

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Friday 22 March 2002

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

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Sixth Day's Debate

Mr AMERY (Mount Druitt—Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Corrective Services) [10.00 a.m.]: I am pleased to be able to reply to the Address of the thirty-seventh Governor of New South Wales, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, AC. Firstly I congratulate the Governor on her first official opening of Parliament, her friendly nature when we meet at Executive Council meetings, and the interest she has shown in my electorate. Her visit to the Hebersham primary school is still fondly remembered by that school community.

In her Speech the Governor spoke about the Christmas-New Year bushfires, and I should like to place on record some comments regarding those fires. As Minister for Agriculture I can report on the tremendous efforts of New South Wales Agriculture staff during those fires, both in metropolitan and rural parts of the State. The fires made their mark on the landscape at Yeoval, Eugowra, Gulgong, Shoalhaven, Young, Boorowa, other parts of rural New South Wales, and of course, most tragically, Sydney.

New South Wales Agriculture staff were on hand 24 hours a day for the duration of the crisis, to assist land-holders with the welfare of stock and domestic animals threatened by fire. Tragically, a significant number of stock were killed during the fires. In total, about 5,500 sheep and about 100 head of cattle were killed. In addition, 15 pigs, 22 goats, two horses, 2,000 poultry and a number of other animals were also killed. Other producers lost farm sheds, watering systems and other equipment. About 455 kilometres of fencing was destroyed. As the fires raged on, it became clear to all observers that without the efforts of New South Wales Agriculture staff, in concert with the gallant efforts of emergency staff and animal welfare groups, things could have been much worse.

As the member for Mount Druitt, I also take this opportunity on behalf of the community to place on record my thanks to the brave volunteers who work with the Rooty Hill and Plumpton rural fire brigades, the local State Emergency Service staff and other agencies for their efforts during the fires. This was an important family time around Christmas and New Year, but these selfless people gave up their family festivities and put their lives in danger to serve their communities. As the Governor did, I too pay tribute to the efforts of those public servants and volunteers. I also place on record my thanks to the generous public, including rural communities and farmers who donated fodder and offered agistment to fire-affected farmers.

The Governor made reference to the fact that this year is the Year of the Outback, a point I would also like to touch on. The Agriculture portfolio affords many opportunities for travel in the outback, and it is about time the kind of people whom I have met on my trips were recognised and indeed celebrated. I note that the honourable member for Murray-Darling represented the Premier at a function held recently to mark one part of that celebration. The Governor was correct to point out the Government's commitment to rural people. Many rural producers are engaged in a wide variety of agricultural pursuits and contribute in no small way to the massive farm-gate value of agriculture in this State, which has risen from just over \$7 billion in 1995 to more than \$8.2 billion in 2000. The Government will continue to work with rural producers on a number of important initiatives through several portfolios. With regard to the portfolio of Agriculture, I can report that the initiatives of the Carr Government are being reflected in positive trends.

In her Speech the Governor referred to natural resource management and the Government's initiatives in this area. As honourable members would be aware, New South Wales Agriculture plays an extremely vital role in natural resource management, and I can report to the House that our land-holders and primary producers are doing their bit to make their enterprises efficient and environmentally sustainable. Indeed, a recent report entitled "Overview of NSW Government Services 1995-2000" highlights key areas in which New South Wales Agriculture's key twin goals—assisting agriculture to be economically viable and environmentally sustainable—have been implemented over recent years. I will briefly touch on some of those areas.

The percentage of horticulturists adopting integrated pest management systems developed by New South Wales Agriculture has increased from 5 per cent in 1995 to 15 per cent in 2000. The high percentage of cereal farmers adopting stubble retention has remained steady at around 71 to 72 per cent. The percentage of New South Wales sheep in footrot-protected areas increased from 75 per cent in 1995 to 98 per cent in 2000. The number of enrolments in Agriculture college home study and short-course enrolments increased from 20,389 in 1995 to 23,557 in 2000. The number of chemical residue tests carried out on plants, livestock and meat increased from 42,608 in 1995 to 48,493 in 2000. The percentage of chemical residue tests that returned unsatisfactory results decreased markedly from 1.3 percent in 1995 to 0.3 per cent in 2000.

The report shows that the agriculture sector in New South Wales has been moving from strength to strength due to the efforts of forward-thinking producers. I am pleased that the Government, through my department and other agencies, has been able to work with rural producers in achieving these successes. As I said, the Government is working with primary producers in their efforts to achieve profitable businesses that are both more efficient and more environmentally friendly. One example of this is the recent modifications made to the Irrigated Agriculture Water Use Efficiency Incentive Scheme. Under the enhanced scheme there is no assets test and the maximum amount available to individual irrigation enterprises under the scheme increased from \$17,000 to \$29,000.

The incentives offered by the enhanced scheme are: 80 per cent of the cost of preparing an irrigation and drainage management plan, up to \$12,000; 50 per cent of the cost of new irrigation technology, up to \$15,000; and 50 per cent of crop water use monitoring costs, up to \$2,000. These incentives are available to all commercial irrigation enterprises, including irrigators who, in special circumstances, earn more than half their income off farm. We have had our share of natural disasters, with fire, flood and, in some parts of the State, very little rainfall. But with excellent commodity prices and, in most parts of the State, fortunate conditions for cropping, farmers have had a better run in the last year than they have had for quite some time. Wool has climbed back to near-record prices recently, and beef and lamb prices have been extremely healthy for some time now. It is in these times that primary producers think about replacing essential equipment and putting some hard-earned money away for tougher times, which, as we all know, are never far away when you are making a living on the land.

The Government is making an enormous investment in the communities of Western Sydney, and the electorate of Mount Druitt is no exception. I take this opportunity to inform the House about investments in the electorate of Mount Druitt that I believe will play an important role in improving the opportunities and facilities of the Mount Druitt community. The Government is making an investment in education in Western Sydney and I am extremely pleased to say that the electorate of Mount Druitt will receive an important part of that. Recent funding initiatives include \$14.9 million for the Chifley College senior campus and \$6.9 million for upgrading of Chifley College at the Bidwill, Dunheved, Mount Druitt and Shalvey junior campuses. I pay tribute not only to the present Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. John Watkins, but also to the former Minister, the Hon. John Aquilina, who made the concept of senior high schools and colleges a reality after many years of opposition to them in some quarters.

