

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday 27 February 2002

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

**Mr Speaker** offered the Prayer.

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

### Sessional Orders

#### Days and Hours of Sitting

**Mr WHELAN** (Strathfield) [10.00 a.m.], by leave: I move:

That the House take note of the sessional orders and the resolution on days and hours of sitting adopted on Tuesday 26 February 2002.

I thank the Opposition for its co-operation yesterday, which was the day Her Excellency the Governor delivered her Opening Speech. The Address-in-Reply debate will continue in this House today. The Opposition's co-operation enabled the sessional orders to be adopted, and I indicated to the Opposition that there would be a take-note debate on the issues today. Clearly, all oppositions—I recall this only too well—do not like the standing and sessional orders of the government of the day. However, the sessional orders adopted yesterday include, importantly, the citizens' right of reply and the code of conduct for members. I am sure honourable members will not disagree that the procedures adopted by the House are important. As I said, it is understandable that some standing and sessional orders will not be agreed to by the Opposition, and I can distinctly recall being in that position.

I indicate to the Opposition that there are some issues of concern to me and to the Government, particularly relating to notices of motions and the papers prepared by the Parliament. In the House yesterday I indicated to the Opposition spokesperson that the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee should meet, consequent upon decisions made by Mr Speaker that on private members' days only the first 10 notices of motions for bills and notices of motions for general motions be considered. There were many hundreds of notices of motions in the previous parliamentary session. It was impossible for the Parliament to sit and deal with all those notices of motions.

As a result, the use-by date of many notices of motions has expired. Some relate to a time set or an event that has occurred—some notices went back to 1999. I am concerned about the ability of members to submit notices of motions, on behalf of constituents or as a shadow Minister. That is the role of members, whether they are in government or in opposition, and that role should be unfettered. Another concern relates to the needless work being created in preparing the notice paper. I ask that the Clerks convene a meeting of the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee to examine the procedures and eliminate the waste of preparing papers, while preserving the right of members to give notices of motions and to have them recorded in *Hansard*. In my view members should have that right unfettered.

Undoubtedly the Opposition will raise some issues. I assume one issue will be the absence of question time on Friday sittings. I will listen and then reply to the Opposition spokesperson's comments. Parliament rarely has a question time during Friday sittings. Friday sittings are used for the purpose of dealing with private members' notices of motions and by the Government for important government legislation. That will continue. I am reluctant, except by concurrence, to push bills through unless a bona fide time period has been given, not only as provided in the standing and sessional orders, so members can research the bill and the information and make a valued contribution to the debate.

**Ms Moore:** Like WorkCover.

**Mr WHELAN:** There are exceptions, such as the petrol tax in 1986. Some matters do arise suddenly, but in the main honourable members would be hard-pressed to find a bill that has gone through the Parliament

without everyone involved being fully briefed. In relation to the WorkCover legislation, meetings were held. Opposition members will say that they complained—and they had a right to complain—about the short notice of the bill, but members could consult the committee of experts and staff from the Minister's office who were available. I will reply after I hear from honourable members who will contribute to this debate.

**Mr HARTCHER** (Gosford) [10.07 a.m.]: I move:

That the motion be amended by addition of the following paragraph:

- (2) That it is the opinion of this House that the following sessional orders should not have been adopted:

Closure, Restriction on;  
Deputy-Speaker and the Chairman of Committees;  
Friday Sittings;  
Parliamentary Secretaries;  
Quorum and Division Bells.

The Coalition accepted the sessional orders moved by the Leader of the House yesterday because it agreed with the Government that it was inappropriate to debate the sessional orders and the days and hours of sitting while the House awaited the summons to attend Her Excellency in the Legislative Council. However, the Coalition is concerned about a number of the sessional orders. I thank the Leader of the House for providing us with the opportunity this morning to place on record our concern and to move an amendment appropriate to that concern. The Coalition's principal concern is that the sessional orders should reflect the operation of the Parliament as the body representative of the people of this State which, firstly, enacts the laws and, secondly, holds the Government accountable. In fact, the sessional orders do not reflect the two primary themes of having a constituent body and a legislative body in this State.

Why is the Coalition concerned? One concern relates to Parliamentary Secretaries. The Government is avoiding compelling Ministers to attend Parliament. Ministers are required to appear in the Chamber for only three quarters of an hour at question time and during divisions. Under the provision in the sessional orders regarding Parliamentary Secretaries, Ministers' responsiveness to Parliament is essentially optional. Ministers should come to the House during debate on legislation to answer questions on behalf of the Government. This is especially important in Committee when questions are put and points of view argued. Parliamentary Secretaries simply occupy the Minister's seat and sometimes reply to various points raised in debate by reading the handwritten notes supplied by departmental advisers. There is no interchange between Ministers and members of Parliament. Legislation should be developed through the parliamentary process that brings it to Parliament; it should not simply reflect the bureaucracy for which Parliamentary Secretaries act as spokespersons.

This is not a trivial point but a fundamental concern. The Government has ignored this issue repeatedly, and it is now embodied in sessional orders that Ministers will not attend Parliament and reply to debates and that bureaucrats will write replies for Parliamentary Secretaries. We object strongly to that development. We believe Ministers should come to Parliament not simply for pro-forma debates but to answer questions and engage in the interchange that occurs in Committee. The Committee process does not involve formal debate: it is designed to elicit information, pose questions, gain answers to develop an understanding of the rationale behind various parts of a bill and to argue about its operation. This is a crucial concern for the Opposition. We believe the Parliamentary Secretary system does not work and should not be embodied in sessional orders.

The Opposition's second concern—in order of priority—relates to Friday sittings of the Legislative Assembly. These sittings do not operate in the same manner as the second chamber in Federal Parliament in Canberra to which members go to make private members' statements or to table second reading speeches. Friday sittings are a programmed sitting of the House and thus should operate under the normal processes of the House. There is one difference: on other sitting days the House rises at 10.30 or 11.00 o'clock in the evening while on Friday it rises in the afternoon so that members can return to their electorates. However, the Government has made Friday sittings operate as a second chamber in the Canberra model at which formal speeches are made and recorded in *Hansard*.

Under this sessional order, divisions, question time and calls for quorums are not allowed. We previously raised the quorum calls issue because we believe the Government's action is unconstitutional, and on that occasion the Leader of the House said, "Well, why don't you take it to the Supreme Court?" Quorums are not called on a whim. The right to call quorums is laid down in the New South Wales Constitution Act, which requires that 20 members be present in the House when business is transacted. Attempting to ignore and seeking to overrule the constitution by way of sessional order is a most contemptuous act. The Government is telling the

people of this State that it believes it can dispose of or disregard the constitution at whim so long as it can pass the appropriate sessional order. The quorum provision is laid down in the constitution. If the Government does not like that provision it should amend the constitution, not seek to subvert it through the sessional orders. Quorums are important so quorum calls should be permitted during Friday sittings.

Divisions should also be permitted on Fridays because they reflect and record the views of individual members about legislation, amendments to legislation or issues before the House so that those members may be held accountable by their electorates on polling day. Electors, if they wish—and many do in these days of increased accountability—can read *Hansard* to see how their member of Parliament voted on a particular issue on a particular day. Important points of principle and divisions on them should not be simply postponed to another sitting day as part of some mass process—which is the effect of deferring divisions. Divisions make members accountable to their electorates, and denying members the ability to call for divisions on sitting Fridays dilutes that accountability. Oppositions do not call for divisions for fun. We all know the reality of politics: the Government will usually win, especially if it has a large majority. However, we believe our votes should be recorded for our constituents to see. Accountability is important, which is why we believe divisions should be allowed on Fridays.

Our third concern about Friday sittings relates to question time. Under the Westminster system, power in our society has passed over many years from Parliament to the Executive. However, Parliament can keep a check on the Executive via question time. Ministers in this Government regularly refuse to answer questions. That is bad enough, but even worse is the decision by the Government not to submit to questions on Fridays. Few Ministers appear in this Chamber on Fridays. Friday after Friday we see Parliamentary Secretaries and the Leader of the House—whom I commend for the zeal that he has shown in the past and continues to show—but few of their ministerial colleagues. We rarely see the Premier. This Government regards Friday sittings as simply a talkfest for the backbench.

Parliament is the parliament sitting; it is not simply a debating chamber intended to appease a small group of people while the real work of governing takes place elsewhere. At the end of the day, under our constitution and constitutional practice Parliament is the fundamental body that governs this State and the Executive is the delegated body that, through this place, carries out the will of Parliament. Accordingly, Friday sittings of Parliament should not be Clayton's sittings but genuine sittings of the Legislature. The real reason that Parliament sits on Friday is not so that members may make speeches—as the Leader of the House suggested—but so that the yearly statistics can reflect the fact that the House sat for a large number of days. This is clear from last December's Government press release, which stated that Parliament last year sat for the greatest number of days since 1974.

The Government is concerned only about presenting the image to the community that Parliament is sitting regularly. However, it is not telling the truth: Friday sittings of the House are not genuine sittings. This lack of genuineness is borne out by the fact that many Friday sittings have lasted only from 10.00 a.m. until 1.00 p.m.—barely three hours. No workers in this State would collect a pay cheque at the end of the week if they had worked for only three hours on a regular working day.

**Mr Ashton:** Unless they work in radio.

**Mr HARTCHER:** Or unless they are left-wingers like the honourable member for East Hills, who does not believe in a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. Let that comment be a reflection of the views of the left wing of the Australian Labor Party. My next point relates to the positions of Deputy-Speaker and Chairman of Committees, as set out in the sessional orders. Honourable members were told that it was important for this House to have not just a Chairman of Committees, as always has been the practice, but a Deputy-Speaker as well. Now that the process has been in operation for three years, we can see that it does not work. The only rationale or reason to have an office of the Deputy-Speaker separate to the Chairman of Committees is to provide a job to another right wing member of the Australian Labor Party.

The purpose of this House is not simply to provide jobs for members of the various factions of the Labor Party. No other Parliament works with a Speaker, a Deputy-Speaker and a Chairman of Committees, each drawing a separate salary and accoutrements of office. This Parliament and its budget and should not be abused in that way. The sessional orders should not simply reflect jobs for the boys or girls. The Coalition does not support that and calls upon the Government to give a real accounting of why it believes it needs a Speaker, a Deputy-Speaker and a Chairman of Committees. It has never been justified, and the reason it has never been justified is that there is no justification.

I will address the restrictions on quorums and divisions between 10.00 a.m. and 10.30 a.m. on Wednesdays and Thursdays. The half-hour gap was introduced when some members of Parliament went to the honourable member for Gordon, Tim Moore, when he was Leader of the House. They said that because of child-minding requirements and other restrictions upon them they could not arrive at 9.00 a.m., the then scheduled time. The honourable Tim Moore agreed that while Parliament would sit at 9.00 a.m., as a family-friendly process votes would not be recorded between 9.00 a.m. and 9.30 a.m., to enable members to get their children to school. That rationale disappeared when the commencement of sittings was moved to 10.00 a.m. No council or business in the State operates with a half-hour warm-up period. Those organisations are well and truly functioning before 10.00 a.m. There is no reason for the half-hour gap between 10.00 a.m. and 10.30 a.m. in this Parliament other than the fact that it suits the Government to get its members here by 10.30 a.m.

This Parliament should operate in the same way as every Parliament, that is, once it starts work it should work effectively. It should not have Clayton's Fridays and Clayton's periods between 10.00 a.m. and 10.30 a.m. The people of New South Wales pay us and expect us to operate all the time. That is what we are here to do and what the people of New South Wales will hold us accountable for when we face the elections in March 2003. The Government, through its sessional and standing orders, reflects that it is not interested in being accountable to the people of the State. The Government ensures that Parliament runs to its own convenience rather than the convenience of the electorate, and the Coalition rejects that. We reject the half-hour gap between 10.00 a.m. and 10.30 a.m. and the Friday sittings, which is for the convenience of Parliamentary Secretaries so Ministers do not have to be in the Chamber. We also reject the restrictions on calls for quorums and divisions.

These are important points relating to the proper functioning and accountability of the House. We make these points not simply for the convenience of the Opposition or the crossbench. These points emphasise the role of the Parliament as a representative body that reflects the will of the people. The Parliament is accountable to the people who are our masters: they elect us, pay us and expect an accounting from us. For these substantive reasons, the Opposition has moved these amendments and calls upon the Government to accept them or properly justify to the people why these sessional orders are in place. The people of this State want to know why the Government chooses to run Parliament in this manner and how it serves the people.

**Mr FRASER** (Coffs Harbour) [10.25 a.m.]: I support the amendments moved by the honourable member for Gosford and reiterate his reasons for moving them. I will restrict myself to the Friday sittings and the restrictions on calls for quorums and divisions between 10.00 a.m. and 10.30 a.m. on Wednesdays and Thursdays. Traditionally this House set down Thursdays as private members' day. Honourable members from both sides of the House have an opportunity to debate private members' bills and notices of motion that are regularly put before this House. The Leader of the House told us this morning that Friday sittings gives honourable members an opportunity to discuss notices of motion they have put on the notice paper. The notice paper at the end of the last session, before the prorogation of this Parliament, contained more than 600 motions. It was farcical when the Leader of the House suggested that the Government was giving the Opposition an opportunity to discuss those motions.

On numerous occasions during the past three years when the Opposition has tried to prioritise a motion as a matter of urgency for the community, the Government has blocked that motion from discussion. On other occasions when members of the Government have put forward motions, the motion is given urgency and is allowed to be discussed. An example that springs to mind is the motion in relation to the Newcastle Knights leagues club being in the grand final. That is farcical and makes a joke of the Parliament in this State. The Government does not allow the Opposition the freedom that the Leader of the House indicated during his speech earlier this morning. If the Government is serious about having its much vaunted and publicised greatest number of sitting days—66 days—it should give us a private members' day on Fridays with a question time. The Government should allow us to put our legislation and notices of motions before the House so we can debate those issues. It should give us an opportunity to have a question time on Fridays.

It is farcical to have no calls for quorums or divisions on Fridays. Members from country electorates normally travel to Sydney on Sunday night or Monday, depending on scheduled meetings prior to Parliament sitting on Tuesday, and because of the sittings as listed they do not get home until Friday night. As the honourable member for Gosford said, often on Fridays our planes are booked for 6.00 p.m., 7.00 p.m. or 8.00 p.m. and we have no calls for quorums, no divisions and no business. We cannot get on an earlier flight because flights to regional New South Wales are hard to obtain at short notice and we are stuck in Sydney until a late hour. It is a waste of resources and does not give members of Parliament an opportunity to service their

electorates properly. Occasionally, country members and members of the National Party have gone home to meet commitments. The Government on those occasions has changed standing orders for the day and has taken votes to try to embarrass country members when they are not here. That is an absolute farce and a waste of taxpayers' money.

The Government has listed 15 Friday sitting days on this year's schedule. If we take those Friday sitting days out of the sitting schedule—they are non-event days—we will sit only 51 days this year. We are supposed to have a minimum of 17 private members' days. However, if we get 10 private members' days we will be lucky—I predict that the Government will continue its past practice of overriding private members' days on Thursdays. It will move a motion to change the orders of the day to allow government business to be dealt with and private members' business will not proceed. Government business usually proceeds on those days when embarrassing private members' legislation is to be brought before the House and the Government does not want to hear it.

The Government, in its arrogance, tells the State that it will sit on the days it chooses. It lists 15 Friday sittings, which in effect are non-sitting days. As the honourable member for Gosford said—and as *Hansard*, the record of this Parliament, shows—we are lucky to sit for three hours on those Friday sitting days. The Government will continue this farce for the sake of a headline, leading up to an election, that states "We sat 66 days this year". Farcical is the only word that can be used to describe the Government's statements. Arrogance is behind the decision to set such a sitting program—arrogance by a Government that is stale. Yesterday the Government even reannounced programs that have been in existence since 1997.

The restriction on calls for quorums and divisions between 10.00 a.m. and 10.30 a.m. on a normal sitting day is, once again, a farcical situation. Members from country electorates are usually in Parliament House at 7.30 a.m. The restriction is for the benefit of our city cousins because traffic may be too heavy or they want to sleep in because they went to a function the evening before and stayed out too late. They do not come into the House before 10.30 a.m. That is not good enough. If country members are here for a sitting week—we are here four nights a week—other members have an obligation to be in this House at 10.00 a.m. and calls for quorums and divisions should be able to be called from the commencement of each sitting day. As the honourable member for Gosford said, the decision to restrict calls for quorums and divisions was originally made by Tim Moore in the days when the House commenced at 9.00 a.m.—not 10.00 a.m.—on the basis that some members had to deliver children to school.

The media and others should take note of the porkies that are being told by the Government even prior to the session commencing. The Government would have us believe that we will sit 66 days to discuss business. As I said, we will perhaps have 10 private members' days and 51 real sitting days in all. As the honourable member for Gosford said, we do not see Ministers in this Chamber on Fridays. The Leader of the House is here, but he is no longer a Minister. Parliamentary Secretaries run in, read second reading speeches that are written by departments, debate does not proceed on those bills and the House adjourns at 1.00 p.m. For the past number of years I have been a member of the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee. However, the committee has held one meeting, which was aborted because of business of the House. In the last calendar year the committee did not meet. I make the interesting point that the Government has the numbers on the committee so we cannot get changes through anyway. The Government puts forward these sessional orders as an indication that it is a Government that is proactive in doing the right thing by this State. Once again it is a farcical situation imposed by an arrogant Government.

If Government members want the proper democratic processes to proceed in this State I urge them to list Friday as a fair dinkum private members' day and to hold question time on that day so that the Government can be put under the scrutiny of this Parliament. According to the Westminster system question time allows Ministers to be asked questions—although Ministers do not give answers to our questions. In this way the Government can run Parliament the way that, I believe, the public of New South Wales wants it run. The Government has proposed 66 sitting days but will give us only 51. That is not what the people of New South Wales and the people of my electorate expect. Forcing country members to stay in Sydney results in a huge expense to the State. If a division were called on a Friday I would be interested to see how many regionally based Labor members and Ministers would be in Parliament House. Whilst country members have an obligation and duty to remain in Sydney on Friday sitting days, Ministers slip out to country electorates to open events or to make announcements—without giving local members the common courtesy of advising them that they will be in their electorates.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Ms Moore.**

**GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY****First Day's Debate**

**Mr COLLIER** (Miranda) [10.36 a.m.]: I move:

That the following Address-in-Reply to the Speech which Her Excellency the Governor has addressed to both Houses of Parliament on opening this session of the Parliament of New South Wales be now adopted by this House:

*To Her Excellency Professor MARIE BASHIR, Governor of the State of New South Wales in the Commonwealth of Australia.*

May it Please Your Excellency—

We, the Members of the Legislative Assembly of the State of New South Wales, in Parliament assembled, desire to express our thanks for Your Excellency's Speech, and to express our loyalty to the Sovereign.

We assure Your Excellency that our earnest consideration will be given to the measures to be submitted to us, that we will faithfully carry out the important duties entrusted to us by the people of New South Wales, and that the necessary provision for the public services will be made in due course.

We join Your Excellency in the hope that our labours may be so directed as to advance the best interest of all sections of the community.

I congratulate Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir on her role as Governor of New South Wales. Everywhere I go in my electorate people pay compliments to her dignified manner and compassion, to the way in which she relates to individuals and groups, and to her understanding of the issues facing each and every Australian. I am honoured to move the adoption of this House's Address-in-Reply to Her Excellency the Governor's Speech on the opening of Parliament yesterday. I am privileged to lead the debate on behalf of the Carr Government. The year 2002 marks a political milestone for the New South Wales Parliament. It is, of course, the centenary of women's suffrage. In this great country of contrasts, our Australia, New Year's Day 2002 marked the beginning of the Year of the Outback. Ironically, as the International Year of the Volunteer came to an end, our State was in the midst of one of our greatest challenges of recent times—the bushfire crisis beginning Christmas Day.

There are a thousand stories of lives and property saved and of the courage and unselfish commitment of our volunteers throughout the crisis. Grays Point, in my electorate of Miranda, borders the Royal National Park in Sydney's south. In recent times this bushfire-prone area has seen the loss of the lives of three volunteer firefighters. On Christmas Eve we have a tradition in Grays Point. The firefighters drive through the streets with Santa, atop one of their trucks, distributing boiled lollies to the local children. The past three years it has been my privilege to play Santa Claus on the back of the fire truck. Last Christmas Eve as the truck stopped to turn in Greenhaven Road, Grays Point, on the edge of the Royal National Park, I could sense the unease and foreboding amongst our experienced firefighters. On Christmas Day some of these volunteers from Grays Point were fighting bushfires in the Blue Mountains. By Boxing Day they were fighting fires in the Royal National Park and Heathcote National Park.

On Boxing Day and in days following in the electorate of Miranda I witnessed the generosity, compassion and spirit of the people of the Sutherland shire. The GyMEA Trade Union Club opened its doors to 600 people of all ages very early that Boxing Day morning. They included aged residents of John Paul Village and families, some with their pets, cut off from their homes in Heathcote and Helensburgh. The "Tradies" management and staff, the local Salvos, the Red Cross, St Vincent de Paul, as well as the Department of Community Services, ambulance and the police all combined their efforts in a calm, quiet commitment to the wellbeing of all 600 persons. Local residents and businesses attended with offers of food and help. Some looked after the pets of the evacuees while others offered stranded children a swim in their own backyard pools.

Each time I attended the Grays Point Rural Fire Service station I saw locals continually arriving with food and offers of help. Many called in just to say thank you to our magnificent volunteers. I take this opportunity to thank Captain Wayne Roberts and the men and women of the Grays Point Rural Fire Service for their truly unselfish commitment to my community. It was so fitting yesterday to see our magnificent volunteers in a guard of honour to Her Excellency. The Year of the Volunteer has officially ended, but their work goes on, and tonight a grateful Grays Point community is having a fundraiser just to say thank you.

I also thank and congratulate president Graham Hill, manager Tim McAleer and the staff of the GyMEA Trade Union Club as well as the local emergency organisations and residents for the relief and comfort they brought to those affected by the bushfire in the Sutherland shire. I know that members of the Grays Point Rural Fire Service and indeed the shire community will welcome proposed amendments to legislation giving the

commissioner power to ensure hazard reduction works are implemented across all land tenures as required. Welcome too are the legislative proposals to streamline the approval process for hazard reduction and a new State environment planning policy to ensure that councils map bushfire-prone areas and implement appropriate planning and setback provisions.

The Carr Government's commitment to maintaining the highest standards of achievement and a quality learning environment is readily apparent at schools within my electorate. Spending on education across New South Wales has been increased to a record \$7.6 billion in the year 2001-02. Oyster Bay Public School is to get a new hall—something long-promised and long-awaited under the Coalition but being delivered under the Carr Government. Recently, during a visit to GyMEA North Primary School, the Premier announced funding of more than \$880,000 for basic building, maintenance and renovation projects across 14 schools in my electorate—from Como Public School to Kirrawee High School, from Yowie Bay Public School to Sylvania High School, and from Jannali East Public School right across to Port Hacking High School.

The projects include everything from new floor coverings and telephone systems to playground improvements and toilet upgrades. The Government has brought these projects forward by up to four years. Bringing these projects forward to this year is most welcome. It means better learning environments for our children now—and that means better results for our primary and high schools. Late last year an influential OECD study revealed reading literacy standards in New South Wales high schools to be the highest of any Australian State and among the best in the world. The Government's successful Reading Recovery Program—with some 14 reading recovery teachers in local shire schools—has played an important part in this outstanding achievement. The Government's focus on spelling, writing and reading as part of its literacy strategy, and the continuing expansion of its numeracy strategy, means high achievement and excellence at our schools.

The level of computer literacy and information technology skills among our primary and high school students is simply astounding. Schools such as GyMEA Bay Public and Kirrawee High are running computer programs, networks and hands-on IT courses that rival those of the professionals. That is a tribute to the ongoing provision of computers to our schools, but it is also testament to the skills and talents of our teachers. As a former teacher, I understand the demands that teachers face. I value and congratulate them on the wonderful work that they are doing at schools in my electorate. Teaching is indeed a noble profession, and I welcome Government initiatives to enhance the standing of these committed professionals in our community.

I saw that professionalism not that long ago at the GyMEA Technology High School, when over a weekend a fire gutted classrooms and an administration block. Teachers and staff rallied. They came to the school on the weekend and re-roomed and re-timetabled that high school of some 700 students. On Monday morning I was present when, following a short assembly, those 700 students were in their rooms at their lessons. That is a remarkable achievement. I congratulate the principal, Anne Wright, and the staff of GyMEA Technology High School. That is just one example of the commitment and professionalism of schoolteachers within the electorate.

The Carr Government is committed to better health care for the people of the Sutherland shire. We are building a better Sutherland Hospital. The New South Wales Government's \$82.5 million redevelopment of Sutherland Hospital is on track for completion in 2003. Work has commenced on the new ward block and clinical services building near The Kingsway. This new building will incorporate surgical and oncology wards as well as new coronary, high-dependency and intensive care facilities. The construction of the new building will be followed by the renovation of the hospital's south wing. The redevelopment process has taken place in consultation with user groups right across the hospital, and with a minimum of disruption.

To date, progress with the redevelopment of the hospital has included a new \$5.1 million accident and emergency department, with a magnificent contribution from a committed shire community; a \$1.5 million day surgery unit and renovated aged care ward; and \$800,000 day respite facilities for the frail aged and dementia patients. As this redevelopment proceeds the hospital continues to enhance its services. An extra \$32 million in recurrent funding for the South Eastern Area Health Service in the last budget means enhanced services for cancer, diabetes, asthma, respiratory and day surgery patients, as well as mental health clients. The \$82.5 million redevelopment of our hospital is not just a major capital works project but a very real demonstration of the Carr Government's commitment to improve health facilities and improved health care in the shire.

Our Sutherland Hospital is greatly valued by the community. Its redevelopment by the Carr Government stands in stark contrast with the Coalition's policy—a Coalition that was content to let this

important community facility run down. Labor is delivering where the Coalition failed. I welcome also the Government's \$20 million plan to recruit and retain nursing staff and to attract former nurses back to the profession. One of my constituents, Jennifer Enriquez, of Kareela, a former nursing sister, is about to return to that profession. Jennifer was attracted by the Government's package and hopes to work at the new Sutherland Hospital. It is very pleasing to see the Government's initiative attracting such high-calibre personnel as Jennifer Enriquez.

The total investment by this Government in transitways, motorways and railways that are currently being undertaken or planned is greater than at any time in the past 50 years. I am pleased to say that my electorate and the Sutherland shire are benefiting from that. The Eastern Distributor and the \$794 million M5 East are making car travel to the city from the shire safer, smoother and quicker. The \$47 million Woronora Bridge, opened last year, has eliminated the hazardous hairpin bends going down to and leaving the Woronora River. Last week I was privileged to attend the launch of the environmental impact statement for the Bangor bypass by the Minister for Transport, the Hon. Carl Scully, along with the honourable member for Menai. The Bangor bypass will cost around \$100 million. It will take thousands of cars off local roads daily. This exciting project is due to commence later this year.

The Bangor bypass links with the western side of the Woronora Bridge. On the eastern side of the bridge, a \$4 million right-hand turn facility is currently under construction at Acacia Road, Kirrawee. The project will direct traffic to the south from the Woronora Bridge, taking that traffic out of the shire and away from local roads. I am pleased to say that work commenced on Monday on the Miranda five-ways. This \$7.1 million project will see the end of the notorious roundabout often labelled the number one black spot in the State for minor accidents. The roundabout will be replaced with traffic signals following extensive community consultation and a \$50,000 traffic study.

These major projects in the shire—the Woronora Bridge, the Bangor bypass, the Acacia Road facility and the Miranda five-ways—total more than \$150 million. They are all being completed or commenced in the term of this Government. Of course, other projects that are not so expensive have improved the safety of our pedestrians and motorists at important intersections. I instance the traffic lights at The Kingsway and Sylvania Road, and The Kingsway and Hotham Road—long awaited by the community, and delivered under Labor.

On the rail transport front Labor has delivered an easy access upgrade to Caringbah station. Recently the Government announced a \$3.1 million easy access upgrade for Miranda station. The installation of a lift, access ramp, upgraded facilities and extended awnings are all good news for the 7,500 passengers who use Miranda station daily. I am told that the current ramp is unsuitable for those with disabilities and those in wheelchairs. The installation of a new ramp will comply with Australian standards and provide easy access to the station for those in wheelchairs. We in the shire value our beaches, our waterways and our natural heritage. The completion last year of the \$90 million upgrade of the Cronulla sewage treatment plant has provided us with beaches that have never been cleaner. Late last year the State Government announced a further \$11.5 million to upgrade 20 sewage pumping stations across the shire, which will result in a cleaner Georges River, Woronora River and Hacking River. Our beaches and waterways are so clean that I have heard locals tell of sharks cruising in Gunnamatta Bay.

Only two days ago the Premier declared Boat Harbour at Cronulla to be an aquatic reserve, which will preserve and protect the habitat of marine creatures in rocks and rock platforms for future generations of shire residents. It will ensure that children do not have to look to a textbook or an aquarium to see our marine treasures but rather, with their parents, they will be able to observe them on rocks and in rock pools. This Government cares about the environment and it has kept its promises on waterways. Siltation continues to be a problem for watercraft in Port Hacking. The \$850,000 tender to treat the channels in Port Hacking will be called next month. The project continues to fulfil a promise made in 1995 by Bob Carr as then Opposition Leader that his Government would continue to fully fund maintenance dredging in Port Hacking. That is good news for boaters and good news for people across the shire. When this Government makes a promise it keeps that promise.

Her Excellency spoke of legislation to enhance community safety, crime prevention and law enforcement. Much has been done by this Government to enhance and strengthen police powers. Sentences have been increased for certain offences. New offences have been created in response to changing circumstances where appropriate, for example, delivering of packages that are designed to cause fear and alarm. The new Minister for Police, the Hon. Michael Costa, visited Miranda and Sutherland local area commands to discuss concerns and issues with front-line police. The Minister met Local Area Commanders Reg Mahoney and Henry



Karpik. The meetings were frank and productive. I take this opportunity to thank Superintendent Reg Mahoney and Superintendent Henry Karpik, and the men and women of their commands for their hard work and commitment to the people of the Sutherland shire. The Minister has introduced a number of reforms, many of which have been welcomed by front-line police in my electorate.

Changes have been proposed to the Bail Act to remove the presumption in favour of bail for repeat offenders. I understand from police that those changes are very welcome. Consolidating police powers and setting out sentencing principles in legislative reform are also very welcome. Often crime prevention is not as simplistic as some would like to make out, nor is it an issue for police alone. Anyone who has worked in the criminal justice system would know that often the causes of crime are complex, and that effective crime prevention means bringing together resources from across the community. During my time as a legal aid solicitor working at Sutherland Local Court I saw some common patterns among offenders: education to year nine, poor literacy and numeracy standards, illiteracy, drug dependency, alcohol dependency or both, joblessness, psychiatric problems, child abuse victims and family breakdowns. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

These common features were never offered as excuses for crime, but often they are the unseen factors that lie behind the reality of crime. For many offenders crime is a vicious circle: a crime-court-prison merry-go-round. I, for one, welcome the Government's new place management program, which currently operates in Miller. The program aims to tackle the underlying causes of crime. New South Wales has a healthy, vibrant economy. We have the lowest unemployment of any State or Territory. Since 1995 new jobs in New South Wales have increased by 400,000. The New South Wales economy is growing faster than the national economy, and 200 major investment projects are under way.

This Government has produced a budget surplus for six successive years, plus a \$10 billion reduction in debt, which clearly demonstrate responsible fiscal management by the Carr Government. I note that New South Wales was the first State to abolish the bank accounts debit [BAD] tax, some 3½ years ahead of the national timetable. This will benefit households and small businesses throughout my electorate. As Her Excellency said, New South Wales is the engine room of the Australian economy. It is sound fiscal management that makes possible the programs in my electorate and across the State. I know that all honourable members will support the motion.

**Mr NEWELL** (Tweed) [10.56 a.m.]: I second the motion of the honourable member for Miranda to adopt the Address-in-Reply to the Governor's Speech. I take seriously my role as the representative of the Tweed electorate to work hard for every individual, community group and organisation within the electorate. Every day I meet constituents who have an expectation of this Government and an expectation that I, as their representative, will work hard to achieve the best possible outcome for the Tweed. In the past three years the Tweed has gained many services. The New South Wales Fire Arms Registry, which relocated to Murwillumbah, provides 50 jobs. I have had the privilege of touring the facility on many occasions and I congratulate the staff and leadership of Mr Gary Corbin, the Manager of the Fire Arms Registry, on their work. They are very professional and knowledgeable about the registration of firearms and the issuing of licences to gun owners.

The new community health centre, established in Murwillumbah some 12 months ago, is situated in the same building as the Fire Arms Registry. The centre brought together a number of agencies to provide services to the community. Previously many of the services were scattered throughout the town or located in a very old and almost inaccessible building behind the present Murwillumbah District Hospital. The cluster Director of Northern Community Health Services, Mr Paul Starr, oversees the facility, which is ably led by Siobhan Lassey, who has done a great job in pulling the services together and ensuring that the community of Murwillumbah has access to professional people. They provide a service that is second to none. Despite various constraints that have been experienced at different times, the staff work exceedingly well. I congratulate them on their performance, particularly in the provision of services, including counselling services, which have assisted in strengthening the community in many important ways.

Much has taken place at the Murwillumbah District Hospital over the past three years while I have been the State parliamentary representative for the Tweed electorate. The children's ward at the hospital has been refurbished and the hospital's operating theatres have been upgraded. A high dependency unit also has been established, at considerable cost. All of these improvements have been co-ordinated very ably by the hospital's chief executive officer, Mr Ian Murray. Behind the scenes some very expensive upgrading of equipment has taken place, including improvements to the airconditioning and fire response systems.

Although these upgrades do not result in more patients being treated and are not items of expenditure for which members of the public see a direct benefit, it nevertheless must be acknowledged that without that upgrading of equipment, to the tune of \$1 million, the hospital would not be able to function efficiently and in the future would not meet modern building standards. Members of the public may not be aware of the substantial expenditure that has taken place behind the scenes, but they may rest assured that the expenditure has been applied to ensuring that the Murwillumbah District Hospital will be able to provide a high standard of health services long into the future.

I refer now to education facilities in the Tweed electorate. Recently I was delighted to announce to the Bogangar-Cabarita community that the development application for the Bogangar Primary School was lodged last week with the local council. If the application is approved, it will result in a long-awaited new primary school being built at Bogangar. I have found the delays associated with the application process very frustrating and regrettable, but I am pleased that some of the causes of the delays have been worked around. I hope the council will appreciate that some of the school's facilities were redesigned to accommodate council requirements.

As a result of consequential changes to the design, I am sure that the residents of Cooley Street and Towners Avenue in Bogangar, who were very concerned about the original design concept and who worked assiduously through my electorate office for changes to the original design to be made, are pleased with their success in ensuring that residences in the area are not adversely affected by increased traffic. The amended design has ensured that utilisation of Cooley Street and Towners Avenue to provide access to the facility will no longer be part of the project. I am sure that the residents of the area are celebrating and appreciate the efforts of the officers of the Department of Education and Training and the staff of my electorate office in conveying to the Minister for Education and Training their concerns about the original design.

As part of the Behavioural Initiatives Program, two centres will very shortly come on stream: the tutorial centre at Murwillumbah for students who have behavioural difficulties at school, and a school for specific purposes, to be known as the Caldera School. Those centres will be established in the Tweed electorate as soon as some aspects of land rezoning and development are resolved. The centres represent part of the Government's ongoing commitment to assisting students who have behaviour problems. I know that the Department of Education and Training is serious about establishing those centres because a principal has already been appointed to the Caldera School and arrangements are being made to ensure that the school will be operating as soon as possible to provide services to meet the needs of students who have behavioural difficulties at school.

In the near future the Minister for Education and Training will visit the Tweed electorate in connection with secondary education matters, and I expect that the Minister will make some welcome announcements at that stage. Over the past 18 months a committee has examined the provision of secondary education in the Tweed electorate and on the Tweed coast. A discussion paper entitled "Focus on the Future: Options for Secondary Education on the Tweed and Tweed Coast" was presented to the community in my electorate last year. As a result of a quite thorough public consultation process, the department has made recommendations to the Minister. Very soon the Minister will announce the result of the consultation process, and it is expected that that will result in additional facilities being provided for the benefit of the Tweed and Tweed coast community.

Next week the Premier will visit the Tweed electorate to open the third and final stage of redevelopment of the Tweed Heads District Hospital. The hospital's chief executive officer, Trish Hogan, her team, and members of the broader community are looking forward to the opening of the new facilities. I will have more to say on this matter in the future. Last year a community health centre was opened at Tweed Heads for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The centre's team leader, Sue Follent, is doing a great job of providing services in the new facility for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The centre is part of the strategy of the provision of three community health centres, and provision of a centre for the Kingscliff area is in the planning stages.

My contribution to the Address-in-Reply debate would not be complete without mentioning the massive roadworks that have been undertaken in the Tweed electorate, particularly the Yelgun to Chinderah motorway, which is part of the Pacific Highway upgrade. The project is well and truly on track and will be opened later this year. The roadworks have been carried out at a cost of \$340 million, and one-third of the funds for the project were provided by the Commonwealth Government. The State Government has carried through the project very well. I congratulate the Abigroup construction company, which has ensured that the project has been well and truly completed on time, although not without some angst on the part of various groups.

Before the project was submitted to tender, a consultation process was undertaken—a hallmark of the Carr Government. The Government was prepared to consult with local industries, particularly the sugarcane industry, which is vital to the economy of the North Coast, and with community groups such as environmental organisations and local councils to ensure that the selected route would have minimal impact upon the sugarcane industry. As a result of the consultation process, a route was selected which presented some engineering difficulties, but those difficulties were largely overcome by virtue of some innovative design.

I recently again inspected the project, which features a number of bridges and a tunnel, resulting in the creation of a tremendous roadway. Some fauna overpasses have been included in the Yelgun to Chinderah motorway to link green corridors rather than sever them, and that has added considerably to the cost of the project. However, the Government has seen fit to ensure that the roadway resulted in minimal impact upon the natural environment and the sugarcane industry, which is a vital primary industry in my electorate. As recently as last week I launched a public consultation program for a pedestrian overpass at Sexton Hill, a facility that is long overdue.

