate and specifically, although not exclusively, the Indo-Fijian community. These events are firmly within the Hindu cultural tradition, although those present at some of the events were by no means exclusively Hindu. The Indo-Fijian community in Liverpool is significant and has grown greatly in recent years. It has been a positive addition to Liverpool's already highly varied cultural diversity.

The 1996 census revealed that in the new release suburbs of the western Liverpool council area the most common place of birth, apart from Australia, for residents living there was Fiji, and those residents are largely Indo-Fijian. Liverpool is now recognised as the Indo-Fijian capital of New South Wales. Some members of the community arrived here many years ago. However, the bulk of the current community arrived here more recently. Substantial migration followed events in Fiji in 1987. Following the formation of the Fiji Labour Party, the first Labour Government of Timoci Bavadra was elected in 1987. This was then followed by two coups by Sitiveni Rabuka, leading to a military takeover.

This horrific legacy was overcome by the adoption of a constitution that allowed for a return to democracy. This led in turn to an election and a further victory for the Fijian Labour Party; Mahendra Chaudhry became the new Labour Prime Minister. Once again there was a coup, this time on 19 May 2000, leading again to a military takeover. Following legal proceedings, funded in part by contributions from Liverpool, new elections were held. However, this did not end the uncertainty, with the new Government refusing to follow its constitutional obligation to open ministerial positions to the Fijian Labour Party. I understand that the matter is back in court in Fiji.

The politics of Fiji to which I have just adverted have seen not only uncertainty but also much racism against Indians and Indo-Fijians. This uncertainty, racism and persecution have led to many Indo-Fijians leaving Fiji to seek to make their lives elsewhere. In my view, this has been very much to the detriment of Fiji. However, it has been very much to the benefit of Liverpool. For example, one of my acquaintances in south-western Sydney is someone who was elected in 1987 as a Labour member of the Fijian Parliament. Another acquaintance of mine is a former assistant secretary of the Fijian Trade Union Congress.

When Mahendra Chaudhry visited Australia after the coup in 2000, Liverpool was one of only two places in New South Wales where he held a public meeting. In fact, shortly after the May coup, Liverpool saw its biggest demonstration in many years; about 4,000 people demonstrated against the overturning of democracy in Fiji. In that context, it is not at all surprising that Indian festivals are celebrated in Liverpool. The first event I mention was organised by Shree Sanatan Dharm Sabha of New South Wales Incorporated. The President of the organisation is Sri Gyan Singh, whom I have known for some time. The function, including a Jhanda Bhandan ceremony, occurred over three nights. I was able to attend on the evening of Saturday 27 October.

The master of ceremonies on the evening was Rajendra Kumar. I had the opportunity of addressing the gathering. Amongst other points, I was happy to indicate that as a Labor politician I felt very comfortable with any tradition that embraced Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahendra Chaudhry. A significant part of the event was the presentation of parts of the Ramayana. This is the great Sanskrit epic which deals with the activities of Lord Rama and other deities and characters. It has been described to me as the Hindu bible, although that seems to be a far too Eurocentric perspective and a far too westernised description. Certainly, it deals with what may generally be termed creation histories.

The event occurred at the Sabha's Temple, which is located in a factory unit in Prestons. It was the third or fourth time I had visited that temple. A Pandit from India, a religious leader, described in Eurocentric terms as a Hindu priest, assisted in the various ceremonies and observances. Another Pandit involved was Pandit Vishnu P. Kashyap. The second event I report on was held the following day, Sunday 28 October. It was the Diwali Mela Festival, which was held at the Whitlam Leisure Centre in Liverpool. The President of the organising committee was Vijend Prasad. I attended the festival in the afternoon, together with councillor Cecilia Anthony from Liverpool council.

Diwali is usually translated as "festival of lights". It is often described, once again using a Eurocentric perspective, as a Hindu Christmas. It involves the giving of presents and spending time with one's family. Obviously, it also has religious overtones. The Diwali Mela Festival lasted all day and featured singers, dancers, various speeches and a parade of spectacular floats. It also featured the launch of a web site and business directory for the Indian community by Radio Navtarang, one of the Hindu radio stations.

I shall briefly mention two other functions. Unfortunately I was unable to attend those functions because they both occurred on 10 November; other events on that day prevented me from attending. One event was the Deepwali Mahautsau Festival of Lights celebration held in Bonnyrigg that day, organised by Guru D. Charan. The other event was also a Diwali Festival, this one held in the Hinchinbrook Community Centre, to which I was invited by Rajesh Kumar. I am delighted that I have been able to attend those functions and provide my support to the Indo-Fijian community in Liverpool.