Last year the Minister for Education and Training and I opened the \$5 million Mount Druitt TAFE information technology [IT] facility. The courses offered cover the full range of IT options, including personal computer support, networking management, network engineering, object-orientated design, programming and web production. Western Sydney is the centre of the knowledge economy, with the second largest number of IT companies in Australia. These companies generate \$2.7 billion a year in an industry expected to generate \$4 billion by 2006. A further 39 per cent of growth in the IT and telecommunications industry has been forecast for Western Sydney by 2006. This new facility clearly demonstrates the Government's commitment to funding cutting-edge education and training opportunities for the people of Western Sydney.

Last year I had the pleasure of hosting the Minister for Transport on a trip to the electorate to look at the current Mount Druitt transport interchange, where he announced a \$10 million revamp. The plans will bring an enormous improvement to these important facilities, which are used by thousands of commuters each week. My major concern is that there is every chance that the community could lose the facility should the Blacktown City Council continue with its obstructionist attitude not only to this revamp but to other State Government projects in the area. The council seems hell-bent on blocking or delaying this and other major projects in our area. Some councillors have complained to me that Parramatta and Penrith often get many of the facilities that Blacktown misses out on. Perhaps it is the obstructionist attitude of the Blacktown council and the difficulties in getting projects such as the Mount Druitt interchange approved and up and running that have led to companies and government departments wanting to invest elsewhere. I will certainly be taking this matter up with Blacktown councillors and with the Minister in the weeks and months ahead.

The Department of Housing plays an important role in my electorate as there is a large public housing estate there. I pay credit to the staff of the Mount Druitt office for their continued support of my electorate office in the many representations it makes. Some of the spending initiatives of the Carr Government in this area include funding of \$16.3 million since 1996 on the Bidwill community renewal scheme. Expenditure of \$2.8 million is planned over the next two years. Action is being taken in regard to dark, narrow back lanes, front access because of paling fences being removed, the creation of new front yards, and the installation of carports. It is clear to any observer that the program is changing the face of the suburbs. An amount of \$2.3 million has been spent over the past 18 months on the Shalvey community renewal project. This extremely valuable project is physically improving the social conditions of a neighbourhood in my electorate. Other projects of this nature are being carried out at Dharruk. A number of places with design problems have been removed and new streets have been constructed. The shape of the housing project has been changed by the program.

Large public housing estates have large maintenance programs and a lot of the housing stock is old, going back to the mid-1960s. The department has spent \$4.3 million on maintenance and \$1.5 million on capital improvements in this financial year alone. Another \$600,000 is to be spent in Shalvey to complete townhouse upgrading in Piccolo Way—another important issue for my electorate. As recently announced by my colleague the Minister for Education and Training, \$1.611 million is to be spent over the next five months on repairs and refurbishment to 20 local schools. The list of repairs and upgrades is long and the funding has been warmly welcomed: it will prompt a boost in activity for tradespeople in the electorate.

Numerous transport improvements have been made, such as the installation of traffic lights and pedestrian facilities. The Government has allocated \$12 million for planning of the Western Sydney Orbital from Prestons to west Baulkham Hills. This project will be of enormous benefit to the people of Western Sydney and Mount Druitt. I have had the pleasure of announcing numerous grants to community groups, such as \$55,000 to Rosie's Place to assist with an outreach program for victims of sexual assault and violence, \$30,000 to the Women's Activities and Self-help House—or the WASH House, as it is known—to assist with the running of a proactive club for adults with a mild intellectual disability, and \$40,000 to the WASH House to assist with the employment of a domestic violence worker.

Late last year I also had the pleasure of announcing that the historic former principal's residence at Colyton Public School would be restored. This building, which dates back to 1883-84, will be used by both the school and community groups. The restoration will also literally be a learning experience for some students. TAFE New South Wales building and construction students will be involved in the restoration, gaining valuable on-the-job training and experience. The Department of Education and Training and the Department of Public Works and Services will co-ordinate the project in liaison with the school. The Department of Education and Training will provide funding for materials, with the school contributing toward the finishing of the building.

Initiatives in the health portfolio are worth mentioning. New closed-circuit television cameras have been installed in all hospital emergency departments for which the Western Sydney Area Health Service is responsible. There will be lockable screen doors for all community health centres and clinics and extra lighting and security for Westmead, Blacktown and Mount Druitt hospitals. The Government continues to fund extremely worthy social welfare projects in the Mount Druitt electorate. Some examples include the Department of Community Services funding of \$78,849 to the Burnside-Bidwill NEWPIN, a safe environment and developmental program for children at risk, and \$53,855 to Murawina Mount Druitt Toy Library. Meanwhile, the Government continues to provide funds for sporting facilities in the electorate, such as \$47,437 for improvements to Aquilina Park South and Reserve Park.

Various grants have been made to local police and community youth clubs [PCYCs] to assist them in the excellent work they are doing in the Mount Druitt community. For example, the Bidwill PCYC recently received funding of \$10,800 for a project to put 10 young people at risk of committing crimes through a basketball referees course. Similarly, the Mount Druitt PCYC has been putting 18 young people who have been involved with juvenile justice conferencing with victims of crime through a life skills course. Our PCYCs have also been on the job in combating graffiti, with the help of a \$2,500 grant to the Bidwill PCYC. I also advise that the community is committed to building a new, fully functioning local courthouse in the electorate of Mount Druitt and continues to lobby me and the honourable member for Londonderry very strongly. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Representatives of local community groups and the police—not to mention local members including the honourable member for Londonderry and me, the Federal member for Chifley, Roger Price—and local councillors in wards four and five strongly support the project. We are all aware that when this project is

completed the people of Mount Druitt will no longer have to travel to Blacktown and Penrith courthouses. We will have to wait until the next budget to see how successful that local campaign has been. I will have more to say about the Mount Druitt electorate when the budget comes down in May. Honourable members are keenly awaiting the Carr Government's May budget. I shall put on record briefly the Government's efforts in relation to our prison system. I acquired the Corrective Services portfolio during the Cabinet reshuffle just before Christmas. The corrective services statistics are interesting. The New South Wales prison population is growing. The Premier referred to that in the House recently when he talked about the proposed bail changes and what impact they will have on the prison population.