A former councillor and well-known personality in the Tweed electorate, Tom Hogan, commented that the overpass was something he had been trying to arrange for 15 years. I am pleased that I have been able to achieve that result in my first term as the State parliamentary representative for the Tweed electorate. The overpass will link communities in the east Banora district, where the major shopping centres and schools of Banora Point are located, and will be of assistance to both members of the community and students, in particular primary school students, by enabling them to walk or ride their bicycles to school and back across the highway in complete safety. The pedestrian overpass will also benefit those who regularly catch a bus to travel into Tweed City or to centres further up the Gold Coast. A number of my constituents have pointed out to me that they literally have to run the gauntlet of traffic on four lanes in order to cross the Pacific Highway at present.

I referred earlier to the Tweed Heads District Hospital. A public dental health clinic employing practitioners who are able to provide services directly to the Tweed Heads community also operates out of the Tweed Heads District Hospital. It provides a tremendous service, but local residents would like to see the provision of extra funding—in particular an additional contribution from the Federal Government—to enable more patients to take advantage of the services of that clinic. On a different tack, there have been major achievements and a number of community groups have been impacted upon by sporting grants, which have assisted a broad range of projects in my electorate. Those projects have benefited the people of the Tweed, improving the economy, their educational, health, tourism, transport and employment options, and the environment.

I note that the former Minister for Sport and Recreation is at the table, and it is appropriate to thank him for his co-operation and hard work in the last two to three years to ensure that a number of sporting and community groups in my electorate were able to benefit substantially from the Capital Assistance Program conducted by the Department of Sport and Recreation. A number of those facilities have yet to come on board. For example, the construction of a \$10,000 skateboard facility at Les Burger sports field south of Cabarita is not yet up and running. I know the community appreciates what has been proposed and no doubt the obstacles within the shire council and elsewhere will soon be sorted out. Funding of \$8,000 was also allocated for the construction of a concrete slab for netball and basketball at the Crabbes Creek Sports Oval, which is utilised by school students as well as after-hours sporting groups. When I visited the area last year the locals could not speak highly enough of the former Minister for Sport and Recreation.

The Dave Burns field at Chinderah received \$9,000 to fund improvements. Funds have also been allocated to the Tweed Heads indoor swimming complex for the construction of a change room and toilet facility for disabled patrons of that complex. Arkinstall Park received funding of \$9,000 to install an irrigation system, which has extended the season for soccer and other groups that utilise that park. Although the North Coast is dry at present, the boggy conditions often continue after the wet season and can extend into winter, causing problems. The Chillingham tennis club received an allocation from the Capital Assistance Program for resurfacing of the tennis courts. At Bruce Bartrim Oval \$900 was spent on resurfacing the turf on the pitch; and at Murwillumbah netball complex, where hundreds of young people, and others not so young, play netball on Saturdays and on week nights, \$6,000 was provided to resurface three netball courts with asphaltic concrete. Those facilities have been a great assistance to the local community.

This year portable shade areas have been provided at the Murwillumbah swimming complex. Shade areas will also be provided for the skateboard park that I mentioned earlier, and four shade shelter sheds will be

constructed at Noel Robinson courts at Tweed Heads South. The shelter sheds are certainly needed and will be appreciated by players at the Tweed Heads tennis club. Safety back netting and a side fence will be constructed at the Uki sports ground at a cost of \$3,200, and \$6,000 has been allocated for the upgrading of a softball field at Piggabeen—many people utilise that complex, particularly during the weekend. Amenities costing \$8,500 will be constructed at Ned Byrne field at Kingscliff. Burringbar School of Arts will receive \$4,500 to upgrade amenities and the Bilambil community will benefit from a grant of more than \$8,000 for drainage works associated with the development of playing fields at the football ground.

As member for Tweed I believe that it is of equal importance that I also strive to meet the needs of individual constituents. Not a week goes past that I do not meet someone who requires my help or who works as a volunteer in the community. Last week I presented lifesavers at Cudgen Headland Surf Club with a State flag. Tomorrow one or more of them may approach me for assistance on an individual basis. I take this opportunity to congratulate the Secretary, Keith Kennedy, and President, Keith Sutton, for their work with Cudgen Headland Surf Club and the job that volunteer organisation does in providing an essential service, particularly in a tourist area such as Kingscliff on the Tweed coast. That organisation does a great job in assisting locals and tourists who swim in the area, many of whom are inexperienced and have little knowledge of the dangers posed by the surf. *[Extension of time agreed to.]*

Last year a Tweed resident, Brendan McGrath, took to the water on the Tweed River and skied for 36 hours to raise money to assist those suffering from cancer. The community rallied behind him and applauded his efforts. Others in the community work quietly behind the scenes, looking after the elderly, delivering food for the Meals on Wheels service, and taking disabled children horse riding. There are families who face life's greatest challenges, perhaps the serious illness of a child. Family and friends rally and government services assist, but it is the emotional support offered by family and friends that never ceases to amaze me. The efforts of all these people who put others before themselves is inspirational. Government agencies can never replace the goodwill that emanates from the volunteers in our community. It is this spirit that is the seed for our future and it is heartening to know that goodwill is flourishing in the Tweed and that our future is assured. However, this does not mean that government can be complacent in its efforts. We must not ride on the back of that goodwill, but rather be the forerunner for its survival.

On 17 January the coastal town of Kingscliff in my electorate was ravaged by hail. More than 600 homes suffered damage. Many ceilings collapsed and house after house sustained water damage, as a result of broken windows and wrecked roofs. Almost 2,000 tarpaulins were used to cover damaged roofs, with tarpaulin reserves called in from Sydney. I understand that, following a call for help from Tweed-Richmond State Emergency Service controller Scott Hanckel, two container loads of tarpaulins arrived a few days after the disaster and were put to good use. Volunteers, many of whom had not long returned from helping fight the bushfires in Sydney, came to assist Tweed residents. Approximately 700 volunteers from New South Wales and Queensland emergency services, Department of Community Services officers, the Rural Fire Service, the New South Wales Fire Service and the Salvation Army arrived to help after the massive storm ripped through the Tweed coast, causing extensive damage to the Kingscliff and Cudgen areas.

The State Emergency Service [SES] groups, backing up from the bushfires, came from as far away as Sydney, Bathurst, Parkes, Lightning Ridge and Gunnedah. I understand that some of the volunteers from western New South Wales saw the ocean for the first time in their lives. The mammoth clean-up at Kingscliff was the largest storm response ever carried out by the region's SES operations manager, Scott Hanckel. The storm triggered just over 1,000 calls to the Richmond-Tweed SES, resulting in an unprecedented effort by local SES workers. It is that seemingly never-ending, generous effort of the volunteers that nourishes our communities. I congratulate Angela Gracie, who was acting controller for the Murwillumbah-Banora Point area at the time of the disaster. Angela did a great job, in the absence of Arthur Akehurst, to pull things together to minimise damage and ensure that the SES response was speedy and effective.

I must say that there has been disturbing news about one aspect. Whilst the insurance companies acted quickly to get assessors on the ground, some residents have had difficulty with one insurance company related to replacements for tiled roofs. Most insurance companies have been very co-operative in respect of the iron roofs that many houses have. Unfortunately, a number of the newer houses have tiled roofs and many were damaged in the storm. Owners of some of the older houses have found it difficult to replace the damage tiles with tiles of a similar colour and type because of the numerous changes that have occurred in the past few years. I call on all insurance companies to assist people in that area. Those companies have been quite co-operative in meeting claims for storm damage to the interiors of houses and replacing household items. However, for some reason or another they have tended to balk a little at meeting costs for the replacement of roof tiles on some houses.

I am sure honourable members would like to refer to and discuss at length many issues that were mentioned in the Governor's Speech. The Governor referred in her Speech to the Government's \$30 million Community Technology Centres Program, which is to provide computers, information technology training and Internet access to small country towns. The communities of Uki, Tyalgum and Chillingham are already beneficiaries of that program. A grant has been made available to those communities for that very purpose. A number of people in those small communities, which are located outside the township of Murwillumbah, find it difficult to get into town to access those sorts of services. The centres that will be established in each of those villages will ensure that those who do not have ready access to transport will receive training and will be able to utilise those modern forms of communication.

The Governor referred in her Speech to a \$30 million allocation by the Department of Education and Training to fund building and security upgrades. Of that amount, \$700,000 will be spent in the Tweed electorate to upgrade security, airconditioning and telephones and to ensure that school buildings in that electorate are maintained at an adequate standard. I am delighted that the Government has embarked on that program. The Governor stated in her Speech:

The Menadue and Sinclair Reports have mapped out a fairer funding system to correct historic inequities between regions...

Obviously, the Tweed electorate will benefit from that system. The official opening of Tweed hospital by the Premier next week will ensure that the Northern Rivers Area Health Service and services located in the Tweed will receive funding on a per capita basis—something that has not happened in the past. I am looking forward to the extra money that will flow through to provide extra services. Health services in the Tweed area, which is located on the Queensland border, take in patients from Queensland and the lower part of the Gold Coast. That places a tremendous burden on facilities in both the Tweed and Murwillumbah hospitals. Thirty per cent of mental health patients come from over the border, which, in turn, places demands on services in the Tweed and leaves those services strapped for cash. That extra funding will ensure that the quality of services in the Tweed area is maintained—an issue which I, as the local member, will watch closely.

In my first speech in this Parliament I spoke about mental health. I am delighted that the Government has allocated extra funds for mental health services. The hospital at Tweed Heads will be provided with an acute care facility to treat mental health patients. At present patients have to go to a facility in Lismore or to facilities on the Gold Coast. That presents problems for cross-border patients who have been ordered to obtain treatment. I have asked the Minister for Health to attempt to address those problems. The Governor referred in her Speech to the fact that the Government will introduce legislation relating to community safety, crime prevention and law enforcement. I congratulate Tweed Shire Council on supporting the community crime prevention plan that has been proposed for Tweed shire, which has not yet got off the ground.

A crime prevention study is under way and crime prevention plans will be implemented in the Tweed Heads and Coolangatta areas. Tweed Shire Council has accepted the fact that a community crime prevention plan should be implemented in the Tweed shire and, in particular, on the Tweed coast—a growing area which has its own set of problems and which receives a lot of visitors during weekends and holiday periods. That area desperately requires a crime prevention plan. Another issue to which the Governor referred is the extension of the Magistrates Early Referral Into Treatment Program. At present a pilot program is operating in Lismore. That program is to be extended to other areas on the North Coast, including the Tweed.

The Governor, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, spoke about the relief and comfort provided by volunteers in times of crisis. The energetic perseverance and passion that volunteers bring to our community sustain and inspire us. On behalf of the people of Tweed I wholeheartedly thank all volunteers for their physical efforts and their inspiration.

**Mr ARMSTRONG** (Lachlan) [11.26 a.m.]: I have much pleasure in participating in the Address-in-Reply debate. I enjoyed yesterday's presentation by Her Excellency Governor Marie Bashir—a country person by birth. That was the first occasion on which I had an opportunity to be present while she was in the Chamber. I was delighted to be present on that historical occasion. Before I refer to aspects in the Governor's Speech I wish to refer to the death of Sir Roden Cutler, a former Governor of this State. Yesterday four members of this House spoke to a condolence motion: the Premier, the Deputy Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the National Party.

All the speakers in that debate referred to Sir Roden Cutler's colourful and great career and to his professional life. I echo the sentiments expressed by those speakers and inform honourable members why Sir Roden Cutler was so respected—an issue referred to by all those who contributed to debate on the condolence

motion. Sir Roden Cutler, who was erect in stature, was focused and had a purpose in life. His single purpose in life was to defend his country. Honourable members would be aware that Sir Roden Cutler was awarded the Victoria Cross. He was an honest man and a man of integrity. In the 40 years that I knew him—and I did not know him well—I was aware that he was comfortable with himself and that people were comfortable with him.

Sir Roden Cutler did not exert pressure; he was a man who was in control. One could not help but be affected by his aura of non-confrontation. He was in control, he had respect for himself and he respected everybody else. Sir Roden Cutler never complained. I am not aware of any occasion on which Sir Roden Cutler complained about anything that was written about him. He went about his life with purpose. I was present on two occasions when he visited country areas, which he did many times. The homework and backgrounding he did before those visits were exemplary. When I turned on my radio at about 5 o'clock this morning I heard one of those talkback programs that seems to be broadcast night and day, on which listeners call in to talk about their problems. I thought that it is a pity that young people do not have a Sir Roden Cutler type of role model. Life is not bad. If you are comfortable with yourself you can be comfortable with society. We all—particularly the young people of today—could do a lot worse for an example of how to live our life than the model provided by Sir Roden Cutler.

As we well know, the Governor's Speech traditionally is prepared by the government of the day. The Governor's Speech yesterday started by referring to the recent and devastating bushfires. A number of guests in Parliament House yesterday had suffered from the effects of the bushfires, including 14 year-old twins from the Blue Mountains who were interviewed on one of the popular talkback shows yesterday morning. In the Governor's Speech a lot of thought was given to the suffering of the victims of fires and the efforts made by the volunteers. The very meaning of the word suggests the unpaid provision of something that would not otherwise be expected. I join in passing on my thanks and appreciation to all those who did their very best to contain a disastrous but natural aspect of our Australian way of life. The siting of houses in eucalypt forest causes a conflict of interest that is almost unique to Australia.

However, I ask members to spare a thought for those who lose their houses and family possessions—some insured and some not insured—in individual fires. In some town or village this week some family will lose everything. A single house fire, though not recognised to the same extent as mass devastation, is just as hurtful and destructive as other disasters to people whose lives are wrecked. The house of a pensioner at Lake Cargelligo was burned down by unknown persons. He was left with nothing and had to move to Young. The place was not insured, and it is believed that certain juveniles were responsible for the fire. My heart goes out to the victim and others like him who lose their possessions because of fire, storm or flood. The local Rotary club may hold a lamington sale and the local storekeeper may provide clothes, which is good, but we should consider the individual tragedies as well as the more spectacular ones.

The Governor's Speech, prepared by the Government, contained many reannouncements of Government initiatives. Some were announced a long time ago and some have been reannounced on a number of occasions. I guess you would call that reinforced reannouncing. It is like repeated advertising: the message will get through eventually. The Speech was very much Sydneycentric. It is not the first time I have stated in this House that a third of the population of the State lives outside Sydney. Those people also pay taxes. They certainly did not get a third of the promises in yesterday's Speech. Bearing in mind that we are only 12 months out from an election, the Speech was very much one of political favouritism. For example, there was no mention of country roads. The country roads system was bled pretty dry by the Government two years ago to support the Olympic Games, and I would have thought that country roads would have been mentioned in the Speech yesterday.

Former rail chief Ron Christie recently stated that \$30 billion has to be spent on the Sydney rail system over the next 40 years—\$750 million a year. That represents \$187.50 every year for the next 40 years for every one of the four million men, women and children living in Sydney. To maintain the same equity of transport infrastructure outside the Sydney metropolitan area, with a total State population of six million, a further \$16 billion should be spent on rail infrastructure for regional and rural New South Wales. I rest my case on that point.

The Governor's Speech contained no message of the massive social and cultural problems in country towns—and indeed in suburbs of Sydney—flowing from public liability and public risk insurance. Last Thursday in Cootamundra and last Friday in Forbes I held seminars on this issue. I anticipated an attendance of 40 or 50 people at each. Much to my surprise, more than 270 people attended the two seminars. After a bit of publicity on radio people came from as far afield as Walgett, Inverell and Gunnedah in the north, Bega on the

South Coast and virtually every point in between. There were speakers from the Insurance Council of Australia, the WorkCover Authority, the Plaintiff Lawyers Association, the Local Government Association, the Shires Association, Employers First, and Mr Ian Douglas of Triton Brokers. There were stories about every type of sporting and cultural activity within country towns and suburbs. Horse riders in trail riding associations cannot afford insurance.

The freehold title to the hotel at Burcher, which is out near West Wyalong, is held by a gentleman who lives in Ryde. For some years there have been exchange cricket matches between teams at Ryde and Burcher, with the site of the match alternating each year. This year it is Burcher's turn to come to Ryde. But the team has been told that it needs its own public liability policy to play at Ryde cricket ground, which will cost \$8,000. A small religious group of 14 women rent a room to meet in the local shire council chambers. A couple of weeks ago they were told that they have to have their own public risk policy to meet—in a local government room. Only yesterday, following the Governor's Speech, I met a gentleman, Mr Campbell, in the foyer of Parliament House who introduced himself. He has stated:

Thank you for listening to me yesterday at what was a most inopportune time for you. The Scottish-Australian Heritage Council has about 54 affiliated clan societies of Scottish associations. We have not been able to obtain umbrella cover for our affiliates as recommended in the exploratory notes for incorporation of associations. We would commend to you the notion that this principle be part of envisaged legislation hopefully in the future.

I guess there are a hundred stories like that. In the middle of the year it will be the centenary of Tumblong village. Lack of insurance might prevent a proposed celebration. Recently, the Woolfest at Forbes was cancelled. It was a wonderful promotional day for tourism, sport and the wool industry. The billycart races at Forbes have been cancelled. The annual football over the silo competition at Mirrool Creek, which is west of West Wyalong, has been going for about 15 years. The competition involves kicking a football over the 36-metre high wheat silos. I think that the last person to succeed, about two years ago, was barefooted. But the competition cannot be held because the small village with a population of about 30 cannot afford the public risk insurance. A shire in my electorate currently has no less than 80 matters pending involving potential cost to the shire. The unavailability of public liability insurance has had a serious effect on sport, culture and quality of life in country towns, and the issue is now at crisis point.

The two seminars carried four motions, which, hopefully, I can persuade the Parliament to support. The first motion proposed that there be a threshold of \$36,000. In other words, anyone who wishes to make a claim may do so only if the claim exceeds \$36,000. Anyone is capable of securing personal accident risk insurance, as people do when they travel overseas by aeroplane. Indeed, many people take out such insurance whenever they fly by aeroplane, because it is not very expensive.

Many accidents occur as a natural part of life. For example, people will trip over; kids will fall off ponies and break an arm; kids playing in trees will fall out of the tree and break a shoulder or their nose; and kids going down waterslides headfirst will knock out a tooth as they land in the pool. Although unfortunate, many accidents are simply part of life. Therefore, why do we have such a litigious society? Indeed, I have been informed that New South Wales is today more litigious than any other State. But why should we have thousands of small claims, which are making it impossible for many organisations to afford the cost of such insurance or to simply obtain cover? I therefore propose that there be a threshold of \$36,000.

Secondly, I propose that all charitable or non-profit organisations that turn over less than \$300,000 a year and are run by genuine volunteers be exempted from prosecution. Such organisations include Apex, Rotary, the local parents and citizens association, and the local gymkhana raising money for the Far West or the Cancer Society. The honourable member for Tweed referred to a couple of organisations in his electorate that conduct fundraising activities for cancer research. My proposal is supported by some 270 people in Cootamundra and Forbes from all walks of life. It has also received unqualified support from the Australian Hoteliers Association, which has contacted me to specifically ask me to indicate its support for my proposal that those organisations be exempted from prosecution.

I also propose a cap on payments for successful claims. I suggest a cap of \$4 million, to bring the legislation into line with the Victorian Motor Traffic Act. Fourthly, I call on the three levels of government—local government, State Government and Federal Government—to commence a campaign to persuade people to bear in mind that we have certain risks that we must take ourselves and we must stop being so litigious.

I recently heard of the case of a local accountant, a professional person, whose client told him she was going to take action against a shopkeeper in the town because she tripped on the shopkeepers step, or something

to that effect. As the client entered the accountant's office, she tripped on his step. The client is now suing both the shopkeeper and the accountant. A golf course in my electorate has pine trees as a feature of the course. In total, there are about 45 pine trees. One of the lady golfers who ripped her ankle on a pine cone is now suing the golf club. As pine trees are a feature of that golf course, such a claim is just silly. People must bear in mind that, for example, pine cones can rip your ankle; if you step on a footpath after recent rain you might slip; if your 12 year-old son goes down a waterslide headfirst, he might knock his teeth out; and if you put kids on a pony at a school fete, they might slip off and break their arm, their finger, or some other part of the body. I ask for support as we go through the process, to ensure balance and reason regarding public liability. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I am delighted that the Minister for Sport is at the table, because we have a serious problem with many of our country sporting clubs, particularly golf clubs and some bowling clubs. Golf clubs, by their very nature, are usually on the outskirts of country towns. In recent times, since poker machines have been installed in hotels, most of those clubs have suffered a downturn in income and many are in serious financial difficulty. The same applies to certain bowling clubs, such as country clubs that cater for bowls, tennis or golf. For example, at West Wyalong the services club was established to take over the country club. The country club in Cootamundra, a golf club with bowls facilities that has accumulated massive debts over the years, has been run entirely by voluntary labour, with the exception of the groundsman. Unless something happens, that social, sporting and cultural centre could be lost to Cootamundra.

In West Wyalong, the bowling club's airconditioning plant, which was installed in the 1950s and is well and truly beyond its use-by date, virtually does not work, but the club does not have the funds to renew it. In Ungarie, the bowling club is run entirely by volunteers. Once those volunteers give up or move on, I hate to think what will happen to that club. In Grenfell, the bowling club is also run by volunteers, as is the golf club. This state of affairs is symptomatic of many country towns across New South Wales, and it is a serious problem. I ask the Government to note the genuine problem of cash flow movement in country towns that has affected the viability and continued operation of those clubs and sporting facilities. I will seek to speak with the Minister about the matter at a later date.

I take this opportunity to speak about country sporting facilities in general. I believe we have not had catch-up following the Olympic Games for sporting facilities in country towns. These days many country sports people are disadvantaged because they do not have access to regional sporting facilities. Let us take swimmers. For example, in the town where I live, which is represented by the honourable member for Orange, we have an outstanding young junior swimmer, James Taylor. James swam fourth in the State Titles last Saturday. Indeed, he has been hailed as one of the brightest country prospects we have seen for years. Yet, every day during winter James has to travel for 2½ hours to train in Bathurst. Cowra Shire Council is currently moving to heat half of its pool complex, and that will be much appreciated. Nevertheless, I ask the Government to acknowledge that both the State and individuals are disadvantaged by the lack of regional sporting facilities, and that we need to further upgrade sporting facilities to try to help the talent in country New South Wales, such as James Taylor.

I now turn to grain freight lines. Recently the Government sold off FreightCorp. The sale has been a long time coming, and we understand the background to that. But we also understand that in June last year promises were made that \$256 million would be made available to subsidise the cartage of grain on branch lines for the next five years. Those branch lines are primarily west of the Newell Highway. However, just a few weeks ago the Treasurer indicated that \$50 million of that \$256 million would go to Werris Creek to build new grain terminals, another \$80 million would go towards purchasing rolling stock, for the cartage of wheat down the main lines, and the balance of the funding would go primarily to subsidising the cartage of petroleum by rail over the mountains. The amount of funding that was allocated to subsidise the cartage of wheat and maintain those lines now looks to be seriously in doubt.

There has been a lot of rhetoric about the sale of FreightCorp, and the Government's intention in that regard is yet to be clarified. I hope someone will soon inform us. For every tonne of grain that moves from rail to road, there will be damage to the roads. If we are to transfer the freight, we must transfer the funding as well. We cannot expect the roads of New South Wales to accept 8 million or 9 million tonnes of grain without some increased funding to increase the tensile strength of the pavements, maintain road edges and drainage at a good standard, and drain roads where there is a salinity problem. These are some of the fundamentals that must be addressed.

Police numbers are a serious problem. I am told that there are about 13,500 police constables in New South Wales and that not more than about 4,000 are available for duty at one time. In recent months we have



heard much speculation about police numbers. We have been told that we are now going to have police back on the streets. However, it would be nice to simply have police in some of the towns. It would be nice, for example, to get a sergeant and two constables in Lake Cargellico. It would be nice to get a third constable in Condobolin.

It would be nice if one policeman could attend the regular traffic meetings held in Grenfell, but as there is no staff in Grenfell an officer would have to travel from Cootamundra. Police have not been able to attend those meetings for the past nine months. Condobolin has a population of nearly 4,000 but its police numbers have been reduced by one sergeant and two constables, and another constable has been transferred indefinitely. I ask, once again, that the Government take note of major staffing problems in country police stations. Very few rural police stations have a full complement to enable officers to adequately police their towns, protect the people, or attend to crime.

Rural theft, which over the years has been continually escalating, is now rampant. It is no secret that the prices of rural commodities—sheep, cattle and machinery—are at high levels. Spectacular new machinery has increased productivity. A truck loaded with 120 lambs worth \$90 each, or 40 wool bales worth \$1,000 each, would be a pretty good grab for thieves, better than stealing a load of cigarettes. But that is a risk that farmers have to take. I ask, again, where is the stock squad that we were promised 12 months ago? Where are the 32 police officers that the Government announced had been appointed? They have not materialised in country areas.

I refer now to water problems in New South Wales, part of the driest continent in the world. Water management problems continue to plague us. Shortly after last Christmas many crops were lost in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area. This year the Lachlan River has supplied water to Hillston through the Wyangala Dam. The Lachlan River has the highest transmission loss of any river in New South Wales. The accepted method of managing the Lachlan River, which winds through flat country and travels approximately twice the length of the nearby road, is that Lake Brewster, just below Lake Cargelligo, is filled at the end of winter. The lower part of the river is then run from Lake Cargelligo to minimise transmission loss and to improve native bird habitat.

This year the river was run through Wyangala Dam, so through the summer months the river was full from Wyangala, which is above Cowra and not far below Oberon. Water loss was up to 60 per cent, so that for every 100 megalitres let out of Wyangala only 40 megalitres arrived at Hillston. That is an absolute waste! That policy was introduced to replicate the natural flow. Under that policy, each year until October every megalitre of water that goes to Wyangala is let go down the river. Unless that water is contained the dams will not be filled. Before Wyangala Dam was built and before the Burrinjuck Dam was built on the Murrumbidgee River, both rivers were chained to water holes, on their natural flow, but today that environment is completely artificial.

A committee tried to grapple with those problems for more than two years. I heard that 154 or 156 models had been tested at the Manly Hydraulics Laboratory, and it was decided to accept model 48 because there was not much wrong with it, but no-one knew why. Farmers are being asked to invest in new technology and new management in the grape, dairy and horticultural industries. Every night more than 130 tonnes of vegetables leave the upper Lachlan area for Sydney, for both domestic and export markets. Farmers find it very difficult to make decisions to invest in new technology that will take upwards of 10 years to pay off, let alone to persuade their bank manager to lend them the money.

These days if a farmer can demonstrate that a project will deliver a good cash flow and he can prove he has security, most banks will lend him money for up to 25 years. A farmer can certainly borrow for up to 15 years with an interest-only loan, and pay back the principal at the end of the 15 years. However, if a farmer cannot demonstrate that he has a continuous water supply, a bank will not lend him money for even 15 months. I repeat, our water problems have to be resolved if this State's primary industry is to enjoy continued growth. At the very time that our primary industry is being hailed as the real champion of this State and the national economy, the fundamental water supply is not being properly planned and managed. That factor may affect the future enhancement and viability of the primary industry.

As always, there are challenges for the Government and for the community. This morning I put to the House that the challenge from a social, cultural and sporting point of view is to fix up public liability insurance and responsibility. On a bigger scale, the challenge is to develop a proper water management program. Road, rail, education, health, and law and order services have not been properly provided for by the Government of this State in the past seven years. Unfortunately, the Speech prepared for the Governor to present to Parliament yesterday did not really address those fundamental problems.

**Mr GIBSON** (Blacktown) [11.56 a.m.]: It is my pleasure to participate in the Address-in-Reply debate. I do not agree with everything that the honourable member for Lachlan said but it was good to hear him speak in this Chamber, because he speaks from the heart. I enjoyed listening to him. Yesterday the New South Wales Governor, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, opened the third session of the Fifty-second Parliament with a wide-ranging Speech outlining the Government's plan for the coming year. Her Speech highlighted the Government's education, policing, health, transport, regional and rural affairs, economic management and environmental programs. Probably the Opposition members who will speak in this debate will use the same theme, that everything that was announced yesterday had been announced previously.

In some instances that may be so, but those programs are either under way or about to happen. I suppose we could make a comparison between policies of the State and Federal governments and I could spend my time talking about the boat people or children being thrown overboard. I could spend my time talking about Peter Reith and his lack of passing on information to the Prime Minister. John Howard must be the only Prime Minister who does not know what is happening in his own country. I could talk about the goods and services tax [GST] that the Prime Minister said during his 1999 election campaign would not happen. However, soon after the election the GST came in with a great bang. I could talk about the Prime Minister who, a few months ago, when the private medical health funds advocated that fees would rise by 14 or 15 per cent, said—

**Mr Fraser:** Point of order: The member states that he could talk about all those issues, but the Address-in-Reply is designed to enable members to respond to the Governor's Speech. None of the issues the member is presently addressing were raised in her Speech nor have they been raised by the Government in the House during this session. I ask you to draw him back to the content of the Governor's Speech.

**Madam ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Beamer):** Order! The Address-in-Reply is a wide-ranging debate. If I upheld the point of order I would have had to stop the honourable member for Lachlan many times. He referred to various issues he thought should have been included in the Speech. However, I am sure the honourable member for Blacktown will return to the motion.

**Mr GIBSON:** I could have taken a point on the honourable member for Lachlan when he said the Governor did not speak about roads, and then went on for 10 minutes to speak about rural roads. This is a wide-ranging debate but the Opposition finds it hard to accept the realities of the real world. Decisions made in Canberra affect everybody in the State, particularly people living in my electorate of Blacktown, who are affected in a very bad way. Blacktown is the largest municipality in New South Wales and the third largest in Australia behind Brisbane and the Gold Coast. The Blacktown municipality has a population of more than 262,000. It is a magnificent area that is growing all the time and is starting to gain prominence as one of the leading cities of the nation.

In the past five years the average price of homes in the Blacktown area has jumped a staggering \$70,000-odd. A real estate boom is occurring in the area at the moment and large business is moving into the area in great numbers. This is a telling factor for the future of Blacktown. One out of every 76 people living in Australia today lives in the municipality of Blacktown. This is a staggering but true figure. Blacktown City has the largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in the State, with a total of 5,500. More than 57,000 residents, 27.2 per cent of the population of Blacktown, speak a language other than English. People of more than 30 nationalities live in my electorate, and they speak more than 40 different languages.

Some two years ago Greg Norman, the great white shark, was looking at investing in western Sydney. Finally, the shark has purchased considerable land at Schofields in the Blacktown municipality and has just announced that he will build one of the best championship golf courses in the world there. Hopefully in the very near future we will stage one of the majors at the Schofields course. If everything goes through planning properly, he thinks development will start in September this year. It is great news for Blacktown and western Sydney that somebody so well known and such a great sportsman would invest in western Sydney. Greg Norman sees the future of western Sydney, as I do, as do many people living there.

Yesterday's Speech was delivered by a Governor who has compassion, charm, poise and respect. The way the Governor of New South Wales goes about her duties is a credit to her. It was good to see her husband, Nick Shehadie, present, looking so trim and fit. I am a Republican, but people such as Professor Marie Bashir are a genuine reason why such a position is maintained and respected. We can compare her position with that of the Governor-General, who is receiving flak from all quarters. What is going on at the moment takes away from the position of Governor-General. We on this side of the House will never forget another famous Governor-General by the name of Sir John Kerr, who could form a good daily double with Hollingworth.

Yesterday the Governor spoke about 2,000 teachers in more than 600 schools who would be involved in literacy and numeracy initiatives for students in the vital transition period from year 5 to year 8. News South Wales leads this country in literacy; our literacy levels are up there with the world's leaders. That is to the credit of this Government. When the Government came to office some seven years ago one of the Premier's main initiatives was to make sure that literacy was taught in the schools the way it should be. He put an emphasis on improving literacy standards. The proof of that is there for everyone to see.

This is on top of the 90,000 computers already in public schools; and there is to be another 25,000 computers. We are the only State, and probably the only region in the world, including the United States, that has computers in all schools. That too is a great feat of the Government. I have often said that we in this State are fortunate. In the State school system we have the best teachers of any education system in the world. We should give them full praise for the great job they do. I have no doubt that children in State schools benefit from the standard of our teachers.

School principals have been coming to see me for a long time about maintenance problems in their schools. Nearly every school in my electorate has benefited from the \$70 million that was allocated a few weeks ago for maintenance. This is no wish list, as the Opposition might suggest. Some of this work has already started, and most of the remainder will start in the next five months. Some of the work will even be completed by then. Blacktown Boys High School, a great high school, has needed considerable money to upgrade its toilets. The sum of \$70,000 has been allocated to that school for this purpose. Doonside High School is a very old school and needs repainting. That might not have happened for the next five or 10 years, but because of the initiative of the Minister for Education and Training and the Government, \$80,000 has been put aside for that painting.

The roof of Evans High School was in bad condition and needed to be replaced. When the principal heard that \$100,000 has been allocated for this purpose he came straight to my office to thank me and asked me to pass on his thanks to the Minister and the Premier. Marayong Public School needed its floor covering replaced, at a cost of \$6,700. The amount of money is not important, it is the fact that this job may not have been done for a long time had this money not been made available. Blacktown Girls High School is a great school, not only because it is in my electorate but because it is up there with the best schools in the nation. That school needed external movement areas, floor coverings and painting, and \$150,000 has been allocated for the work. This maintenance has been needed for long time. It will now be done and the school's problems will be overcome.

Recently Mitchell High School received \$2,500 from the State Government to deal with a graffiti problem. This \$2,500 will combat the graffiti problem and hopefully prevent its recurrence. Work approved by the Minister and the local council has reduced the graffiti problem to the lowest it has been for a long time. As part of the New South Wales schools improvement package, a total of \$102,500 was also allocated in the past few months for minor capital works in the Blacktown electorate. That too has been of tremendous assistance.

The Eagles Baseball Club has received a grant of \$14,500 under the capital assistance program to upgrade lighting in the club. A sum of \$10,500 has been allocated to William Lawson Park for floodlighting, and \$9,000 has been allocated for lighting at Tallowong Oval. Also, Blacktown and Doonside little athletics clubs have received \$10,750 for security storage facilities at their ground. Many children participate in sporting activities at that ground and they appreciate receiving this extra money, which enables work to be done that normally otherwise could not be undertaken.

The Governor referred to the devastating bushfires, which unfortunately are a natural part of our environment. I congratulate the volunteers on the great job they did. Where would we be without our volunteers? We always rely on them to pull us through, and again they have done a tremendous job. Recently the Government allocated \$350,000 to the Blacktown fire station for a new rescue vehicle, the first of its kind, for the benefit of both the emergency services and the firefighting services. That is greatly appreciated. The Rural Fire Service in Blacktown has received a boost of \$960,000. The Opposition often refers to broken promises or work being incomplete. However, since coming to office this Government has allocated a staggering \$34.7 million to Blacktown City Council for rural fire brigades compared to only \$2.9 million under the former Coalition Government during the same number of years. I suppose another point of order will now be taken.

**Mr Ashton:** It's a pity he hasn't got any matches in his pocket.

**Mr GIBSON:** The honourable member for Coffs Harbour is the old satellite. He should talk about bushfires instead of taking points of order. This record spending means that New South Wales Fire Brigades is better equipped to provide greater protection for the Blacktown community. Also, a new minibus was recently provided to help the sick and elderly in my electorate—something that is long overdue. The people of my electorate will benefit greatly from the provision of this community minibus and are extremely grateful to the Government for it. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

When I was first elected as the honourable member for Blacktown my electorate experienced law and order problems similar to those occurring in other communities. Although they may not be major problems to other people, they were of concern to my constituents.

**Mr Markham:** Monumental.

**Mr GIBSON:** That is right. On a daily basis people would sit in the gutters of Blacktown's main street drinking grog, throwing bottles and cans, and using bad language. In fact, often the ordinary good citizens were afraid to walk down the main street. However, with the help of Blacktown police that problem has been solved and it is a pleasure now to walk up and down the main street. The moral of the story is that if communities want something bad enough and pursue it vigorously, problems can be resolved.

I asked my local police superintendent, "To do the job properly how many more police would you need?" He said, "We need 16 more police officers." I am happy to report that after some negotiation, 16 additional police officers were recently assigned to the Blacktown area to help the existing police officers, for the benefit of the local community. Police in my area do a fantastic job and in the past 12 months they have carried out a staggering number of successful drug raids. We do not have a solution to the drug problem; if we did, every city in the world would want to know it. However, police officers in my area have come down hard on drug offenders. Indeed, police officers ride their bikes up and down the main street, on some days nearly all day, making it safer for the citizens of Blacktown to walk the streets. If people see someone dealing drugs they tell those police officers, who keep surveillance and take action, if necessary. That is another successful initiative.

The Governor also referred to changes to the Bail Act, which are long overdue and which are welcomed by my community. Approximately 80 per cent of crime is committed by about 20 per cent of the people who are on bail, some of whom have been charged with many crimes. I would like to refer to Nurragingy Reserve comprising 88 hectares of regional parkland at Blacktown. The honourable member for Wollongong recently visited that park and would agree with those who have visited there that it is one of the best kept secrets in Australia today. It is almost impossible to get into the reserve on a weekend because its beauty and facilities, including lakes and ovals, make it extremely popular. Over the past 15 years Blacktown City Council has managed this reserve and has poured \$6 million into improving it. Recently the Government, in good faith, gave the reserve back to Blacktown City Council so that it may be retained by the people forever. Also, I should like to commend the officers of the State Emergency Service and other volunteers, who all help to make the community tick.

In the past 12 months an extra \$95,579 was allocated to five support groups and three toy libraries across Blacktown, Penrith and the Blue Mountains—so child care services have certainly received a boost. The Blacktown Roving Childcare Centre, which provides child care so that parents can attend parenting classes or work-related courses, also received \$6,357, bringing its annual total allocation close to \$69,000.

Over the years problems have been experienced with Blacktown railway station. Over the next 12 months Blacktown will probably become the largest city station on the network. During the seven years the Opposition was in government, numerous requests were made for escalators to be constructed at the station, yet those requests were denied. Work commenced on the escalators within two or three months of my being elected the honourable member for Blacktown, and today the people of Blacktown enjoy riding up and down the escalators. The provision of escalators has made it easier for the elderly, the sick and the frail to catch a train. This Government has achieved that for the people of Blacktown—it has not just talked about it; it has taken action.