LISMORE LIVESTOCK PRODUCERS

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [4.47 p.m.]: Tonight I acknowledge five people with whom I have been closely associated during my time in the livestock industry. I put on record the fact that they have been acknowledged by their respective peers. The first person I refer to is George Hardcastle. George runs the MacPherson Hereford Stud situated at Old Koreelah near Woodenbong, in the northern part of my electorate. Earlier this year at the Royal Agricultural Show in Sydney, George was acknowledged with life membership of the Australian Hereford Society. George and his wife, Shirley, have contributed to the hereford breed in the Northern Rivers area over a number of years. They continually hold bull sales, and have one of the leading studs in New South Wales. This recognition of George's contribution to the hereford breed in the Northern Rivers region was certainly deserved.

The second person I refer to is Earle Bulmer, who is a brahman breeder. He has the Mountana Stud at Casino, which was formed in 1967. Recently he was awarded life membership of the Australian Brahman Breeders Association. Earle has made a tremendous contribution to the growth of the brahman breed in the Northern Rivers area. I well remember when he had to put up with jibes about the brahman breed, especially in a predominantly hereford area. The Australian Brahman Breeders Association saw fit to recognise Earle's contribution to the brahman breed with life membership. Earle has been supported by his wife, Lynn.

Recently John Barber was named as a member in the general division of the Order of Australia [AM] for his services to the beef industry and the community, especially in areas of development research, promotion and breeding. John is a former chairman of the Northern Co-Operative Meat Company at Casino and was a member of its board of directors for in excess of 30 years. John is also a member of the Australian Hereford Society. He is a cattle breeder of tremendous repute and has made a significant contribution to the growth of different breeds of cattle in the Northern Rivers district. For a number of years he was also a director of the Board of Tick Control and was a supportive member of my Casino Beef Week Promotions Committee. He has also been a member of the New South Wales Farmers Association for 35 years and has always been supported by his wife, Enid.

I also acknowledge John Pollard of Mallanganee, who received a Commonwealth Recognition Award for Senior Australians for his contribution to the community of Kyogle and Mallanganee. John Pollard senior is a former councillor of the Kyogle shire for 35 years and during that time he was deputy shire president. He is also a former councillor of the Northern Rivers County Council and a former councillor on the Far North Coast County Council. He had an intense involvement in the North Coast Regional Fire Prevention Association and was also a member of the Cattle Tick Advisory Committee and the Mallanganee Progress Association. He has certainly made a significant contribution to the wellbeing of the Kyogle and Mallanganee community. He has been well supported by his wife, Betty, and her support has enabled him to carry out his various roles. Lately he has not been enjoying good health but he is coping. I commend John and Betty for their contribution.

Recently at the Warwick Rodeo a tribute was paid to Fraser Ramsey in recognition of his lifetime commitment to the sport of campdrafting. Fraser Ramsey is a campdrafter, a horseman, a stockman, a breeder and a trainer. He is a man who rose from humble beginnings in the Northern Rivers district of New South Wales to become one of the region's best known and most highly respected livestock agents and auctioneers. Along the way, he made a lifelong commitment to the sport of campdrafting. He has said, "Drafting is about the people you meet and the mates you make." Fraser Ramsey is certainly a worthy recipient of the Warwick Rodeo's tribute. I compliment his wife, Laurene, who has been a tremendous help to him while he has made his contribution to campdrafting. I am very proud of all those whom I have mentioned because the North Coast livestock industry is certainly richer as a result of the contributions of these five gentlemen and their families. I am very proud to be closely associated with them, and I am proud to have them as constituents in the electorate of Lismore.

BELMONT DISTRICT HOSPITAL

Mr ORKOPOULOS (Swansea) [4.52 p.m.]: I wish to address the House about the exciting redevelopment of Belmont hospital in the electorate of Swansea. Belmont hospital is a district hospital serving

the Eastlakes Macquarie subregion, which covers my electorate and that of my colleague the Minister for Gaming and Racing, the Hon. Richard Face. The upgrading of Belmont hospital at a cost of over \$20 million over the next three years is part of the lower Hunter health strategy and complements the record \$234 million in capital works, over time, to the Hunter Area Health Service, which was announced earlier this year.