Honourable members may be interested to know that the prison population has increased from 6,261 in 1995-96 to 7,328 in 1999-2000, and since then it has been steadily increasing. At present I think the figure is between 7,600 and 7,700. Similarly, in 1995-96 a daily average of 13,037 adults were being supervised in a community corrections program, while in 1999-2000 this had increased to 18,843 adults. With this upward trend expected to continue, the Government is preparing for the increasing demand on corrective services operations. Last year the Premier announced that almost 2,000 new places would be created over the next four years, and during question time earlier this week he reiterated the expansion in the corrective services portfolio.

This involves the building of three new prisons—at Kempsey, South Windsor and in the State's Central West—expanding eight existing prisons around New South Wales and reopening Cooma prison. The Government is working hard to meet the challenge of accommodating the expanding prison population in this State. No doubt the Carr Government's tougher sentencing laws and strengthened bail provisions will place even more pressure on the prison population. I am pleased that the Premier's message to everyone is that the Government will support an increase in the capacity of the Department of Corrective Services to accommodate an ever-increasing prison population. No reduction in the prison population will be brought about by getting softer on crime or sentencing policies, and I am pleased with the Government's position in this area.

In conclusion, may I say that I hope I have contributed some valuable information to the parliamentary record following the remarks made by the Governor at the opening of Parliament some weeks ago. I have addressed the Department of Agriculture, my electorate of Mount Druitt and the Department of Corrective Services. While this contribution has not been a comprehensive rundown of those three areas, I believe that as this year unfolds, and when the budget comes down in May, I will be able to report to the House more interesting information and statistics to highlight the Government's programs in these three important areas. Once again I congratulate the Governor on her Speech at the opening of the Parliament.

Mr DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [10.23 p.m.]: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the Address-in-Reply debate. As many members have done, I acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of our Governor, Marie Bashir. I also acknowledge Sir Nicholas, because often many duties in this State, as in many other States, also involve the Governor's spouse. I have had the pleasure, as have many other members, of being with the Governor at a number of different functions and community events. As has been acknowledged in the past, the role of Governor is extraordinary and requires an extraordinary person. Marie Bashir is not only a great Governor but also a great Australian. I congratulate her on her first Address to the Parliament as Governor of New South Wales.

The Address-in-Reply debate allows honourable members to cover many topics when assessing the Government's work and the demands of our electorates as well as the State generally. I shall make a number of comments ranging across particular State issues as well as my electorate of Vaucluse. One of the first items covered in the Governor's Speech was infrastructure. No doubt infrastructure in New South Wales has been mismanaged by successive governments, and it is still being mismanaged today. It is a huge portfolio; the Government spends about as much on infrastructure each year as it spends on the health portfolio or the education portfolio.

Instead of bringing all that expenditure together and managing it properly, we as a Parliament have left it fragmented, and this Government has finessed that fragmentation to its political ends. No doubt it is time that the whole area of expenditure was brought under control, and there is only one way to do that. We need to undertake the audit that the Parliament and successive governments have been avoiding for a long time, largely for two reasons. First, various governments wanted to retain the political expediency in allocating infrastructure funding and, second, governments have been reluctant to do an audit because the numbers are so big.

It is time now to do the audit for the twenty-first century. First, we must assess all infrastructure across the State; second, we must prioritise that infrastructure; third, we must look at the financing of infrastructure,

either through public funds or private funds; and, fourth, the process of audit, prioritisation and funding must be transparent. However, that is difficult in the government system. The bureaucracy is reluctant to do that because it removes the political options from the Executive. An audit needs to be done for the twenty-first century.

In relation to the bushfires, I acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of many people from not only New South Wales but across Australia in fighting the bushfires. It was a superb effort, with no loss of life. Although a number of properties were lost, we can all applaud the fact that there was no loss of life in what were extraordinarily devastating bushfires over the Christmas and New Year period. I congratulate all those involved in fighting the bushfires. We look forward to seeing what lessons come out of the inquiries into that event.

The Governor then referred to valuing our rural and regional communities, and the Government's determination that those communities should have fair access to public sector services. That has been a major problem for the Carr Government for seven years, and we will remind the Government of the problem every week in the run-up to the election in 53 weeks' time. The Government is Sydneycentric. It has tried to cope with the problem in various ways, including pretending to create a separate faction focused on rural and regional areas. That has failed. The Government is now scrambling to produce more rhetoric about servicing rural and regional New South Wales. I do not think the Government will make any progress on that during its final 12 months in office. The Carr Government has been Sydneycentric and it remains Sydneycentric to this day. Despite all the rhetoric in the world, in the next 12 months people in rural and regional areas of New South Wales will not see any real improvement in either services or infrastructure under this Government. The next statement in the Governor's Speech is:

While private sector investment will always provide the bulk of jobs, the public sector is significantly enhancing employment opportunities outside of Sydney.

In reality that is rubbish. The Speech continues:

Since 1995 the Government has created over 2,000 new jobs in rural and regional New South Wales, and has relocated 1,100 more.

I accept the relocation. Previous governments were also involved in some relocation of jobs. Clearly, we should continue to consider what roles can be moved outside Sydney to rural and regional areas. The concept that this Government or any government is creating jobs is hilarious. That claim, which we have heard time and time again from the Carr Government, is a window on its confused, philosophical standing. When I explain to people in the community what the members of the Carr Government are all about, I often refer to them as Socialists in pinstripes, which is a legitimate description, but they are also sophists: they will say anything and they will claim anything. The biggest problem with the Carr Government is that in its seven years in office it has been, and continues to be, all rhetoric and no delivery.

In 1995 when Bob Carr sought election he went to the voters with a scorched-earth policy. He promised the earth to every single community across the State. But in his seven years he has delivered nothing. However, I suggest to Mr Amery and other members of the Labor Party who are in this Chamber that at their next party meeting they discuss the concept of a government creating jobs. It does not happen. The Government is actually suffocating employment in New South Wales. We have underperformed for a number of years. If the Minister would examine what happened in New South Wales during the Olympic year he would realise that it was only the incredible pump priming of the Olympics that boosted activity to some extent. However, because the Government continued to tax the community to death while hosting a bloated bureaucracy we continued to underperform in our encouragement of enterprise and employment in this State.