The Government is proud that it has reduced State debt by some \$10 billion. It is good to know that it has produced six or seven budgets in surplus. The Coalition Government failed to produce one budget in surplus, so members opposite do not have much to crow about. One matter not mentioned yesterday in the Governor's Speech was homelessness. As members of Parliament, collectively we should talk more about

homelessness and homeless people. Recently I attended a function in Parliament House on a wet night. While returning to the building I walked past the State Library and I saw 11 men ranging in age from about 17 or 18 up to about 80 sleeping out in the rain because they had nowhere else to sleep. Homelessness is a major problem. Collectively we should speak more about homelessness and endeavour to do something to alleviate the problem in this great, rich country.

It is great to know that Grantham High School will soon become a sports high school in western Sydney, thanks to the Minister for Education and Training. It will probably be called the Hills sports high school. That change is another feather in the cap for the Government. The honourable member for Lachlan said that someone living in Cowra had to travel more than 100 kilometres to participate in sports training. The people in western Sydney, including young athletes, will be able to use the facilities at Grantham Sports High School, thereby overcoming part of their training problem. The people of Blacktown have been fortunate because at last the Government has discovered that they have an appreciation of the arts. In the past few weeks Blacktown has been given \$500,000 for the arts, and that is very important.

As I said, yesterday the Governor delivered her Speech in a dignified and poised manner, and it was a credit to her and to the New South Wales Government. It is a credit to this Government that it has managed this State. It is very hard to solve every problem for everyone, and no-one will ever do that. However, anyone who compares the New South Wales Government with any other State Government or, indeed, the Federal Government to see which government is achieving and which government is not achieving will realise that this Government is probably the best Government the State has ever had, and I am very proud to be part of it.

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

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

### **Sessional Orders**

#### **Days and Hours of Sitting**

**Debate resumed from an earlier hour.**

**Ms MOORE** (Bligh) [12.23 p.m.]: I am alarmed and continue to be greatly concerned that this Chamber continues to function purely as a rubber stamp, and that the only check on this Government is the crossbench in the other Chamber. I again take the opportunity to remind the Premier of his public commitments to parliamentary reform. When he signed the Charter of Reform during the Fiftieth Parliament he publicly committed himself and the Labor Party to procedures for accountability, scrutiny and transparency in developing legislation. He made public commitments that legislation would lie on the table for five days, that landmark legislation would lie on the table for 28 days and that there would be legislation committees. Yet what have we seen from this Government? What did we see last year and in previous years? We saw gagging, guillotining, and legislation being rushed through this Chamber.

I shall refer to some examples that occurred last year and I will do so in the context of very strongly calling on the Leader of the House, the Premier and the Government not to pursue that process in the coming year, but, rather, to allow this Chamber to be a true and democratic Chamber, and to operate in the manner that the people who elect us expect. In June last year landmark workers compensation legislation was rushed through this Chamber in just three days. Then, in round two, in order to avoid public protest the bill was rammed through in three hours in November. That was an absolute indictment of the government, which is happy to have tickertape parades to acknowledge the wonderful and dangerous work that the emergency services people do, but which rammed through legislation that was so important to these people, to their rights and to the rights of their families.

Legislation to increase the powers of the Attorney General to investigate and report on behalf of the people of New South Wales yo-yoed between the two Houses until an ineffectual compromise—which did not provide much accountability—was reached. The bill enabling members of Parliament to pocket unspent electoral funds passed through this Chamber rapidly with the collusion of the major parties. It had been on the agenda for months and I certainly wanted to speak on it. The Government introduced the bill and by the time I left my room and came into the Chamber, which takes two minutes, the bill had already been passed.

After introducing a raft of hardline law and order legislation last year the Government introduced sniffer dog legislation into the Chamber without public consultation and rammed it through within an hour. That legislation is of great concern to my constituents, and there should have been proper public debate on such important legislation.

I share the Opposition's concern about the charade of Friday sittings. I was amused and concerned about the investigative levels of the media that promulgated the Government's hype that the New South Wales Parliament sat for more days than any other Parliament in Australia—when we all know that Friday sittings are nothing more than a charade. If the Premier is committed to accountability he and his Ministers would be here on Fridays, we would have a question time and we would have Ministers, not Parliamentary Secretaries, present in the Chamber and participating in debate. As I have said before, it is beyond my comprehension that Ministers who should be taking charge of legislation do not want to be in the Chamber to defend and argue the merits of legislation that they surely had a hand in developing and that they surely want to see passed by the House. That is quite shocking.

It is appalling that we do not have divisions or a question time on Friday settings. I commend the Leader of the House: at least he has stuck to not sitting beyond 10.30 p.m. That initiative was introduced when the Independents had the balance of power. Before that, when John Dowd ran the parliamentary program, the sitting hours were absolutely appalling in terms of their effect on people's health and the quality of debate and legislation. It was legislation by exhaustion. It was appalling for people working in the Parliament that it sat for 30 hours straight on a number of occasions. It suited John Dowd; he did not mind if we sat here until 3.00 a.m. or 4.00 a.m. However, it had a terrible impact on people's health and on the quality of debate. I commend the Leader of the House for holding firm in terms of the 10.30 p.m. finish time.

I ask the Leader of the House why, in the last year of this Parliament, we cannot look at a real reform of the sitting hours. Why should we start at 10.00 o'clock in the morning and sit until 10.30 at night? Those hours are far too long and they affect people's health and the quality of their performance. Why cannot the Parliament sit from 9.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. Monday to Friday? I ask the Leader of the House to take that on board and to discuss it with the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee.

**Mr Ashton:** What about members from the country? How will they get back to their electorates?

**Ms MOORE:** They can travel to Sydney on Sunday and return to their electorates on Saturday. That can be sorted out. I urge the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee to discuss this issue. It is clearly a lively subject, judging from the interjections. Why can we not revisit this matter? When Tim Moore was Leader of the House the House sat for a time from 9 a.m., five days a week. I would certainly support a return to those hours. Most members of Parliament work through lunch and many of us work through dinner. Starting at 10 a.m. and working until 10.30 p.m. is not sensible in terms of maximum production. In the final year of this Parliament the Government has the opportunity to introduce parliamentary democracy into this Chamber for the first time by allowing a private member's morning every sitting week, letting members introduce bills and allowing votes on them, and by holding question time and allowing divisions to be called on Fridays. Let this be a lively, dynamic Parliament to which the Executive is accountable and where there is genuine debate and inquiry. Let us return to our experiences of the Fiftieth Parliament.

**Mr ROZZOLI** (Hawkesbury) [12.31 p.m.]: I speak in this debate not necessarily to criticise the Government but to offer some constructive suggestions and to draw the attention of members and the Leader of the House to certain matters of concern regarding the operation of Parliament. Members of Parliament do not enjoy the high regard of the community, and some aspects of this motion—such as the Friday sitting arrangements and the role of Parliamentary Secretaries and their bearing on the business of the House—do little to enhance the public standing of Parliament or parliamentarians as they smack of arrangements designed to suit the Government rather than accommodate the wishes of the people and facilitate their proper representation in this place.

Unlike the honourable member for Gosford, who led for the Opposition in this debate, I do not insist upon the provision of question time on sitting Fridays. I do not believe question time is an ingredient absolutely essential to any sitting day. I appreciate the difficulties caused by forcing all Ministers—under our parliamentary system all Ministers must attend question time—to attend Parliament for an additional day. However, the present arrangement—the Clayton's sitting day—is unacceptable. The Government has declared that Parliament will sit a record number of days this year because the House will sit on Fridays. Yet under the standing orders, Friday parliamentary sessions are an extension of Thursday sittings. As we merely suspend business rather than adjourn the House on Thursday, we do not create an additional sitting day. Therefore, in terms of the legal parliamentary process Parliament does not sit on Friday but merely extends the Thursday sitting into the following calendar day. As a consequence we are not entitled to claim or to promote the fact that Parliament is sitting an extra day a week.

Even if we believe we should define Friday sittings not in terms of legal procedural process but calendar days, it is false to claim that Parliament is sitting an extra day because the public expects us to sit the

same hours as we sit on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. In many cases Friday sittings are a mere token because, first, the House sits for only a few hours; second, there is no question time; third, generally only a few Ministers are present; and, fourth, business is often restricted to private members' statements and perhaps reports from parliamentary committees—all of which are useful but hardly constitute a full sitting day, which is what the public expects. I object to Friday sittings in their present form and believe that if the Government were to organise its program a little more astutely it could fit all the business that is normally dealt with on a Friday—or all the work that has been done on Fridays to date—into the parliamentary programs for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

In the past the Government, under the current Leader of the House, has often engaged in fairly useless, time-wasting exercises on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and then sought to justify Parliament's sitting on Friday by claiming that it had run out of time to do the work that it could have done earlier in the week if the parliamentary program had been organised better. As Speaker of the Legislative Assembly I carried in my folder as a source of inspiration in my job a quotation by Francis Bacon, who, if I remember correctly, said "Measure not the progress of your business by the hours of sitting but by the passage of bills." There is little real worth in Parliament's sitting extra hours or days if the business before the House is not dealt with properly and efficiently, and certainly no-one could claim that of Friday sittings at present.

I am annoyed that the glorious fourth estate, which is an essential part of the parliamentary process and whose members should be present in the Parliamentary Press Gallery for important debates such as this—I hope that they are listening to it in their rooms in the bowels of Parliament—seems unable to appreciate the absolute absurdity of parliamentary sittings on Fridays. The media has contributed to the myth that Parliament sits extra hours, which will prove valuable to the New South Wales community. In fact, if the current practice continues, Fridays sittings will be a waste of time for the people of this State. The media should pay more attention to the procedural processes of this place and what they mean for the community. Journalists should point out that, although the Government claims to be sitting the greatest number of days for many years, that is a falsehood because Friday sittings are Clayton's sitting days that produce little, if anything, of benefit to the community at a considerable cost. Considerable cost is associated with a parliamentary sitting, even if few members are present. Therefore, the Government's claim that it is acting in the community interest is spurious, and I challenge the media to recognise that and to tell the people.

What should we do to make Friday sittings—and by that I mean a genuine fourth day of sittings—meaningful and worthwhile for the community? The House of Commons sits five days a week and the first four sitting days are devoted to Government business. Question time is held on each of those four days but not every Minister is required to attend every question time as questions are addressed to different portfolio areas each day. Indeed, the Prime Minister does not attend the House of Commons each day to answer questions. However, there is Prime Minister's question time each week. A significant component of the business pattern of the House of Commons is the allocation of Fridays to private members' business.

If the Government wishes to sit the extra day it should replicate that type of sitting day. Government business would be dealt with on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. On Fridays from 10 a.m. to 5.30 p.m., without question time, private members' business in relation to bills and notices of motion would be dealt with. Ministers would know in advance from the business that has been set down whether they had to be in the House. There would then be much more meaningful debates on private members' business, which is important in the interests of the general community. We would also avoid the present annoying practice of Government business taking precedence on private members' day when pressure builds up on the Government.

Three days would be set rock solid in the standing orders for Government business, leaving aside emergencies, and Friday would be allocated as a genuine private members' business day to deal with bills and notices of motion. Ministers would be present on Fridays, and divisions, quorums and everything that constitutes a normal sitting day would occur except for question time. If that were to occur we could say with a clear conscience to the community that the House was sitting four days a week, that it is part of a working Parliament and that we have a reasonable chance to bring forward, on that full day devoted to private members' business, matters that are important to the community.

At the end of the last session, before Parliament prorogued, there were more than 250 general business notices of motions were on the business paper. Clearly, the vast majority of them could not be debated, and never would be. Bearing that in mind, it is farcical that the House is not to be able to get through a reasonable amount of private members' business. The standing orders provide for the reordering of private members'

motions and the moving of motions regarded by either the Government or the Opposition as urgent. In the interests of fairness it may well be that during one week a Government motion could have priority and during the alternate week the Opposition and the Independents could bring forward one of their motions. The Government would not then be able to debate one of its nonsense motions which usually has no urgency or importance but merely clogs up the system and stops the Opposition from debating a motion as one of urgency. If this is to be a fair and equitable House, these matters must be given consideration.

Governments always think they are making a concession of great value when they give the Opposition a fair go. Governments think it is imperative to tie up the Opposition as much as possible. I remind honourable members from both sides of the House that periodically they change sides. No matter how good or bad a government may seem to be to some of us, it is part of our system that some members sitting on the Treasury benches will become members of the Opposition at some stage and vice versa. If the functions of this House are developed based on equity and fairness they will serve members of Parliament—either party members or those on the crossbench—irrespective of who is in government, and that is very much in the interests of the people. Lack of equity and fairness is bringing the parliamentary process into disrepute, as we have seen in Federal Parliament and other State Parliaments.

A private member should be given the opportunity to deal with business in the House. That should be regarded as an important part of the business of the House, and in those matters the Parliament should be supreme over the Executive. I do not have time to canvass every aspect that flows from this, but I assure honourable members that there is a deal of concern around the countryside in regard to these matters. I commend to this House a deeper consideration of equity and fairness in the parliamentary process and of the relevance of the parliamentary process to the community. We deny that relevance at our peril.

**Mr J. H. TURNER** (Myall Lakes—Deputy Leader of the National Party) [12.46 p.m.]: I commend the honourable member for Hawkesbury, a former Speaker of this House, for his speech, which encapsulates the views and thoughts of many members of the Opposition in relation to this debate. The principal reason I am speaking today is because I am a member of the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee. I have been told by the Leader of the House that the committee will meet shortly. That will be a novel event, as the committee has not met for at least three years to my knowledge. When the committee last met the proceedings were a sham. Members were dished up a piece of paper and told what was going to happen. Any debate was curtailed by statements such as, "We are in government, you are not, and this is how we are going to play the game." I hope that the meeting will be meaningful and not a token meeting, as the earlier one was.

The Government has split the position of Deputy-Speaker and Chairman of Committees. I do not wish to do the Chairman of Committees, who is in the chair as Acting-Speaker out of a job, but when I served as Deputy-Speaker and Chairman of Committees in this House the job was certainly not so onerous that I wanted to split it. I was able to do both jobs, and I question why the position was split. I do not intend to impugn the integrity of the Chairman of Committees or Mr Deputy-Speaker, but at a higher echelon of the Australian Labor Party a reason was devised for the split.

The honourable member for Hawkesbury spoke about Parliament sitting on Fridays. The Government has not fooled the public with the Friday sittings. When I talk in my electorate about the sham of Friday sittings people are aghast. I am concerned that the press has not picked up on the nonsense of the Friday sittings. I wonder how the press has been brainwashed not to undertake research and not to give the sham publicity. The honourable member for Bligh said that the House should sit during normal business hours Mondays to Fridays, and country members could go home on Saturdays and come back on Sundays. That is fine for the honourable member for Bligh, who can slip home to Paddington, but I intend to give my wife the phone number of the honourable member for Bligh and my wife will probably ring her about that absurd idea.

I am happy to sit on Fridays; I am happy to be part of the team that works on Fridays. I agree with the honourable member for Hawkesbury, who summed up the matter totally. As he said, it is incumbent upon the Government to show fairness and equity. I hope that the meeting of the Standing Orders and Procedure Committee will be meaningful. I hope that our Friday sitting days will reflect proper parliamentary work and not be a sham. As the honourable member for Hawkesbury said, the Government must realise that from time to time there is a changing of the guard, and we on this side of the House have long memories.

**Mr McGRANE** (Dubbo) [12.50 p.m.]: I have listened with interest to the debate. I support the comments of the honourable member for Hawkesbury about the procedures of this House during parliamentary sittings. I find it difficult to understand why we sit on Fridays. In essence, we do not sit on Fridays in the true



sense of undertaking the work of the House. I do not agree with the parliamentary sitting times put forward by the honourable member for Bligh. In that regard, there is a split amongst the Independents. It is pertinent to remember that members from country electorates plan their travel arrangements a long way ahead. Last year we sat on Friday of some weeks and other weeks we did not. The parliamentary sittings during the past three years, particularly in the past year, have caused headaches for country members, who find it difficult to plan their time and travel arrangements from their electorates to Sydney.

I believe that the lack of preparation time is an important issue in this place. We do not have sufficient time to plan out contributions to debate. The Independent members need time to consider and research the matters we want to speak about. We do not have a party platform; we do not follow a party line of opposition or support. As honourable members know, I have long experience in local government, where the procedures have their good and bad points. In the local government area I come from, councillors were given more than adequate notice of matters to be discussed at any meeting and we were given time to prepare our case for or against the recommendations of council staff and committees. We are not given that time here, which makes the work of Independents more difficult.

The government of the day should take an overall view. As has been said earlier today, governments change. The Government becomes the Opposition. The only constant is that the Independents stay up the back of the Chamber. As long as we are elected to this place, our seats up the back are secure. But Government members are in danger of moving to the opposite side, because the Opposition wants to be in government. That is the nature of the beast. We all should be given a fair opportunity to put our arguments forward and to represent our electorates. As individual members of Parliament, we should keep in the back of our minds the thought that we are here, first of all, to represent our electorates. A party may be in government and then in opposition. The wheel turns. The government of the day should remember that if it treats the Opposition poorly, when that Opposition is voted into government, it will be treated similarly. That is a good each-way bet.

I was at Wellington races on Monday and I had a couple of bets. I was more sure of winning on Monday than of winning in regard to procedures of this House. I ask the Leader of the House and the Government to give us all a fair go. That is all we ask for. As the honourable member for Hawkesbury has said, the general public has a rather poor perception of members of Parliament. I will not repeat the words that some people use about our performance because I do not want them recorded in *Hansard*. We should not give those people the chance to make adverse comments about the performance of this House. Let us make this place more efficient. If members were given more time to plan and undertake research, the House would make better decisions.

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

*[Mr Acting-Speaker (Mr Mills) left the chair at 12.55 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]*

**BUSHFIRE CRISIS**

**Ministerial Statement**

**Mr CARR** (Maroubra—Premier, Minister for the Arts, and Minister for Citizenship) [2.15 p.m.]: I wish to make a statement on the recent bushfire crisis. There are many ways of seeing the bushfire crisis that hit this State in January: as a resoundingly successful exercise in bushfire control; as a demonstration of interagency and intergovernment co-ordination in defence of lives and property; as proof of the courage and resourcefulness of our fire workers and volunteers. It was all these. But it was something greater. It was an unprecedented demonstration of communal spirit, of sharing, of neighbourliness, of generosity, of the simple goodness of the Australian people on a scale never before seen.

Of all of the statistics that emerge from those terrible weeks in summer one stands out: the Bushfire Appeal Fund, which I launched in December with a \$1 million contribution from the State and Federal governments, now stands at \$7.3 million. And the fund continues to grow. What a tribute to the generosity of Australian people and businesses. Already, over \$2.4 million has been distributed to people in need—to households, to primary producers, to small businesses—in 190 helping-hand grants through the Department of Community Services. For example, as at 25 February grants were being distributed to 40 small businesses, including 22 in the Warragamba area.

Think of how these funds are used by families. The young single mother with two children in Vincentia on the South Coast who lost all her possessions when her rented home was destroyed gets a helping-hand grant

of \$10,000. A 60-year-old man at Warragamba—a volunteer firefighter himself—lost his home while trying to save other homes from destruction. A family of six in the Shoalhaven area, including four children, lost their car, their caravan, their business, but decided to stay on in the burnt remains of their shed-type house while another home is built. All have had these helping hands from their fellow Australians. Now a second round of funding for households, small business and primary producers will be determined by the committee on 12 March.

Long after the flames have been extinguished, the work of the charities and relief organisations goes on—the Red Cross, St Vincent De Paul, the Salvation Army, ADRACare and AngliCare, the churches, the RSPCA, the Department of Community Services and its many community partners, the countless volunteers. The recent fires were more widespread, more numerous, more intense than any of those in the past 60 years. They were worse than the great fires of 1939-40, worse than the fires of 1957, 1968, 1977 and 1988, worse even than the terrible fires of 1994. During the worst of the crisis no fewer than 450 separate fires were blazing across the State. A total of 745,000 hectares of bushland were ravaged. Yet what was the result?

For all the individual stories of loss and misfortune, Commissioner Phil Koperberg led the most successful firefighting operation in the history of the State. The commissioner is with us in the gallery today. The number of homes destroyed—for each owner and occupant a personal tragedy—was nonetheless limited to 109. And not a single person, firefighter or civilian, died as a direct result of the fires. Make a comparison with the recent tragic fires in California. In 1999-2000, in the Californian fire season 115,000 hectares of bushland were burnt, with the loss of 1,385 houses, and 20 brave firefighters lost their lives. An equivalent loss in New South Wales would have seen, not 109 houses lost, as was the case, but 9,100. Since coming to office, in the wake of the fires of 1994 we have increased the Rural Fire Service budget by 123 per cent, to almost \$114 million this year. The National Parks budget under this Government has risen by 137 per cent, to almost \$226 million, since we came to office.

**Mr O'Farrell:** What do they spend it on?

**Mr CARR:** The Deputy Leader of the Opposition interjects on cue. There has been a big increase in national park area.

**Mr O'Farrell:** What did they spend it on? Certainly not on fire management; not a single dollar on fire management in the national parks.

**Mr CARR:** Let me answer the question. He asked, "What did they spend on fire management?" The answer is \$87 million, which is a darned sight more than was spent on fire management when the Coalition was in government.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I ask the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to listen in silence until the Premier has completed his ministerial statement. The Opposition will have an opportunity to reply at the appropriate time. I place the Deputy Leader of the Opposition on two calls to order.

**Mr CARR:** I have the courtesy to give this information to the House not in answer to a question that might be prearranged, but as a ministerial statement conferring on the Opposition equal time to reply. If they are not being vulgar, they are being negative. If they are not being negative, they are being ill-mannered. Always the dross. But they say, giving us credit for the increased expenditure on the national parks, "Your Government has vastly expanded the national park coverage in New South Wales," as, indeed, we have. But here is the killer statistic: the previous Government spent \$16 per hectare on national parks; we have spent \$35 per hectare on national parks. That is the killer statistic, and all the opponents of nature conservation on the Opposition side of the House cannot abide that figure.

Let us not be distracted. Isn't it good to be back, by the way? Over the same period funding for the Fire Brigades has increased by 60 per cent, this year reaching \$386 million. I want to be gracious and acknowledge the words of the Prime Minister about the New South Wales response to the fire crisis. Again, the vulgar and ill-tempered members of the Opposition are talking, and just when I am about to lay on the record the words of their national leader, Prime Minister John Howard. On 26 December 2001 the prime Minister said:

Can I say what a fantastic job the fire authorities of New South Wales, the Rural Fire Service, has done and all the emergency services. They are handling the situation magnificently.

I see the honourable member for Coffs Harbour nodding. Some people made the job of these splendid agencies even harder than it might have been. More of that later. The Prime Minister went on to congratulate all those

who stood in the front line in New South Wales. I quote also Mr Len Foster, head of the Australasian Fire Authorities Council—the peak body of rural fire services in Australia and New Zealand,. Interestingly, when he who wrote to Commissioner Koperberg on behalf of all the interstate services he said:

The overwhelming view of the chief executive officers from the participating agencies is that the interstate involvement was an outstanding success.

He said that the management issues that had caused concern in 1994 were not evident this time round. He further said:

It was very pleasing to note that co-operation between Australian fire agencies has moved so far in a positive direction.

We will introduce a State environmental planning policy strengthening the requirement that local councils consult the Rural Fire Service on development proposals in bushfire-prone areas. We are issuing updated planning guidelines for councils, town planners, developers and home owners. We will expand the powers of the Rural Fire Service Commissioner. In future, Rural Fire Service personnel will be able to go to any land, private or public, to carry out hazard reduction work required under local bushfire plans and do this work at the expense of the owners. A new code of practice will streamline approval for hazard reduction work.

Let it not be forgotten that a second natural disaster, the violent storms of 16 February, damaged large parts of Sydney and brought another 8,400 calls to the State Emergency Services, bringing the total for the summer to more than 25,000, in addition to the 80,000 hours of work contributed by SES workers during the fires. No other country in the world has an organised volunteer movement to cope with emergencies comparable to that of Australia. No other State has an organisation superior to ours.

To the Rural Fire Service, the New South Wales Fire Brigades, the State Emergency Service, the police, the ambulance services, the Bureau of Meteorology, the Department of Community Services, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, State Forests, the fire services from interstate and New Zealand, the many charities and volunteer services, the RSPCA, the registered clubs, the churches, and the countless brave and selfless individuals I extend on behalf of all members of the Government our profound thanks. Honourable members would be aware that the New South Wales Coroner is conducting a wide range of inquiries into the causes of bushfires and the effectiveness of the fire fighting effort.

Today I am able to announce that there will also be a parliamentary inquiry. In 1994 when Labor was in opposition, we moved to set up a parliamentary committee and the Coalition Government of the day opposed it. There are some ashamed faces on the Coalition side of the Chamber because the Coalition opposed an inquiry whereas Labor will establish a joint parliamentary committee to examine, among other things, hazard reduction and other fire prevention measures, as well as the environmental impact of bushfires. I hope the inquiry does not become too detained or bogged down in Coffs Harbour. I imagine there would be some interesting matters of fire practice and fire management to pick over in the wake of the disaster and that some people in the fire services in Coffs Harbour would have some interesting stories to tell.

The inquiry will also examine the causes of fires, bushfire management and control, and the equipment and training that is available to our firefighters. The committee will report before the end of June. Whenever it is possible to improve this State's bushfire-fighting capacity, this Government will do that. The inquiry will not be a reflection on any organisation but instead will be an attempt to further assist fire-fighting organisations in their work and upgrade their efforts, where possible, even more. As well, the inquiry will be an expression of our gratitude, a mark of our confidence in the fire services of this State and of the firm place they have won, with countless other organisations, in the hearts of the Australian people.

**Mrs CHIKAROVSKI** (Lane Cove—Leader of the Opposition) [2.31 p.m.]: It goes without saying that all members of this House congratulate everyone who was involved in the recent bush fire fighting efforts. It is not just the Government that recognises how well our volunteers and professional firefighters performed—indeed, all who were involved in the battles against fires recently in this State. I place on the record that the Premier's statement is applicable to professional firefighters, the police, emergency workers, members of the Rural Fire Service, members of the State Emergency Service, members of the New South Wales Volunteer Rescue Association, the Australian Red Cross and all other members of organisations who were involved in this massive effort. It showed once again what the people of this State can do when they come together as a community; it showed once again the amazing spirit that exists among the Australian community—a spirit often referred to as mateship, or the idea that people lend a hand when others are facing a crisis.

That spirit was amply demonstrated throughout the community also by people who could not actively participate in firefighting but whose generosity contributed to fundraising appeals made across the State to assist

those who had lost so much. As I know my colleague the shadow Minister for Emergency Services and other honourable members did, I visited areas that were ravaged by the fires. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition and I visited areas in our electorates that were being threatened by fire. I can tell honourable members that it is a reasonably scary experience to be standing near a bushfire, in spite of the fact that the bushfires at the sites I visited were relatively low level. The smoke, ash, noise and the intense heat could be fully appreciated only by those who actually experienced them.

We need to ensure that we learn from this State's recent bushfires. As the Premier said, in 1994 a coronial inquest and parliamentary inquiry were held. We learnt from those inquiries and ensured that a number of recommendations were implemented to improve the State's response for the benefit of those affected by fire and, more importantly, for those who fight fires. I agree with the Premier's comments relating to the need for a parliamentary inquiry. In fact, I have been calling for such an inquiry for a couple of months, and I am delighted that the Premier has taken up the Opposition's suggestion. The reason that a parliamentary inquiry is needed rather than just a coronial inquiry is that there are large numbers of people who want to tell their stories but who would not have standing at a coronial inquiry. A parliamentary inquiry will provide those people with an opportunity to provide information to the Parliament.

Recently the honourable member for Camden and I attended a meeting at Warragamba where we met people who have more than 50 years experience in bush fire fighting. Such people have great knowledge and understanding of what has taken place in their communities over the past 50 years and they want an opportunity to place their understanding and knowledge on the record so that we who constitute the Parliament can learn from their experience and knowledge and provide the best information and resources for those who will fight fires in the future. I noticed at that meeting a level of anger—which was only to be expected. People were wondering why they were yet again facing horrendous fires.

**Mr Ashton:** Because people light fires.

**Mrs CHIKAROVSKI:** The Premier was heard in silence, perhaps the honourable member could show me the same courtesy. He is always complaining about how rude other people are; he might like to set a courteous example for members on his side the House. As I said, the people at Warragamba were angry; they were distressed and wanted to know why the bushfires had happened. They wanted to know why areas which had never previously been burnt in the way that they were burnt recently had been so badly affected. They wanted answers, but they also recognised the need for a constructive approach and the need to learn from recent experience. They want to give this Parliament the benefit of their knowledge and information.

A number of questions that people are asking need to be answered. For example, the Premier has referred to the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the fact that the service spends money on hazard reduction. The facts as I understand them are that in 1994 there were 3.8 million hectares of national park in New South Wales and in that year 47,000 hectares were hazard reduced. It is well known that over the past several years the national parks estate in this State has increased to 5.5 million hectares but the average hazard-reduction rate over the past four years has been only 11,000 hectares. That figure should be compared to the 1994 hazard-reduction rate of 47,000 hectares in 3.8 million hectares of national park. It is little wonder people are asking what the National Parks and Wildlife Service is doing about hazard reduction. They want to know what the service is doing about hazard reduction and whether the lack of hazard reduction resulted in the destruction of their homes. Was it a lack of hazard reduction that caused Warragamba, Shoalhaven and other parts of this State to burn as badly as they did?

The question needs to be asked and answered. We should also learn from recent experience about the quality of resourcing. I congratulate Commissioner Koperberg on the outstanding job he did. I recognise his work, the work of volunteers and others who were involved as being certainly above and beyond the call of duty. Many of those people left their families on Christmas Day to try to do the right thing and save other people's homes, and we are very grateful to them. But the Opposition wants to ensure that Commissioner Koperberg has all the resources he needs and his volunteers need to be the best equipped volunteers in the world. For example, we need to know whether firefighters need aerial equipment, such as the much-talked-about and much-loved Elvis. We want to know whether that type of equipment is needed on a permanent basis, and how many pieces of aerial firefighting equipment are needed. We also need to know whether we should be sharing that type of resource with other States such as Victoria.

**Mr Carr:** The Prime Minister promised two of them.

**Mrs CHIKAROVSKI:** I shut up when you spoke, so you can shut up when I am speaking.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Chair will make decisions about those matters. The Premier will cease interjecting and the honourable member for Gosford will cease responding to those interjections.

**Mrs CHIKAROVSKI:** These are important questions and that is why the Opposition has already proposed terms of reference for the inquiry. The Opposition wants to know, for example, whether the police have adequate powers in relation to arson offences and whether the penalties for such offences are appropriate. The Opposition has heard that very little will happen to the number of young people and others who have been charged with arson offences. Is that an appropriate response to a crime that has the potential to ruin so many lives—a crime that destroys property and has the potential to cause loss of life? That subject should be among the terms of reference of the inquiry. Let us make sure that the police have the powers they need and that the courts have the sentencing ability they need.

We need to ensure that there are proper strategies in place for communication. One complaint was that there was often difficulty in communication between the firefighters and the communities affected. Communities have said, "We did not know where to turn. We did not know whether we should have evacuated. We were not quite sure what we should be doing." We must ensure there is effective communication and systems are in place so people know what to do, whether to stay or leave. That aspect should be included in any terms of reference.

Equally important is the necessity to spell out the method of support for the victims of bushfires. We must ensure that the money the Premier has referred to gets to those in need in a proper and appropriate time frame. The honourable member for Camden and I talked to a number of small business people in Warragamba and surrounding areas who said they were experiencing great difficulty in accessing money from the bushfire appeal. The time lag between applying for and actually accessing that money meant that their businesses were going to go down the tube. By the time they accessed the funds, they would not have a business: it would be too late. We need to have in place a proper method to ensure that those affected by such a disaster and entitled to access those funds receive the money in an appropriate time frame.

The Opposition believes other matters are important and should be included in the terms of reference of this inquiry. I will be happy to confer with the Government about our suggested terms of reference in order to make sure that all matters that should be properly canvassed are properly canvassed. The Opposition has made it clear from the beginning that this is not a witch-hunt. This is not about apportioning blame or finding scapegoats: it is about making sure that we learn from this disaster. Commissioner Koperberg will agree that we learned from the 1994 bushfires and we must learn from the 2001-2002 bushfires. If we do not learn from them, we stand condemned. We would also stand condemned if we are not prepared to make some hard decisions, or if we are not prepared to recognise that some things that were not done properly in the past need to be changed.

That means having a look at the public authorities—the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Catchment Management Authority and others—to determine what their roles were and what their liabilities may have been. If there is liability we need to make sure that anyone who has been adversely affected because of the negligence of a public authority is properly compensated. That, too, must be one of the terms of reference; that, too, must be one of the matters for this parliamentary inquiry to investigate. It was a very difficult time for all those people who were directly affected, who lost properties or businesses, and who were out fighting the bushfires.

One night I was in the city and I happened to see a group of firefighters at The Rocks. They had just returned from fighting bushfires in the Blue Mountains and—to use a colloquialism, which I am sure you will allow in this instance, Mr Speaker—they were buggered. They were going to have eight hours sleep and then go back again, because they were committed to making sure that the people of New South Wales were protected. That sort of dedication we have come to expect from the people who turn out time and again during emergencies that confront this State. That dedication is an expression of their very strong concern for the people of this State. We must support these people, because they support us. We must do everything we can to support them. The Opposition congratulates everyone who was involved, everyone who had a role in making sure that, although these fires were devastating, their impact was minimised.

The Opposition particularly thanks Commissioner Koperberg for his role. I was at the parade the other day and I saw the thousands and thousands of onlookers and I believe the cheer that went up when his name was mentioned was well deserved. I am sure the commissioner would be equally well received in this House. We are not in the habit of giving three cheers, but let me say of the commissioner's performance in recent times, if it were to do that, I am sure this House would say that three cheers are not enough.

## PUBLIC LIABILITY INSURANCE PREMIUMS

### Ministerial Statement

**Mr CARR** (Maroubra—Premier, Minister for the Arts, and Minister for Citizenship) [2.44 p.m.]: Mudgee Council was recently forced to cancel its annual Christmas carols because it could not afford the \$5,000 public liability insurance premium. The Hawkesbury River bridge-to-bridge waterskiing race was cancelled for the first time in 40 years for the same reason. Public liability insurance premiums are causing serious difficulties for the community. Small businesses and community groups are having difficulty obtaining affordable public liability insurance. In addition to the problems with public liability, builders are having difficulty obtaining compulsory home warranty insurance, and professionals cannot obtain professional indemnity insurance.

There are many cases like those I have quoted. This is not a simple problem and it is not unique to New South Wales. It is a complex national issue. The insurance industry argues that several factors have combined to create the current crisis: low, and possibly uneconomic, premium levels in the 1990s; losses in investments; fewer insurers now offer public liability insurance following the collapse of HIH; the increase in the number of personal injury claims; and the size of compensation awarded by the courts. Insurers were making adjustments for these factors before the events of 11 September. They now say additional steps are required to stem losses flowing from exposure to claims from 11 September. That has had a big effect on reinsurers, as the House would be aware.

We have had the collapse of HIH, the issue of terrorism insurance, and the crisis with public liability. On each occasion we have pressed the Federal Government and the Prime Minister to facilitate urgent action on these issues. The Prime Minister wrote to me as recently as last month saying he sees no need for a meeting on the impact of terrorism on insurance, which I find hard to believe. In response to the problems facing small businesses and community organisations, the Commonwealth Assistant Treasurer, Senator Coonan, has announced she will convene a national meeting on public liability next month. The meeting will deal only with public liability.

The Prime Minister must show leadership and convene a national summit involving heads of government and the insurance industry to examine all the problems besetting the insurance industry. The Commonwealth regulates the industry. It does so through the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. For example, the Australian Prudential Regulation Authority recently increased the amount of capital that insurance companies need to back their public liability risk. That must lead to higher public liability premiums. The point is, the Commonwealth has a direct role and direct influence on the insurance market.

The Commonwealth has the power to obtain information from insurers to analyse the causes of the current crisis. It is the Commonwealth's responsibility to examine the conduct of insurers towards consumers, and to do other things as well. The insurance industry also needs to review its own practices. The industry should ensure that current prices are not an overreaction to the collapse of HIH and to what happened on 11 September. The industry should give rational quotes for public liability insurance, based on the risk involved. At the very least, insurers should explain clearly to customers why their individual risk circumstances may not be relevant. In the current market a good claims history or low level of risk does not seem sufficient to ensure that insurance will be either obtainable or affordable. This is extremely frustrating for those community organisations with impeccable records and low risk.

The industry's opposition to taxes is not new and stamp duty is clearly not the cause of recent massive premium increases. However, any merit in the arguments against taxation will be considered as part of the Government's review of options to tackle public liability insurance problems within the State. No-one should persist with the argument that it is the duty of the State government to subsidise insurance premiums. I am aware some organisations may want this. I understand how disappointing it is, particularly to country communities, that events are cancelled because of the inability to obtain insurance.

I must make this important point: While insurance costs are necessarily factored into levels of public funding for certain community services, direct subsidies for other events and organisations might actually entrench inflated premiums at taxpayers' expense. In the short term, some community events and activities might be able to proceed if subsidies were given but, in the long term, the whole community might end up paying for higher premiums for years. We have taken action in this State such as the provision of a \$600 million rescue package following the collapse of HIH. The package covers claims against HIH—both compulsory third party [CTP] motor vehicle and home building warranty.

We also called on the Prime Minister to set up the HHH royal commission. I think it is fair to say that we shamed him into setting up that royal commission. We introduced health care liability reforms in response to an increase in litigation and skyrocketing insurance costs. The Government will also shortly introduce legislation to exclude terrorist acts from compulsory third party motor vehicle policies. That will ensure that the CTP scheme can continue, despite international reinsurers refusing to cover terrorist acts as part of their response to what happened on 11 September.