The commitment to our public hospitals by this Labor Government contrasts sharply with the disgraceful cuts to funding of the health system across Australia by the Howard-Anderson Government. Moreover, there has been no commitment of future funding increases to our public hospitals by the Federal Government. I am excited about the upgrade of Belmont hospital, which includes a new non-medical drug detoxification unit, which is currently under construction; new day surgery wards; upgraded operating theatres; a new accident and emergency ward; a new palliative care ward, and a general upgrade of all the wards.

Over the past decade or so the Eastlakes Macquarie Dementia Service has provided dementia-specific day care services on the campus at Belmont hospital. Otherwise known under its original name of the Ocean Centre, it provided those in our community who suffer dementia with somewhere to go for daytime structured activities, and at the same time provided day respite for their spouses or carers. The service has been operating out of a converted demountable building that has severely outgrown its utility. The demographics of the district show a significant ageing population. The honourable member for Liverpool, who is in the chair, would not be surprised that this excellent service has experienced a substantial increase in demand for its programs.

There is currently a waiting list for the service. I am pleased to report to the House that the Hunter Area Health Service, headed by Professor McGrath and her officials, has agreed to a proposal to establish the service on a new site at the Belmont hospital campus and has included this new service as part of its master plan for the upgrade of the hospital. I have worked with the management committee of Eastlakes Macquarie Dementia Service—the service manager, Sister Josephine King, its president, Mrs Jenny Webb, its treasurer, Dick Delbridge, and its vice president, Ern Alchin—to obtain agreement from the Hunter Area Health Service for a 25-year lease of a site and, importantly, to work towards achieving capital funding from the Department of Ageing, Disabilities and Home Care for purpose-built premises.

The beauty of this new building is not only that services for clients with dementia will be more professionally accommodated but also that co-location of allied services could also operate from the same building. The application has the support of the Hunter Area Health Service, the Lake Macquarie City Council, my colleague the Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development, and me. I urge the department and the Minister for Health to give it favourable consideration. The prospects for better quality health care for our community are assured with the commitment by this Government—a commitment that is appreciated by all.

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 Swansea on drawing the attention of the House to the situation at Belmont hospital. From time to time people choose to make mischief about what is going to happen at the Belmont hospital and what its future role will be in regard to the very important area of health care for people who live on the eastern side of Lake Macquarie. I place on the public record that there is no doubt whatsoever about whether Belmont hospital will be closed or downgraded. Some people, during the most recent Federal election, tried to make political capital out of this matter, and that is of no use to anyone.

The fact is that the Belmont hospital is here to stay. It plays an important role in the provision of health care in the Hunter region, especially on the eastern side of Lake Macquarie, which is represented by the honourable member for Swansea and me. I fully support what the honourable member for Swansea said in relation to dementia. I am sure that a need exists for improved services, and I am equally sure that that we will work collectively to have the matter resolved. Belmont hospital came into existence as the first of the suburban hospitals in the Newcastle-Lake Macquarie area. It was the only one ever to be built in the area. Sites were selected all over the place back in the 1950s in attempts to identify a suitable place for a hospital, and among those was a site at Charlestown which will never be used for that purpose.

The site to which I refer is used for renal care and has an ambulance facility. Eventually it will also be used for some form of community health service. Similar sites were identified on the western side of Lake Macquarie, but the medical scene changed dramatically. Of course, the world's best John Hunter Hospital now provides health services for the area, and there is no need for a suburban hospital. That is the basis for the argument advanced by people who say that the Belmont hospital will be closed. Belmont hospital has been established at great public expense and it will service the community. It is a substantial building and it will provide substantial services in the future. Those who raised money for the Belmont hospital, for example the women's auxiliaries, continue to be misled by people who make mischief. I wish they would stop doing that.

PARRAMATTA TO CHATSWOOD RAIL LINK

Mr TINK (Epping) [4.58 p.m.]: While the Parramatta to Chatswood rail link is a vital infrastructure project, which I support, I am deeply concerned about the way in which the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning has responded to representations I have made on behalf of concerned Epping and Eastwood residents, including Daniel Restuccia, Brian McLauchlan, Andrew Davidson, Linds Guthrie and Irene Timmins. Many of their concerns relate specifically to the way in which the proposed changes to the rail link arising from the preferred activity report affect Epping and Eastwood.

On their behalf I received responses dated 7 and 9 November 2001, signed personally by the Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning, relating solely to the proposed changes in the Roseville-Lindfield area, including a deeper tunnel and new alignment but not referring to the Epping-Eastwood area in any way. However, it is quite plain from the preferred activity report that those proposed changes have nothing to do with Epping-Eastwood, where the proposed new alignment is said to be needed to avoid construction of new rail bridges over the M2.