The Governor's Speech states, "Later this year, the Government will host a business roundtable." Again, that is another photo opportunity. It is interesting to note that for every single year of the seven years of the Carr Government there has been a business seminar, roundtable or whatever. An analysis of those events reveals that they are no more than an opportunity for the Premier to give one or two speeches and get a few photos taken before he departs. They are not followed up. Ultimately, the businesspeople who attended the events wonder why they wasted half a day listening to the Premier make another speech. The Speech then refers to education, which is a very sore point in my electorate where the Government has closed public schools. Part of the philosophy of the Carr Government is to give up on public education, and that is exactly what it has done in my electorate by amalgamating the Vaucluse and Dover Heights high schools.

I have asked the Minister for Education and Training for the long-anticipated briefing on the design of the new amalgamated school. I hope I eventually get that briefing, which was promised by the previous Minister for Education and Training until he lost his job for creating such a shemuzzle in public education. I would like

to know the status of the high schools in my electorate. I would like to know the status of the design proposals, their cost and the time scales. Or is this yet another example of the Carr Government closing down public education and making a number of promises prior to the next election? We are at a critical point leading into the next election and the Government is promising the earth to the parents in my electorate. The Government claims that we will have a wonderful new school with substantially enhanced facilities. But they see the details of that. Let us see before the election exactly what the Government intends to do rather than rely on its promises.

The Governor's Speech goes on to refer to the number one issue in New South Wales: community safety, crime prevention and law-enforcement. The Government has failed, and continues to fail, on policing in this State. All this week front page news was taken up with the mismanagement of that portfolio. Ultimately, our community wants to see police on the beat, but all we have is more rhetoric. We have not seen police on the street. We have seen some celebrities policing and various television shots of senior police and the Minister walking the footpath. But we want to see beat police. We would like to see greater use of surveillance equipment and video cameras in a number of hot spots in my electorate, not only at Bondi Beach and Bondi Junction, which, to some extent, I share with the honourable member for Coogee, but also at Double Bay. Video surveillance in such hot spots could make quite a difference. What we really need from a government, but I do not think we will get it from the Carr Government, is political will to back up the police of this State. We will have to wait for 12 months to see that.

The Governor's Speech also refers to the Drug Summit and acknowledges naltrexone treatment. I again remind honourable members that when we discussed naltrexone treatment in this State we had to drag the Minister for Health in the Carr Government kicking and screaming to the table to consider that option. I well remember day after day in this House the then Minister for Health ridiculing the option suggested by a number of members of this House. That ridicule was the result of the philosophical stand of the Carr Government and its great difficulty with the concept of abstinence. The arguments raged and arranged for six months before we were able to convince the Carr Government to give naltrexone treatment a go. It is pleasing to see that it continues to be an ongoing treatment option and, clearly, one that we should further investigate and expand, if we can.

I turn now to the section of the Governor's Speech dealing with e-government. Not one member of this Parliament would deny that it is a very important part of any public sector and a very important part of the economy. However, it is somewhat disconcerting that a senior Government Minister prides himself on being computer illiterate. It is a terrible shame after seven years. This policy must be driven by senior Ministers as well as the senior economics Minister. It is ridiculous that a senior Government Minister continues to pride himself on being computer illiterate. The Speech refers to the cross-city tunnel. I have asked the Minister for Roads for information on traffic planning throughout the process of investigation, approval, construction and delivery of the Eastern Distributor.

I continued to ask the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads whether he would finally do a traffic plan for the eastern suburbs. It was part of the approval process for the Eastern Distributor. The Roads and Traffic Authority did not do the plan at the time, and it still has not done a plan. Now we have the same process. The cross-city tunnel is on the drawing board and I have asked the Minister what impact it will have on congestion on connecting roads in Rushcutters Bay, Edgecliff, Double Bay, Woollahra, Paddington, Bondi Junction and Bondi.

A tunnel will have a dramatic effect on all those roads. I ask the Government again if it will ensure that the RTA undertakes the regional traffic plan that we have long sought as a matter of urgency; otherwise there will be another traffic disaster at the end of the construction period and local streets will be flooded with increased traffic volumes. The Governor's Speech also talks about transport services. We are currently being subjected to a review of bus services in the eastern suburbs, and it is a major point of concern to many constituents. I was intrigued yesterday to listen to the honourable member for Bligh, who raised a number of concerns and said:

It seems that the State Transit Authority has not listened to the concerns of the local community and intends to impose a "one size fits all" solution.

I agree with the honourable member for Bligh. I have delivered thousands of petitions to the bus authority and I will be submitting them to the Parliament. Those petitions express grave concern about the changes to the bus services, especially the one that comes to mind, the 321 route. Yesterday the Parliamentary Secretary who was at the table at the time said, "This is the first I have heard about community concerns, and they should also be considered." I totally agree with that general statement. One of our concerns about the evaluation was that the

bus authority put out proposed changes to the bus services and, as part of it, did not distribute changes to the timetables. I have asked the authorities to consider the comments of the community and come back for a second round of consultation before they impose new arrangements on the community. There will be a huge public outcry if they do not do that. I again ask the Minister for Transport to seriously consider the concerns of the community and put those proposed changes, including the timetables, through a second round of consultation as a matter of urgency. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The Governor's Speech referred to a stronger State economy, and that is where we get to the real hypocrisy of the Carr Government. For seven years the Carr Government has done everything it possibly can to slow down economic reform in Australia, especially in New South Wales, while reaping the benefits of economic reform from the Federal Government and the boost in the State's economy. The Premier really should be in this House every single day thanking John Howard and Peter Costello and confessing that he has benefited from enormous tax revenues that have gone up every year, well in excess of budget, and have rescued his budget blow-outs every year. Instead, we get this sentence: "Careful fiscal management has seen healthy Budget surpluses ...". That is rubbish. Year after year in New South Wales there have been extraordinary windfall tax revenues rescuing budget blow-outs. They are budget blow-outs not just within the recurrent side of the budget but also in capital expenditure. The Carr Government should start being a little honest in that regard.