Today I am pleased to announce another sensible initiative aimed at pushing down the pressure on rising insurance costs. I mentioned earlier that one of the many factors leading to rising costs is the increase in personal injury claims and the size of compensation payouts when those claims are contested. The trend has been driven by an increasing trend towards litigation in our society. Australia is adopting a culture of blame even when the damage suffered might be minor and temporary. Elements in the legal profession have encouraged a view that someone else must always pay; that litigation is the way to resolve disputes. All it does is increase costs for insurance customers and the wider community.

So today I can announce that the Government is introducing restrictions on lawyers advertising for personal injury matters to take effect from 1 April. I have discussed this with members of the Law Society of New South Wales and they are supportive of these changes. I give them credit for that and I thank them for their sympathetic approach to the problem that this represents for the Government of New South Wales. The rules that we propose will stop lawyers advertising personal injury services on television, on radio and in hospitals. For example, patients and visitors will no longer see those offensive advertisements for lawyers in hospital lifts.

The new rules will also restrict the kinds of statements that lawyers can make about personal injury work in printed advertisements or advertisements on the Internet. The rules will prevent lawyers engaging in ambulance chasing advertising. This advertising encourages people to claim for every slip and fall, regardless of the merits of the case or their genuine need for compensation. The new rules will counteract the trend to excessive litigation which is evident in parts of our society. On the broader question of public liability insurance the Government is holding discussions with the Insurance Council of Australia, the New South Wales Council of Social Service, arts and sporting organisations, small business and tourism operators and local government representatives.

The Government is helping organisations help themselves. Next month the Minister for Sport and Recreation will launch a detailed risk management guide for sporting and recreational clubs in the State. The Government is working with local councils to identify options for managing their liabilities arising from the HHH collapse. There is a need to consider how councils might arrange their insurance and risk management in a more effective and consistent way across the State. We are holding discussions with the insurance and building industries to ensure that the Home Building Warranty Scheme is not adversely affected by these developments.

The Government is co-operating closely with Victoria, which has a similar scheme, to develop a co-ordinated response to the issue. The New South Wales Government has asked that the issue of public liability insurance be placed on the agenda for upcoming meetings of the Council of Australian Governments and the Standing Committee of Attorneys General. In December, Cabinet directed the Cabinet Office, Treasury and the Attorney General's Department to co-ordinate a review of potential reform measures such as reforms to the tort law system and the statutory requirements to hold public liability insurance.

The Government intends to put on the table for discussion at the national meeting some of the options for reform being considered by the review. The options include capping damages for some types of compensation, such as compensation for lost future earnings. Another option is to set thresholds for claims so that trivial claims do not waste valuable court time or increase costs for the community and insurers. Another reform worth considering at this national level is allowing provisional damages awards and encouraging or requiring the use of structured settlements. The success of these reforms, however, depends on the Commonwealth fulfilling its commitment to change the taxation system so that structured settlements are not subjected to disadvantage.

*[Interruption]*

Aren't Opposition members pathetic! They do not have a policy to bless themselves with. They have not got a policy on anything. We were promised in February—and we are still in February—that there would be a policy blitzkrieg from the Opposition. We are searching the skies and not a document is coming across the channel. Not a document is in sight. I have the Stasi on the radar and there is no sign of a blitzkrieg anywhere. They say that the Stukas and the Messerschmitts are still in their hangars.

Time is passing and there is no sign of a policy blitzkrieg. Honourable members should remember that Opposition members threw Peter out in December. It is not too late in the year for them to change their leader. It is not too late for the manifest ambitions of the sneering, leaking team opposite to make itself clear. Our old friend the honourable member for Vacluse has positioned himself. I have a quote from the honourable member for Vacluse but I do not want to interrupt the train of his concentration now by drawing on it. Honourable members are insisting that I use the quote. On 13 June 2000 the honourable member for Vacluse repeated that he could not loyally serve on the front bench under the Leader of the Opposition. If honourable members saw those quotes in the Sunday papers they would be aware that the honourable member for Vacluse is not serving loyally on the front bench under the Leader of the Opposition. Isn't it good to be back?

*[Interruption]*

The Leader of the National Party is interrupting—the man who is never there. He is never at the bushfires, never in the country and never doing the job. He does nothing, is never around and is never on duty. Other reform options include requiring parties in personal injury cases to undertake conciliation and introducing shorter limitation periods for claims.

**Mr Souris:** What was that about Tamworth?

**Mr CARR:** What a childlike performance from George! Give us a single policy on any subject.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I ask the Premier to return to his ministerial statement.

**Mr CARR:** George, give us a single policy on any subject! Before this session is over I am going to read out the policy rollcall subject area by subject area, portfolio area by portfolio area along the front bench and ask shadow Ministers to produce any evidence of a policy blitzkrieg. It might be you, it might be you or it might be you. Give us a policy—a scrap of policy. Enough of these distractions!

Other reform options include requiring parties in personal injury cases to undertake conciliation and introducing limitation periods for claims. The impact of lawyers' fee arrangements on the growing litigiousness of our society will also be considered. Limiting the liability of organisers of events that have a particularly high value to the community might also be considered, as might limiting the liability of organisers of inherently dangerous activities. The Government recognises that there are advantages and disadvantages in each of these options. This is why they should be discussed in a national forum. If the Government could be certain that reforms to New South Wales laws would help reduce insurance costs we would not hesitate to introduce a range of these options now. But the issue has national implications.

The findings of the HIH royal commission will also need to be reconsidered. We need to be certain that any reforms to New South Wales legislation will address the underlying causes of the problem. We need a consistent and nationwide response. Our new rules on lawyers advertising are an important step in stemming the rise in insurance costs. The Government will bring additional serious reform proposals to the national meetings. Our rich diversity of cultural, social, business and sporting opportunities is under threat. We have to fix public liability. We have to do it nationally; we have to do it co-operatively, and we have to do it quickly. This Government wants solutions and will do anything in co-operation with other jurisdictions to get them.

**Ms SEATON** (Southern Highlands) [3.02 p.m.]: The Premier has at last woken up to something that we have been calling on the State Government to do something about for some months.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Premier will resume his seat. The honourable member for Southern Highlands has the call.

**Ms SEATON:** The Premier's comments today have highlighted breathtaking hypocrisy in the Australian Labor Party's approach to the insurance crisis, which is affecting community groups, businesses and sporting clubs around the State. To date the Premier has steadfastly ignored the plight of the many groups that are having to cut back on activities or reduce the scope of their business activities. They are struggling in this public liability crisis, which he has ignored. A very interesting thing happened last week.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I call the Minister for Information Technology to order. I call the honourable member for Illawarra to order. The Premier will cease interjecting.



**Ms SEATON:** Last week the Treasurer called a press conference in which he tried to blame this entire issue on the Federal Government. He said that this was a national issue, that it was nothing to do with the State Government and that it was the Federal Government's problem. At the same time a very interesting set of documents was circulating in the name of the honourable member for Port Stephens, Mr John Bartlett. The honourable member was promoting a public liability insurance summit involving the Attorney General, the Hon. Bob Debus, and the Minister for Fair Trading at Westbury Marina Resort on Thursday 21 February. He had invited businesspeople in his electorate to part with \$30 to hear two of the Premier's Ministers talk about public liability.

The media release of the honourable member for Port Stephens of 17 January stated that anyone who came along and spent their \$30 to listen to the two Ministers would have a chance to make contributions to the Government's formulation of legislative change by the second half of this year. On the one hand the Premier is saying that this is a Federal Government problem, we should get rid of all this; on the other hand the Government is saying that it has some power to influence the situation. It cannot have it both ways. This is a State by State issue. The cost of public liability insurance and indeed a number of other insurances is influenced by a range of State legislation.

Under fair trading legislation, anyone that forms an association is required to have about \$10 million worth of liability insurance. A range of clumsy pieces of State legislation is creating conflicts and additional costs to businesses and volunteer groups. These issues are heard in legal jurisdictions in this State. The Premier is not telling us how much money the Treasury is raking in every day from stamp duty on increasing public liability and other insurance premiums as a result of this crisis. Last year the Premier, the Treasurer and this Government raked in something like \$40 million of stamp duty on public liability insurance premiums alone. And let us remember that they are charging a 10 per cent stamp duty on top of the GST-inclusive price of a premium. They are double dipping; they are charging a tax on a tax. In addition, the stamp duty from public indemnity insurance policies last year was of the order of \$60 million in New South Wales.

The Trowbridge and Deloitte report that came out last week predicts an increase of up to a 20 per cent in the cost of such premiums to businesses. This Government stands to get another \$23 million just out of those two types of insurance. The growth in premiums is a good explanation for the Premier and the Treasurer trying to put the issue onto somebody else and ignoring their responsibilities to bring the crisis under control in this State. Mr Speaker, I do not know why the Premier has suddenly woken up but perhaps it is because people in electorates held by Labor members are starting to cry poor. They cannot go ahead with all the different events and business activities they want to conduct.

The *Illawarra Mercury* has daily reports showing how this insurance crisis is affecting people in Labor seats. Perhaps that has made the Premier wake up at last and realise that there is a problem. But he has not yet told us whether he is going to bite the bullet and recognise that he is profiteering from the stamp duty increases on increased public liability insurance premiums that he rakes in every day. If the Premier were really serious about dealing with insurance premiums and bringing them under control there is one thing he could do. Members will be aware that legislation introduced last year will introduce changes and new regulations to the level of competencies and the way in which education and training are arranged for real estate and property agents. Many people in that industry are waiting to see the regulations that will go with the legislation.

Real estate agents and property agents in New South Wales ought to be congratulated on their efforts in raising the standards of their industries and in raising their levels of education and training. They are waiting for the State Government to produce the regulations that will complement the legislation and give it meaning. For the first time the legislation also requires real estate agents to have compulsory professional indemnity insurance. Real estate agents are concerned that, because the Government is delaying the production of those regulations and is giving no guarantees about the date of release of a consultation paper, when they seek to obtain that professional indemnity insurance for the first time the insurance industry will have no evidence on which to base premiums. Therefore, we might see a whole new professional indemnity scheme commence, with premiums at a much higher level than would have been the case had the Government released the regulations and other information and given the insurance sector reason to be confident that the real estate and property agents industries are doing their best to increase their competencies.

Another issue the Premier mentioned but dismissed was home warranty insurance. This issue is affecting builders across New South Wales who are having to turn away contracts and reduce their staffing levels. When I was briefed on this issue by senior members of the Department of Fair Trading I was disappointed to learn that there is an attitude of neglect, that the Government is clearly dismissing the plight of builders who are in this situation. I have been told by senior representatives of the department that only 2 per cent of builders are affected by this problem. As a result, the Government is not interested in this matter.

The minutes of last year's meeting of the ministerial reference group on home warranty insurance contain an action note stating that the reference group seeks advice from the Crown Solicitor about the deeds of indemnity, and now legality. Those deeds of indemnity are causing builders to put their own homes in hock before they can even make an insurance application or have an insurance premium agreed. The Minister has had the opportunity to provide advice from the Crown Solicitor to the ministerial reference group to solve this problem, but he does not care enough to even ensure that that advice is provided. That is another example of the Government's indifference to small business, and its indifference to the costs that are inevitably loaded onto home buyers who, when they move into the home they have built, have to cover the costs of the delay and the costs that builders are having to pay.

The Premier very deliberately did not mention stamp duty. The Premier needs to come clean on exactly how much stamp duty he is raking in from the increase in premiums across all sectors of insurance. Figures provided by the Insurance Council of Australia show that there has been an increase in public liability claims from approximately 53,000 to 88,000 per annum. Payouts have increased from \$883 million to \$1.2 billion. More than 60 per cent of settlements are uncontested, and this has contributed a great deal to the costs of the system. Something like 50 per cent of the \$1.2 billion payout figure involves legal fees. It is simply not acceptable for the Premier to have spent the last two months denying any responsibility at State level for this state of affairs.

After refusing to call a State Premiers and leaders meeting to discuss this issue, and after refusing to take any initiative whatsoever on the issue, the Premier has suddenly decided to make a statement on this issue. Perhaps at last he has realised what everyone on this side of the House has known for some time: that public liability costs are absolutely crippling small business, volunteer organisations and sporting organisations. The Premier ought to have said two months ago that he was going to take to the meeting in March a comprehensive approach to public liability and solutions to the crisis. He should have put together a comprehensive program; he should have taken leadership on this issue; and he should have been signalling to business and volunteer community groups and sporting groups that he wants to see an end to this.

The Coalition welcomes efforts to stop ambulance-chasing advertisements. We look forward to examining changes to legislation that reflect the fact that terrorism is no longer covered in many instances. We look forward to seeing such legislation and considering the details of it. However, the Premier should take his own advice and stop participating in the blame game. He should get serious about finding solutions to home warranty insurance, professional indemnity and WorkCover, and he should take action to reduce the costs of insurance to business and the community.

### **DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

**Mr SPEAKER:** I draw the attention of the House to the presence in the gallery of former senator and Consul General in New York Michael Baume and his wife, Toni.

### **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE CONFERENCE**

#### **Ministerial Statement**

**Mr AMERY** (Mount Druitt—Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Corrective Services) [3.16 p.m.]: I inform the House that the New South Wales Government will sponsor a delegation to attend the International Women in Agriculture Conference, which is to be held in Spain later this year. We are supporting four high-achieving women from across New South Wales to attend the conference in Madrid. They are Diana Gibbs, Jon-Maree Baker, Robbie Sefton and Marie Russell. Members may recall the names of the first three women, all of whom are winners of the New South Wales Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation Rural Women's Award. Diana Gibbs is a wool and grain grower from Cootamundra and was the Rural Women's Award winner in 2000. She has used her award to help with plans to establish a joint venture with the Wiradjuri people of the Riverina to sell wool products to Europe. Jon-Maree Baker is a mixed farmer from Narrabri who won the award in 2001. Following her win, Ms Baker initiated training programs to develop technical, business and leadership skills within the cotton industry.

This year's award winner, Robbie Sefton, is a sheep farmer from Coonabarabran. Ms Sefton also runs a public relations company focused on rural issues and providing employment opportunities for young country-based people. The fourth delegate we are sponsoring is Marie Russell, a grazier based 220 kilometres west of Cobar. Marie is also co-chair of the New South Wales Rural Women's State Advisory Committee, as well as

being involved in many other rural-based groups and organisations. These four women, with their diverse backgrounds and interests, will ensure that New South Wales perspectives on agriculture are included in these high-level discussions. They will join the official Australian delegation to the International Women in Agriculture Conference in Madrid, which is expected to attract more than 1,500 women from numerous countries stretching across Europe, America, Africa and the Asia-Pacific.

New South Wales Agriculture will also hold workshops to help other New South Wales delegates to prepare for the high-profile conference. Discussions at the Women in Agriculture Conference will include the role of women in globalisation, sustainable development of agriculture, and the influences women can have on public policies affecting agricultural development and food safety. I wish our delegates the best for their visit and I look forward to hearing of their experiences when they return. No doubt they will be able to share their experiences and knowledge with other Australian rural women and communities on their return. On behalf of all members, I wish them a safe trip.

**Mr SLACK-SMITH** (Barwon) [3.19 p.m.]: The Opposition joins the Government in congratulating four high-achieving women from across New South Wales who will attend the International Women in Agriculture Conference in Madrid. They are Diana Gibbs, Jon-Maree Baker, who comes from my electorate of Barwon, Robbie Sefton and Marie Russell. It is extremely important to acknowledge that women participate in virtually all agricultural business in New South Wales. Agriculture is the largest employer in regional and rural New South Wales. It is therefore a very important industry. Women play an important role not only in day-to-day farm management but also in decision making and research and development. I acknowledge that the genesis of this began with the Rural Women's Network, which was created by one of the best agricultural Ministers New South Wales has ever seen—the Hon. Ian Armstrong.

**Mr Scully:** Bring him back!

**Mr SLACK-SMITH:** A new Coalition government would do that straightaway. In 1993 the then Minister for Agriculture, the Hon. Ian Armstrong, created the Rural Women's Network because he acknowledged—as do all National Party members of this House—that women are an important part of the agricultural industry in New South Wales.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition seems to be about to say something; I suggest he does not.

**Mr SLACK-SMITH:** It was that genesis in 1993 that led to the success of rural women from New South Wales participating in the International Women in Agriculture Conference in Madrid. On behalf of the Opposition, I wish them well in their endeavours.

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

### Restoration of Business

**Mr WHELAN:** Members have inquired about the prorogation of Parliament, which causes notices of motions previously given to lapse. Any item of general business can be reinstated by notification to the Clerk prior to Friday 8 March. Members wishing to avail themselves of that opportunity should forward a short note to the Clerk indicating by number the notice of motion or bill they wish to have restored.

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

### Notices of Motions

**Mr SPEAKER:** Before calling for notices of motions, I remind members of the purpose and function of this parliamentary procedure. When members give notices of motions, they are informing the House that they intend to propose that the House do something or order something to be done, or they are expressing an opinion in regard to some matter. A motion must, therefore, be phrased in such a way that, if agreed to, it will purport to express the judgment or will of the House. A notice of motion should be termed so as to give a precise proposition for determination by the House. Recently notices have become inordinately and unnecessarily long. The Chair emphasises that the giving of a notice of motion is not intended as an opportunity to make a long argument or convey the substance of a proposition. Nor, as Erskine May points out at page 336 of the twenty-second edition of *Parliamentary Practice*, should notices of motions be "tendered in a spirit of mockery or designed merely to give annoyance".

The House will be aware that I have advised the Clerks to scrutinise all notices to ensure that the form and content of any motion that is to come before the House is in order and does not offend any standing order of the House. Under my authority the Clerks will eliminate unnecessary statements or arguments from notices prior to their publication in the business paper. I also remind members that a clearly legible, signed notice of any motion must be handed up in writing to the Clerk at the table at the time that it is given. I have said this before when insisting on a typed notice. However, if the notice is legible I will accept it because I acknowledge that there are occasions on which members wish to expedite motions.

### **BILLS UNPROCLAIMED**

**Mr SPEAKER:** Pursuant to standing orders, I table a list detailing all legislation unproclaimed 90 days after assent as at 27 February 2002.

### **PETITIONS**

#### **North Head Quarantine Station**

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

#### **Pymont Point Development**

Petition praying that an alternative Elizabeth Macarthur Bay master plan be supported to avoid overdevelopment of Pymont Point, received from **Ms Nori**.

#### **Stem Cell Research**

Petition praying that the House support adult stem cell research and oppose the creation and use of embryos for stem cell extraction, received from **Mr Hartcher**.

#### **Scottish Hospital**

Petition supporting an upgrade of the Scottish Hospital, Paddington, that does not diminish the heritage value of the site, received from **Ms Moore**.

#### **Genetically Engineered Food**

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

#### **Freedom of Religion**

Petitions praying that the House reject proposals to reform the Anti-Discrimination Act which would detract from the exercise of freedom of religion, received from **Mr Amery, Mr Bartlett, Mr Gibson and Ms Hodgkinson**.

#### **Disorderly Houses Act**

Petition praying that the Disorderly Houses Act be amended to confer on councils and shires the right to ban the establishment of brothels in towns of less than 20,000 people, received from **Ms Hodgkinson**.

#### **Prince George Reserve**

Petition seeking acquisition of Prince George Reserve as a link in the Jervis Bay public reserve system, received from **Mr W. D. Smith**.

#### **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**.

**Branch Line Above Rail Community Service**

Petitions asking that above rail community service obligations on branch lines be reinstated until branch line infrastructure is upgraded to a standard to ensure competitiveness with main lines, received from **Mr Armstrong** and **Mr R. W. Turner**.

**Manly JetCat Services**

Petition seeking reversal of the decision by Sydney Ferries to stop JetCat services to Manly at 7.00 p.m., received from **Mr Barr**.

**Sydney Harbour Bridge Multipass**

Petition seeking the introduction of a multipass system for toll payment by northern Sydney residents, received from **Mr Barr**.

**Thirroul Railway Station**

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

**Lane Cove Tunnel Works**

Petition praying that the House initiate a review of Lane Cove tunnel works, received from **Mr Collins**.

**Moore Park Landscaping**

Petition calling for permanent removal of car parking from Moore Park, and praying that Moore Park be landscaped to the same standard as Centennial Park, with strategic mounding and tree planting to prevent future car parking, received from **Ms Moore**.

**Sydney Harbour Bridge Toll**

Petition requesting that the Sydney Harbour Bridge toll not be increased, received from **Mrs Skinner**.

**Timor to Gundy School Bus**

Petition requesting review of decision to cease school bus service from Timor to Gundy, received from **Mr Souris**.

**Kempsey and Macksville Pacific Highway Upgrade**

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

**John Fisher Park**

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

**Manly Lagoon Remediation**

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

**Lake Burrinjuck Water Level**

Petition requesting the Department of Land and Water Conservation to maintain the level of water in Lake Burrinjuck at a minimum of 45 per cent, received from **Ms Hodgkinson**.

### **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**.

### **Lake Burrill Rehabilitation**

Petition praying that Lake Burrill and surrounds be rehabilitated by removal of man-made channels and foreshore obstructions, received from **Mr R. H. L. Smith**.

### **Queenscliff Geographical Names Board Classification**

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

### **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**.

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

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

### **Northbridge Primary School**

Petition seeking permanent classrooms to replace temporary demountable classrooms at Northbridge Primary School, received from **Mr Collins**.

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

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

### **Pig Farming Code of Practice**

Petition praying for the introduction of a code of practice to protect intensively farmed pigs, received from **Mr Amery**.

### **Battery Cages for Laying Hens**

Petition praying for support to phase out battery cages for laying hens, received from **Mr Amery**.

### **Local and Regional Roads Funding**

Petition praying that funding be increased to allow local government authorities to maintain local and regional roads, received from **Ms Hodgkinson**.

### **Lake Macquarie Policing**

Petition praying that the House implement measures to reduce antisocial behaviour and crime in Lake Macquarie electorate, received from **Mr Hunter**.

### **Cronulla Police Station Upgrading**

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

**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**.

**Malabar Policing**

Petition praying that the House note 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**.

**MINISTRY**

**Mr CARR:** The Minister for Community Services, the Hon. Faye Lo Po', is currently on leave for medical reasons. The Hon. Carmel Tebbutt, who holds the portfolios of Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister Assisting the Premier on Youth, and Minister Assisting the Minister for the Environment, has also been appointed as Acting Minister for Community Services, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Women. The Attorney General will represent the Acting Minister in the Legislative Assembly.

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

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**HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS PATIENT ACCESS**

**Mrs CHIKAROVSKI:** My question is directed to the Premier. After seven years in office can the Premier explain why, according to his own official figures, a quarter of the 26,000 emergency patients requiring urgent admission to our hospitals in December were forced to wait more than eight hours for a bed, with some hospitals such as St George being so short of beds that half the patients had to wait for over eight hours?

**Mr CARR:** Nurse shortage is the fundamental answer. It is something we have addressed, a package we have announced.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I call the honourable member for North Shore to order. I call the honourable member for Epping to order. I call the honourable member for Davidson to order.

**Mr CARR:** We have outperformed the Opposition when it was in government. It would be churlish for me, in this first answer in question time, not to congratulate the Leader of the Opposition on the outcome of the Hornsby by-election. After spending \$200,000 of Liberal Party money and making promises—

**Mrs Skinner:** Point of order: The Premier just mentioned Hornsby. Fifty-six per cent of Hornsby hospital patients wait more than eight hours. It is the worst hospital in this State. Answer that, Mr Premier.

**Mr CARR:** In Hornsby the Opposition did not promise anything for the hospitals; it promised \$112 million over four years out of the country roads budget to lift the increased toll on the Sydney Harbour Bridge and it still got a derisory swing that had shadow Ministers attacking the Leader of the Opposition in the Sunday press. It was unbelievable. People had barely got home from the polling booths and three shadow Ministers were ringing up Sunday papers lamenting the performance of their own leader. One of them, the honourable member for Gosford, said, "With no ALP in the race, we should have romped home."

**Mr Hartcher:** Point of order: The question was about health and patients waiting more than eight hours after Labor's seven years in government. There was no mention of Hornsby. The Premier's remarks are irrelevant. They bear no relationship to the question. The Premier must also answer why he did not have the guts to run a candidate in Hornsby.

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

## STEM CELL RESEARCH

**Mr COLLIER:** My question without notice is to the Premier. What is the Premier's response to recent initiatives in stem cell research?

**Mr CARR:** Important ethical precedents are raised by the use of IVF embryos in scientific research. In New South Wales all stem cell research takes place only under the strictest of conditions and subject to National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines. It would appear from yesterday's rather confused statement from Canberra that the Commonwealth Government is setting the scene to ban the use of embryonic stem cells for research. If that is true, such a ban would put Australia out of step with the rest of the world. It would put us further to the right of the already conservative position taken by the Bush Government in the United States of America. It would devastate the nation's medical research and biotechnology sectors but, more importantly, it would effectively extend the suffering of many thousands of people with illness and disease.

This Government will balance community concerns about stem cell research with the huge potential health benefits of this work. New South Wales has been working closely with the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions to ensure that a nationally consistent model for assisted reproductive technologies is developed. In order to get the balance right we have consulted widely with the community, scientists, practitioners and peak bodies on this model. This work came about because a two-year parliamentary inquiry, chaired by the Commonwealth Minister for Ageing, Minister Andrews, gave the go-ahead for certain types of stem cell research in Australia. Mr Andrews now appears to have rallied Federal Cabinet to overturn that decision.

In doing so he undermines the efforts of States and Territories to develop a workable model that respects community concerns whilst supporting life-saving research. And that is what it is—life-saving research. This is a bad decision, a short-term decision by the Howard Government. Work being undertaken in Australian institutions that could one day lead to a cure for diabetes, Alzheimer's disease and certain cancers may, in fact, have to stop if this is the stand to be taken by Canberra. To discontinue this research will mean many more old people, for example, will suffer the slow, demented decline of Iris Murdoch, recently documented, than would otherwise need to. It could be your mother, father, grandmother, grandfather or you yourself when old.

It will also mean more people will endure leukaemia and its agonies. Not to continue research to beat these diseases will make Australia the Dayton Tennessee of the twenty-first century, a place and culture that turned its back on science. This research is not about company profits or indulging medical science; it is about saving lives. This research is about alleviating human suffering. Stem cell research might help us find a cure—certainly better treatments—for diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, certain cancers, mental illnesses, spinal cord injury, cystic fibrosis, organ failure, stroke, heart disease, and damaged retinas, reduce hearing impairment and restore immune responses in people with HIV.

I am advised that the current scientific understanding is that, while adult stem cell research is promising, it is the embryo research that shows a greater potential to find treatments and cures for these conditions. Many of us would have visited hostels and wards for those with spinal injury or spinal disease, who are confined to an existence as paraplegics or quadriplegics. What a miracle it would be if in our lifetime we, as a community, could take a message to people in wheelchairs that they will be able to walk unassisted again. What a wonderful thing that would be.

In the event that embryo stem cell research is banned—even spare embryos from in-vitro fertilisation treatment—New South Wales institutes such as Westmead Hospital, Prince of Wales Hospital and the Garvan Institute would find their hands tied. We will not tie the hands of heroic medical researchers whose one motivation is to relieve human suffering and allow people to live longer and better lives. Our job is to assist the people in those research institutes, those heroes of the science laboratories. Their one motivation is to relieve the suffering of fellow humans. New South Wales will not close those laboratories and stifle that research. We will not drive our best researchers out of this State.

The Commonwealth is placing Australia behind the rest of the world in finding cures for disease and improving quality of life. Banning research that could ease human suffering and save lives is wrong. I will be taking up this issue with the Prime Minister at the Council of Australian Governments on 5 April. I will strongly urge the other States and Territories to ensure that the needs of the research community continue to be supported and that the potentially groundbreaking public health benefits of this type of research are not lost.



**NEW ENGLAND HEALTH SERVICES**

**Mr SOURIS:** My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Health. Will the Minister explain how many vital health jobs will be lost in small communities such as Carinda, Barraba and Tingha because of his plans to introduce cluster management of public health services in the New England area, despite strong opposition from local communities that are angry at the lack of consultation?

**Mr KNOWLES:** For the record, there will be no jobs lost as a result of the efforts by the New England Area Health Service to better manage health services in the New England region. The proposal is to move from 10 to 19 administrators into critical positions—to take people out from behind desks and put them on the wards. Everywhere I have been in this State clinical services resources are scarce, and we all understand globally, nationally and in this State the shortages associated with nursing, specialist care, general practice and allied health professionals. If a manager is spending a great proportion of time behind a desk doing paperwork and that person can be freed up to do more clinical work, I think overwhelmingly the community will respect that proposal.

Under the proposal clinical hours will increase and there will be fewer administration hours. The value of the staff's clinical skills—in many cases people have invested years in training to achieve those skills—will be reincorporated. There will be greater autonomy for health professionals and the identity of communities will be maintained. We are rebuilding many country hospitals, particularly in small towns, to reinstate the identity of country community health care. Everywhere I go there is a recognition that communities want clinical services, not bureaucracy. The proposal is sensible and will be worked through with the communities in question. I should add that it is not a secret around New England that when senior members of the area health service briefed members of the National Party they made it very clear that they were comfortable with this model until very recently, when they thought they might play a bit of politics with it. Members opposite can play politics; we will provide the clinical care.

**Mr Souris:** Point of order: Under the standing orders of this Parliament and under your careful jurisdiction the Minister does not have the right to misrepresent facts. If I was one of those National Party members, I agreed from the first word onwards.

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

**M5 EAST**

**Miss BURTON:** My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Roads. What has been the community's response to the State Government's M5 East?

**Mr SCULLY:** Mr Speaker—

**Mr Hartcher:** How is your dog?

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

**Mr SCULLY:** It should not surprise us that after several weeks away the only contribution to policy of the alternative leader and members opposite is to ask me how my dog is. Come on—ask me!

**Mr Hartcher:** How is it?

**Mr SCULLY:** I am happy to say that I share illustrious company. Both President Roosevelt and President Nixon had dog issues. Members opposite have asked me how my dog is, and I am happy to tell them.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I suggest that the Minister approach the rostrum and answer the question.

**Mr SCULLY:** It is appropriate that I conclude those remarks by simply saying that President Roosevelt had Fala and President Nixon had Checkers. I am happy to talk about the M5 East, and it is appropriate that I do so. The honourable member for Kogarah was at the opening of the M5 East. I am pleased to say that Tony Lockett has returned to play for the Sydney Swans because the M5 East has opened. I was browsing the Internet the other night and this is what Tony Lockett had to say:

The new extension of the M5 has really helped. Now it's opened, it's probably saved me 25 minutes each way, so whoever was responsible for that—

members opposite were not responsible—

I just take my hat off to you. No toll gates—I'm very happy about that as well.

Australian Property Monitor has told us that property prices have increased as a result of the M5 East. The honourable member for Kogarah should be telling her community that house prices in Bexley are up 6 per cent, house prices in Beverley Hills are up 5 per cent and house prices in Bowral—this Government worries about Bowral—are up 17 per cent. All the members across southern and south-western Sydney have told me what impact the M5 East has been having on people in their communities: improved quality of life, reduced travel time and extra time with their families.

The New South Wales Road Transport Association has written to me advising what impact the M5 East has had on the heavy vehicle industry. The NRMA has written to me about the number of minutes that motorists have saved. Up to 75,000 vehicles per day have been using the M5 East. Traffic on Stoney Creek Road has reduced by 40 per cent; traffic on Moorfields Road, Kingsgrove, has reduced by 30 per cent; traffic on Canterbury Road has reduced by 15 per cent; and traffic on Bay Street, Brighton-le-Sands, has reduced by 35 per cent. Members opposite hate this information; they loathe it because they know that the lives of people in communities across southern and south-western Sydney are vastly improved as a result of the M5 East.

The Eastern Distributor and the M5 East have been delivered by this Government during its second term in office. I am pleased to inform the House—I guess members opposite do not like to hear this—that we are getting on with delivering transport infrastructure. We are delivering road and rail projects, and we are delivering transitway projects. Today I announced—and I am pleased to inform the House—that the preferred tenderer for delivering the financing, construction and operation of the cross-city tunnel will be a consortium led by Baulderstone-Hornibrook. The project is different from what was originally envisaged. We invited the private sector to give us ideas about how better to deliver the cross-city tunnel.

Baulderstone-Hornibrook came up with some interesting ideas. It will be a longer, deeper tunnel. For the information of those who are unaware of this fact, the tunnel was going to end slightly west of the Kings Cross tunnel but now it will finish east of that tunnel. It will be longer and there will be far less traffic impact on William Street. There will be extra merging lanes in the tunnel and near the Western Distributor. We expect to conclude that contract with Baulderstone-Hornibrook later this year. Construction will commence this year on the cross-city tunnel, the Western Sydney Orbital, the Liverpool to Parramatta transitway and the Parramatta rail link.

#### **DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES CASE OFFICERS PORNOGRAPHY TRANSMISSIONS**

**Mr HAZZARD:** My question is directed to the Premier. One year ago today the Minister for Community Services told Parliament that child and family case officers involved in the transmission of pornography were under investigation. Can the Premier clarify whether those officers are still suspended on full pay, despite transmitting what investigators described as "unbelievably sick images", while thousands of child abuse reports go uninvestigated because of a lack of resources?

**Mr CARR:** I am not aware of the case. I will find out and report back to the House.

#### **RETURN TO SCHOOLS AND TAFE PROGRAM**

**Mr GREENE:** My question is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. What is the latest information about plans to have senior education bureaucrats return to the classroom?

**Mr WATKINS:** I thank the honourable member for Georges River for his question and for his hospitality during my recent visit to the Georges River College. The two campuses are great schools with wonderful staff. Every day we should pause to remember the tremendous work being done in our schools by Department of Education and Training employees, particularly our teachers. Day in, day out, across the State—from remote areas to the largest city schools—they devote their working lives to our young people, who are the future of this State. Some members in this place have had the privilege and the responsibility of working as teachers. I had a quick look this morning at the *New South Wales Parliamentary Handbook* and identified at least 17 members of the House who are ex-teachers.

**Mr O'Farrell:** Did that include George?

**Mr WATKINS:** I did not forget George. That means about 20 per cent of members of this House have had the privilege of working as teachers. Every teacher knows and most of us, regardless of whether we are teachers, recognise that teachers are second only to parents in shaping the future of the children for whom they are responsible. More than 750,000 children across the State are at school today preparing for their future. I can now report that our teacher numbers will be boosted when 123 senior education administrators from the Department of Education and Training return to the classroom.

The Return to Schools and TAFE Program is designed to ensure that senior education bureaucrats get in touch and stay in touch with the communities served by our schools and TAFE colleges and with parents, children and teachers from the largest comprehensive high schools in the western suburbs of Sydney to the smallest one-teacher school in the State's north-west and our world-class TAFE colleges. Our senior executive staff, from the director-general down, are going back to school. This program provides each of the officers concerned with the opportunity to meet teachers, parents and students and listen to their concerns. It means that they will experience at first hand the challenges faced and the rewards enjoyed by front-line teachers in our classrooms. They will learn how to respond to these issues in a concentrated and co-operative way.

During term one senior executive staff will be on duty in primary schools, secondary schools, TAFE colleges and private training providers in all areas of the State. These officers will be in special schools, isolated schools and schools that are difficult to staff and will take part in activities appropriate to their expertise. Each of them will spend an average of five days in the field. I am particularly pleased that the board of management, and the department's senior executive, have embraced this program enthusiastically. Starting from the top, the Director-General of the Department of Education and Training, Ken Boston, will spend time in both city and country schools and on TAFE campuses in Newcastle and Western Sydney.

He will also relieve a district superintendent—one of 40 most important educational administrators who work hard in districts across the State to ensure that our schools are delivering the highest level of education to students. Apart from the director-general, the deputies are also getting back into the field. Jan McClelland, who is in charge of corporate services, will be in schools from Wiley Park to Granville and will also help out TAFE in the Illawarra. Many honourable members on both sides of the House will be familiar with Dr Alan Laughlin. He spent 20 years teaching in Sydney's west and south-west and will be going back into classrooms in those areas.

**Mr Hartcher:** Point of order: The prorogation of Parliament took off the agenda all matters previously before Parliament. Such matters are relisted only if they are specifically brought to the attention of the House through a motion for their relisting. This policy was announced by the former Minister for Education and Training, the honourable member for Riverstone, in 1999 but was never implemented. Not one of the 16 bureaucrats whom the honourable member said would visit schools has done so. The current Minister for Education and Training is announcing the same policy notwithstanding the fact that he requires a specific motion to do so.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Minister for Education and Training is explaining to the House how he will put the program into operation.

**Mr WATKINS:** Robin Shreeve, the Deputy Director-General of TAFE, will be back in colleges in the St George area and as far away as Broken Hill. These are but a few examples of what senior executive staff will be up to as part of this back-to-the-classroom initiative. All senior executives, not just the board of management, have submitted their returns outlining to the director-general where they will be and when they will be there. For the sake of completeness, I must add that I, too, have submitted my return. Last Friday I was back in the classroom at Riverside Girls High School at Huntleys Point in the electorate of the Leader of the Opposition—who unfortunately is not in the Chamber—teaching legal studies to students in years 11 and 12.

I had the pleasure of teaching that subject several years ago. The girls listened intently as I explained the problems faced by an Opposition in New South Wales. Their behaviour was exemplary—far better than that exhibited by Opposition members today—and they welcomed me warmly into the classroom. This is a most important program and its aims are simple and clear. We must ensure that those involved in the administration of the Department of Education and Training remain in touch with the people whom they serve: teachers, particularly parents, and the wider community of New South Wales. It is imperative that our senior administrators build bridges with the people who deliver education day in, day out. That is the aim of this policy. This program will engender co-operation and understanding and deserves our support.

### COUNTRY POLICING

**Mr J. H. TURNER:** My question is directed to the Premier. How does he explain that, contrary to the views of the Minister for Police, country policing is in crisis, with commands such as Mudgee and Taree taking industrial action to abandon 24-hour policing because of acute staff shortages and increasing stress leave, with no respite in sight? Why is the Premier stripping country towns of police protection?