In short, the planning Minister and his staff who must decide whether to approve the project are not even reading representations being made to them. In the result, the Epping-Eastwood representations are probably buried in the Roseville-Lindfield file. Given that people who are newly affected by the proposed changes have none of the rights to make representations under section 113 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act that people affected by the original environmental impact statement [EIS] proposal had, this sloppiness and downright incompetence by the planning Minister and his staff is a disgrace.

On 4 December 2000 the transport Minister's office assured me in writing that the transport and planning Ministers agreed that any submissions received on the preferred activity report will be forwarded to the Department of Urban Affairs and Planning [DUAP] while the project is considered for approval. Under section 115C of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, the planning department's director-general, in preparing an assessment of the preferred activity report for the Minister, is to examine representations made in response to the public exhibition of the EIS, submissions by the proponent and any other thing the director-general considers relevant.

The only people not specifically covered by this requirement to examine are those affected by changes proposed in the preferred activity report, including my constituents listed earlier and many others they represent. Bearing that in mind, as well as the appalling incompetence demonstrated personally to these people by the planning Minister, together with the assurance of 4 December 2000, it would be completely unjust and procedurally unfair if the planning department's director-general did not give the utmost priority to a thorough assessment of each and every concern these people have, doing so under the statutory category of "any other thing the Director-General considers relevant".

The director-general should be aware of and give due allowance to the fact that, according to this week's *Northern District Times*, representatives of the proponent are still canvassing the Epping-Eastwood area because they are not certain that all people affected by the changes in the preferred activity report have been notified. In short, the director-general of the planning department should extend procedural fairness and give full consideration to the submissions of all those affected by the changes in the preferred activity report, especially given the demonstrated personal incompetence and disinterest of the planning Minister.

These are strong words, but I believe they are warranted. I was astonished to receive these letters, which are plainly designed for people in the Roseville-Lindfield area. As the member representing Epping and parts of Eastwood, I find it extremely unnerving that the correspondence does not mention that area at all. These people were not originally affected by the proposal, which went through the entire EIS process, and they have been affected only as a result of the changes brought about by the EIS process. As members would be aware, under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act people who are affected by the result of the EIS process do not have any rights to have their views taken into account. Submissions on behalf of these people, above the submissions of all others, must be given the full consideration of the planning department. That is the only redress these people have and something must be done about the matter.

NON-ASSOCIATION AND PLACE RESTRICTION ORDERS

Mr BARTLETT (Port Stephens) [5.03 p.m.]: I have now been the member for Port Stephens for a little over two years, and during that time I have received a number of complaints about groups of young people doing the wrong thing in their community. Some 12 months ago, when the Minister for Police visited the Port Stephens electorate, the issue of groups of young people causing concern in the area was raised. I was called to a

meeting of the Nelson Bay Town Improvement Committee, which was also attended by members of the Nelson Bay Chamber of Commerce, at which concerns were expressed about groups of young people in parks and on the streets.

I have also raised the matter with members of the Raymond Terrace Chamber of Commerce. The Justice Legislation Amendment (Non-association and Place Restriction) Bill, which was recently introduced, goes a long way towards addressing the concerns that have been expressed. I received a letter from Patricia Jefferson in which she expressed her heartfelt concerns about what is going on adjacent to her premises. In her letter Ms Jefferson said she will be forced to leave Lemon Tree Passage because of those concerns. She also said:

Just 4 weeks ago I saved the wonderful barbecue facility that the Parks and Reserves built for the benefit of families using the park. It was just lucky that I looked over just as these two kids were setting fire to the outside latticed wall of this facility. I immediately rang the Fire Brigade and Police, both arriving very quickly, so thankfully this facility was saved, the kids got away of course.

The Justice Legislation Amendment (Non-association and Place Restriction) Bill amends the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999, the Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act 1987 and the Bail Act 1978. The legislation has passed through this House and is now in the upper House. The main purpose of the introduction of the legislation was to provide for non-association—that is, you are no longer allowed to see John Smith or Bill Brown—and place restriction orders in relation to bail, sentencing, leave from custody and parole. In other words, offenders will not be allowed to enter the central business districts of Raymond Terrace and Nelson Bay. However, it is not the jurisdiction of police to decide such matters; only a court can make such decisions.