That is one of the reasons a number of independent commentators are criticising the Carr Government not only for lack of accountability but for lack of transparency in relation to financial information in this State. There is no doubt this State is benefiting from tax revenue from a booming economy in New South Wales. I also remind honourable members that the Premier was elected in March 1995 on a "no new taxes, no tax increases" platform. I am continually reminded each day that he has taken every single opportunity since being elected seven years ago to increase taxes, widen taxes, increase charges, raise new user fees, et cetera. No doubt I can mention many more but some increases are the insurance protection tax, the payroll tax on superannuation, the bed tax, the electricity distributors levy, land tax rate increases and land tax on owner-occupied homes, parking space levies, the Sydney Harbour Bridge toll, tobacco license fees, keno license fees, pollution license fees, vehicle registration, stamp duty, poker machine taxation changes, stamp duty general insurance—a tax on a tax by doing it post-GST—health insurance levy increases and motor vehicle transfer stamp duty increases.

The Minister for Transport's creative package, recently announced, involved general issue number plates, driver knowledge and hazard perception tests, the RTA handbook and the vehicle inspection fees. We have also had new increased court fees and the distance education fees that the former failed Minister for Education and Training introduced. We have had increases in transport fares, dog and cat licences, bulk water charges, emergency department fees, fishing taxes, water rates, traffic offences—dramatically increased under this Government—sewerage inspection fees, litter fines and a large number of other fees scattered across just about every department. The concept of looking at user fees within each portfolio is simply back door taxation, and there has been a dramatic increase in user fees under this Government.

During the Hornsby by-election, which was another slap in the face for the Carr Government, somebody said to me, when we were discussing the increase in the Sydney Harbour Bridge toll: "Where has all the cash gone? What have they done with all the money?" I am intrigued that this level of understanding of the budget is now widespread in the New South Wales community. People realise that the Carr Government has never had so much money rolling in the door of Treasury, but they have never seen worse services at the front line, whether in the funding of teachers, nurses or police. One has to ask, "What has it done with the money?" We then have to look at waste under the Carr Government, and I will mention a few examples of that. This Government was elected saying, "We will reduce consultants' costs to \$50 million per annum." That was one of the major promises in the election campaign in 1995. After seven years in office that would equate to \$350 million for each consultant—which is a lot of consultants. This Government, after seven years, will have spent in the order of \$750 million on consultants right across the board, and that is an extraordinary extravagance.

Honourable members will remember that this Government talked about reducing advertising costs. This is a Government that last year spent in the order of \$104 million on government advertising, much of it sheer waste. We only have to look at major projects to see other examples. There was an extraordinary management bungle over the airport link, with construction blowing out by about \$230 million. Even before the Parramatta to Chatswood rail line is anywhere near being constructed, let alone delivered, there have been blow-outs of hundreds of millions of dollars in the estimation of the project. The Conservatorium of Music had a cost blow-out of about \$75 million and the M5 East budget blew out by about \$280 million. The Government has announced in the past couple of days that the compensation for the management bungle for the Bondi rail project will be about \$4 million. Government costs on that cancelled Bondi rail project are in the order of \$6 million.

At the other end of the scale we find that this Government has no shame. The Premier spent \$254,000—a relatively small amount for him—on a graffiti report which in the end recommended painting over the graffiti. There were any number of examples of extraordinary waste by different departments, but the one I am reminded of, as we come up to another election, is our estimate that the Carr Government's media advisers cost about \$1 million extra in the run-up to the State election in 1999. Unfortunately, I think we will find the same thing again when we receive the accounts after the next election, which is 12 months away.

Every week during the next 12 months the Opposition will remind the community of not only the dramatically increased revenue but also the Carr Government's waste and extravagance. Let me continue examining the waste and extravagance for a moment. I refer to the document "Labor's Identified Savings", which was issued in March 1995, the last month before an election. One item relates to parliamentary secretaries. The document states that "this saving will include the abolition of four of the eight existing parliamentary secretaries, saving over \$500,000 each year"—\$500,000 each year! If we have a look at how many parliamentary secretaries there are at the moment, lo and behold there are eight!

Mr Brown: And counting.

Mr DEBNAM: The honourable member interjects to say, "and counting". I note the number is increasing. Another one was appointed this week.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Cabramatta has always been a Parliamentary Secretary. She now has a different role.

Mr DEBNAM: As Mr Speaker said—same person, different role. The real issue is that there are eight of them. What did the Premier trumpet prior to the last election? He promised the abolition of four of the eight existing parliamentary secretaries, saving \$500,000 per annum. Well, here we go again! I said there were eight, and they are: The Hon. Ian Macdonald in the upper House, and the honourable members for the electorates of Heathcote, Cabramatta, Canterbury, Newcastle, Bankstown, Strathfield and Wyong. When one looks at the record of the Carr Government during the past seven years, it has been seven years of rhetoric, seven years of mismanagement and seven years of promises that the Premier has had to live down because he has not delivered post-election. But, basically, it has been seven years and the Carr Government still does not have a plan.

The Government does not have a plan for this State; it never intended to have a plan for this State, because its only strategy in New South Wales has been to try to stay in office. The Government was well taught by Graham Richardson. It will do whatever it takes and say whatever it takes. I think the community now widely agrees that the Carr Government is all about spin. That is all it is about. There has been no delivering. There has been extraordinary mismanagement across every single portfolio, from the Premier down—mismanagement not only of expenditure but also of most aspects of public administration, including accountability and transparency. As I mentioned briefly before, one of the greatest concerns the Opposition has is the extraordinary effort that the Carr Government makes to hide information, whether that relates to credit card expenses or legitimate applications under freedom of information [FOI] legislation.

Mr Crittenden: Put in an FOI application.

Mr DEBNAM: The honourable member raises the subject of FOIs. FOIs are a history of shame for the Carr Government. Despite the legislation, the Government has done everything possible to ensure that the general public and the Opposition will not gain access to legitimate information that they are seeking. The Opposition will remind the community every single week during the next year about what the Government has done and what it promised prior to State elections and what it has failed to deliver.

Mr BROWN (Kiama) [10.54 a.m.]: It is with great pleasure that I reply to the Speech of our State's Governor, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, AC. I found her Speech to be imaginative and visionary. Professor Bashir is a great asset to this State and I congratulate Premier Carr on her appointment. There could be no greater difference between Premier Carr's appointment of our Governor and the Prime Minister's appointment of the Governor-General. There were many aspects of the Governor's Speech that will enrich the day-to-day lives of people in New South Wales, particularly the people I represent on the New South Wales South Coast and in the Southern Highlands. This is despite the fact that many people in my electorate are not altogether familiar with all of the proceedings of their Parliament in Sydney. Sydney is seen by many as the large place with all that traffic and expensive restaurants. The aspects of the Governor's Speech that I will reply to today include transport, job creation, safer communities, a fair and accessible health and education system that provides world-class services, the protection of our unique environment, and the recognition of our volunteers that make our communities what they are.