**Mr CARR:** We are not doing that. However, on the issue of policing, while reading the local press I encountered a very funny contribution from our old friend the honourable member for Baulkham Hills. This business of putting senior people back on the job in schools or policing has met with general acclaim but when the local newspaper asked the honourable member for this response to the idea of getting senior police out on the job he said he saw problems with it. He said it was a self-defeating exercise and he asked *The Hills News* on 19 February, "What if they arrest somebody?"

### CIRCLE SENTENCING

**Mr W. D. SMITH:** I ask the Attorney General a question without notice. What is the latest information on the trial of circle sentencing in New South Wales?

**Mr DEBUS:** It is a matter of longstanding concern, no doubt, to all honourable members of this House that Aboriginal people in New South Wales are nearly 10 times more likely to be sent to gaol than anyone else.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume her seat.

**Mr DEBUS:** Aboriginal people make up 1.5 per cent of the State's population. Aboriginal men make up approximately 16 per cent of all male prisoners in New South Wales and, astoundingly, Aboriginal women make up approximately 29 per cent of all female prisoners. Aboriginal juveniles represent 39 per cent of all juveniles in detention centres. Clearly, there continues to be what can only be described as a tragic overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in our prison system. That is why, of course, the Government continues to work with Aboriginal communities to come up with solutions that will hopefully break the cycle of crime in Aboriginal communities. Earlier this month in Brewarrina I discussed crime problems with community leaders. I must say that I was extraordinarily impressed by the open-minded attitude of councillors, police and local businesspeople to finding new solutions to crime in that particular part of the world.

While in Brewarrina I was pleased to announce eight new Aboriginal community patrols for regional communities in not only Brewarrina but Kempsey, Wilcannia, Casino, Bowraville and Deniliquin. Those community controls, conducted by Aboriginal volunteers, have proven to be extremely successful in the reduction of the involvement of young people in unlawful and antisocial behaviour before the need for police action. For example, the community patrols in Dareton have shown an extraordinary capacity to reduce the level of antisocial or unlawful behaviour. It is for the same reasons—the need to break the crime cycle and the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in our gaols—that the Premier announced last November the setting up of a trial for circle sentencing in the Local Court at Nowra. In circle sentencing the magistrate, police, prosecuting authorities, the victim, support people of the victim, the defendant, support people of the defendant, and an Aboriginal community justice group comprising respected Aboriginal elders from the community sit in a circle outside the formal court hearing and jointly determine an appropriate sentence for the offender. This technique has had very high levels of success, for instance, amongst indigenous people in Canada.

On Tuesday 26 February a 28-year-old Aboriginal man from Nowra faced the first circle sentencing court in Australia after pleading guilty to common assault and malicious damage to property. This man sat before his community leaders, the magistrate, legal representatives and the victim and the sentence decided upon was later ratified by the magistrate at the Nowra Local Court. Indeed, the 28-year-old man received a three-month gaol sentence, subject to assessment of his suitability for home detention. He also received a nine-month good behaviour bond, anger management counselling and supervision by a respected elder of the Aboriginal community. I am told that in this case even the victim thought the sentence was a tough one. Circle sentencing, significant as I hope and believe it will become, is not indeed a soft option. As I say, in Brewarrina I spoke to white and to black community leaders who were united in their desire to explore more alternative solutions to the prevention of crime. I can report today that in response to community wishes the Government will extend the pilot circle sentencing program to Walgett, Brewarrina and Dubbo. We will be particularly looking at its use for Aboriginal repeat offenders.

Let me be clear: circle sentencing will not be an easy option. Indeed, the chair of the Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council, Winsome Matthews, says that many people would rather face the traditional court sentencing processes than be forced to face their peers, their community and the victim, who more often than not will also be from that same community. The suitability of a guilty person who chooses circle sentencing is determined by the local Aboriginal community justice group, which looks at issues such as the person's ties to the community. Although similar methods of circle sentencing have been used in Canada, as I have said, it should be noted that the process here has been developed by the local Aboriginal community justice groups and is based on their circumstances. That is an important point because we are talking about an Aboriginal community solution to what is largely an Aboriginal community problem.

The option of circle sentencing is restricted to local court matters, not to the more serious crimes dealt with in higher courts, and it excludes any sexual crimes or domestic violence. I am sure that most honourable members will welcome this initiative. There could be some destructive views expressed by some of those opposite with more extreme views but I am sure that the more socially concerned honourable members will welcome any move in this direction to reduce crime. I am also sure that the Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council and responsible Aboriginal community leaders in regional New South Wales would be happy to speak to any honourable member about this issue, which is of such vital importance to us all, that is, breaking the cycle of crime and curbing that deplorable and vast overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in our corrections system.

### **RACING INDUSTRY SEXUAL ASSAULT ALLEGATIONS**

**Mr OAKESHOTT:** My question is directed to the Minister for Gaming and Racing. Has the Minister been informed of a sexual assault on a female jockey, reported to police last weekend? If so, does the Minister stand by his decision last year to refuse calls by victims for an open inquiry into allegations of sexual abuse within the racing industry?

**Mr FACE:** I am aware that further allegations have been made in regard to a sexual assault on a former female employee in the racing industry. That person previously raised concerns with Judge Barrie Thorley during his recent examination of procedures and practices relating to the handling of sexual harassment in the racing industry. On that occasion, although she indicated she had previously been sexually assaulted by a licensed person, at the end of the day she did not wish to proceed with police action. On the latest occasion, I am aware that the matter has been referred to Yass police and that the woman has been referred for appropriate counselling. The Thoroughbred Racing Board is currently awaiting advice from the police on whether this latest incident is in any way connected with the racing industry.

As soon as I became aware of the matter I made inquiries because I was concerned that there may be some connection with concerns previously raised with me by a member of this House—whom I have kept fully informed at every juncture. If the sexual assault did occur, I am deeply concerned that such an offence happened and about the likely effect on the girl. Until such time as further information comes to hand, the matter remains solely for the police. Only yesterday I entered into arrangements with police, which were reaffirmed this morning by my deputy director-general, to keep us informed at all times and to establish whether there is a connection between this matter and what happened previously.

In addition, I have requested the Thoroughbred Racing Board to keep me fully informed of recent developments in this matter. I add that considerable measures in regard to sexual assault within the industry have been taken since the previous matter of Valerie Kost was raised. Since then Judge Thorley has put in place a whole raft of measures to, hopefully, prevent such an offence recurring. I have instructed the three codes to undertake the measures—as they have duly done—and any further measures that are required. Every member of this House would be appalled by such an offence, if it did occur in the industry. If sexual assault did take place, I will turn over every possible stone to ensure that the persons responsible are brought to justice.

**Mr OAKESHOTT:** I ask a supplementary question. In light of the Minister's answer, will he hold a full and open parliamentary inquiry into the issue?

**Mr FACE:** The honourable member for Port Macquarie has become known as the boy wonder. This is a police matter. When I have the full information in front of me I will take appropriate action. The honourable member for Port Macquarie should stop coming here with his flights of fancy.

## YEAR OF THE OUTBACK TOURISM INITIATIVES

**Mr BLACK:** My question without notice is to the Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs. What is the latest information on plans for the Year of the Outback and tourism initiatives in western New South Wales?

**Mr WOODS:** I recognise the enthusiasm of the honourable member for Murray-Darling for the outback. If ever there was a man of the outback, there he is. He is a great representative of the outback. The Year of the Outback recognises the unique culture and the unique talents of people in rural and remote Australia. In New South Wales we have long recognised the contribution that the people of the Far West make to the State's identity and heritage. The New South Wales Government has committed \$2 million towards promoting the outback culture and community and its unique tourism experience. The outback is something that should be shared and experienced by all Australians, particularly city dwellers.

In keeping with this promotion, my department, together with the Premier's Department, is working with communities in far western New South Wales to promote the outback as a place to do business and a good place to live. My department is actively assisting in the delivery of economic development initiatives. These initiatives include a trade show where the 16 local government authorities included in the Year of the Outback promotion and their major businesses will have the opportunity to showcase their region. These businesses will have the opportunity to show the rest of Australia the innovative and progressive employment and business opportunities that are available in far western New South Wales. The trade show, which will include about 50 businesses, will be held at Sydney Town Hall over two days during September.

Another initiative is the Working Outback program. This program aims to promote the career options available in the Far West to skilled people and newly graduated students. A prospectus for each of the 16 local government areas in the Far West is being compiled and will be used to attract investment and people to those areas. The prospectus will list businesses, lifestyle and employment opportunities in each area and will include case studies on many of the successful industry sectors, such as horticulture, tourism and aboriginal businesses. The Government is also undertaking a range of projects and initiatives to assist communities and businesses in the outback.

The Far West, traditionally the home of mining and agriculture, is now home to some of the State's most flourishing tourism enterprises. To assist the growth of this industry, my department is targeting agritourism as one main area that can be further developed. As part of this initiative, we recently conducted workshops on agritourism and developing a regional property stay network. These workshops, run by industry professionals and established farm stay owners, cover practical topics such as how to get started, marketing, industry accreditation and insurance. The workshops were held in Bourke, Condobolin and Euston. A significant number of participants indicated serious interest in setting up farm stay properties as a result of attending these workshops.

My department is working with Tourism New South Wales to conduct a series of regional tourism forums, one of which was held in Broken Hill and Dubbo. The Government has also assisted the community of Lockhart to develop a brochure promoting the town as an agritourism centre. The brochure will be published and distributed as part of the Year of the Outback program. Assistance has also been given to the Mallee Hen Corporation to stage the annual outback music festival in November this year at Nymagee. This festival attracts 2,000 visitors to the town. The State's west is home to a large artistic community and is increasingly used as a location for local and international films. The Far West region film industry, centring on Broken Hill, contributes about \$1.2 million to Broken Hill. My department is working with the Regional Development Board to develop a prospectus to attract film producers and other investors to this characteristically Australian region.

The Government is also supporting the Back O'Bourke Tourism, Cultural and Education Centre, which will be officially opened later this year. The facility, which will be located on the Kidman Way in Bourke, aims to generate sustainable employment and increase investment in the Bourke and Orana regions. The Government will continue to work with rural and remote communities—and with the local member for the outback—to develop the unique talents and showcase the wealth of opportunities that are available in far western New South Wales.

**Questions without notice concluded.**

## CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

### Tamworth Equine Centre

**Mr WOODS** (Clarence—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs) [4.27 p.m.]: This motion should be heard urgently because the Federal Government has just reneged on its support for the Tamworth Equine Centre. The Federal Government must turn around its decision and show its support. This motion is a matter of urgency because a recent meeting of a committee of senior members of the National Party, including the newly elected State member of Parliament for Tamworth—a committee set up to examine the feasibility of the centre—effectively reversed the Federal Government's previous support.

This motion is urgent because the equine centre will create 600 jobs in Tamworth. If the National Party is serious about jobs in Tamworth, it should respond immediately. This Government supports jobs and economic development in Tamworth. The urgency of this motion follows the committee meeting, attended by the Deputy Prime Minister, a National Party Senator and the newly elected State member of Parliament, which reversed the Federal Government's previous support for the project. The motion is urgent because it will give the new member for Tamworth a terrific opportunity to show his effectiveness in belting a few heads in Federal Government and getting their support. They are the reasons why the motion is urgent.

**Mr Armstrong:** Point of order: The Minister should seek to establish the urgency of his motion, not debate the substance of it.

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

### User-pays Policing

**Mr TINK** (Epping) [4.30 p.m.]: It is urgent that the House condemns the Carr Government's user-pays policing proposals. It is urgent that the House supports the principle that the role of uniformed police is to protect the public generally and not just those who can afford to do special deals. It is urgent that the House calls on the Carr Government to meet its police numbers promise without resorting to rent-a-cop policing. My motion is urgent because struggling small businesses in many less affluent communities already burdened by sky-high crime rates will not be able to afford police. The motion is urgent because the big shopping centre complexes, with their international backing, will hire police, and criminals will be forced out to the very shopping strips and small businesses that are already hit by high crime rates.

The motion is urgent because the question simply is: Why should people have to pay twice for the most basic service required to be provided by State Government, that is to say, the provision of police in uniform to protect the public, to ensure public safety? Why is it that from now on, if the proposal is implemented, a member of the public who sees a member of the Police Service in uniform will have to ask, "Is this police officer working for us, the public, today or for a private interest, for a private company or a bank?"

**Mr Martin:** The duties don't change.

**Mr TINK:** If, as the honourable member says, the duties do not change, why would anyone want to pay twice for that sort of policing service? It is an oxymoron; it is a joke. It is a stunt designed to get the Government out of the appalling mess that it is in in trying to meet its police numbers promise. Above all, it is in complete conflict with one of the most fundamental recommendations of the Wood royal commission: that secondary employment be prohibited in those areas in which police have a regulatory role. Police Minister Costa, if he proceeds with this proposal, will create a climate conducive to corruption at street level by promoting the most fundamental conflict of interest for a uniformed police officer.

Police are sworn without favour or affection to prevent all offences against the public. Police in uniform working for private interests will be paid to protect those who pay them against would-be offenders, and not to protect the public generally. If a police officer in uniform being paid by the bank becomes aware of a domestic violence dispute some distance down the road, what is the officer to do? Will the officer go and help in the resolution of that domestic dispute to a successful conclusion? If the officer does attend, what happens if the bank is robbed? His or her private duty will be to protect the bank. And if the officer does not go and help with the domestic violence dispute and somebody is hurt or murdered, what of the officer's obligation in that respect? This arrangement will put all police in a terrible dilemma, and that is why Justice Wood recommended against it in the first place.

There are 600 police on long-term stress leave now. If we think that police stress leave is bad at the moment we have seen nothing yet, because under this proposal they will be doing extended work in uniform for private interests above and beyond their normal hours of work. Under the proposal the amount of permanent part-time work being done by police will increase as police move towards working for private hire out of hours. What will be left of the structure of police working primarily and foremost for the public generally, and being paid generally with taxpayers' money? That structure will diminish as police increasingly work for private interests, for those who can pay. Police will come to ignore people who cannot pay.

I know for a fact that many police and members of the public are deeply disturbed by this proposal. It should not proceed on any basis. There should be no question of police working other than in uniform at all times for the public generally. At no time, whether in Hurstville, Rockdale or at any other place, should people ever have to ask themselves, "Is this police officer working for me and the public?" In Hurstville and Rockdale, which this Government has already stripped of police resources, it is a disgrace that people will be forced to pay for those services. [*Time expired.*]

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

### **TAMWORTH EQUINE CENTRE**

#### **Urgent Motion**

**Mr WOODS** (Clarence—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs) [4.35 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) calls on the Federal Government to reiterate its support for the proposed Tamworth Equine Centre;
- (2) notes a recent meeting between the Deputy Prime Minister, a senior National Party senator and the newly elected State member of Parliament for Tamworth; and
- (3) expresses concerns, following this meeting, about a decision by the Deputy Prime Minister to set up a committee to examine the feasibility of the centre, effectively reversing the Federal Government's previous support for the project.

The Federal Government should stop horsing around and immediately commit funding to the Tamworth equine centre. The State Government has put funding on the table. The time has long passed for the Commonwealth Government to make a commitment to the people of Tamworth. I think all would agree that this equine centre is of vital importance to Tamworth. It will create some 600 new jobs for the area. In addition, it will cement Tamworth as the premier location for equine events in Australia. Unfortunately, it seems that the National Party does not have sufficient influence in the Federal Government to ensure that the project gets off the ground.

Recently the Leader of the National Party and the Deputy Prime Minister held yet another meeting involving National Party Senator Sandy Macdonald, the new National Party member for Tamworth, members of the equine centre board and representatives of Tamworth council. The best that the brains trust of the National Party could come up with for Tamworth was a study into the economic benefits of the centre. What sort of commitment is that? Of course, it is not a commitment. It is yet another example of Mr Anderson carrying out the instructions of the Liberal Party. He is being told that the Federal Government does not have enough money to fund the Tamworth equine centre, so he meekly says, "Oh well, we will have a study instead."

The National Party no longer has any sway in the Federal Coalition. Time and again we have seen examples of the National Party at the Federal level being unable to influence decisions of the Coalition in Canberra. I would think Mr Anderson has about as much influence with John Howard and the Federal Government as has Malcolm Fraser. The Liberals simply want to knock the project on the head. The feasibility study, to anyone looking on, is nothing more than a stalling tactic to ensure that the Federal Government does not have to make a decision on this proposal. The National Party cannot even make a case to dispute that. Indeed, if National Party members bothered to do their research they would know that the State Government completed the feasibility study months ago.

What has happened since then? The New South Wales Government did the study, identified the economic benefits and committed funding to the proposal. Meanwhile, the National Party has had meetings, some secret and some transparent, in a pretence of doing something about the issue. Whilst the National Party



has its meetings, the Government has shown the colour of its money. The State Government has put funding on the table. This begs the question: What ability has the newly elected member for Tamworth? This proposal presents a great opportunity for the honourable member. As I said before, this is a great opportunity for him.

**Mr Slack-Smith:** The member for New England?

**Mr WOODS:** No, the new member for Tamworth. Let us not make any mistakes about this. This is a great opportunity. When the Federal member for New England was a member of this place he came to us, he saw the Premier and he got the funding. This is a great opportunity.

**Mr Slack-Smith:** He's got big shoes to fill.

**Mr WOODS:** He has got big shoes to fill, as the honourable member points out. It was the former Independent member for Tamworth who lobbied the Premier long and hard to secure our funding commitment. I know he is in Canberra now continuing to pursue the Federal Government on this issue. However, he might find it more difficult to see John Howard than it was to see the Premier, given the importance we placed on him and his electorate. At this stage it appears that the new member for Tamworth is unable to get a solid commitment for funding from the Federal leader of his party. That is not a good start only 13 months out from an election.

Today the State Government issues a challenge to the new member and the National Party: Show us the money. Show us the colour of the money. Put it on the table. Let us see how fair dinkum you are. Prove to the electorate of Tamworth that you have a bit of clout, that the State National Party has clout with the Federal Coalition and that the new member has clout in the National Party. It is not an unreasonable request to secure the 600 new jobs the project would create in the Tamworth area. I hope he can prove that the National Party is more than a silent partner in the Coalition.

It is a real test of strength for the National Party, one it has failed in the past. It is also a test for the new member. Are the National Party and the new member for Tamworth willing to fight for country people, or are they content to sit on the sidelines and allow city Liberals to dictate what happens in the bush? No party can claim to represent the interests of country families if it allows 600 jobs to slip away. These jobs are there for the taking; it only needs money from the Federal Government to make them a reality. Does the National Party have that commitment to country jobs, or does it not? It is not a hard question; it is a simple question. The Tamworth equine centre may give us the answer.

One would be hard pressed to find a National Party policy on how it will create jobs in the country. In fact, one would be hard pressed to find the National Party, full stop. The Hon. George Souris has been the Leader of the National Party for six years, and he has not come up with one single policy on how he will create jobs in country New South Wales. To say that the Hon. George Souris and the National Party are living in a policy-free zone does not do justice to the Leader of the Liberal Party, a fellow member of that illustrious group. The State Government recognises that the development of the new equine centre is of great importance to the people of Tamworth, which is why, not so long ago, the Premier asked me to go to Tamworth to put our funding offer on the table.

The announcement of our funding offer was received with resounding applause. People were very happy with it. They wanted it. But they also want the Federal Government to be involved. A long-time campaigner for the Tamworth equine centre, Mr Brian Cobcroft, told the *Northern Daily Leader* that the funding commitment from the New South Wales Government was "a wonderful gesture by the State Government". No such gesture has been forthcoming from the Federal Government. Tamworth Mayor James Treloar told the same newspaper:

I would suggest there is a lot of support and a lot of reasons for it to be a Federal initiative as well.

Right away I can give Mr Anderson 600 reasons why the Federal Government should support that project: the 600 new jobs that will be created if Tamworth is able to develop this project. The State Government has a long-term commitment to the creation of jobs in Tamworth. Since April 1995 the State Government has facilitated 19 projects, representing \$25 million of private investment and 843 new jobs over the life of the project for the Tamworth area. This figure does not include substantial flow-on benefits that have resulted from the creation of these new jobs. For example, we assisted Byron Aviation Engineering Pty Ltd to establish an aircraft servicing and refurbishing plant in Tamworth, which created 20 new jobs. My department assisted Peel Valley Exporters develop their sheep and land abattoir.

**Mr Armstrong:** Point of order: The urgency motion, unfortunately for the Minister, is quite specific. It does not refer to abattoirs, and it does not refer to other job creation in the Tamworth area.

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

**Mr WOODS:** The State Government assisted the Australian Defence Forces Flight Training College with British Aerospace Flight Training and it assisted with the expansion of Fennings Timber Sawmill and Processing. Our commitment is solid. We have always said we are willing to work with the Federal Government to see this project through. Unfortunately the people of Tamworth are still waiting for the Commonwealth to come to the party. Let me point out again that we worked with the people of Tamworth, the council and the former member to get past projects up and running. The wood is on these people to come good. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr ARMSTRONG (Lachlan)** [4.45 p.m.]: The motion is quite specific. I am delighted that the Minister made the point that the previous member for Tamworth worked with the Government on this project. I quote from the *Northern Daily Leader*, which says:

**Windsor welcomes equine centre study**

MOVES to take the politics out of the battle to get Federal Government funding for the proposed Australian Equine and Livestock Centre have been welcomed by Independent MP for New England Tony Windsor.

He said yesterday Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson was "on the right track" in his decision to have the feasibility of the project investigated by Professor John Chudleigh.

Not three minutes ago the Minister praised the previous member for Tamworth, now the Federal member for New England, on his judgment about the equine centre. Therefore he has effectively nullified his argument. The Minister has made much of the \$3.5 million promised by the New South Wales Government, but he has not said that it is conditional. The Government has not put the money on the table. The Minister has some previous history in this sort of matter. This money from the New South Wales Government is conditional on the Federal Government putting up its money. The Minister does not remember that when he was the Federal member representing the port of Yamba the New South Wales Government of the day put up money conditional on the then Federal Labor Government matching it.

The Minister has what one might call a selective memory. Is the Minister seriously questioning the judgment of Professor John Chudleigh, one of the most esteemed rural academics in this nation and a man of international reputation, a man who has had considerable experience in the equine industry, a man whose wife has been heavily involved in the showing of horses for many years? Is he seriously saying that Professor John Chudleigh should not be invited to look at the feasibility of this major industry assistance? To reinforce the Government's support, the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Anderson, said in the *Northern Daily Leader*:

But I believe—we all believe—the concept is a good one and would be good for Tamworth and the New England electorate as well as all other parts of the north-west.

The *Northern Daily Leader* is not necessarily known for supporting the conservative side of politics, yet just a few days ago, on 23 February, its editorial stated:

**Investigation into viability of equine centre welcome**

WHOEVER is advising Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson on the issue of funding for the National Equine and Livestock Centre at Tamworth has come up with a sensible solution that has now put what's become a hot political issue at arm's length from politicians.

That would be so except that, in desperation, today the New South Wales Government is trying to score political points off the kids of New South Wales—the campdrafters, the rodeo riders and people in the pinto societies—instead of showing respect for the recreational horse industry. The Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] estimates that approximately 9,000 horses are moved throughout this State's roads every weekend but instead of respecting the importance of the recreational horse industry, this Government is playing politics. This Government has acted contrary to the opinion stated in the *Northern Daily Leader*, which is one of the most respected newspapers in the northern part of the State, and despite the opinion expressed by Mr Tony Windsor, who is a former Independent member of this Parliament and the current Federal member for New England, and whose opinion was often massaged, metaphorically speaking, by the Government when he was a member of this House.

The point that must be borne in mind is simply that \$90 million in capital investment is tied up with regional solutions funding. This Government has said that \$3.35 million will be allocated from the Regional Solutions program. Any staff member could advise the Minister for Local Government, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs or any other honourable member of this House that if public money is distributed, that must be done only after a proper report has been obtained by those who are managing the Regional Solutions program.

**Mr Hickey:** But that has been done.

**Mr ARMSTRONG:** That applies to any specific program, and that is what the Regional Solutions program is. As the only honourable member in this Chamber who currently shows horses, breeds horses and runs campdrafters, I make the point that there is agreement underpinning this project and there is agreement behind a similar proposal for Goulburn in the south, and this Government should acknowledge that.

**Mr Woods:** I used to show horses.

**Mr ARMSTRONG:** "Used to" does not count. The Minister does not do so now. Equitana is operating out of Melbourne after having broadened its equine industry activity from the southern part of New South Wales. This State is very much in need of the Tamworth equine centre to draw the horse industry from Rockhampton to Dalby back to the centre of New South Wales. The area from Tamworth to Scone is the home of the Australian Stock Horse Society, which has the largest horse industry membership in this nation—more than 9,000 members—and it is the father, if one likes, of all horse industry societies.

Tamworth has a reputation for cutting horses, quarter horses and stockhorses. People such as Chris Ward and the Cobcrofts, who are very famous, operate out of Tamworth. Brian Cobcoft and his first wife were Olympic competitors, so there can be no doubt that Tamworth is the right place for an equine centre. Similarly, there can be no doubt about the need for an equine centre.

The Minister for Local Government, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs may wish to write out a cheque without any conditions, but if he does not want to produce a public document authorising a thorough investigation, then it will be on the Minister's head when the Auditor-General inspects the consequential arrangement. Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson will provide the funding in a proper manner.

**Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills):** Order! There is too much interjection.

**Mr ARMSTRONG:** Mr Tony Windsor says he supports the centre and the new member for Tamworth, Mr John Cull, who romped in after the recent by-election, cited his support for the centre as one of the main planks of his by-election platform. I assure the House that the centre will be established, and when it does the Minister for Local Government, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs and I will personally request permission to ride around the arena. I will cut the first bullock and the Minister can cut out the second bullock, and I will out-point the Minister on the figure eight.

On a more serious note and leaving politics aside, I reiterate that the establishment of the equine centre at Tamworth is necessary. As honourable members would know, the recreational horse industry is very big in New South Wales, in terms of the number of jobs it creates and in terms of the social and sporting contact it provides for the people of this State. In recent times there has been a great deal of discussion about fires. I recall that in 1994 approximately 800 horses were transported from around the North Shore in Sydney to the St Ives Showground. The number of recreational horses in Sydney is unbelievable.

Honourable members should bear in mind that Australia has an international reputation for polo and polocrosse that is based largely on the efforts of people such as the Ashtons, the Rosses and in more recent years Kerry Packer, who has done a great deal internationally for polo. Australia is arguably the leading country in the world for recreational horse activity. Australia is exporting Australian stockhorses to places such as America and is now exporting Welsh ponies back to the United Kingdom. Incredibly also, Australia is exporting million-dollar Arab horses to Saudi Arabia. Australia's Olympic jumping horses are worth well over \$1.5 million, judging by recent sale prices, and some horses in that price category will be exhibited at the Royal Agricultural Society's Royal Easter Show, which will take place in approximately three weeks time.

The equine centre at Tamworth is necessary and the project is fully supported by the National Party, particularly the honourable member for Tamworth and the honourable member for Lachlan. Moreover, as

evidenced in writing, the centre is fully supported by the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson. As all honourable members know, John Anderson is not about to fake the figures. The Commonwealth Government's funds will be on the table and the Minister for Local Government, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs should put up his money too and produce his cheque now. After all, the cheque can be returned to him if the project does not come off, but the equine centre at Tamworth will be established.

**Mr HICKEY** (Cessnock) [4.55 p.m.]: Once again, it is great to follow the real Leader of the National Party in a debate on the equine industry, as I did on 4 December 2001. It is great to witness the leadership of the real Leader of the National Party but it is also sad that although he spent 10 minutes telling the House how much the equine centre at Tamworth is needed and how great it will be, the Federal Leader of the National Party will not provide the necessary funds. Since the election of the Independent Federal member for New England, the Howard Government has withdrawn its support for the equine centre in Tamworth. In contrast to that, the New South Wales State Government has put \$3.35 million on the table and awaits a matching commitment from the Federal Government.

Prior to the election the Coalition made all the promises in the world, but those promises remain unfulfilled. It seems that at this stage the Federal Coalition is running away from the negotiating table as quickly as possible. Members of the Federal Government, particularly members of the National Party, are intent on exacting revenge on Tamworth and they are trying to walk away from the promises that have been made. It is great to hear the real Leader of the National Party acknowledge that the equine centre is a great proposal and that it will bring prosperity to people living in the Tamworth area. It is however a sad fact of life that members of the Coalition are inclined to follow the tactics of some veteran Queens Counsels and deny, deny, deny, thereby ensuring that the Federal Government will renege on its previous undertakings and destroy a project that would have created hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars for the Tamworth economy.

After the most recent Federal election result in New England, Prime Minister Howard and Deputy Prime Minister Anderson set out on a path of revenge on behalf of their well-and-truly humiliated former Coalition member for New England. Their actions sum up what Federal Government policy is all about: the Federal Government could not care less about creating jobs in rural and regional areas of New South Wales, it does not care about Tamworth and it is walking away from promises that were made during the most recent Federal election whilst making every possible excuse. Last December I gave many reasons why the much-needed equine centre should be located in Tamworth. The establishment of the centre would be worth approximately \$15 million per annum to the Tamworth electorate but apparently that is insufficient reason why the Federal Government should provide \$3.35 million to match the New South Wales State Government's contribution. Quite clearly, members of the National Party are not really concerned about rural areas of New South Wales.

*[Interruption]*

The honourable member for Coffs Harbour is determined to draw attention to the recent disastrous fires so he can acknowledge the views that have been expressed by firemen in the Coffs Harbour electorate. Since 1995 the New South Wales Government has reallocated 1,100 jobs from Sydney to rural and regional areas, including the transfer of 228 jobs in the Roads and Traffic Authority from Sydney to country towns such as Glen Innes and Dubbo and 50 jobs from the firearms registry in Sydney to Murwillumbah.

**Mr Slack-Smith:** Point of order: The motion for urgent consideration relates to the equine centre at Tamworth. It has nothing to do with the Roads and Traffic Authority or the figures quoted. I ask you to bring the honourable member back to the subject being debated.

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

**Mr HICKEY:** The Opposition obviously does not understand that the equine centre will generate \$15 million into the economy, which will create jobs, and neither do John Anderson or John Howard. The two Honest Johns, they are called in Tamworth, are they not? In Bathurst—

**Mr George:** How did you go in the Bathurst election?

**Mr HICKEY:** We won. In Bathurst 36 jobs will be created in the Registry of Co-operatives. Another 1,500 jobs will be created in New South Wales during the next three years. The honourable member for Casino is so active in the House that we hardly ever hear from him. Here he is—a member of the National Party who is

city-orientated—backing up John Anderson and John Howard for walking away from regional areas. That is the bottom line of members of the National Party. They could not care less about Tamworth or about the rural and regional areas of New South Wales. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr SLACK-SMITH** (Barwon) [5.00 p.m.]: This debate is a typical example of the New South Wales Government's total economic irresponsibility. The Government's attitude is: Throw in the money. Do not worry about the Chudleigh report. Do not worry about one of the most esteemed experts who is involved in a viability survey to ensure that the equine centre is fair dinkum and will be profitable. Do not worry about that, just throw the money in. While we are talking about the Roads and Traffic Authority, we should not forget about the money provided by the Federal Government for the Namoi Valley underground water system. The New South Wales Government walked away from that. The Government makes plenty of noise but, in achievement it falls a long way short. I think the Minister has his horses and jobs mixed up. There is no way in the world that the equine centre will ever employ 600 people in Tamworth on a permanent basis. It would be more like 60. As I said, I am pretty sure the Minister has his horses and his jobs mixed up. It is the same so far as his economics are concerned. It is economic fudging. That is what the Minister is doing.

[*Interruption*]

That is typical of this Minister: hitting a bloke when he is down. Here we have the newly-elected honourable member for Tamworth who is totally defenceless in this House because he has not made his inaugural speech. The Minister picked on him and said that his shoe size is 10. Well, the former member for Tamworth's shoe size was much smaller, so Tony Windsor should fit into John Cull's shoes! The member for Tamworth has worked very hard on this project. He has received a commitment from John Anderson, which is more than the former member for Tamworth received. The Minister did not put up one single cent of this money until the former member resigned from Parliament. If the Federal member for New England, Tony Windsor, was so effective in Tamworth, why has he not had the same effect in Canberra? There is no way in the world he could be, because he has no say in Canberra, as he had no say here.

The current member for Tamworth is going to work hard to ensure that this project goes ahead. If the Minister is prepared to commit the Government to \$3.5 million, let him write the cheque. This is a typical case. The Minister has fudged the figures and does not know whether the project will be viable. If Professor Chudleigh says the project is viable, the money will be forthcoming. It has not been forthcoming because the Federal Liberal-National Coalition is fiscally responsible, which is more than I can say for those opposite. This will be a major centre that will provide for cutting, dressage and all the other horse events. It will also have the capacity to host cattle sales and livestock exhibitions and it is therefore important. I believe the project should go ahead but the Minister is playing politics, and he ought to be ashamed of himself. Funding from Regional Solutions should be used for something that is viable.

The Federal Government is being financially responsible and, so far as members on this side of the House are concerned, we have to make sure the project is viable. If it is not, I am afraid we will have to cut some corners to make sure that it works. The Federal Government is prepared to wait for Professor Chudleigh's report. Those opposite are prepared to go along blindly and contribute \$3.5 million of taxpayer funds. The people of New South Wales pay the highest taxes in Australia and the \$3.5 million will not make much difference. If that is the attitude of the Government, that is fine. We on this side of the House are responsible. We will be pushing this project when Professor Chudleigh gives the okay. The funding is available for Regional Solutions. The Minister has misled the House about the number of jobs that will be created. There will not be 600 jobs. The Minister should be fair dinkum. We must work towards the establishment of the equine centre and once it is shown to be viable, we will push for it. Let us not play politics; let us get behind the equine centre for Tamworth. The Minister should go ahead sign the cheque and we will welcome the cash.

**Mr MARTIN** (Bathurst) [5.05 p.m.]: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate in support of the motion. Firstly, to expose some of the hypocrisy we have heard from members on the other side of the House I will put a scenario to the honourable member for Barwon. He is a member of the board of the Inland Marketing Corporation in Parkes. The Federal Government, including the National Party, arranged for David Asmus to conduct a feasibility study to determine whether this project was viable. His answer was no. But the National Party and the Liberal Party in coalition contributed \$7 million to the project. They arranged for one of their chosen brethren to produce a report but, despite the findings that the project was not viable, put \$7 million into it for purely political purposes. What will happen if John Chudleigh arrives at the same conclusion?

This House heard an exposé by the honourable member for Lachlan about why the project is viable and why we need it. I feel a bit sorry for the honourable member for Tamworth. He has been thrown in here and,

now that he can see what he has around him, I think he is starting to realise why the Opposition's rating is down to 4.5 per cent. It will be a fast learning curve if he is to survive. He will not get a lot of support if what we have witnessed is the collective genius of the Opposition. The Leader of the National Party, the financial genius, is never around for these sorts of debates. The New South Wales Government put the money on the table last October. A feasibility study has been conducted and everyone agrees that Tamworth is the appropriate place for this facility.

The Carr Government, under this Minister, has said, "Here is our \$3.35 million." It is conditional on the Federal Government doing the right thing. All the Federal Government has to do is put up its \$3.35 million and the project will get under way. The trouble for the honourable member for Tamworth and all the people involved with the equine industry is that it is a lay down miseré that this project is going to work. The hypocrites opposite are telling us that this issue is about regional development, but I remind House that the first action of the Howard Government in 1996 was to abolish the Federal Department of Regional Development. The Opposition wants to conduct another study. If the result is the same as the Asmus report, what will happen? It recommended against the Inland Marketing Corporation but the pork-barrelling Coalition put \$7 million into the project.

Members of the Opposition should read *Hansard* tomorrow because they will be very embarrassed about the comments that have been made in this debate. The issue is really the vindictive nature of the National Party and a "get-square" for Tony Windsor. This Government was prepared to work with Tony Windsor for the benefit of the people of Tamworth, although, with 17-seat majority, the Government did not need his vote. Tony Windsor will be subjected to that time and again.

**Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills)** Order! The honourable member for Lismore will cease interjecting.

**Mr MARTIN:** That is what this is all about. I wish I had known that was what National Party members were up to when I was with John Anderson last Saturday at the Rylstone show. I could have had a cup of tea with John, who is quite a personable bloke, put this issue on the table and discussed it. He would not then have been able to jump on members of the Liberal Party in relation to this issue. Support for the National Party in the polls is at only 4 per cent, and it will remain at that level because no-one in the bush believes it has any influence over the Liberal Party. The National Party has become an irrelevant rump, if I can put it that way. We must look at this issue in the cold, hard light of day. This is a cynical exercise by members of the National Party.

There is a simple solution to this problem. Instead of conducting another feasibility study the Federal Government should allocate \$3.35 million towards the project and let it go ahead. It has been argued that this project will generate an additional 300, 400 or 600 jobs. Earlier the honourable member for Lachlan said this was a much-needed facility. The Government is locating the facility in the right place. The Federal Government is trying to find what it considers to be an honourable way out of this mess. Honourable members should bear in mind what happened at the last Federal election. The Prime Minister and the disgraced Peter Reith have been exposed because of the lies they espoused.

The word "honourable" does not sit at all comfortably with members of the National Party. They should be honest in relation to this issue. All they have to do is match the commitment that has been made by the State Government. The money has been on the table since last October. The new member for Tamworth should be given an opportunity to refer to this issue in his inaugural speech. I would have liked to have had an opportunity to represent my community on an issue as important as this. The new member for Tamworth has not yet done so.

**Mr WOODS** (Clarence—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs) [5.10 p.m.], in reply: I never thought I would see the day when a National Party member would stand up in this Chamber and criticise a Labor Government for spending money in the bush. It is almost unbelievable. I cannot stress strongly enough how important this project is to the people of Tamworth. John Anderson and Sandy Macdonald know that, but members of the National Party have failed to come through for people in country New South Wales.

I should have welcomed the new member for Tamworth earlier when I moved this urgent motion. He has not yet spoken in this House about this important project. I was a little bemused about a number of issues that were raised earlier. The honourable member for Barwon spoke about a commitment that John Anderson gave to the new member for Tamworth. Members of the National Party talked about conducting a study, which is hardly a commitment. Earlier the former Leader of the National Party said that will happen; at least he showed some leadership on this issue.