The bill provides for non-association and place restriction orders to be imposed on persons who are sentenced for offences carrying a maximum penalty of six months imprisonment or more. It also provides for non-association and place restriction conditions to be imposed on the grant of parole under the Children (Criminal Proceedings) Act 1987. The bill provides for two kinds of non-association order. The first prohibits the offender from being in the same company as one or more specified persons, and the second prohibits the offender from all forms of association with one or more specified persons. It provides for one kind of place restriction order, which will prohibit the offender from frequenting or visiting a specified place or district. An order under the proposed section will last for up to 12 months.

I have often being told that police do not have enough powers. I have discussed the matter with police officers, who have told me they have move-on powers but that offenders can simply cross to the other side of the street to comply with the order. With this bill the Carr Labor Government has added to the armoury that police can use. We have had the knife laws, the drug house legislation, increases in sentences for gang assaults, the move-on legislation, videoconferencing, and we now have these non-association laws. The Government is responding to the community's concerns. I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise these matters in the House and hope that they will be addressed.

TROUT CLASSIFICATION

Mr TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [5.08 p.m.]: I have been approached by members of the New England Trout Acclimatisation Society who are concerned that recent State Government legislation is threatening their sport and the multimillion dollar tourist activities associated with it. The group, which has 780 voluntary members, liberates trout on behalf of New South Wales Fisheries into a total of 3,931.3 kilometres of various streams between the Barrington Tops and Deepwater, near the Queensland Border. Each year the group distributes two million fingerlings into rivers and streams in this area, with a survival rate estimated at between 2½ per cent and 5 per cent. In real terms, that equates to between 12 and 25 fish in each kilometre of waterways. Since a huge percentage of grown trout are fished out during the season, it leaves a minimal number to be labelled as a threatening species under the new legislation.

For those unaware of the implications of this new classification of "Key Threatening Process" in part 7A, schedule 6 to the Fisheries Management Act 1994, it means that trout are now regarded as a danger to a number of native fish and frogs. The reasoning behind that new classification by the Fisheries Scientific Committee is hard to follow and appears to have been based on restricted scientific data. Trout, as most people would know, is an introduced species. It is not a prolific breeder like the cane toad in northern Australia and its numbers have been built up since the beginning of the last century through the introduction of fingerlings, which are then subsequently fished out and replaced once again. One could say it was a wholly industry-sustained endeavour and a sport supported by its participants.

No extensive trout research has been carried out in the New England district since Dr John Lake's study in 1956. However, members of NETAS have discovered through their inquiries that the new listing of trout as a threatening species is based on a 1976 publication on the Lake Eucumbene catchment and used no recent scientific evidence relating to the New England. Another matter of concern to me is that this declaration, which affects so many involved in trout fishing in the north of the State, was made without any consultation with them. Members of NETAS were not informed that this action was being considered or that they could make a submission. It is simply not good enough to explain that the information was available on a web site or through advertisements in metropolitan papers when a key organisation is not involved in a process which threatens its livelihood.

In fact the first NETAS knew about it was from an article in the *Daily Telegraph* on 18 June this year, three days after the closing date for submissions. I must stress that NETAS has been in existence for more than 50 years. It is a major stakeholder. It has a wealth of data and experience that should have been considered, yet it was given no notice that this action was being considered. I would like the Minister and his department to consult much more widely on these issues. I do not think there are many people these days who are not concerned about the environment, about the survival of native species and about retaining biodiversity. But along with the balanced majority who want a managed change of practice, there are environmental extremists who regard every introduced species as a danger, regardless of evidence to the contrary. NETAS supports the identification of the other five fish named as threatening species in the recent reclassification. However, it believes there is no solid scientific grounds for including trout on that list and, indeed, regards its inclusion as a threatening act against a valuable tourist industry and a sport which engages thousands of Australians and overseas visitors each year.

NETAS argues that much more evidence should be gathered about the total environmental factors affecting the existence of native fish and frogs in the New England environment. Farming practices, the logging industry, population growth, climate change, ozone depletion and many other elements contribute to the extinction of native species. It is too simplistic to pick the easiest target and, with little evidence to back it up, declare it as threatening to satisfy a minority fringe baying for action. I call for a moratorium on the classification of trout as a threatening species and for it to be removed from the key threatening process list until a further and more broadly based scientific investigation takes place. I urge that this process link all organisations involved in trout fishing and the distribution of fingerlings in consultations about future classification, and to take into consideration the economic impact of killing off the trout fishing industry.

Private members' statements noted.

House adjourned at 5.13 p.m. until Friday 16 November 2001 at 10.00 a.m.