Firstly, I wish to speak about the role of our volunteers. The electorate of Kiama has hundreds of volunteer organisations. These range from the Meals-on-Wheels organisations, surf clubs from Warilla to Shoalhaven Heads—including my surf club at Kiama, the Berry Garden Club, the Gerroa Environmental Protection Society, the Robertson Environment Protection Society, Albion Park Chamber Of Commerce, Jamberoo Rate Payers Association, Lions, Rotary and Apex Clubs, the State Emergency Service and the many branches of the Rural Fire Service, to name but a few.

All of those clubs and societies play an important role in my regional electorate to bring different interests to my attention and to generally help their neighbours and community. It is appropriate that the Governor should acknowledge such groups, particularly those that assisted in putting out the fires that so devastatingly destroyed so much property and bush, which in turn caused suffering and loss to so many. I extend heartfelt thanks to all the firefighters and to those who directly assisted, such as the State Emergency Service. Recognition should also go to the surf clubs who gave up their time to assist the firefighters in Jervis Bay, since the only way to transport people and supplies was by water, as all roads were inaccessible.

I turn now to job generation. Honourable members know that the New South Wales economy is strong. It is the engine of the Australian economy. In five of the last six years it has grown faster than the national economy. Growth in the suburbs of Shellharbour and Gerringong in the Kiama electorate clearly demonstrates that there is both consumer and business confidence. More people are moving into the area and more large businesses are building new premises to service this growing population. All of this economic activity has had a positive influence on jobs. The Illawarra's unemployment rate is now only 6.7 per cent. However, there are still issues with young people trying to get a job of their choice, as well as those who have been retrenched finding jobs in the industries in which they previously worked.

One particular industry caused a lot of stress for employees soon after I was elected to Parliament. I refer to the Port Kembla Coal Terminal. There was a concern that the Government's lease fees were too high to keep the terminal profitable and in operation. The lease fees were \$1.30 per tonne of coal. If the terminal had closed, more than 100 blue-collar workers would have lost their jobs and it would have been a serious blow to economic confidence in the Illawarra. Branch member Peter Bell and the unions, and the businesses with a direct interest in the coal terminal—including BHP—came to see me and my colleague the honourable member for Illawarra and we lobbied the Government to reduce that fee.

With the intervention of the Premier and the Treasurer, the fees were reduced from \$1.30 per tonne to 50¢ per tonne, saving the company millions of dollars per year and retaining over 100 blue-collar jobs. That was but one of the challenges we face in the Illawarra. I am pleased to hear that the Carr Government has reduced public sector debt and liabilities by \$10 billion, and had a budget surplus when confronted by the collapse of HIH last year. Not only did the Government have a budget surplus after the collapse of HIH, it had a budget surplus after staging the most successful and spectacular Olympic Games the world has ever seen.

Public liability insurance is an issue of very real concern to volunteer organisations in the Kiama electorate. Last year, with the collapse of HIH Insurance, there was significant concern about home warranty insurance and about very substantial increases in premiums paid by community groups. I have spoken in the House about the need for the Federal Government to get its act together and make sure that the Commonwealth regulatory body responsible for the insurance industry, the Australian Prudential Regulatory Authority [APRA], is doing its job to make sure that insurers are looking after our communities and are financially sound. APRA took its eye off the ball last year and HIH Insurance collapsed, causing grave concern in the community. I congratulate Bob Carr and the Government on trying to find a solution. I hope that the Premier's meetings on this issue with Senator Coonan in the following weeks will prove productive.

I acknowledge the investment in the Illawarra by the private sector. It is also important to acknowledge the Government's investment in the public sector. The assets that we as a community own are worth an historical high \$93.5 billion, and that figure looks like it is only going to grow. One need only look at the Government's policy to relocate government agencies to the regions to demonstrate the point. We on the South Coast have done well out of this policy. Over 100 public sector jobs will be moving out of Sydney to Wollongong with the relocation of the State Superannuation Administration Authority, and 58 public sector jobs will be moving out of Sydney to Nowra with the relocation of the Department of Local Government. This interventionist policy of the Carr Labor Government is giving businesses in the Illawarra a great boost in confidence. The growth of public sector jobs in the Illawarra will have a positive and significant spin-off for other jobs.

I turn now to the Governor's comments on crime and our desire for safer communities. In this session the Government will place on the business paper for debate a number of bills to enhance community safety, crime prevention and law enforcement. Only yesterday I was discussing with the Attorney General the upcoming legislation to remove the presumption in favour of bail for repeat offenders. This will require reform of the Bail Act 1978 following consideration of the recent report by the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research entitled "Bail in NSW: Characteristics and Compliance", which highlighted the increasing incidence of persons failing to appear in compliance with their bail conditions.

Many in the community are concerned about the discrepancy in sentences that the courts impose. That is why I support the introduction of legislation that will set out general sentencing principles. Those principles will require the courts to take into account the personal circumstances of the victims, such as their age and whether they have any disability. Drugs are still a problem in our communities. However, since the Carr Government held its comprehensive Drug Summit much more has happened to help rehabilitate addicts. I am a strong believer in the concept of rehabilitation, and I was pleased to hear the Governor say that the Government will create an extra 70 rehabilitation beds, bringing the State total to 685, which will provide the capacity to treat an additional 280 people a year. I welcome also the Government's commitment to spend \$8 million to expand methadone, buprenorphine and naltrexone treatment.

Crime in our communities needs to be reduced. However, it is not a job for the police alone. The communities that I represent understand this. I have regular meetings with police in the area command to try to work out local solutions for local problems. Cross-agency co-operation is also an important component of any crime prevention strategy that brings into play the need to address causes of crime, such as lack of educational opportunities, drug and alcohol dependency, family breakdown, unemployment and lack of activities for young people.

Next I wish to discuss the need for a healthier community. It is pleasing to hear that better health care is a major priority for the Government. This is reflected in recurrent funding being at a record \$8 billion this year. Due to the Menadue and Sinclair reports, the Government has mapped out a fairer funding system. This has particular relevance to the Illawarra Area Health Service, which historically did not receive its fair share, in my opinion, but now is being better funded. Area health services can now plan better to fund communities in this State because they can plan on a three-year basis. This is good news for those needing health services in the Illawarra, South Coast and Southern Highlands.