The present Leader of the National Party has shown no leadership on this issue. Why did the present Leader of the National Party not support the new member for Tamworth and say, "We will belt a few heads in the Federal Government and get this money for Tamworth?" Why is that not happening? After years of solid service from the former great Independent member for Tamworth, Tony Windsor, the people of Tamworth must be feeling a little let down by the National Party. The new Federal member for New England continues to pursue the Federal Government in relation to this issue. Only yesterday he spoke about his fears of losing the project. He said:

It's already been investigated by NSW Treasury and found to be financially viable. I also believe that once it is given the green light the money should be made available as quickly as possible because there is always the fear that another State or city will come in and pinch the concept.

Mr Windsor is awake to the plans of the National Party. He knows that members of the National Party are simply wasting time as they do not have enough clout to get a solid commitment from the Liberal Party in relation to this issue. Where is the solid commitment? Earlier the honourable member for Barwon referred to commitment but, when pressed, he would not say what that commitment would be. I will be disappointed for the people of Tamworth if this new National Party study concludes that the 600 jobs that would be created by the centre were not worth having. Earlier the honourable member for Barwon questioned whether this project was worthwhile. Members of the National Party said, "The jobs are not there. Why should we have this centre? Professor Chudleigh might come up with fewer jobs."

Members of the National Party are looking for a way out. Country Labor will continue to fight the Federal Government to ensure that this project comes to fruition. Our offer, which is on the table, is a fair dinkum and genuine country offer. The honourable member for Tamworth appears to be fitting in well in the National Party room. If this project does not go ahead he will be exposed as being one of the usual mould: someone who states, "We will get a commitment, but let's have a study." The State Government has made a commitment to Tamworth. I only hope for the sake of the project that the National Party and the honourable member for Tamworth are willing to make the same commitment.

I never thought I would see the day when National Party members talked down country projects, as did the honourable member for Barwon. He ran down the project and said that the jobs are not there. He said that there was some doubt about the project. He said, "Let Professor Chudleigh make a decision in relation to this issue." Where is his loyalty to country people? It simply and demonstrably is not there. I never thought I would see the day when National Party members attacked a Labor Government for wanting to spend money in the bush. It is unbelievable. Yet that is exactly what members of the National Party are doing. They are running down the project and criticising the Government because it wants to spend money in the bush. Opposition members should bear in mind that this is not a political issue for Government members; this is an issue for the bush. We are helping members of the National Party. We want members of the National Party to go to Canberra, belt a few heads and get this money. I hope they do.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.**

## **PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS**

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### **CESSNOCK ELECTORATE COMMUNITY DRUG ACTION PLAN**

**Mr HICKEY** (Cessnock) [5.15 p.m.]: Honourable members would be aware of the impact of drug abuse on our young people. The electorate of Cessnock is not immune to the ravages of drug abuse, drug addiction and the web of criminal activity that is part and parcel of this scourge. The Carr Government took the initiative and held a Drug Summit that incorporated a whole-of-government approach to investigating the scope of modern drug use in our communities. It also identified what action should be taken to enhance the delivery of services to communities that suffer from the effects and flow-on problems of drug abuse.

The Drug Summit recommended that it be acknowledged that some communities and families feel overwhelmed and helpless and are looking for leadership and positive ideas—a shared game plan to enable them to deal with illicit drugs. That statement could not ring truer for the parents who come into my office pleading for answers to something that is destroying their children's lives. The family unit is placed under stress and it

often collapses under that stress. The community as a whole must better understand, discuss and take ownership of the issue of drug abuse and the solutions to that problem. The community must be empowered to address its causes and impacts.

As difficult as it sounds, communities must show compassion towards those who are engaged in harmful drug use. Ongoing leadership and the collaboration of community interests are needed to sustain effective community action. A major recommendation from the 1999 summit suggested realistically that a concerted campaign should be based on best-practice models to inform the community, especially local government, parents, young and old people and community organisations about illicit drugs. An important aspect of that recommendation involved targeting at-risk young people and informing the broader community using a variety of methods including advertising, direct mail, surveys and public meetings.

An important aspect of any project must be the maximisation of the input and involvement of young people in the design of peer education advertising. Each region or area must have services available to provide a core or basic level of drug and alcohol services. Such programs must be provided through the public health system, community and welfare agencies, government and non-government agencies. As a result of the Drug Summit recommendations the Cessnock area was recently allocated \$300,000 to develop a local community drug action plan which will include a one-stop shop for the area's young people. The project, which will be based in the Cessnock local government area, will be aimed at improving young people's health and lifestyles. It will look at ways of enhancing the capacity of existing agencies to meet the identified needs of our youth.

A whole-of-government approach is evident in the project's core business. It will include schools, sporting clubs, youth services, health services, Cessnock City Council, police and the Department of Community Services. The project will be co-ordinated by the Hunter Centre for Health Advancement in partnership with the New South Wales Premier's Department. Project managers have been engaged and are currently investigating the content and distribution of the survey that will be distributed to all 5,000 young people aged between 12 and 19 years. The survey will also target the general community and service providers. This is a great initiative that will identify what services are currently available, where the gaps and barriers are and what potential solutions can be put in place to meet the needs of young people and the local community.

I applaud the work of the Special Minister of State and the foresight he has provided in this much-neglected area. I also commend the foresight shown by the Carr Government in holding the Drug Summit. New South Wales is leading Australia in its drive to combat the drug trade in an attempt to halt the spread of drug abuse amongst our most important asset, our young people. I acknowledge that the Special Minister of State will be in my electorate this Friday to start the MERIT Program, the Magistrates Early Referral Into Treatment Program. It is one of the leading programs in the court system dealing with drug abuse and the resulting crime waves. It goes a long way towards proving that the Drug Summit was not a facade. It was a genuine attempt to redress the problem. It is great that the Carr Government is on the front foot in countering the illicit drug trade. It is a long way ahead of the approach of the Opposition at the Drug Summit. Opposition members need to have a good, long look at themselves. *[Time expired.]*

### KU-RING-GAI ELECTORATE BUILDING DEVELOPMENTS

**Mr O'FARRELL** (Ku-ring-gai—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [5.20 p.m.]: I start this parliamentary year where I finished the last parliamentary year: seeking relief on behalf of my constituents from the Carr Government's ill-considered and devastating policy to increased densities not only across Sydney but within my local community. I again raise the issue of infill State environmental planning policy [SEPP] 5 developments. When Labor was elected it changed the SEPP 5 policy, which previously had been used judiciously to increase the number of nursing homes and retirement villages in communities across New South Wales, to allow that policy to apply to infill developments. That means that if a house is sold next your property that house can be bought by developers and the single residence can be replaced with multiple units. Of course, that fundamentally changes the residential amenity of the area. My principal concern is that the policy is being abused, and has been abused. Those abuses have been brought to the attention of the Minister for Planning, and still he refuses to address the issues.

My second concern is that the Government, in its determination to increase population densities through the application of infill SEPP 5, does not ensure that State-supplied infrastructure and services keep pace with and match the demands of the increased population density. Thirdly, I am concerned about something highlighted during the January bushfires, which affected my electorate as well as other parts of Sydney. One of the areas most blighted by infill SEPP 5 developments in Ku-ring-gai is North Turramurra, which is bounded on



three sides by the Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park. North Turramurra has been threatened by bushfires in the past. North Turramurra is not an appropriate area for infill SEPP 5 developments, principally because there is only one road in and out. Residents of North Turramurra are already experiencing tremendous traffic congestion during morning and afternoon peak hours. God forbid what would happen during a bushfire given the enormous population increase that the Government's infill SEPP 5 policy development is causing in the area.

Over the Christmas period the Minister acted in relation to SEPP 53 and Ku-ring-gai local council by determining to take direct control over six sites within the Ku-ring-gai municipality. He indicated that that was simply the first of a series of sites that New South Wales Planning will take control of. We totally reject the Macquarie Street approach to planning. Some in this House may be used to the Eastern European approach to planning: centralised planning. We abhor it. We reject it. Amongst the sites earmarked by the Minister for Planning are two in Pymble in the vicinity of Livingston Ave and the Pacific Highway. The existing traffic problems there continue to be ignored by the Government. It refuses to do anything about the worst blackspot on the Pacific Highway in the metropolitan area, Pymble Bridge. The Government's decision to allow the construction of over 300 units adjacent to the site will simply worsen the existing problem. The Government is prepared to increase densities but is not prepared to put up the money to ensure that infrastructure and services meet the demands of those increased densities.

Another interesting development this week was the expose by the *Sydney Morning Herald* in relation to the crisis within the State Rail Authority. SEPP 53—and to some extent infill SEPP 5—is predicated on the people who occupy the new units using the rail system. The Christie report—until now the secret Christie report—makes clear that the CityRail system is struggling to cope with existing demand and there is no spare capacity for the new residents. The Carr Government's determination to increase population densities is affecting local areas and it is not being matched by an equal determination to upgrade infrastructure and services to meet the increased demand. I am pleased that the Liberal Party has announced a policy in relation to SEPP 5 and SEPP 53 that will give voters a clear choice at the next election—not just in my part of Sydney but across Sydney—in relation to these issues. This is evidenced by a letter I received today from constituents in Lister Street, Wahroonga. It thanked me for my letter outlining the Liberal Party's attitude to SEPP 5 and my prompt and relevant reply to an earlier email on the subject. The letter continued:

Comparison with the obfuscatory and trite form letters eventually received from the Labor Party machine minders makes your informed comment truly stand out.

It is about time the Government responded to the Ku-ring-gai community, listened to council and put an end to both these policies.

### GENERAL PRACTITIONERS DISTRIBUTION RATING SYSTEM

**Mr BARTLETT** (Port Stephens) [5.25 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of Parliament the ludicrous situation facing medical practitioners who wish to work in parts of the Port Stephens electorate. General practitioners are distributed geographically under a rating system referred to as RRMA, which stands for Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Area. It is a way of assessing where areas fall along the urban to rural or remote continuum. RRMA 2, for example, is classed as urban whereas RRMA 4 is classed as rural. Overseas-trained doctors and Australian-trained doctors need a service provider number to practise. But sometimes service provider numbers are given for a period of, say, up to six months. A doctor who wished to practise in the Port Stephens area approached me. When he went to a remote area he could practise for only six months. He moved his family, started his business and then his service provider number was cancelled. So medical practitioners who go to an area that is hard to staff may be able to practise there for only six or 12 months. They have all the expense of setting up a business, buying a home, enrolling the kids in school only to find that they cannot practise any more.

Rural areas surrounding urban areas in the Newcastle region are facing a crisis in the supply of general practitioners because lines separating RRMA areas, which defy rational thought processes, are being drawn on maps. For example, I have an area in my patch called the Tilligerry Peninsula. It is classed as RRMA 4. It has about four doctors—it may have five doctors; one might be leaving. An equal distance away is the suburb of Medowie, which has 7,000 people and only one practising doctor. The average should be in the vicinity of one doctor for 1,200 to 1,500 people. A doctor has just ceased servicing the community of Karuah. With the surrounding area, Karuah has a population of 2,000. It is classed as RRMA 2, that is, urban—Medowie is also classed as urban—and it is even further away than the Tilligerry Peninsula from, presumably, the urban services provided by Newcastle.

A doctor in Medowie has worked for some 18 months without a break servicing a population in the vicinity of 7,000 people. However, as the area is not classified as RRMA 4 the doctor cannot get additional medical help into the area. Karuah, which is about 60 kilometres from Newcastle and is classified as RRMA 2, also cannot attract doctors. Doctors are interested in going to Karuah; I have phoned them and we have spoken about the issue. A doctor who services an RRMA 4 area receives something like \$40 per 20-minute consultation, whilst a doctor who services an RRMA 2 area receives something like \$17.50 per 20-minute consultation. Doctors say they are not encouraged to go to areas that are on the lower end of the RRMA scale. As a result, those areas do not attract general practitioners.

We have the ludicrous situation where the lines on the map seem to be denying doctors the right to go to areas even when they want to. The lines on the map indicate that an area is an RRMA 2 area rather than an RRMA 4 area, but there does not seem to be any logic associated with that. I believe that Noosa and Caloundra in Queensland are classified as RRMA 5 areas. Those areas are receiving a huge amount of funding and are therefore attracting doctors, whereas areas such as Medowie and Karuah in my electorate cannot get any assistance. RRMAs also impact on subsidies for enrolled nurses. The doctor at Medowie cannot get a subsidy for an enrolled nurse to assist her with some of the duties in the surgery, so she is on her own. If that doctor leaves the area—and there is probably a 50:50 chance of that occurring, because she is so overworked—Medowie will then end up with no doctor. [*Time expired.*]

### PUBLIC LIABILITY INSURANCE PREMIUMS

**Mr ARMSTRONG** (Lachlan) [5.30 p.m.]: Once again I raise the issue of public liability insurance and the effect it is having on a number of organisations and individuals in my electorate. Last Thursday and Friday I held two seminars, in Cootamundra and Forbes, which were attended by a total of more than 270 people from the electorate. When I called the seminars and advertised them in the local newspaper, I expected perhaps 50 people from each town to attend. During the seminars, extraordinary stories were recounted regarding the effect of the current litigious society and the regulations that enable people to sue one another. I was informed that in one local government area 80 matters involving public liability insurance are either under way or about to commence.

One of the stories was about a family having a picnic in a park: dad having a few drinks, mum looking after the kids, and the kids climbing an old peppertree. One of the kids falls out of the peppertree and cracks his shoulder. That injury will cost the shire about \$80,000. Kids have been falling out of peppertrees for as long as I can remember—indeed, since Adam was a small lad. Last Sunday I received a telephone call from a publican at Burcher, a town west of West Wyalong. For some time West Wyalong and the Ryde RSL Club have been holding reciprocal cricket matches. One year the Ryde RSL Club cricket team travels up to Burcher, and another year the Burcher cricket team travels to Ryde. This year it is the Burcher team's turn to come down to Ryde. The club has been informed that it will have to have its own public liability insurance to play cricket at the Ryde cricket ground, but it simply cannot afford it. It has been said that the average age of the cricketers is about 60 years, so they are not likely to do much harm to themselves.

Tumblong, a town south of Gundagai, has a centenary coming up. The town cannot hold its centenary celebrations because, firstly, it cannot get insurance and, secondly, even if it were able to get insurance it could not afford it. One of the wags who told me the story said, "I guess it means we may have to put it off until the 200th year, but we won't be about for that long." Another story recounted at the conference related to workers compensation insurance and its effect on employment. Recently an abattoir employee injured his knee. The knee was repaired, the employee returned to work, and some months later he commenced an action on the basis of loss of sexual function. A subsequent finding resulted in the employee receiving considerable damages on the basis that he cannot put weight on his right knee. A number of similar claims are now being made throughout my electorate.

Almost every shire in my electorate would be able to relate similar stories of cases in recent times. They are dead scared to support local events, such as Woolarama in Forbes, which is a promotional event conducted each March by the local ladies from the tourist centre. At the event they promote wool, conduct shearing demonstrations, wool spinning demonstrations, and knitting and dressmaking demonstrations. They have live sheep there, and they have music and lots of food. It is a fun day. The event is held at the railway station. This year the shire indicated it could not insure the event. It tried to get private insurance, but found that it simply could not afford the cost of that insurance. I now refer to the Area Park Water Skiing Park in the western part of the State. Water skiing takes place on a dam dug by the community about 20 years ago, which accommodates about two boats at one time. Unless the park can get some form of insurance at a reasonable cost for next summer, it will not be able to hold water skiing there.

The matters referred to by Mr Carr during a ministerial statement and by the honourable member for Southern Highlands and me are urgent. We do not have the luxury of waiting for inquiries to overcome the immediate problems of so many charity, volunteer and community organisations that have time constraints. I ask the Government to acknowledge the urgency of dealing with public risk and public liability insurance so that community organisations in the country are able to conduct their social and cultural events.

**Mr MARKHAM** (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.35 p.m.]: I have listened with interest to the matters raised by the honourable member for Lachlan concerning public liability insurance. I have no doubt that every member of this House could relate similar stories. Only last week the Illawarra Rowing Club approached me about public liability insurance costs regarding the club's establishment on Lake Illawarra. The club was concerned about the fact that it had heard that its current insurance costs could be increased by up to 500 per cent. The club indicated to me that if that were the case, it would have to simply shut its doors, padlock them and walk away, because there was no way the club would be able to raise additional funding for public liability insurance.

There is no doubt that the problem extends right across the board. The honourable member for Lachlan has indicated his concern, and I assure him that I have raised the issue with the Government over the past few months. Just prior to Christmas an organisation that provides drug and alcohol rehabilitation services approached me. It was the only organisation of its type between Sydney and the Victorian border. The organisation has operated for some 20 years and has never had a public liability insurance claim against it. Suddenly, after the organisation finally found a broker who could get an insurance company to insure it, the insurance premium jumped from something like \$2,500 to \$17,000. That is quite a slug for an organisation that relies on volunteers. I have no doubt that the Government is fully aware of the problem. I know that the Government regards the matter as urgent, and I have no doubt that the Minister responsible will take note of the remarks of the honourable member for Lachlan.

#### **ELECTRIC LAMP MANUFACTURERS (AUSTRALIA) PTY LTD CLOSURE**

**Mr GAUDRY** (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.37 p.m.]: On 24 April this year Electric Lamp Manufacturers (Australia), which operates in Clyde Street, Hamilton and is the only remaining electric light manufacturing company in Australia, will shut its doors. All electric lights, including fluorescent, incandescent and the new environmentally friendly lights, will then be imported. ELMA has been in production for 71 years. At its peak it had a workforce of more than 1,000 people. Its present workforce of 220 is a reflection of declining domestic manufacturing industries through a globalised approach to trade and competition with overseas industries that pay their workforces much lower rates of pay.

Many countries are introducing technologies that compete with our local products. The closure of other industries in Clyde Street, Hamilton North, reflects that trend. ELMA is the third major industry in that street to close in the past decade; the other businesses being Lanes Hardware and Goodman Fielder. Over the past 10 years ELMA's share of the domestic market has declined as a result of low-priced imports, particularly from China and Italy, which have lower labour costs. A worker at ELMA earns about \$700 a week but a worker in China earns about \$70 a week. What is the Federal Government's policy on industry and manufacturing? Decisions made in the board rooms of multinational companies are purely economy based rather than based on what is now called within the industry the triple bottom line: the environmental, social and economic position. I congratulate the ELMA workforce on the way it resisted this closure for such a long time.

Each year the 220 employees at the plant produced 45 million to 50 million globes and 13 million to 15 million tubes. The long-term employees were highly skilled and had a sense of loyalty to the company. Mike Gill, the general manager, liaised with the workforce in an endeavour to compete with overseas manufacturers. However, the company lost \$500,000 over the past two years. The major shareholding companies in that group—Philips and Rexel, which own 35 per cent each; Thorn, which owns 20 per cent; and Crompton, which owns 10 per cent—gave consideration to investing \$2 million to reline the company's furnaces, but in the end it decided against doing so and closed the plant.

The Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development worked with the Department of State and Regional Development to assist the company, as did the Australian Workers Union, which has members at the plant. To the credit of the plant's general manager workers entitlements and redundancy payments for all workers will be met. However, multinational groups have made no commitment to invest in technology to ensure that wherever possible manufacturing industries are retained. I am sure that the department will assist the workers to find employment and to develop their skills. The union, through its Pathways program, will ensure that that occurs. This closure, which marks the end of a very important industry in Australia, should cause us to look at industry policies, especially those of the Federal Government. [*Time expired.*]

**Mr FACE** (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [5.42 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Newcastle for bringing this matter to the attention of the House this evening. As the honourable member said, ELMA has lost \$500,000 over the past two years. Late last year the company decided upon a major blast furnace upgrade that would have cost \$2 million. Rather than spend that capital, continue to make losses and not be able to fund employee entitlements, the company decided to close. To the company's credit all employee entitlements will be paid in full. The Australian Workers Union [AWU], the Electrical Trades Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union are satisfied that the company is in a position to pay—unlike National Textiles at Maitland whose workers were put out on the street. A large portion of the equipment at the plant has been earmarked for sale and relocation to a number of foreign producers, enhancing the company's ability to pay.

Industry protection and industry policies are the responsibility of the Federal Government. However, workers at the plant will need to be retrained since their skills are highly specialised and tailored to meet the needs of this one industry. The AWU representatives are speaking with the company with a view to the company funding a retraining and job placement package through the Pathways organisation. That organisation undertook the same type of project following the closure of the Newcastle Steelworks, with which I was intimately and heavily involved.

I will request the Hunter Institute of TAFE to view sympathetically any reasonable request for assistance and co-operation that the company, unions, Pathways or individual workers make to it. The plant was unusual in that it commenced operating when a group of manufacturers decided to work together to produce electric light globes. The company was established in Hamilton North in 1931 after the Scullin Federal Government introduced tariffs. At one stage the plant employed 1,000 workers, now there are 200. The honourable member for Newcastle and I will do all we can to retrain the company's workforce and get them back into employment.

#### **NORTH HEAD QUARANTINE STATION**

**Mr HAZZARD** (Wakehurst) [5.44 p.m.]: I express my concerns about the management of the quarantine station at North Head. I grew up on the northern beaches and attended Manly West Public School and Manly High School. I ran a business in Manly for many years and I spend a lot of time in Manly. I am well aware of the historical significance of the quarantine station and of its significance to the soul of the residents of the peninsula, particularly those in Manly. Sadly, over the past few months two major buildings on the site were destroyed by fire. The first building was destroyed by fire in October 2001 in what has been suggested were suspicious circumstances. Following the fire the Government gave an undertaking to address the security of the quarantine station. However, a relatively short time after that another building on the site was destroyed by fire. On a number of occasions I have written to the Minister for the Environment about the site. On 19 August 1999 I wrote:

I express my concerns as a local Member of Parliament on the Peninsula with regard to proposals for Quarantine Station, North Head ...

However I am also concerned in a broader sense that the Quarantine Station should be preserved for public usage and whatever the purposes applied to it should have full public access ...

As a local Member of Parliament and a resident of the Peninsula I oppose the effective privatisation and related exclusion of the public from the Quarantine Station by the granting of a 40 year lease.

Since that time it has become apparent that the Government's real agenda is for a 45-year lease, which constitutes a long period of exclusion of the public. The damage to the buildings and the time spent by the Government in trying to resile what it will do with the private sector on this site demonstrate that it is time for the Government to give up on its proposal for private sector involvement in the site. Clearly the National Parks and Wildlife Service is incapable of managing the site, which belongs not only to the peninsula; it belongs to the people of Australia. The site is unique. The very timbers of the buildings evoke a great sense of history. The Government should cease going down the path it has been walking with regard to this site. I know the Government is awaiting the outcome of a commission of inquiry. But regardless of that outcome, it is time the Government arranged the appropriate preservation of the site and allowed maximum public access. Alternatives to management of the site by the National Parks and Wildlife Service should be considered.

Perhaps it is appropriate that the buildings are brought under the care and control of the Historic Houses Trust, which will ensure that these wonderful assets are preserved for the public for all time. From discussions I have had with the Mayor of Manly, Jean Hay, I know that Manly Council has a strong view about

preservation of the site. Mayor Hay confirmed that she wants the site preserved. The amblings of the Government should come to an end. It is time the site received the protection it deserves, and the cost of providing that protection should be met from the public purse. The Federal member for the region, Tony Abbott, has written to the Minister expressing his concerns in this regard, as has the honourable member for Manly on a number of occasions. I ask the Government to show some heart and preserve this vital piece of Australia's history. It should put aside its current proposal and give us an assurance that the quarantine station at North Head will be preserved for future generations.

### **PUBLIC LIABILITY INSURANCE PREMIUMS**

**Mr MARTIN** (Bathurst) [5.49 p.m.]: I raise a matter of great importance, and a matter that was aired today in this House by the Premier and others: public liability insurance. It is certainly one of the hottest topics being discussed around Australia. I am sure honourable members can give many examples of the impact this matter is having in their electorates, particularly in electorates that incorporate small rural communities. In recent times I have received representations about public liability insurance from such organisations as the Rylstone Bush Race Club; the Yetholme Progress Association, which operates a small progress hall at Yetholme, a small village on the way to Bathurst; the Kandos Street Machine Club, another volunteer organisation; and Motorcycling New South Wales. All these organisations, with the possible exception of Motorcycling New South Wales, rely on volunteers to function and they face the prospect of going out of business because they cannot afford or cannot get public liability insurance.

We have been talking about this crisis for some time, but the moment has arrived for action. I was pleased to hear the Premier say today that he would make some positive moves about such insurance. I hope there will be co-operation between the two arms of government to resolve this crisis, otherwise life as we know it in small rural communities will grind to a halt. The committee of the Yetholme Progress Association comprises eight women. In its wonderful old hall it runs probably 12 to 15 functions a year. Everyone—school kids, the local pensioner group and the farmers association—uses the hall; it is vital to the life of that village. The association is now faced with a threefold increase in public liability insurance premiums.

The president of Motorcycling New South Wales, Kevin McDonald, lives in Bathurst. He is also a director of the group's national body. Its public liability insurance premiums have increased from \$135,200 in 1999 to \$747,000 in 2002. It is a large organisation but it relies heavily on volunteers. The Insurance Council of New South Wales, the Federal Government, the Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority and all other interested parties must come together to resolve these issues. About 70 kilometres south of Bathurst, towards the Abercrombie River, is the village of Burruga, the most remote village in my electorate. Its population of 150 is very self-sufficient. The people of the village look after themselves. They have their own sporting club. When the general store burnt down a few years ago the locals built another store on the back of the small licensed club. It is being run as a co-operative. The villagers even resurrected the old dam at the copper works. With the help of a former member for Bathurst this remote village received a grant from the Department of Land and Water Conservation and developed its own reticulated water system, which the villagers own and operate.

These self-supporting people have now been told by GIO that not only is public liability insurance out the window, everything else is also. The recreation club was deemed to be a bad risk and effectively had to close down. Life in the village will virtually grind to a halt. The general store will not be able to supply provisions and the recreation club, which hosts functions and entertainment and is a place where locals meet to have a beer, will have to cease to function. The club has been advised that it is too much of a risk for its members to play darts or indoor bowls in its premises.

The one thing that is consistent with all these groups is that not one of them has made an insurance claim! It is not as though they are serial offenders. I hope that by bringing this matter to the attention of the House today the relevant parties will realise that we are pressing the panic button. I would like us to explore what has been done in South Australia to protect volunteers in that State. Its Volunteer Protection Act provides indemnity for volunteers, who are vital to the organisations I have referred to. Similar legislation may be beneficial to our volunteers.

**Mr MARKHAM** (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.54 p.m.]: The honourable member for Bathurst raised a matter similar to that referred to earlier by the honourable member for Lachlan. Public liability insurance is a major issue, and it was the subject of a ministerial statement made earlier today by the Premier. I have no doubt that the Government will proactively pursue a direction that will alleviate some of the problems. All organisations with a volunteer base are faced with having to find more money to pay increasing public

liability insurance premiums, money which could be better spent providing services to the community. Real problems will be created in many areas. In Wollongong, Meals on Wheels is faced with a public liability bill that will impact on the quality of service it is trying to provide to elderly people in their homes. The issue has to be addressed and I know that the Government will do just that.

### **GRABINE STATE RECREATION AREA ACCESS ROAD**

**Ms HODGKINSON** (Burrinjuck) [5.56 p.m.]: I first raised concerns about the Grabine State Recreation Area in this House just over 20 months ago. Today, those concerns, especially about the access road, remain unaddressed by the Government. Grabine State Recreation Area covers 800 hectares and is located about 83 kilometres north-west of Crookwell on the foreshores of Lake Wyangala. This spectacular State recreation area can be accessed through either Bigga or Reid's Flat. The main access road is through Bigga. Visitors who come to enjoy the region's recreational opportunities, often towing a caravan or boat, have to travel the last 22 kilometres over a treacherous gravel road. I have made representations to Ministers in this place, including the Minister for Land and Water Conservation, about access to the Grabine park.

Up to 316 people a day use this road in the peak periods over the Christmas holidays. A safety audit of the Grabine road that was conducted in 1997 identified a number of issues that required urgent attention, including intersections, signage, sight distances, overtaking opportunities, erosion and traction, to name just a few. The Grabine road is maintained by the Crookwell Shire Council, using its own funds. It is the only road access to a State park in New South Wales that is not sealed. Council estimates that it will cost between \$8 million and \$10 million to seal this road and bring it to a safe standard. However, part of the road does not belong to the council. Just over half of the road, 11.9 kilometres to be exact, was resumed by the State Government and became a Crown road, but no funds were committed to maintaining the State's part of the road.

Crookwell Shire Council has been maintaining the entire length of the road to the tune of about \$25,000 while the State Government sits back and says, "Thank you very much." I raised this matter on 10 May 2001 with the then Minister for Land and Water Conservation, Mr Amery, after council's approaches to the department had been unsuccessful. It took the honourable Minister until mid-August to reply and then he just passed the buck to Treasury. His reply was full of great promises of investigations, discussions and representations, all of which have come to nothing. He said he would refer the matter to Treasury, seeking funds to upgrade the Crown road.

Almost 10 months after making my representations I was recently informed that the promised submission to Treasury apparently did not take place. Instead, the new Minister for Land and Water Conservation, Mr Aquilina, has now informed council that "advice has since been received that the level of funding required in this case would not be sufficient to warrant an enhancement bid being considered by Treasury". However, no indication has been given as to who gave this advice to the Minister and, given the desperate need for State Government funding of this road, why the Minister has meekly accepted this advice and thrown it into the too-hard basket.

Crookwell Shire Council believes that it has been fobbed off by the new Minister with a promise that his department will investigate an alternative funding opportunity within the State park allocation. The Minister has further advised council that this allocation will not even be considered until the end of this financial year. Will Crookwell Shire Council have to wait another 10 months before it is again told that funding is not available? This Government is sitting on a budget surplus of about \$700 million but it refuses to accept responsibility for the part of this road that has been designated a Crown road. For too long the Carr Labor Government has been sponging off the ratepayers of Crookwell shire. The council is forced to divert badly needed funds from other roads such as the Rugby-Crookwell Road because the Government will not accept its responsibilities.

Given the Government's disgraceful record of refusing to accept its proper responsibilities, it is inevitable that the council will have responsibility for the Crown road parts of Grabine Road foisted back on the ratepayers of Crookwell shire. Indeed, the former Minister foreshadowed this in August last year. Before this happens the Government must give a binding commitment to upgrade Grabine Road. The road must be sealed and it must be sealed with State Government funds. The Government must also reimburse council for the funds that it has already donated to the State for previous maintenance of the road. The Government has been shirking its responsibilities for too long. I challenge the Minister to do the right thing, seal and maintain Grabine Road and stop sponging off the ratepayers of Crookwell shire.

**Mr JOE WAGNER AND Mrs WILHELMINA WAGNER**

**Mr GIBSON** (Blacktown) [6.01 p.m.]: Tonight I wish to speak about the Wagner family of Blacktown, who have no objection to my putting their name on the record. I know Joe, who is an elderly gentleman, and his son, Frank, quite well. Joe's wife, Wilhelmina, who is a well-respected lady of 77 years of age, is not in good health. She needs considerable care because she has undergone many operations. Last year my electorate staff and I did all we could to help the family when Wilhelmina needed a special operation. Unfortunately, one day last year Wilhelmina collapsed at home and Joe had to take her back to hospital. According to Joe a "peg" has been inserted into her stomach and she is being kept alive by being fed through that tube. She was transferred to the Quakers Hill Nursing Home where she remained for a short time. Arrangements were then made to transfer her to another nursing home in Blacktown.

On about 15 February Joe received an account from the Moran Health Care Group Pty Ltd, which owns and manages the Quakers Hill Nursing Home. It was a small account: \$23.96 for accommodation and \$5.60 for medication. Joe paid the account somewhere around 19 February. He was not concerned about receiving the bill; however, he was distressed that the bill was addressed to the estate of the late Wilhelmina Wagner care of Joe Wagner. Joe telephoned the manager of the Moran Health Care Group, Mr Richard Johnson, asking for an apology. He said, "I only want an apology on behalf of the family, nothing more. I realise it was probably a mistake." When Richard Johnson refused to give that apology an argument ensued. Joe rang me yesterday and again last night to tell me about his conversation with Mr Johnson. I could not believe that anyone from this health group could be so callous.

This morning I telephoned Richard Johnson on behalf of Joe Wagner and said to Mr Johnson, "Under the circumstances I think it is only right that you apologise to the family." Richard Johnson acted as if a bomb had been thrown at him and refused to apologise. When I asked him why he said, "Because our records show that Wilhelmina Wagner is deceased. She actually died in our home some months ago." I assured Mr Johnson that Mrs Wagner was alive and breathing today. Despite that assurance he refused to give an apology. The Wagners made the best decision to remove Wilhelmina from the nursing home. This family has been treated in an inhumane fashion and I felt the matter should be raised in Parliament. All the family wants is an apology. Mrs Wagner and her family are doing it tough enough at the moment and a simple apology would go some way to resolving this matter.

**CRONULLA ELECTORATE SERVICES**

**Mr KERR** (Cronulla) [6.06 p.m.]: Recently I received a letter from Mr John Casson, President of the Cronulla Chamber of Commerce, which does an excellent job bringing many matters to public attention and working hard to ensure that the Cronulla shopping centre is a better place for its customers. He raised a number of matters, one of which relates to the relocation of the bus stop presently situated outside the McDonald's Family Restaurant in Cronulla to the police station, where it would be better patronised. The honourable member for Wollongong would be pleased to hear that the suggestion to relocate the bus stop accords with the wishes of the mayor of Sutherland shire. There is general agreement on both sides of the House for the proposal.

Further, Mr Casson asked me to make representations for the release of land adjacent to the southern end of Cronulla railway station to provide commuter parking, which is sadly lacking in the area. The story surrounding that land is akin to an Agatha Christie mystery. I am sure the honourable member for Liverpool would be concerned that public assets do not fall into capitalist hands! People in my electorate are anxious that the land be retained in public ownership to ensure that commuters—in other words, the workers—are well served. Once again, on behalf of the workers I ask the Government to come clean and tell the people of my electorate what it will do with the land at Cronulla railway station. It was interesting to see in the *Sydney Morning Herald* yesterday and today the proposals for denationalisation of State Rail. Honourable members are concerned about the proposals because there is considerable pressure to get additional funding. I do not want the commuters of Cronulla to be sacrificial lambs in the transport Minister's chase for the spare buck.

Mr Casson has asked me to arrange a meeting with the licensing police to discuss the antisocial behaviour of drunks who are causing damage in the Cronulla area, and I will be writing to the police Minister with that request. Mr Casson has also asked me whether a reasonable number of police could be allocated to Cronulla. He said he has been informed that the shire has 215,000 residents and the total number of police is only 286. Bearing in mind that about one-third of those police are on leave or rostered to other duties at any given time, that does not leave many officers to actively carry out patrols or to attend calls for assistance. That is the view of the Cronulla Chamber of Commerce. I do not know about the figures from another source. However,

the people of my electorate are entitled to have reasonable police resources allocated to the Cronulla area, and no-one could argue with that. The matters I have raised will be the subject of correspondence to the police Minister shortly.

### DUBBO RACECOURSE DEVELOPMENT

**Mr McGRANE** (Dubbo) [6.11 p.m.]: I bring before the House a matter of great concern to me and to the Minister for Gaming and Racing. I note that the Minister is in the House, and I thank him for his presence. An impasse has developed between the racing authority, the City of Dubbo Turf Club and Dubbo City Council with respect to a proposed redevelopment of Dubbo racecourse. On 1 July 1998 the Country Racecourse Development Fund allocated \$1.2 million for the development of a sand training track at Dubbo. Dubbo council is the trustee of the racecourse land, but that is not the problem. The problem is that the council has a road development program for roads adjacent to the racecourse. The program involves Yarrandale Road, Wheelers Lane and Cobbora Road, which is known as the golden highway.

The council has long-term plans relating to access from Wheelers Lane to Cobbora Road. The area covers land about 300 or 400 metres to the west, where Yarrandale Road enters Cobbora Road from the other side. The land on the northern side belongs to the racetrack. The council proposes to construct a large roundabout to provide access from Wheelers Lane to Cobbora Road. The 1,000-metre chute at the racetrack will have to be altered if the roundabout is constructed because the council wants to build a spur road that links Wheelers Lane, Cobbora Road and Yarrandale Road.

Dubbo City Council, the racing authority and Dubbo Turf Club have had many negotiations on this matter, which has been continuing for a long time. Indeed, the matter arose when I was the Mayor of Dubbo City Council. When I left office I thought that the problem had been solved but that is not the case. Now there is a total impasse, and the \$1.2 million allocated by the Country Racecourse Development Fund will not be available forever. If the Dubbo Turf Club agrees to the council's proposal and alters the 1,000-metre chute, there will be an additional cost of about \$800,000 because the whole racetrack will need to be rejigged.

The concern is that racing in Dubbo will cease for at least 12 months. If the council is not aiming to construct the roundabout for another four or five years, racing in Dubbo will be held to ransom, in a sense, because the development of racing in Dubbo depends on the allocation of \$1.2 million for a sand training track. It is a chicken and egg syndrome, and the matter must be finalised. We need an external opinion on the design proposed by Dubbo City Council for the road interchange linking Cobbora Road, Wheelers Lane and Yarrandale Road.

At one stage Dubbo Turf Club agreed to an amended plan, which provided for two different shoots to be constructed on a rejigged racetrack. That would have resulted in a 12-month delay in relation to designing a new racetrack. That is not what we want. It is not the answer. If there is no racing in Dubbo for 12 months, that will not be good for racing not only in Dubbo but in western New South Wales. In many ways racing flows from Dubbo to other areas in western New South Wales. We need an answer. The racing club thought the council would contribute \$800,000, but the council will not contribute \$800,000. So we have a horrible impasse, which means that racing in Dubbo cannot be developed. I doubt whether the traffic flow figures for the area in question are correct. I doubted the figures when I was the Mayor of Dubbo City Council, and I do not think traffic flows have increased since that time. I am calling for an external opinion of the road design for that section of the golden highway.