Many people in the Illawarra are getting excited that the Wollongong hospital is nearing completion and that major works will commence at Shoalhaven hospital this year. But we will never forget, nor forgive, the former Liberal-National Government for closing down Kiama hospital. This was a significant blow to an important health service in my home town. It is great that the Carr Government has reopened Kiama hospital and that we have professional staff taking care of those who need health services in Kiama. Often mental health services are neglected by government and the community at large. This historic lack of attention has led to many families enduring undue stress. I am comforted to know that this problem is being addressed. The Carr Government has announced it is halfway through a three-year, \$107 million program to significantly increase mental health services across the State. That will provide 700 additional staff and 150 new acute care beds, 90 of which will be located in rural areas. A new in-patient health unit will be opened at Wollongong in the near future.

Education is one of the areas of public policy that I am very committed to and passionate about. Last year it was reported that the literacy levels of New South Wales students were the highest in the OECD. This is a fantastic result and one that students, teachers and the community should celebrate and maintain. This year 2,000 teachers in more than 600 schools will be involved in literacy and numeracy initiatives for students in the vital transition period of year 5 to year 8. Schools in the Kiama electorate will receive some of the \$1.7 billion to be invested in school upgrades and capital works across the State. This is very pleasing news, especially for students who currently attend Shellharbour Public School. This public school is bursting at the seams. This year, a new school in the new suburb of Flinders will be constructed. Also, work will commence on a \$4.5 million upgrade of my old high school, Kiama High. I am still lobbying for funds to rebuild the Shoalhaven Heads Public School, and I hope to hear some good news about that in the budget this year.

It is so very important that our students and teachers are provided with good quality education buildings in which to learn and teach. It is pleasing that the Government is properly recognising this in the communities that I represent. I was also very pleased to hear the Governor pay due recognition to our teachers. I agree with her that our society rightly values teachers, and I support the Government initiative to implement a

range of strategies to enhance the standing of the teaching profession. This complements the 300 teaching scholarships worth \$3 million in subject areas such as technical and applied studies, mathematics, science and English to address teacher shortages.

As a young member of this Parliament who grew up in the 1980s I was influenced strongly by the need to properly protect our environment. I remember going to meetings with my father to see how we could help protect the Franklin River from being dammed. I recall that many of those meetings were in the little town of Jamberoo, just west of Kiama. Eventually the Franklin River was saved with the election of the Hawke Labor Government, which used its foreign affairs powers under the Federal Constitution to legislate against damming that amazing river—a river that could have been lost forever if the conservative Coalition had been elected in 1983.

One of the concerns about the Coalition was confirmed with the defection of the honourable member for Port Macquarie from the National Party because of his wish to make a greater contribution to not only environmental policy but also policies to address overdevelopment on the New South Wales coast. I commend the honourable member for Port Macquarie for having the courage to give effect to his conviction and leave the Coalition. I wish him all the best in pursuing the Robert James Jellys of the world in his electorate.

One of my duties as a parliamentarian is my committee work, and I am the vice-chair of the Public Works Committee. This committee currently is drafting a report after conducting hearings about how the New South Wales public sector is reducing its greenhouse gas emissions, as instructed by the Premier. I am glad that this Government is trying to do its bit to reduce the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The Governor also addressed this point by stating that the Carr Government has foreshadowed its intention to introduce amendments to the Electricity Supply Act to provide for a compulsory 5 per cent per capita cut in emissions below 1990 levels.

If we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions below those of 10 years ago by 5 per cent per capita in this State, which has the largest population and therefore is the greatest emitter of CO², that would have a very significant impact on our part of the world. I wish that other countries were as committed as this State to reducing CO² in an attempt to steady the continual global warming. Even though many in the community are wanting to reduce the impact on the environment simply to protect our planet, some need other incentives to do so. That is why I applaud the Government's initiative to implement a comprehensive plan to promote greener vehicles and to lower greenhouse gas emissions, including stamp duty incentives and environmental benchmarks.

The electorate of Kiama has a spectacular coastline and it needs to be conserved for future generations. That is why I will support proposed amendments to the Coastal Protection Act that will improve responses to beach erosion, facilitate coastal planning and enhance public access to beaches and headlands. A comprehensive policy needs to be defined that will state where development can and cannot occur on our coastline. Although the Government has already created more than 200 new national parks since coming to office, I welcome its intention to create more. I also applaud the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the Illawarra for its excellent work in protecting the environment and allowing the public to access those magnificent areas.

Finally, I turn to transport and roads, which are of significant relevance to the people I represent. Of all the matters that people speak to me about, transport and roads are the ones that are raised most. The Government has done more about roads and rail in the Kiama electorate than has any other government. Some of the achievements are the completion of the Oak Flats interchange and the purchase of land for Shellharbour City Council's east-west link. The Roads and Traffic Authority has commenced work on the North Kiama bypass and the \$36 million bridge over the Minnamurra flood plains has reached its half-way stage. Road funding is important to local economies and to road safety. However, public transport is also very important.

Towards the end of last year Minister Scully joined me, my parliamentary colleagues and my local community to officially open the electrification of the railway line to Kiama. Since that \$50 million project has opened, many more passengers are using the rail. That can only be a good thing for the environment and for getting more cars off the road. Since train travel has become more popular, at times it is becoming more difficult to get a seat on a train. We need more carriages on the network and I was heartened to hear from the Governor that later this year the Government will bring into service the first of the 135 new rail carriages currently on order or under construction.

However, the rail electrification needs to be extended further, as does the upgrade of the Princes Highway. I will continue to lobby the Federal Government for that road to have equal status with the Pacific

Highway, by having it declared a road of national importance. To conclude, the Governor informed the Parliament of many projects that the Government will undertake in the last year of its second term. My job is to keep fighting to ensure that the people in the area I represent get their fair share.

Mr R. H. L. SMITH (Bega) [11.13 a.m.]: I am pleased to contribute to the Address-in-Reply debate. I congratulate Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, AC, on the delivery of her Speech and compliment her on the dignity she has brought to the office of Governor of New South Wales. I have seen Her Excellency on only a couple of occasions, at official functions, and she is doing an absolutely wonderful job. On behalf of my electorate of Bega I invite her to come and see what we believe is the most lovely place in New South Wales, if not Australia, on the far South Coast. My electorate extends from the Pambula-Merimbula area in the south to Ulladulla, which is basically halfway to Sydney from the southern extremity of my electorate.