**Mr FACE** (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [6.16 p.m.]: The honourable member for Dubbo has every right to be concerned about what he has revealed in the House tonight. On 23 February I visited Dubbo, where I spoke to the honourable member, the City of Dubbo Turf Club, the Mayor of Dubbo City Council and the city manager. I am of the opinion, as is the honourable member for Dubbo, that we need to consult the Roads and Traffic Authority and a senior engineer—that is no reflection on the engineer at Parkes. I am not a traffic expert, although I spent some time in traffic facilities when I was in the police force. I am not yet convinced that Wheelers Lane is necessary. We are talking about \$4 million. I am sure traffic enhancements at another intersection near the school, which people allege is dangerous, with traffic control lights will suffice.

I am talking now as the Minister for Gaming and Racing. If Dubbo racing club closed for 12 months I would not want to be responsible for the end result. In the past several racing clubs, which I will not name, closed for extended periods, and one of them has never recovered. Dubbo racing club went through a trauma 10



years ago as a consequence of various factors, and it missed out on being a regional training centre in the Rowland Smith plan. However, the club is now back on its feet, and recently sponsorship of \$100,000 was announced. Honourable members would not believe the rate of progress at Dubbo racing club.

Now someone wants to put a road through the racecourse, which would result in the racing club closing for 12 months. During my visit to Dubbo the mayor admitted that the council did not want to proceed with its roads plan for another five years. I believe that there is a better way to resolve the impasse. Originally I thought the matter should be referred to the Minister for Land and Water Conservation, and that will probably happen later. As the Minister for Gaming and Racing I can assure the honourable member for Dubbo that there is a way to overcome this ludicrous situation. There is an easier and much less expensive way to resolve the impasse without jeopardising Dubbo racing club.

**Private members' statements noted.**

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Restoration of Business: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders**

**Motion by Mr Whelan agreed to:**

That standing and sessional orders be suspended so that:

- (1) members, or the Leader and Shadow Leader of the House on their behalf, may submit to the Clerk, by the close of business on Friday 8 March 2002, written notification of any General Business Notices of Motions and Orders of the Day standing in their names which lapsed due to prorogation which they wish to restore to the Notice paper.
- (2) notices requested to be restored will be listed in a supplement to the Business Paper entitled "Restored Business", and
- (3) notices of general business given on and after 27 February 2002 will have precedence over restored business.

*[Mr Acting-Speaker (Mr Lynch) left the chair at 6.20 p.m. The House resumed at 7.30 p.m.]*

**DEATH OF JAMES ALEXANDER CAMERON, LL.M, A FORMER SPEAKER OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**Mr CARR** (Maroubra—Premier, Minister for the Arts, and Minister for Citizenship) [7.30 p.m.]: I move:

That this House extends to Mrs Cameron and family the deep sympathy of members of the Legislative Assembly in the loss sustained by the death on 19 January 2002 of James Alexander Cameron, LL.M, a former Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

There is a tradition in this Parliament—one of its finest—that we honour our own. We do so across the divisions of party and faction. We dim past quarrels and kindle an affectionate remembrance. When death has forever ended the clash and tumult of affairs we say those things of moment about our political friends and foes that we did not, or could not, say before. In that spirit we honour the memory of the late Jim Cameron. I remember in the early 1980s my friend Peter Crawford, the former member for Balmain, saying to me, "Quick, come to the Legislative Council: Jim Cameron is about to speak." We dashed across to the other place because Crawford, whom the honourable member for Cronulla will recollect with fondness I am sure, had persuaded me—I did not take much persuading—that Cameron was a great, old-fashioned orator. He was the last of his type and his speeches were entertaining, a pleasure and a delight. He used language that was a throwback to the oratorical style of the early years of the twentieth century and it was a thrill for anyone interested in political communications to hear him.

In researching this speech I dug out an article of rare perception—which I commend to the House—about New South Wales politics that appeared in the *Bulletin* magazine on 16 June 1981. It refers to a change in the then Liberal leadership and the emergence of Bruce McDonald and Jim Cameron. The author of that article was Bob Carr. It is full of interesting anecdotes and quotes John Mason—I think I recall my source. When Mason left the office of the Leader of the Opposition he said, "Don't leave Cameron the soda water." According to my source, he then took his staff to the Tattersalls Club, ordered a Henschke riesling and, filling the glasses of his staff, said, "Well, I've got some bad news, boys—it's God and Mammon." He was of course referring to McDonald and Cameron, who were taking over the leadership of the State Liberals.

**Mr O'Farrell:** There was no confusion about roles.

**Mr CARR:** There was certainly no confusion about who was God and who was Mammon. In his article the journalist Carr wrote:

Jim Cameron is a former Askin Press secretary, law graduate and morals crusader. His language is far removed from McDonald's "Guys and Dolls" badinage. He uses expressions such as "plain as a pikestaff". He once said of the Governor's speech, "Right up to the skies I exalt the man who delivered it ... Right down to the bowels of the earth I deplore the speech itself."

In August, 1979, he told parliament the Wran Government was like that of Nero for ignoring "great primary challenges." He went on to say that the problem No 1 in NSW was communism and attacked the government because "There is no reference in the Governor's speech to the threat of communism."

**Mr O'Farrell:** Just like this week.

**Mr CARR:** This deplorable state of affairs continues to this day. There was another speech yesterday by another Governor and it contained no reference to the threat of communism. The article continued:

In a speech on education he said: "Parents with strong spiritual reflexes, keen to raise their progeny in the same traditions they themselves inherited from their forebears, find their children's minds in the grasp of secular humanists." He told parliament that society should return to the "tried and true that worked for our forebears, living within the inherited truth and wisdom of those before us."

We can see where his son inherited some of his instincts. The article continued:

In 1979, touching on economics, he asked the Premier to proclaim 1980 the Year of the Joint Stock Company and "thereby recognise the role of private enterprise companies as the main generators of employment and prosperity."

As a contemporary Labor leader, I do not disagree with much of that statement. The article then retails other stories about him. From this we can see that Jim Cameron was an original and a strong personality. He was an old-fashioned orator and political communicator. I think he enjoyed the fact that Crawford and I admired his oratory so much that we would go to the Legislative Council to hear it when he was translated to that House. I guess there is a story to be told about Jim Cameron's years spent working for Sir Robert Askin. I am sure that his views about Sir Robert were interesting but I was never privy to them. I could not think of many people more unlike Robert Askin than Jim Cameron. The bare facts of Jim Cameron's curriculum vitae are that he was the member for Northcott from 1968 to 1984, Speaker of this House from 1973 to 1976 and member of the Legislative Council from April to October 1984. Those bare bones say very little about Jim's mix of faith and reason, culture and conviction. In his maiden speech in 1968 he said:

I confess, Mr Speaker, that I am a traditionalist, though I hope a reasonably flexible traditionalist, and that I am one of those who seek to preserve and nurture the links which our community has with its past.

That is a conservative view that is easy to understand and to relate to a tradition of conservatism. He went on to say:

... a large part of my motivation for being in politics is directed towards the preservation of western civilisation, the preservation of its strengths, holding secure the tremendous treasure house which we have taken from our predecessors.

That is beautifully put. Jim was an enormous character. His rich oratory and love of English resonated in this Chamber and outside it. Principled conservatism was at the core of his political faith during a time of some social dislocation and rapid social change. He revered Edmund Burke, and in that sense he was a true conservative. I am told that Jim was an atheist turned fervent Christian and that his conversion shared much with that of Malcolm Muggeridge—he certainly shared Muggeridge's adamant certainty. A friend suggested that Jim Cameron was the closest thing we have ever had to Enoch Powell, and those who know their subject will be aware that that is high praise. Like Powell, Jim perhaps despaired too much of his fellow human beings and viewed things too much in sharp contrast—the good and bad—and too little in the shades and shadows of human frailty.

Although, having talked to Jim, I think that is probably an unfair judgment. I am sure that his intellectual influence shaped many people in the Liberal Party and the entire conservative side of politics. I imagine that the success of his son Ross in winning election to the House of Representatives and retaining his difficult, marginal seat in the recent Federal election would have been a source of immense pride to Jim. No-one has told me, but I guess that Jim would have fairly burst with pride at the success of his son Ross in the great arena of national politics.

I say to the Cameron family and to his many friends: Temper your sorrow with the knowledge that Jim realised splendidly the civilised ideals that drew him to this Parliament. He did plenty. He held office. He would

have done more if he had been there at the stage of the political cycle when the conservatives were in the ascendancy. Instead his political maturity was when Wran ruled the roost. Politicians, his career demonstrates, are not venal or self-seeking. His career demonstrates that this Parliament is still a place to debate the great issues of life, death and morality of how we live on this earth. In his maiden speech, from which I quoted earlier, Jim said that this House:

... means a great deal to me and I intend with every atom of my being—

a real Jim Cameron expression. Plain as a pikestaff, he might have added—

to be a credit to it so far as my abilities permit.

In his parliamentary service, and in his life, it was a goal nobly achieved. I bid an affectionate, respectful farewell to James Alexander Cameron. If I were giving a speech in another place, in that heaven or hell or limbo reserved for politicians, I would cross a space, one corner to the other, to hear his rich phraseology, his vigorous enunciation and his clearly expressed ideas.

**Mrs CHIKAROVSKI** (Lane Cove—Leader of the Opposition) [7.41 p.m.]: It is not often that the Premier and I agree, but we are certainly agreed on one thing tonight: that James Alexander Cameron was one of the more colourful and courageous members to serve in this Parliament, as well as probably one of the most thoughtful. In a profession where forthrightness was the norm, Jim Cameron was always first in line to defend the core beliefs he held so strongly. He was one of a small group of members who have served in both Houses. He served first in this House, as the member for Northcott, from 1968 to 1984. Then, in 1984 he was elected to the Legislative Council as an Independent aligned with Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile's Festival of Light.

Jim Cameron was elected by his Liberal parliamentary colleagues as Speaker in this House from 1973 to 1976 and as Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the early 1980s. He referred to himself as a "flexible traditionalist" but most would regard him as a true conservative. He was a ferocious and vigorous debater and was fearless in championing the values he saw as fundamental to an ordered Christian society and an ordered Christian life. He had a brief intellectual flirtation as an atheist when younger, but matured to become a Christian warrior in the fullest sense of that term. He championed many causes including the monarchy, educational rigour, the armed forces and a particular favourite of his, the merits of western civilisation. When he left Parliament he summarised his beliefs as the four Rs—renewal, reformation, revival and revitalisation.

As the *Sun-Herald* commented at the time, this was not a common war cry to hear echoing through this Chamber or in the Legislative Council. On his election to the Legislative Council he issued the warning that he saw political power as intrinsically dangerous. He said, "I am idealistic about life but mistrustful of government, whomever it may be that exercises it." Unfortunately, it was not long after this that he suffered a serious heart attack and his career in the Legislative Council was cut short. In his first maiden speech in 1968, which was delivered in this Chamber, Jim Cameron did not set himself modest horizons when he pronounced his commitment to the preservation of western civilisation. The essential elements of this civilisation he saw as freedom of the press, freedom of religion and freedom of association, plus the concept of ballot-box democracy. These are the fundamental beliefs that an overwhelming majority of honourable members in this House and this Parliament subscribe to.

Like many members who have served in this House representing Sydney electorates, Jim Cameron was born in country New South Wales, on the far North Coast at Coraki, in 1930. His father, Donald, was the local blacksmith and his mother, Joyce, a schoolteacher. After completing his education at Canterbury Boys High School he attended the University of Sydney, where he graduated with an LLB in 1961 and later completed his Masters in 1970. As we have just heard the Premier say, he had a facility for, and a love of, the English language and was a prodigious producer of papers and articles. He loved nothing better than a rousing debate, as many of us who have attended State council can attest to.

After briefly trialling a career in advertising, Jim Cameron joined the staff of the Liberal Party, where his duties included working as press secretary to the Hon. Pat Morton and the Hon. Robert Askin. In later years he was generous in his admiration of and gratitude to Sir John Carrick. He believed the first-hand experience of working with Sir John was invaluable in developing his personal work discipline, style and ethic. His association with Sir John was also inspirational in his subsequent parliamentary career. There are many members on the Coalition benches who similarly feel a humble gratitude that they have had the benefit of the advice and counsel of Sir John.

Jim Cameron was called to the bar in 1961. He lectured part-time in jurisprudence and public international law at Sydney University and transferred to the Roll of Solicitors in 1972. He was an elder of St Stephen's Church, across the road from this Parliament, a member of the United Nations Association and Chairman of the National Committee of the Festival of Light in 1976. It was while he was attending St Stephen's that he met his wife, Helen. Between them they produced six amazing children. Jock works with an international group dedicated to Christian leadership. Ross has successfully been the Federal member for Parramatta on three occasions and we are very proud of him, as is his family, but as we all know, he is now also a Parliamentary Secretary in John Howard's Federal Government. Margaret taught in developing countries and is now living in Washington, Christina is an educational publisher, Duncan is an information technology specialist, and Lachlan works with the Deutsche Bank.

In all six children, and among his grandchildren, the legacy of Jim Cameron lives on. His influence is evident in the careers they have chosen, the personal interests they have, the capabilities they display and their very personalities. Family was a passion with Jim, and his pride in his extended family was a great joy that he carried with him throughout his life. It is with sincere regret that I pass on my condolences and those of my colleagues in the Liberal Party and the National Party to Jim Cameron's family. We will all miss him.

**Ms ALLAN** (Wentworthville) [7.46 p.m.]: I want to speak fairly briefly to this condolence motion. I did not serve in the Parliament during the time that Jim Cameron was a member of this Chamber, but I must recommend for compulsory reading Tony Abbott's excellent obituary in the *Australian*, which I am sure many honourable members have read. It is a fabulous piece. I notice that the years that Jim Cameron served in this place were certainly formative years for me in terms of my political perceptions. I suppose Jim Cameron represented the devil incarnate for me, as I was developing politically. It is interesting how, in politics, we change our views. Our views evolve and our attitudes certainly evolve. As a member of Parramatta City Council I learned that one should have respect for one's political opponents when one actually meets, debates and talks with them. I certainly did not develop that relationship with Jim. In fact, when I was a young Labor Party firebrand I probably loathed and detested him—but those were the old days. I have mellowed considerably since then.

However, I did see Jim on many occasions around this place. In those subsequent years, particularly when he was a member of the Legislative Council and a lobbyist for the Law Society of New South Wales, he was certainly very visible in this place. I was well aware that he was around. I do, of course, have an association with one of his sons, Ross Cameron, whom I am delighted to see in the gallery with members of his family. Ross is the Federal member for Parramatta, one of the Federal seats that overlaps my electorate. I want to take this opportunity to express my condolences, particularly to Ross and the other members of the family, some of whom I have probably seen at polling booths on election days.

I appreciated the comments made by Tony Abbott in the obituary when he referred to the fact that Jim Cameron probably saw his family as his most outstanding achievement. The Leader of the Opposition has referred to the relationship with Jim's wife, Helen, and their six children, and to their success with their family. Ross has certainly been a great warrior for the Liberal Party in the Federal electorate of Parramatta. He has not only taken the seat from the Australian Labor Party but has continued to deny the Labor Party a return to that seat.

The electorate of Northcott, which Jim Cameron represented as local member, at various times of its composition was very close to my electorate. I do not want any more of that area in my electorate, but some suburbs, particularly around North Rocks, are very close, in fact, adjacent to my electorate. Many people in those areas would be well aware of Jim Cameron's public service. Of course, Jim Cameron was a former Speaker of this Chamber. I looked at some of the lengthy pronouncements that he made when he was Speaker. It is not surprising, because of his background, that many of his rulings related to legal issues. He took a great interest in the relationship of this Chamber to the legal system as a whole.

One ruling in particular would give a great deal of encouragement to the current Opposition, or to any Opposition. I am sure that former Speaker Rozzoli will also speak to this debate. Jim Cameron as Speaker made a profound comment on sub judice, which is not in vogue at the present time. In one of his pronouncements on the subject he made it quite clear that it is reasonable for us as a Parliament to discuss many of the issues that in more recent times are immediately banished from the House because they are sub judice and before another Chamber. In relation to sub judice Speaker Cameron ruled:

... Parliament must retain its standing as the highest tribunal in the land and cannot afford to let itself be muzzled concerning important issues ...

The honourable member for Epping would think that was a delightful ruling, but fortunately it is not applied these days. This evening I am entertaining a group of people, including the Chairman of Parramatta Leagues Club, Alan Overton. Alan has asked me to pass on his sympathy. I do so and I express my sincere condolences to Jim's family.

**Mr SOURIS** (Upper Hunter—Leader of the National Party) [7.52 p.m.]: I join with the previous speakers in paying tribute to the late Jim Cameron, the Liberal Party member for Northcott from 1968 to 1981 and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly from 1973 to 1976. Jim Cameron was elected on four occasions until 1981. During that time he was, as I said, Speaker of this great Parliament from 1973 until 1976 in recognition of his superior debating skills and his knowledge of standing orders and in-House strategies. His name is emblazoned in the Chamber just below the upper gallery. Jim Cameron came to politics as a staffer under Liberal Party General Secretary John Carrick, then as speechwriter to Opposition Leader Pat Morton, and then as speechwriter to the then Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, Bob Askin, who went on to become one of the State's most successful Liberal Party Premiers, in partnership with National Party Leader and Deputy Premier Charles Cutler.

Prior to entering Parliament Jim Cameron practised as a lawyer, having become an articled clerk in 1961 and completed his Bachelor of Laws at the University of Sydney. He became active in Liberal Party politics in the 1960s, becoming a member of the Liberal Party State Executive in 1967 and also a member of the party's Federal council. Jim Cameron was Deputy Leader and acting Opposition Leader in 1980 and 1981. He was also shadow Attorney General during that time. He resigned from this Chamber in 1983. In 1984 he was elected to the Legislative Council on a Call to Australia ticket, beginning a 12-year term in February 1984. A major heart attack forced Jim Cameron into retirement in October 1984. Jim Cameron's eloquence was legendary, his command of English was impressive and his speeches inevitably attracted a wide audience. On behalf of the National Party I extend our sympathies to Jim Cameron's family and friends, to his wife, Helen, to Jock, Ross, Christina and Lachlan, who are in the gallery tonight, and to Duncan and Margaret.

**Mr O'FARRELL** (Ku-ring-gai—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [7.54 p.m.]: I quote:

... a large part of my motivation for being in politics is directed towards the preservation of western civilization, the preservation of its strengths, holding secure the tremendous treasure house which we have taken from our predecessors, in terms of those basic concepts which Western civilization and Western civilization alone has made work. I am thinking, of course, of freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion and freedom of association. I am thinking of basic concepts like our ballot-box democracy, of legal concepts like the onus of proof lying upon the prosecution, and of the jury system. I am thinking of all these matters which are inbuilt in our civilization and constitute so vividly and forcefully its strength.

There can be few maiden speeches so broad in sweep, so high in aim, so fundamental to our being today as was delivered by James Alexander Cameron in this place on 14 August 1968. I acknowledge in front of the Cameron family that unlike Jim I will not enter this debate without notes. Jim Cameron would not have approved of the modern practice in this House of members reading speeches and referring to copious notes. However, in front of four great orators and the mother of six great orators, I did put down some notes. I join the House in expressing condolences to the Cameron family as a former local member of the electorate that Jim Cameron represented in this Chamber. Jim Cameron was elected on six occasions as the member for Northcott. As I have said in this House previously, the electorate was named after General Sir John Northcott, who was not only a former Governor of New South Wales but the first Australian-born person to occupy a State vice-regal position in this country.

Jim represented Northcott with distinction from the first election after the seat was created on 24 February 1968 until he left to join another Chamber on 5 March 1984. I know from my time as the member for Northcott that many people remember Jim's activities and also Helen's activities within the Northcott electorate. I confess that my wife was overawed by the role that Helen paid in supporting Jim Cameron as the member for Northcott. One of the pieces of advice that Judy Baird gave Rosemary O'Farrell was not to fall into Helen's habit of taking evening supper to branch meetings. We quickly delegated that task to the branches themselves. The electorate of Northcott, during its entire existence, was represented by three members in this place—Jim Cameron, Bruce Baird and me—until the electorate was abolished. Interestingly, all three members served their party as Deputy Leader.

I also acknowledge that if I were not the present member, Northcott could have been represented in this Chamber by one of Jim's sons. I know that Jock considered running for preselection when Bruce Baird announced his retirement, or it could have been Ross, whom I ultimately met in the 1995 preselection. I acknowledge that despite that event—which, after all, led Ross to a higher and more successful calling federally than he would have had in this Chamber—Jim was always happy to respond to my requests for advice. I

especially recall him visiting me at my former Pennant Hills home after the announcement that the electorate of Northcott had been abolished. Helen drove Jim down from the Central Coast and left him at my home while she went shopping or visiting family. Jim gave me sound advice and support on my progress towards the neighbouring seat of Ku-ring-gai, which I now represent in this Chamber. Jim owed me nothing. I won preselection over one of the Cameron clan, so he had good reason to owe me nothing. But he was prepared to help because he saw it as being in the best interest of the party.

Jim Cameron was a Liberal Party supporter all his life, his departure in the mid-1980s from the party notwithstanding. Prime Minister John Howard told those who gathered across the road at the thanksgiving service for Jim Cameron that "He may have resigned, but he never left the Liberal Party". I believe it was Ross who reminded us that Jim Cameron said at the time "It's not me that's moved". Thankfully, the test of that was that he later rejoined the party, when perhaps it had gained a bit more balance. Jim Cameron worked for the Liberal Party from March 1948 until December 1959 before a period at the Sydney bar. Whilst employed by the party he served as its staff officer to this place working, as other speakers have said, for two of its leaders, Pat Morton and Robert Askin.

Jim was a strong supporter and associate of the party's legendary General Secretary, John Carrick, later a New South Wales Senator, Federal Cabinet Minister and Senate Leader. Jim became a firm friend of the Prime Minister. John Howard recalled at the thanksgiving service that he first met Jim Cameron when they went to law school together in 1957. Jim Cameron helped hone John Howard's debating skills. As the Prime Minister admitted, Jim honed John Howard's skills by defeating him tirelessly and endlessly in debates they had at university together.

Jim was a successful State member of Parliament. He was a successful member of this Chamber. I think one of the missed opportunities in Jim's life was that he never had the chance to serve in a ministry in this place. There were all sorts of suggestions put around as to why Askin did not honour Jim with preferment to the ministry. There were issues about jealousies and rivalries within the Liberal Party. The former Speaker in this place and member for Hawkesbury says that it is a much higher honour to be Speaker of this place. I defer to such wisdom. But I am certain that, had Jim Cameron been given control of a ministry, his legacy to this State would have been vastly more significant. The contribution that he has made is tremendous, but I just wish he had had the opportunity to bring his energies and values to one of the portfolios in this State.

I might say that when Jim Cameron was elected Speaker in 1973 he said something that I would urge Mr Deputy-Speaker to pass on to the current Speaker. He said:

Above all, I pledge to you that I will work jealously to defend the ancient freedoms and privileges of members wherever they sit.

No higher ideal can a Speaker have, and long live the day that that sort of ideal returns to this Chamber. While Jim Cameron was a successful member of this Parliament, his career was cut short by ill health. It is a matter of record that Jim Cameron was the only person in this Parliament who voted against organ transplant legislation, and that he was the first member of any Parliament to benefit from such legislation. It is interesting that he was elected to the upper House in 1984 to serve a 12-year term. That term, had it continued without interruption, would have kept him in this House until 1996, after I became a member of this place.

Jim's illness has been commented upon. I have heard it said that in part the illness was due to the fact that Jim worked his heart out for the Liberal Party. To some extent, I think that is an acknowledgment of the contribution that he made. I am grateful that the operation was a success and that he led a productive life for the next 18 years in the company of his family and for the benefit not just of the Liberal Party but the wider community. After Jim's return to the party he sought preselection for a number of Federal seats, although without success. But where he failed, his son Ross succeeded. Ross's successes in 1996, 1998 and 2001 rekindled Jim's passion for politics. Ross attested to this fact at the thanksgiving service when he talked about his daily conversations with his father about not only his progress but matters in Federal Parliament generally.

My last memory of Jim Cameron is of his arrival at the December State Council meeting in Parramatta, where the New South Wales Liberal Party was paying tribute to John Howard's stunning third election victory in a seat represented by Ross Cameron. Ross won that election despite an extremely adverse redistribution and despite an enormous and determined effort by the Sussex Street headquarters of the Labor Party. I recall saying to Helen that it was good to see Jim there, though he was clearly not well. Helen responded that she could not have kept him away. Jim's political career ended too early, as did his life, but there is no doubt that as a lifelong Liberal Party supporter his life ended appropriately on a very high note for the Federal Liberal Party and his friend John Howard, who leads us nationally.

My wife and I attended Jim's moving thanksgiving service. I want to place on record what a marvellous contribution was made to the thanksgiving service by the Redeemer Baptist Church choir. If ever there was an occasion when music lifted souls and cheered spirits it was at that service, and I offer my congratulations. But I want particularly to take up John Howard's words at the service. In eulogising Jim Cameron, John Howard said:

There can be no better testimony to any person than the tributes we have just heard from Jim and Helen's six children.

The verbal skills of the Cameron offspring are legendary. And why wouldn't they be? They were trained by a master.. A former member of this Chamber with whom I have some association, Bruce Cowan, served in this place with Jim Cameron. Bruce reminded me after Jim's death that, before Jim's elevation to the Speakership, when Jim Cameron spoke in this place people came down to listen to him. That is a long way from the direction in which most speeches drive people today; they are normally driven in the opposite direction. That is a tribute to the sort of legendary oratory to which the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the National Party have paid tribute tonight.

So it is not surprising that the Cameron children, from Jock to Lachlan, paid such outstanding tributes to their father. Two things were clear to me from their comments at the thanksgiving service. One was obvious. That is that it is not easy being the children of a politician who, in the Prime Minister's words, had "an uncompromising will to argue what he believed in regardless of the consequences." The second was less obvious to those of us who are not members of the family. That is that each of Jim's children talked of his enormous capacity for love and forgiveness. While critics may have seen Jim Cameron as inflexible and unyielding, those who knew him best spoke of a man who exhibited unconditional love, was the first to embrace others, and regarded life as too short to hold grudges. It was a great tribute to a great man from those whom he and Helen had given life to and raised.

Jim Cameron commenced his maiden speech in the Legislative Council, when he moved to that Chamber in 1984 for a six-month period, by quoting Disraeli's comment after his unsuccessful maiden speech in the British House of Commons on 7 December 1837. Disraeli said:

Though I sit down now, the time will come when you will hear me.

Throughout his life James Alexander Cameron was a vociferous supporter of what he termed "the preservation of the basic concepts and strengths of western civilisation". He did so from an unapologetically moral and value-based perspective. He may not always have been heard, he may often have been misunderstood, he may frequently have been vilified for his beliefs, but his words, and their fundamental correctness will continue to be heard just as Disraeli's speeches are remembered. On behalf of my family and my wife, I extend condolences to Helen, present in the gallery, who, in the words of one of her daughters at Jim's funeral, was his "anchor for faith and life", and to their children Jock, Ross, Christina and Lachlan, who are here this evening, and to Margaret and Duncan and their families.

**Mr TINK** (Epping) [8.06 p.m.]: I first came to know Jim Cameron, in a fairly remote sense, back in the early 1970s, when working as a summer clerk in the Premier's Department. Through visiting this place in a very menial capacity to deliver mail and suchlike I learnt the run of the Parliament. The building was very different then. In the mid-1980s none of the construction works at the back of these precincts had been commenced. The building was very much as it had been for probably 90 years. For members it was a rabbit warren, and everyone had to live and work close together in every sense of the word.

I came into that environment as one of the most minor functionaries possible. From my perspective, the Speaker was remote, austere but well respected. I have come to understand why only tonight. I turn to a ruling a ruling that I found earlier, the same ruling referred to by the honourable member for Wentworthville. I will quote that ruling in full, because I would like to think that one day this Parliament will return to observance of that ruling in relation to the sub judice rule:

So far as the application of the rule is concerned Parliament must retain its standing as the highest tribunal in the land and cannot afford to let itself be muzzled concerning important issues affecting the whole community whilst these issues are being discussed by subordinate tribunals and attracting wide ranging discussions in the news media.

Anybody who asserts that a matter ought not be discussed because it is sub judice must carry the onus of showing that substantial damage will flow from the matter being discussed, and, in addition, that the precise matter sought to be discussed is identical with the issue before the court.

With great respect, Mr Speaker, that is a very fine ruling.

**Mr SPEAKER:** I agree with you.

**Mr TINK:** Let us pay respect to Jim Cameron and follow a ruling that has gained bipartisan support. It was an unusual ruling for a Speaker to make in a Parliament controlled by the Executive Government of the day. It was not until today that I fully understood the significance of Jim Cameron's role as Speaker. Only a Speaker of significance could make such a spot-on ruling in the formidable Askin-Lewis period of Executive Government. I read from a clipping from the *Sun-Herald* of October 1984 on Jim's retirement:

Askin saw problems and made him Speaker.

"It was a great failure that I was lured by Bob Askin's inducement to accept the Speakership", Cameron said. "If I just held out I would have been a Minister in a short time. In Cabinet I would have been influential and effective. But the one thing the Speaker can't do is speak. I had to watch the Liberal Party become rudderless on explosive moral issues."

With great respect to Jim, he undersold himself in his role as Speaker. I can do no better than quote that superb ruling, which we should hark back to. Although I did not agree with many of Jim's views, I believe he had a far greater influence on the thoughts and ideas of the Liberal Party than many party members who have served as Ministers at any level of government. Jim need not have been concerned about a lack of influence because he accepted the Speakership and could not become a Minister.

For years after those early days I attended to State Council meetings, and we would all take a deep breath when we heard the words, "Jim Cameron, Cheltenham branch". Up he would get. I agree with the Premier that almost every performance by Jim Cameron was extraordinary and memorable. Towards the end Jim's physical problems became more obvious, but whenever he rose to speak he had the genuine respect and affection of everyone in the room. Many of his traditional enemies on the left held him in absolute and genuine affection, and that became very obvious to me when he took the floor at State Council.

He also took the floor at many Cheltenham branch meetings, a branch that I inherited from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition after the 1999 redistribution. I remember well the many lively discussions at the little Cheltenham Croquet Club building to the side of the main clubhouse. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition mentioned Jim's last appearance at State Council. I was astonished that, despite his failing physical health, Jim made the trip from the Central Coast time after time to take part in those branch meetings. He always made contributions, and I always gained from them.

Ross and I share the Carlingford branch. Ross, who is now the Federal member for Parramatta, shows many of the attributes of his father, and some I will never forget. As Jim was preparing to speak he would move his jaw and mouthline, a bit like a champion athlete limbering up. Jim would limber up for the debate. You knew that this was going to be something, that a champion was about to speak. I attend the Carlingford branch meetings and have noticed that Ross has exactly the same mannerism. He is not a bad speaker, either. He certainly leaves me in his wake.

My first electorate secretary, Sonia Whitlock, worked with Jim for many years. We swapped our Jim Cameron stories with great affection. I support the comments of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition about the recent service across the road. I was utterly astonished and will never forget it. Each of Jim's children got up to speak about him. I have never seen anything like it. That service was truly an event where listeners could truly understand the man by listening to those who spoke about him and who contributed on Helen's behalf. I will remember the Cameron men, and I will remember the story about how they had to stand on the stairwell and perform. Jim would mark them and provide all sorts of critical comments. All I can say is this: even though the Cheltenham Croquet Club does not have a stairwell, I know exactly what it feels like. To a great character, one of the outstanding characters of this Parliament and public life in the New South Wales Liberal Party, I pay my respects.

**Mr KERR** (Cronulla) [8.16 p.m.]: The Premier's comments earlier about Jim Cameron were correct. He was certainly right when he said that I would remember Peter Crawford, a former member, with great affection. The Premier mentioned that Jim Cameron was probably the person in this Parliament most like Enoch Powell—I would assume in breadth and depth of intellect. But Jim Cameron had many similarities with a number of people who served in the House of Commons with Enoch Powell in the 1950s and 1960s. In his recent biography on Churchill, Roy Jenkins, a former Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Home Secretary, wrote that Churchill was too great a man to be imprisoned by the circumstances of his birth. The same could be said of Jim Cameron. Despite his humble origins he went on to great critical and intellectual achievements. It was in his celebrated 1937 book the *Case for Conservatism* that Quentin Hogg declared:



Conservatives do not believe that political struggle is the most important thing in life. The simplest among them prefer fox-hunting—the wisest religion.

Jim Cameron was exceedingly wise because the political struggle came a long way behind religion and family in his values. Jim was a great scholar. Everyone who has read his contributions in *Hansard* and the *Public Platform* would recognise his scholarship. He also had a similarity to Harold Macmillan, who was always conscious of the constant tension between what he described to as the gownman, or scholar, and the swordsman. It is impossible to become a Prime Minister or the head of any elected government without being a swordsman. When Macmillan became Prime Minister he wrote:

There was a certain atmosphere of unreality and even absurdity. Perhaps because I had spent so many of my hours of my life in reading, and since my whole education had been based on the old learning, I was at any rate on one side of my nature and training what has been called "a gown man": a product of a system which was intended to supply in the Middle Ages "clerks" as priests and administrators.

I think the mantle of scholar would resonate in Jim Cameron's life, but anybody who was present in this Chamber or in the Legislative Council during the time that Jim Cameron was a member would also acknowledge Jim's dexterity with the sword during debate. Earlier the honourable member for Epping referred to Jim's contribution as Speaker and to his rulings that basically enshrined the principles of parliamentary practice in the Westminster system and currently have their place as precedents of the Chair. Jim Cameron's contribution really came through when, during the thanksgiving service for him, his most qualified critics, his sons and daughters, spoke about their experience of him as their father. Despite the difficulties that each had during Jim's fatherhood, all of his children returned to him the unconditional love that he gave to them—the highest tribute that anyone can pay a human being. They loved him. Jim was a man who gave considerable service to the State, and all honourable members can be proud that Jim Cameron served in this Chamber.

**Mr ROZZOLI** (Hawkesbury) [8.21 p.m.]: As one of the members of this House who served with Jim Cameron throughout the majority of the time he served in this Parliament, I add my condolences to Helen and other members of the Cameron family who are present in the Chamber. Jim and I served together for 10 years in this Parliament. I first met Jim Cameron in the late Harry Jago's lounge room on Boxing Day in 1972, when, under the whip of Premier Bob Askin, Jim had assembled all members of the parliamentary party in an effort to win what was described at that stage as the unwinnable fight, namely, the by-election for the Hawkesbury electorate. Rightly or wrongly, the Liberal Party had preselected a callow youth who in the estimation of many people probably lacked the essential wherewithal to win the contest. Jim attended with other colleagues, and from that day onwards he and I forged a remarkable bond. It is interesting in life that the strongest bonds come not from the good times but from the bad times, adversity and struggle.

Following my election to Parliament, despite all the contrary predictions of the pundits, I joined Jim in what was then known as the Ministerial Room, which was not very far from the Chamber. Certainly the vibes of that room would affect you, Mr Speaker, as they affected me, because the Ministerial Room was on the site of the current Speaker's Chambers. In those days members of Parliament shared offices, and there were six members in that office. That was actually quite a generous apportionment because I can remember tales being told of the Opposition's common room, which was located on the far side of what is now known as Speaker's Square, having up to 14 Opposition members crammed inside it.

We had only six members in our office but it was also the general Government common room, where experiences were shared. Jim was always very much in the forefront of making contributions on those occasions. Another very subtle reason for having all the young bloods, as they were referred to in those days—although it is hard to imagine Jim being described as a young blood, that was pretty much what he was at that time—was the proximity of our room to the Chamber. Whenever a quorum was called, we were always the first to answer the call because we merely had to walk across the corridor to the Chamber, but if we did not turn up we were really in trouble.

At that stage I learned from Jim a very good technique for dealing with second-class mail. In those days considerable second-class mail poured into parliamentary offices, as it still does. Jim had a table measuring five feet in length and three feet in width, on which he used to place all his second-class mail, pending the opportunity to look at it. When the pile was so high that some of it fell on the floor, he put the mail from the floor into a wastepaper bin, thereby reducing the pile to one that could again hold the second-class mail that arrived over the next few months. That example stuck with me because it was a very practical way of dealing with the problem, and to some extent it showed Jim's great sense of humour in operating his filing system.

My next experience of Jim was when he was suddenly elevated to the position of Speaker. As a member who has had the experience of serving as Speaker I believe—and I hope I am correct in saying this on your behalf also, Mr Speaker—the role of Speaker is the highest parliamentary office. It is not the highest Government office, but it is the highest parliamentary office. Although I know that Jim would probably have preferred to have been on the floor of the Chamber with a portfolio, he nonetheless acquitted himself in the role of Speaker with great distinction. As has been pointed out during references to Speaker's rulings during this debate, Jim had a great appreciation of the finer points of the Westminster tradition. In common with most Speakers, Jim attended seminars in England that often featured Speakers and discussion of the role of Speakers. Jim brought back wisdom from the House of Commons that he subsequently applied in the discharge of his duties in this House. Jim was a very fair Speaker and, as all Speakers do, struggled with the constant tussle that occurs between the Government and the Opposition.

There would be very few Speakers who do not commence their occupancy of the Chair without all the good motives and without an understanding of the impartiality that is required from a Speaker. Stresses that are placed on Speakers are particularly great and neither the Government nor the Opposition gives any quarter. If the Speaker happens to be a victim of the tussle across the floor of the Chamber—as witnessed recently in the Federal Parliament—then so be it; the Speaker is a victim of the system. It takes considerable courage and determination to try to withstand such pressures and uphold the Westminster traditions about which Jim felt so strongly.

The reference to Jim's sub judice ruling is interesting because his application of the rule is the correct approach to the sub judice issue. Like Jim, I believe that this Chamber has sovereign authority to discuss all matters and that there needs to be a great and powerful reason why it should be prevented from doing so. In previous times there were actually many more debates about the application of the sub judice rule than occur now. Mr Speaker, you are being fairly lightly treated so far as the application of the sub judice rule is concerned.

**Mr SPEAKER:** I am.

**Mr ROZZOLI:** It is usually the case that during the application of the sub judice rule there is very great division between the two sides of the Chamber. It is not always the Government who invokes the sub judice rule. If a member of the Opposition happens to be somehow or other bound up in the subject matter, then the Opposition will strongly defend its member and seek to invoke the sub judice rule. On a number of occasions during Jim's speakership he was called upon to rule on the application of the sub judice rule. I am sure that on each of those occasions Jim endeavoured to give the House the greatest flexibility possible. I remember Jim as a fair and honourable Speaker. He carried on very well in the tradition established by Sir Kevin Ellis, who was probably one of the greatest Speakers that this Parliament has ever had and who was noted for the wisdom of his rulings. Jim was also very conscious of the dignity of the office of Speaker and carried out the role of the first officer of the Parliament with great distinction.

Jim faced what I have faced but what not every Speaker faces: having left the office of Speaker he remained as a member of Parliament. That is not, I assure the House, an easy transition. Honourable members may think it does not really mean very much, that you just get on with business as usual. But it is a difficult transition from being in that illustrious chair to suddenly being one of the backbenchers in opposition. I recall another Speaker of this House, Speaker Kelly, who was defeated in the 1988 election, saying to me that at least he got the second prize. He said that the first prize would have been to win his seat and still be the Speaker, but in fact he thought it was better to have lost because he could not comprehend coming back here as a backbencher after having been Speaker for as long as he had been, which was 12 years. He perceived that as being a very difficult task.

Jim handled that transition remarkably well. Those of us who were here in those days always enjoyed his contributions to debate. I am not sure that we always agreed with them or with his particular slant, but one of the great things about debate in this Chamber is that it is not necessary for us to always agree. It is obvious that there may be disagreements across the Chamber, but even that is not always the case. I can recall occasions on which members on the other side of the House have said to me, "I wish I could have made a speech like that." It is often the case that we share a common view across the Chamber. We also on occasions have differing views with our own colleagues.

So be it. Jim always upheld the great tradition of parliamentary debate: that you speak from the heart about what you believe in and on behalf of the constituency you represent. Because I am so interested in the parliamentary process I have written a number of papers in which I have deplored the decline in the capacity of members of Parliament to speak their minds on issues of great moment, and to express those views in the way in which they wish to express them.

Nothing deterred Jim Cameron from expressing the views that he held so strongly. As other speakers have said, Jim was always interesting to listen to because of his command of the English language and his delivery—in contrast to some members, both then and today, who put you to sleep because they lose the thread of what they are saying or do not punctuate their speeches to provide any measure of interest. Jim never failed to command attention because he was capable of delivering a speech in an interesting and intelligent way, and invariably speaking about intelligent matters.

It was a sad day in 1983 when Jim decided he would leave the Liberal Party, and I believe Parliament was the poorer for his going. I understand the reason he left when he did, and the action he took, but I believe to this day that if he had been able to hold on a bit longer and grapple with the problems that beset him at the time, he would in the ensuing years have made a further great contribution to the Liberal Party and to the New South Wales Parliament. To Helen and to the family I extend my condolences. I have suffered the loss of a good friend and colleague whom I appreciated and respected, and whose memory and example will be with me as long as I remain a member of this Parliament.

**Mr COLLINS** (Willoughby) [8.33 p.m.]: It is a particular pleasure to follow the honourable member for Hawkesbury as the other Liberal in this Chamber who briefly served alongside Jim Cameron. I was first elected to the New South Wales Parliament in 1981. My memory of Jim, though, goes back at least a decade earlier. I, too, remember that first campaign of the honourable member for Hawkesbury, which was really the prototype environmental campaign when the environment was a brand-new, fresh, green issue in this State and in State politics.

My memory of Jim Cameron probably goes back to the University of Sydney Law School, where he lectured and where I was a student. Of course, he and I also worked together for the New South Wales Division of the Liberal Party, then based in a creaky, damp basement in Ash Street. Indeed, it was there that I saw Jim Cameron contest preselection. It may not have been the first time he contested preselection, and I think it was probably for the Federal electorate of Parramatta, against, I suspect, Nigel Bowen, who, of course, went on to serve this country as a very distinguished Federal Attorney-General and after whom a Federal Court building has been named.

Jim Cameron, on that occasion in that dank, dusty basement filled with political memorabilia even then, delivered what, to me, is probably the most inspiring speech I have heard from any New South Wales politician. I do not say that gratuitously. I have seen many, many great performances in this Chamber and elsewhere, but the speech that Jim Cameron gave was philosophical. It was a deep personal insight into political philosophy and for that reason it was rare. All too rarely in this place or on a campaign trail do we hear any attempt at political philosophy. Jim Cameron made that attempt and made it repeatedly. He was not always right, but he was invariably eloquent, articulate and insightful.

The next cameo of Jim was when I was a member of the New South Wales Parliamentary Press Gallery. After working for the Liberal Party I had been fortunate to be selected as a specialist trainee in public affairs television and became a researcher for *This Day Tonight* and *Four Corners*. I did a story here while he was Speaker. Indeed, as I sit on the back bench, where you have time to observe these things, I note from the plaque on the wall that Jim Cameron was Speaker from 1973 to 1976. I am reminded of the time when I interviewed him about the inadequacy of the sitting days of this Parliament. Of course, they were halcyon days. That was the golden era of this Parliament so far as sitting days are concerned because, with the exception of this pre-election year, in which I believe we will sit for 66 days—

**Mr R. H. L. Smith:** Including Fridays.

**Mr COLLINS:** Which now includes Fridays—the number of days on which we usually sit, and the pattern of sitting days for the past 20 years, has been considerably less than it was then. I interviewed Jim and I recall—it seems to me now in hindsight that he would probably have regarded it as foresight—that he took some offence at the fact that I should uncover this low number of sitting days and that he as the Speaker had the job of trying to defend the Parliament. That was Jim as Speaker and me as a member of the press gallery. Our time together in the Chamber, which was from 1981 until he left the parliamentary Liberal Party, was all too brief.

I know that on the occasions I saw Jim during the past 20-odd years, the period that I have been a member of this Chamber, the thing that gave him the most singular satisfaction was his family. He was always devoted, first and foremost, to his family. The achievement that Ross gained for the family in winning Parramatta was a tribute to Jim as a father, and I believe it moved him enormously. As do all my colleagues, I congratulate Ross on his continued tenure of that difficult swinging seat and wish him well in the years ahead.

On a personal note, Jim really surprised me once. I forget the exact occasion or how it came about but it revolved around the fact that I had given each of my sons three first names. My second son is David James Cameron Collins. Jim said, "David James Cameron Collins. That's fascinating because the best man at my wedding was David Collins." He did not know, and I did not know at the time, that David Collins was my uncle. I forget the association, it may have been a northern New South Wales association, but that David Collins was an Associate Professor of Veterinary Physiology at the University of Sydney. Both of us were amazed by that connection. So too is my son, David James Cameron Collins, who brings all those names together. I pay tribute to Jim Cameron for his intelligence, his insight, his philosophy, his deep Christian beliefs, his love of his family, his wit and his humour. Jim Cameron may have made mistakes but, above all, he was a tremendous human being. I pay tribute to him and to the members of his family who are present in the gallery.

**Mr RICHARDSON** (The Hills) [8.41 p.m.]: I pay tribute to the late Jim Cameron, whom I had the pleasure of knowing over a substantial period of time. Jim Cameron was one of the great characters in the Liberal Party. As we have heard, he was a man of great tenacity and firm conviction. Many honourable members have already attested to his facility with the English language. Right now I can hear that great voice with its perfect diction and intonation rolling across the floor of State Council. I am sure that the honourable member for Willoughby and the honourable member for Hawkesbury remember it rolling across this Chamber—from the Speaker's chair in the case of the honourable member for Hawkesbury.

Jim Cameron was never one to shirk an unpopular cause. I am sure that many honourable members agree that in State Council Jim Cameron had the capacity to turn a debate simply on the strength of his oratory. Sometimes he might have pursued a totally unpopular cause or taken a totally unpopular line, yet his command of the English language was such and his thought processes were so clear that he was capable of turning a debate. Few people in politics today have that gift. Jim Cameron was my State member when I moved from Marsfield to Beecroft in 1979. He had been the State member for that area since 1968 and he remained the State member until 1984. I mean no disrespect to his memory when I say that Jim is remembered more for his ideas, philosophy and oratory than he is for grappling with the minutiae of local politics.

My predecessor, the late Fred Caterson—a great friend of Jim's—said as much to me. He then looked at me straight in the eye and he said, "Ah, but he is a fantastic orator", which was true. One could sense the admiration in Fred's voice when he said that. Jim Cameron was always the big picture man. We heard in debate on this condolence motion some of the words that he used in his maiden speech. I will not repeat all of them, but he regarded his motivation for being in politics as:

... the preservation of western civilization, the preservation of its strengths, holding secure the tremendous treasure house which we have taken from our predecessors, in terms of those basic concepts which Western civilization and Western civilization alone has made work.

These days one simply does not hear sentiments like those expressed in maiden speeches or first speeches.

**Mr O'Farrell:** In maiden speeches.

**Mr RICHARDSON:** In Jim's case it was certainly a maiden speech and not a first speech. Jim might not have achieved those lofty ideals. I am pleased to be able to say that western civilisation has not yet disappeared. When Jim quoted in that maiden speech from a statement made by Professor Burnham he suggested that western civilisation might be on the brink of an abyss. I do not think that he single-handedly saved western civilisation, but he certainly did his bit to preserve what he regarded as being important. Earlier I mentioned Jim's conviction. His conviction was so strong that, as a staunch Presbyterian, he was interviewed in 1970 by the *Catholic Weekly*. I think such things were fairly unprecedented in 1970. In that article the author wrote:

But at present he is the most articulate spokesman for the old values and his strong criticisms of the permissive society, pornography and other subjects have drawn him more and more into the public eye.

The article continues:

Yet he believes man is frail, vulnerable, responsive to stimulation, and while capable of glory, cannot achieve this by giving free play to his personality, but by disciplining it.

Lack of self-discipline and internal moral decay have destroyed numerous civilisations and societies.

That theme is again referred to. Jim Cameron maintained those deep beliefs throughout his life. Despite his strong support for the Liberal Party, those beliefs led him briefly to leave the Liberal Party in 1984 and become a member of Fred Nile's party in the upper House for only a few months until he suffered a heart attack. I was interested to read in one of his contributions in the upper House that he had apparently suffered from rheumatic fever at the age of 13 and that had damaged a couple of valves in his heart. I suspect that doctors at that time really did not think that he would live to make old bones, but he did do so. As Ross noted at his father's funeral, during his term in the upper House he was the only member to have voted against the human tissue bill, which provided for heart transplants, yet he ultimately became Australia's oldest living heart transplant recipient.

It could be said that sometimes his principles were mildly compromised, but no-one could ever have called him untrue to his convictions and nobody could ever have described him as being boring. When he left the Parliament in 1984 he proclaimed, yet again, his belief in the four Rs—and I note that the Minister for Education and Training is in the Chamber. For Jim Cameron those four Rs were: renewal, reformation, revival and revitalisation. The Minister might take note of the four Rs as they could be useful when he makes a speech at one of the schools in this State. I was interested to read another example of Jim Cameron's oratory in his final speech in the upper House. He said:

... I want to say that this is by no means a resignation from the fray. I am like that bull that is always pawing the sawdust in the arena. I am not forsaking the fray. I am a great adherent of a great Labor parliamentarian—it was J. T. Lang, or the early days of William Morris Hughes—who said, "When in political difficulty, above all never complain, never explain"—I found that one a bit hard to understand—"but above all, never resign".

Mr Speaker, I am sure that you have heard those words before. He continued:

That has been a watchword with me through my political career. But this is not a resignation from the fray. It is simply a change of place and a change of scene. The Lord has said to me: "You love the declamatory life, you love the rhetorical life, but that is the one thing that is to be denied you in the future. You are to avoid public meetings from public stages, where the adrenalin runs at its fiercest, and from now on you must adopt the less glamorous, less challenging, more painstaking matter of expressing the cause through words on paper rather than words spoken eyeball to eyeball.

As we know, Jim Cameron did not retire from public meetings. He may have retired from the New South Wales Parliament but, after he had accepted that heart transplant—I remember talking to him about it—he actually believed that it was God's will that he should have received the heart and that he should have gone on from strength to strength. He believed it was God's will that, because he had become Australia's oldest living heart transplant patient, he was destined to go into Federal Parliament. I am sure it was his greatest regret that he failed in that regard.

When Ross was first elected, I asked Jim how he felt and, for once, he was lost for words. He simply said, "I am a very proud father." I know that he felt that way right through to the end. Jim is gone now. He will be missed but he certainly will never be forgotten by people in this Chamber, by members of the Liberal Party and by those whose lives he has touched in one way or another. He was a great Australian and a man of great conviction. We may not see his like again. I express condolences to the members of his family. They have lost a father and a husband but they have certainly not lost the memory of him.

**Mr MERTON** (Baulkham Hills) [8.50 p.m.]: I first met Jim Cameron some time in the 1960s when I was—believe it or not—a very young articled law clerk in Parramatta. We needed a barrister for a fairly complicated tenancy case involving a protected tenant. Those with any memory will remember that those were highly technical matters. The barrister who had the brief, an extremely confident advocate who later became a Queen's Counsel and judge, said, "There are three people I recommend. On the top of the list is a fellow called Jim Cameron. I had a case against him last week and this bloke"—I can remember the words now—"was a real fighter, passionate, and someone who would impress the client." At that stage I thought that was important, because the client was a well-to-do, socially connected Parramatta identity.

On the following morning I met this Mr Cameron at Parramatta Court of Petty Sessions, as it was then known. To say that this fellow was a fighter was probably a great understatement. To a young clerk, this articulate barrister seemed almost unbelievable, with his command of the English language and knowledge of tenancy law. The magistrate had little option but to grant the client an order for possession of the premises. In fact, I believed at the time that Jim Cameron's powers of oratory and persuasion alone, if he knew nothing about the law, would have been sufficient to win the case. As many people have said and written recently, Jim Cameron, like Ross, was always keen to provoke responses from people by asking questions. About 30 seconds after he had met me he found out, in this order, that I had an association with the Salvation Army, I went to Fairfield High School and I lived with my parents. Then he asked, "Son, what kind of car do you drive?" I was a second-year articled law clerk earning about £6/10/- a week, \$13, and my response was the truth, "A 1930 Riley Sports Tourer. I bought it in pieces for \$50, Mr Cameron, and I took it home and put it together."

That hit the right note with Jim. He recalled that he had once owned a Jaguar Mark IV, which he had been forced to sell so that he could go to law school. More recently he had owned a 1955 Riley Pathfinder. So we were virtually blood brothers. On that basis our newly found friendship was cemented for life. The case finished at about 4.15 and I was about to farewell Jim when he asked, "By the way, what you doing tonight?" I thought it was a bit unusual, but Jim loved to ask people questions. As I said, Ross has obviously inherited that trait. My response was something like, "Mr Cameron, I have to work on the Riley because I think the magneto is not working properly. It is only running on three cylinders, which makes it very slow." He said, "Son, don't worry about the Riley. It will keep. You can work on it at the weekend. Why don't you come with me to a meeting at Parramatta Town Hall?" He had picked his mark. Being a young man of an inquisitive nature, I thought the Riley could wait. This bloke was persuasive; make no mistake. As I said, he persuaded the magistrate that his client should gain possession of the house from the protected tenant, which was very difficult.

**Mr O'Farrell:** Impossible.

**Mr MERTON:** That is right, except if you had Cameron on the job. I did not realise what I was getting into until I walked down Church Street side by side with Cameron to be literally mobbed by a frenzied crowd clutching banners and chanting "Yankee warmongers", "End the war" and "Bring back the troops". It was a Vietnam rally. Jim was to debate Australia's involvement in Vietnam with an equally passionate and articulate Francis James. Having successfully reached the town hall with the assistance of the Parramatta police, I walked down the aisle of the packed hall side by side with Cameron and sat in the front row. All this had happened in but a few hours, since I first met the man. My barrister friend had described this man as passionate and a real fighter, and he was dead right. The debate commenced and it was like a world title boxing fight. Round by round they exchanged points. Cameron showed no fear, dishing out responses to the audience, which I might add was substantially anti Vietnam and anti Australia's involvement—and within 10 minutes definitely anti Cameron.

I recall that a woman sitting in the front row interjected, screaming out to Jim, "Why don't you go and fight in Vietnam?" Jim, bracing himself, swept back his immaculately coiffured and generous head of hair and said, "Madam, I am uninsurable. No insurance company would take me on in war." Little did they know in those days about heart transplants and Dr Chang. The meeting seemed to go on for ages and when it ended I could not believe the experience. I was a young boy of 17 or 18, fresh from school, who had met a barrister at the local court and ended up sitting in the front row of a Vietnam rally with one of the protagonists. It was a big transition. I was relieved to get away from the chanting mob, crankstart the ancient Riley—it did not have a starter motor—and drive home.

This was only the second political meeting I had ever attended. I had been to a Menzies rally, where I heard the great man in action. He flourished in feeding off interjectors. I thought I had met the new Menzies after Jim Cameron's performance at Parramatta Town Hall that night. It had a great impact on me as a person just out of school. And I must admit that it still has. Jim's 16-year political career has been spoken of by other speakers tonight. I will not elaborate on it. It is a distinguished career. He was member for Northcott for many years, Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, and Speaker of this Chamber—a very notable and worthwhile role that you possess at present, Mr Speaker. He was also a member of Legislative Council. It is a fine record by any standard. There will be a permanent notation of his record in this Chamber forever.

Throughout Jim's life he did not depart from fundamental principles: courage, conviction and commitment. These principles, which he displayed in the 1960s Vietnam rally at Parramatta Town Hall, never left him throughout a political career that had its share of highs and lows. Throughout all these events Helen stood side by side with Jim and supported him. She supported Jim until the end. It has been reported that Jim proposed to Helen on a number of occasions before Helen realised that it was her destiny to enter into a lifelong partnership with J. A. Cameron. That partnership produced six children: Jock, Ross, Margaret, Christina, Duncan and Lachlan. They have produced 13 grandchildren and, if my information is correct—I apologise if it is not—another three are on the way, a worthy effort. Each of Jim's children has written a personal tribute to him. They make excellent reading. They come from the depths of the hearts of caring, fond children who have great memories of their father.

Life was not always easy in the Cameron household, because Jim was a man of principles. Often the principles he embraced were not the popular principles of the day. The family had to wear this. They wore it and they lived with it. In the end I think they would all say that on most occasions Jim was probably right. There is a common thread in each of the tributes. They refer to a man who had a set of beliefs to which he stayed true to

the end; a man who had the rare ability to strongly contest and at the same time to genuinely like his adversary; a man who liked people from all walks of life, such as the plumber who visited the house to fix the drain. For Jim his family were the riches of his life. A member of the family referred to a quote from a hero of Jim Cameron's, Winston Churchill, who said somewhat tongue in cheek, "I am prepared to meet my maker. Whether my maker is prepared for the great ordeal of meeting me is another matter." That is an apt description of Jim's life.

I believe that the last time I saw Jim Cameron was on the night of what we regard as the glorious Federal election victory in the seat of Parramatta. I recall it was at the Woolpack Hotel—ironically, some hundred yards away from the Parramatta Town Hall, the scene of our first meeting 40 years ago. Jim Cameron, a man of passion, conviction and courage, has left us. His legacy lives on—not only in the lives of the members of the Cameron family, but in the lasting influence he has made on the many people who knew him. His life's work is equally enshrined in the beliefs of the many thousands of Australians who share Jim's ideals and beliefs. I conclude with a verse from an old Salvation Army hymn. I ask that members substitute mentally for the word "flag" the things that Jim stood for: courage, conviction and commitment. I believe this verse sums up Jim's life:

They bid me choose an easier path,  
And seek a lighter cross;  
Thy bid me mingle with Heaven's gold  
A little of earth's dross;  
They bid me, but in vain, once more  
The world's illusions try;  
I cannot leave the dear old flag,  
'Twere better far to die

They say the fighting is too hard,  
My strength of small avail,  
When foes beset and friends are fled,  
My faith must surely fail...  
But, O how can I quit my post  
I cannot leave the dear old flag,  
'Twere better far to die.

Jim Cameron has gone, but his memory will live on. It is living in the Federal electorate of Parramatta, where Ross is doing a great job. It will live on in the individual members of the Cameron family. So I am very pleased to say: We miss you, Jim. You have a distinguished record, a record that few will be able to emulate. Helen, of course, was always a tower of strength. Helen always kept the home fires burning—and literally that was the situation. As a member of this Chamber, I am pleased to pay tribute to Jim Cameron.

*Members and officers of the House stood in their places.*

**Motion agreed to.**

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

### **Bills: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders**

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

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow the introduction forthwith and progress up to and including the Minister's second reading speech of the following bills, notice of which was given this day for tomorrow:

Conveyancing Legislation Amendment (e-Plan) Bill  
Motor Accidents Compensation Amendment (Terrorism) Bill  
Sydney Bethel Union Extension Amendment Bill  
Children (Detention Centres) Amendment Bill.

### **CONVEYANCING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (e-PLAN) BILL**

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

#### **Second Reading**

**Mr YEADON** (Granville—Minister for Information Technology, Minister for Energy, Minister for Forestry, and Minister for Western Sydney) [9.04 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

In 1979 this Parliament passed the Real Property (Computer Register) Amendment Act, which enabled New South Wales to introduce the first computerised land title registration system in Australia on 31 October 1983.

While title creation has been automated since 1983, the lodgment of subdivision and other plans in Land and Property Information New South Wales has remained a largely manual process. It requires a lodging party, who may be a private person but more often a solicitor or professional lodging agent, to attend the Sydney office of Land and Property Information and produce the plan and the associated documents.

The Conveyancing Legislation Amendment (e-Plan) Bill will formally establish the first Internet facility in Australia for the remote electronic lodgment of plans and associated instruments, for registration by the Registrar General. I must point out that electronic lodgment will not be compulsory. People will still be able to lodge their plans manually, if they so choose. To provide an understanding of electronic lodgment I will first outline the principal features of the proposed legislation. Then I will explain how the e-plan system is to operate in practice. The e-plan bill will amend the plan registration provisions of the Conveyancing Act 1919, the Real Property Act 1900, the Strata Schemes (Freehold Development) Act 1973, the Strata Schemes (Leasehold Development) Act 1986 and the Community Land Development Act 1989.

The amendment of the Conveyancing Act sets the pattern for the amendments that are to be made to the other Acts I mentioned. The bill inserts a new section 6A in the Conveyancing Act. This section authorises plans and accompanying instruments, such as section 88B instruments creating easements and covenants, to be lodged electronically. While documents accompanying an electronically lodged plan will normally be lodged electronically, there will be exceptions in the case of certificates of title or old system deeds, which are generally lodged by mortgagees. On occasions, court orders, statutory declarations and other prescribed documents will also be produced manually.

The new section 6A also provides for a special approved form for signatures that is to be used for both electronic and manual lodgments. This form must be signed by the surveyor, the local council representative, the landowner, the landowner's mortgagee or lessee and others to indicate their consent to the purpose of the plan. A further section to be included in the Conveyancing Act is section 195AA. This provision sets up the e-plan system. Under this system, a person can lodge plans and accompanying instruments electronically only if he or she is authorised to do so by the Registrar General. Approvals will be subject to conditions, and may be cancelled by the Registrar General.

The bill amends section 195H of the Conveyancing Act to allow the Registrar General to require the electronic lodging of a replacement plan, if a plan that was lodged electronically is to be amended after being registered. The bill includes a new section 196AB in the Conveyancing Act to allow the Registrar General to require production of a copy of an electronically lodged plan, or the originals of any electronically lodged documents, or the original approved form for signatures. The production may be required either before, or for a period after, a plan is registered. It is envisaged that this power will be used to ensure that the plan and instruments that are lodged are of the highest quality, and to check on any alleged irregularity in a plan or document.

The second last amendment to the Conveyancing Act is the inclusion of section 203A. This deals with the evidential value of an electronic plan or document. The section provides that a hard copy version of any plan or other document that is registered in electronic form has the same validity and effect as an original plan or document if the copy is issued by the Registrar-General. The final amendment to the Conveyancing Act involves the insertion of a validation clause in schedule 9 to the Act. The purpose of this amendment is to validate retrospectively the registration of certain proposed road acquisition plans, which were lodged with the Registrar General by the Roads and Traffic Authority, in order to test and develop the electronic plan lodgment system.

The amendments to the Real Property Act parallel those made to the Conveyancing Act which I have just outlined. They are particularly about authorising the electronic lodgment of delimitation plans. These are survey plans that are registered to establish the true boundaries of parcels in limited folios of the Torrens Register. The amendments proposed for the Strata Schemes (Freehold Development) Act 1973 and the Strata Schemes (Leasehold Development) Act 1986 also parallel those of the Conveyancing Act. However, there are two additional changes to the strata schemes legislation that I should mention.

The first of these changes repeals obsolete provisions that require the Registrar General to send copies of registered strata plans to various rating, taxing and valuing authorities. Since this information is now made available automatically under administrative arrangements, the legislative requirement is unnecessary. The second amendment to the strata legislation allows the Registrar General to apply the same presumptions of regularity to strata plans as he applies to deposited plans registered under the Conveyancing Act. Those



presumptions are, firstly, that a signature or consent given under a power of attorney has been authorised and, secondly, that a subdivision certificate that has been given by the local council has been duly endorsed. The last group of amendments to be made by the bill are to the Community Land Development Act 1989. Again, these changes simply parallel those in the Conveyancing Act. In the operation of the e-plan system, surveyors and solicitors will each have an important role to play, as they do now under the present land development and plan registration process.

Because surveyors are responsible for their plans and have the capacity to prepare subdivision and other plans in electronic format they are best placed to lodge plans electronically. However, before a surveyor or other person can lodge a plan electronically he or she must be approved by the Registrar General and obtain a user identification and password from the Registrar General. As is mostly the case now, solicitors will be responsible for obtaining the signatures and consents required on the approved form for signatures. They will also continue to have the task of preparing the instruments to accompany a plan, such as instruments creating easements, covenants and strata or community title by-laws.

The surveyor, or other authorised person, will scan the completed approved form for signatures and any accompanying instrument in a tagged image file format, called a TIFF file, and transmit them and the plan electronically to the Registrar General using a secure Internet facility. An on-line lodgment form is to be completed by the surveyor or other authorised person. When a plan is lodged, notice of the successful lodgement and the plan number, together with an invoice for the fees payable, will be forwarded by electronic means to the lodging party. The fees are to be paid within seven days by traditional means or electronic funds transfer. The certificate of title or old system deeds and any statutory declarations—for example, establishing adverse possession—must be lodged manually for connection to the plan. A plan cannot be registered without the production of these documents.

At lodgment, councils will be sent an electronic copy of a plan affecting land in their areas. This will enable councils to ensure that there have been no unauthorised changes to a plan after they have approved it. As has been the case since 1993, when a plan is examined and registered by the Registrar General an image of the plan and the accompanying instruments will be stored in the plan imaging system of Land and Property Information New South Wales. As well, an electronic copy of the newly registered plan will be sent to the council for the area affected and to other rating or taxing authorities. The procedures I have outlined were formulated, as I said earlier, with the benefit of experience gained in pilot projects undertaken with the Roads and Traffic Authority and with private surveyors. There has been wide consultation with user groups on the proposed e-plan system.

I am pleased to say that the proposals have the support of the Law Society of New South Wales, the Institution of Surveyors, the Association of Consulting Surveyors, law stationers, the major banks and licensed conveyancers. In excess of 12,000 plans are registered each year in Land and Property Information New South Wales by the Registrar General. When implemented, the proposed legislation will deliver savings to Land and Property Information New South Wales in processing plans and recording data. It will facilitate the direct lodgment of plans by councils and public authorities, and it will benefit landowners by reducing the time taken to lodge plans and have them registered. e-plan is yet another example of this Government's commitment to excellence in electronic government. I commend the bill to the House.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Mr D. L. Page.**

#### **MOTOR ACCIDENTS COMPENSATION AMENDMENT (TERRORISM) BILL**

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

#### **Second Reading**

**Mr YEADON** (Granville—Minister for Information Technology, Minister for Energy, Minister for Forestry, and Minister for Western Sydney) [9.14 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

In a ministerial statement in the other place on 11 December last year the Special Minister of State announced that the Government would introduce legislation in this session of Parliament to amend the Motor Accidents Scheme to respond to changes in the international reinsurance market. As members would be aware from recent media coverage, international reinsurers have decided to withdraw liability cover for terrorist-related insurance

losses following the tragic terrorist attacks in the United States of America on 11 September 2001. The withdrawal by reinsurers of cover for terrorist-related losses has wide implications across the general insurance sector in Australia. The international reinsurers action also has particular implications for the New South Wales Compulsory Third Party [CTP] Scheme. This is because New South Wales licensed CTP insurers are required to provide unlimited liability cover for death or injury resulting from a motor vehicle accident.

The statutory third party policy prescribed by the Motor Accidents Compensation Act 1999 requires a CTP insurer to indemnify the owner and/or driver of a vehicle for death or injury which is a result of and is caused—whilst the vehicle is being driven, involved in a collision or near miss—by the vehicle running out of control or by a defect in the vehicle during its use or operation. Advice provided to the New South Wales Motor Accidents Authority by senior counsel confirms that the legislation is not only confined to negligent actions involving a motor vehicle, but also covers intentional injury—for example, such as could result from a terrorist action using a motor vehicle as a weapon.

All New South Wales CTP insurers reinsure against losses. As a result of international reinsurers' withdrawal of cover for terrorist-related losses, CTP insurers are exposed to a potential liability that cannot be covered by reinsurance. The action of reinsurers has serious potential to impact on the affordability and viability of the New South Wales green slip scheme. The Motor Accidents Compensation Amendment (Terrorism) Bill excludes all liability arising from a terrorist act involving a motor vehicle from the CTP scheme. The Government is concerned to ensure that the scope of this amendment is limited strictly to only those circumstances that are clearly attributable to a national or international terrorist attack.

The terrorist exclusion introduced by the bill will apply only to a circumstance that could, considering the nature and context of the act, be reasonably characterised as an act of terrorism. The ministerial statement also indicated that the proposed amendment would operate retrospectively from 1 January 2002. The bill has been drafted accordingly. The approach taken by the bill is to exclude liability for any terrorist act occurring after 1 January 2002 and before 1 January 2003. Once the legislation comes into force a third party policy, whenever issued, will not extend to cover this liability during the period of the exclusion. The Queensland Parliament has enacted a similar change to the Queensland CTP scheme, which is underwritten by private insurers, as is the New South Wales scheme. This measure is temporary and is put in place for a limited period only to address the immediate on-going viability of the New South Wales CTP scheme. The bill's exclusion of terrorist acts will apply only until 1 January 2003 or the proclamation of an earlier date.

The inclusion of the proclamation provision is to provide a mechanism to terminate the exclusion clause before the date otherwise provided by the bill should any viable alternative approach emerge. It is intended that the proclamation provision would be utilised only if alternative arrangements were in place. Clearly, there would be consultation with CTP insurers before the Government took this action. This will allow for the position to be reassessed in the light of any national arrangements being put in place or any change in the availability of reinsurance cover for such incidents. As I indicated earlier, the international reinsurance issue affects the general insurance sector across Australia and is not limited only to the New South Wales CTP scheme. Despite these significant national implications, the Federal Government has not yet announced any intended action. The New South Wales Government calls on the Federal Government to work with the insurance industry to find an effective solution to this problem. I commend the bill to the House.

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

### **SYDNEY BETHEL UNION EXTENSION AMENDMENT BILL**

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

#### **Second Reading**

**Mr CRITTENDEN** (Wyang—Parliamentary Secretary), on behalf of Mr Debus [9.21 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of this bill is to authorise the trustees of the Bethel Union to extend their operations beyond the port of Sydney so that they can assist seafarers visiting any port in New South Wales, to remove the restriction on the type of facilities the trustees can provide to seafarers and to provide the trustees with an investment power in accordance with the Trustee Act 1925. At the beginning of the nineteenth century a number of bethel organisations were established in different parts of the world as a lay initiative dedicated to addressing the spiritual welfare of seafarers. Each organisation is independent and has no connection with any other bethel organisation.

The Sydney Bethel Union is a charitable organisation which, since 1822, has provided religious and secular instruction and social recreation for seafarers of all nations visiting the port of Sydney. In the mid nineteenth century the trustees were given a grant of land upon which to build a chapel and other necessary buildings. The Sydney Bethel Union Extension Act 1908 extended the powers of the trustees and authorised them to erect a mariners church and other related buildings, reading rooms, a lecture hall, a gymnasium, lavatories and "such other accommodation as the trustees may think in their discretion is advisable". The 1908 Act also appointed new trustees and vested additional land in the trustees in exchange for some of their land which had been resumed by the Government. The Sydney Bethel Union currently operates a hostel for seamen visiting Sydney. Seamen pay a nominal sum to stay at the hostel.

Shipping movements have altered over the years as more shipping goes in and out of other New South Wales ports. There is a reduced demand for the Bethel Union's facilities in Sydney but there is a need to provide facilities in other New South Wales ports. The bill will enable the Bethel Union to provide facilities for the religious and secular instruction and social recreation of seafarers throughout New South Wales. In the course of its operations the Bethel Union has received donations and bequests which have been used to finance its operations. The Act does not give the trustees a specific power to invest moneys and to apply that income for the purposes of the Bethel Union or a power to employ people to assist in the running of Bethel Union facilities. The bill provides the trustees with an investment power in accordance with the Trustee Act 1925 and the power to employ people to assist in the running of the facilities.

I turn now to the bill. Items [1], [5], [6] and [8] of schedule 1 amend the Sydney Bethel Union Extension Act 1908 to enable the trustees to extend their operations beyond the port of Sydney to any port in New South Wales. Items [2] and [3] of schedule 1 amend the Act to enable the trustees to extend the types of facilities that they can provide to seafarers. Items [4] and [7] of schedule 1 amend the Act to update outdated language by removing references to "seamen" and replacing them with references to "seafarers". Item [9] of schedule 1 inserts proposed sections 8A, 8B and 8C into the Act. Proposed section 8A will give the trustees power to invest money in accordance with the Trustee Act 1925. Proposed section 8B will give the trustees the power to employ or otherwise engage people to assist in the operations of the Bethel Union. Proposed section 8C will give the trustees the power to make grants to associations, institutions or bodies of persons engaged in mission work among seafarers. In conclusion, the bill is designed to enable the Bethel Union to better assist seafarers who visit New South Wales ports. I commend the bill to the House.

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

### **CHILDREN (DETENTION CENTRES) AMENDMENT BILL**

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

#### **Second Reading**

**Mr CRITTENDEN** (Wyong—Parliamentary Secretary), on behalf of Mr Debus [9.28 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill amends the Children (Detention Centres) Act 1987 to extend the sentence of juveniles who have escaped or failed to return from leave by the number of days that they are unlawfully absent from custody. The colloquial term "street time" is used to refer to the time an offender is unlawfully absent from custody. The bill also amends the juvenile justice legislation to clearly state the delegation of functions by the Minister for Juvenile Justice in the Children (Detention Centres) Act 1987. Juvenile detainees who escape from lawful custody, when apprehended, are either charged under section 33 of the Children (Detention Centres) Act or are charged with the common law offence of escaping from lawful custody. Juvenile detainees who fail to return from leave are charged under section 37A of the Children (Detention Centres) Act. If juveniles are charged and found guilty of escape or failure to return from leave, they can be given an additional term of up to three months, but currently cannot be made to serve the time they were unlawfully absent from custody.

In the past the now repealed section 447A of the Crimes Act 1900 operated to add street time to escapees' sentences, but not to those of juvenile detainees who failed to return from leave. Section 447A of the Crimes Act was repealed when the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act 1999 became law in 2000. Section 254 of the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act, which largely replaces section 447A of the Crimes Act, does not apply to juvenile offenders who are sentenced under the Act. Amending the Act to include street time

in the sentence of a detainee found guilty of escape under section 33 of the Act would mean a return to the status quo prior to the changes to the Crimes Act that occurred when the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act was proclaimed.

In addition, for the first time juvenile detainees who are charged with failure to return from leave will be required to serve street time. Amending the Act to include street time in the sentence of a detainee found guilty of failing to return from leave under section 37A (1) removes the inconsistency and confusion that exists in the detention centres. For example, experienced detention centre staff have advised that it is not uncommon for clients who failed to return from leave to be charged with escape—section 33—rather than fail to return from leave, where the detainee has made a deliberate and planned effort to escape while on leave. As the offences of escaping and failing to return from leave are separate offences to the original offence for which the offenders are serving a control order, the punishment should be separate and not concurrent with any other order.

The Department of Juvenile Justice has been advised by the Crown Solicitor that the Community Welfare Act 1987 does not provide a power to the Minister for Juvenile Justice to delegate the Minister's functions under juvenile justice legislation because no order has been made under the Public Sector Management Act 1988 to construe references to "Minister" in section 5.1 (1) of the Community Welfare Act to include references to the Minister for Juvenile Justice. It appears that the definition of "community welfare legislation" in the Community Welfare Act does not include juvenile justice legislation and that the powers of delegation available to the Director-General of the Department of Juvenile Justice under section 5 (2) of the Community Welfare Act accordingly do not extend to the director-general's functions under the juvenile justice legislation. Parliamentary Counsel has recommended that this matter be rectified by amending the Children (Detention Centres) Act 1987 to clearly state the delegation of functions by the Minister for Juvenile Justice.

The Children (Detention Centres) Act and Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act take differing approaches to the custodial status of detainees and inmates. Whilst this poses no difficulty to the operation of these Acts, it can create anomalies in other legislation. The Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act 2000 is one such piece of legislation. Detainees should be treated in the same manner as adult inmates for the purposes of the Child Protection (Offenders Registration) Act 2000. Schedule 3.1 to the bill makes the necessary definitional changes to achieve that. I commend the bill to the House.

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

## **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

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

**Mr WHELAN** (Strathfield) [9.33 p.m.]: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow for the following routine of business on Thursday 28 February 2002:

- (1) from 10.00 a.m. to 11.15 a.m., private members' statements; and
- (2) at 11.15 a.m. the Speaker will leave the chair until the ringing of one long bell at approximately 2.15 p.m.

The House will adjourn at 11.15 a.m. to enable all honourable members to attend the State funeral of the late Sir Roden Cutler, a former Governor of New South Wales.

**Motion agreed to.**

**The House adjourned at 9.34 p.m.**

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