My electorate is quite large and has some of the most wonderful attractions, tourist destinations and retirement areas in New South Wales. The Governor's Speech was designed to outline the direction in which the Labor Government would go in the third session of the Fifty-second Parliament. The Government has really lost its way and does not have many ideas left; it is running out of puff, it has been in office too long. The Governor's Speech contained basically nothing for rural and regional New South Wales, which is extremely disappointing. I am sure that many Country Labor members were disappointed that their areas were almost entirely left out of the Government's projected plans for the next 12 months or so.

When the Carr Labor Government first came to office it promised that there would be no new taxes or increased charges. However, capital works spending, certainly in my electorate and those surrounding, has almost collapsed. Although the Government is overflowing with funds it has increased taxes as though there is no tomorrow. Basically the Government is not spending that money in a way that will give good value to the people. My electorate is very much a retirement area but it also has a huge tourist industry as well as the traditional industries of farming and fishing and small businesses. It is those areas in which the Government does not look after the basic facilities such as health and education.

I express my gratitude and thanks to the volunteer bush fire fighters, the Rural Fire Service, for the wonderful job they did over the Christmas and New Year period. A number of local firefighters sacrificed their holiday period to attend the fire in the Deua National Park or the more damaging fires in the Shoalhaven. A lot of property was lost and the severity of the fires was immense. In the Deua National Park about 60,000 hectares was burnt out. The Rural Fire Service, the State Emergency Service, the Volunteer Rescue Association, State Forests, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, the Ambulance Service, and the Police Service—all the emergency services—were involved in fighting that fire. They put in an incredible effort to make sure it did not escape from public land; no private land was burnt. The services are considering how they can improve their land-use methods so that a fire such as that does not happen again.

The destruction caused by bushfires in the Shoalhaven area was far worse. People lost personal possessions, houses, stock and fences, and there was generally a great deal of damage. The fires, which were attended by many Rural Fire Service volunteers from my electorate, were catastrophic. I am very proud to have been appointed to the Joint Select Committee on Bushfires, which you, Mr Deputy Speaker, will chair. I am looking forward to participating in the work of the committee and making recommendations to find better solutions or better management approaches to prevent future loss of life and property.

The Governor mentioned healthier communities. As all honourable members know, in New South Wales the health system goes from crisis to crisis. In the Bega electorate, regular public meetings have been held about different cutbacks that have been foreshadowed. Because of the motivation of the community and the closeness of health facilities to areas where retired people have chosen to live—in some respects, health facilities are good in my electorate—people soon turn up to public meetings to show their displeasure when health facilities are threatened by cutbacks. In times past the Bega electorate was able to obtain increased services to meet demand and some specialists would be brought down to my electorate instead of people having to travel to Canberra or Sydney to obtain their services. In more recent times, however, the focus has been on trying to maintain the existing services. It is a desperate shame that people have to expend all their energies trying to keep what they have without any prospect of an increase in services in an area that obviously has had huge increases in population rates, especially with retirees and tourists.

Pambula District Hospital always seems to be under attack. I believe it is the intention of the Southern Area Health Service to make the hospital basically an aged persons home with an accident and emergency section attached to it. Such a proposal is unacceptable to the people of the Eden, Pambula and Merimbula areas.

They want their hospital, and they intend to fight for it, as they have done on a number of occasions. I am sure that the Southern Area Health Service will incur the wrath of the community if it proceeds with this proposal. It would make a world of difference to the operation of hospitals if district boards could be reinstituted so that a number of hospitals could network with input from community representatives. I believe that hospital boards would give the Government some idea of what is required and provide the community with an opportunity for input as well.

Public dental health treatment in my electorate is nothing short of a disgrace. There are two public dental health clinics, one at Pambula and one at Moruya. Both centres have lost their full-time dentists and have locums instead. They have massive waiting lists, yet the Southern Area Health Service seems to be unable to retain permanent dentists for those two facilities. I will give the House some idea of the problems with dental health care in my electorate. The waiting list statistics for the Southern Area Health Service for 20 February show that 200 people were waiting for treatment in Pambula and 159 in Moruya. Both of those towns are in my electorate, and their waiting lists should be compared with other areas under the administration of the Southern Area Health Service. Queanbeyan had only 57 people waiting, Goulburn had only 22, Young had only four names on the waiting list, Cooma had only three, and Yass had no waiting list at all.

There is absolutely no doubt that there is something wrong with the way the Southern Area Health Service is advertising for replacements to fill the two vacant positions in Moruya and Pambula. A short while ago the waiting list at Moruya was 70, and that does not count the people who just gave up because there seemed to be no hope of getting into the surgery. The Milton-Ulladulla Hospital is actually in the South Coast electorate but is used by people who live in Ulladulla and other areas farther south in my electorate. The Minister for Health visited my electorate and announced an upgrading of the hospital, but it still has not happened.

I strongly hope the honourable member for South Coast is successful in having the project become a reality in the May budget. The hospital is very old and has only 22 beds for a district population of approximately 20,000. The whole hospital complex is run down and old and needs a total upgrading. I urge the Minister to ensure that a budget allocation is made in May to bring the hospital up to standard. A couple of years ago the blood bank in Bega was closed, and that was met with a great deal of angst from the community. Members of the Australian Red Cross were also most upset. At that time it was stated that the Bega blood bank was the most expensive collection area in New South Wales and that was the reason for its closure.

As I have noted in this House on previous occasions, since the Bega blood bank closed some other district must now be the most expensive collection area. If I were representing that area I would be very careful because the risk of that area's blood bank being closed on the ground of being the most expensive collection area is very grave. If the matter were not so serious, it would be amusing to note that at almost the very instant that the Bega blood bank closed, the Minister for Health stated on radio that blood supplies were critically short. He repeated that statement over a number of months and pleaded for volunteers to donate blood. I can assure the House that that did not amuse people in the Bega electorate.

In the forthcoming budget I hope there will be a continuation of the capital works program for the Merimbula Public School. The project is currently at the consultation and planning stage. At one time great angst was felt about the department changing the footprint of the building, but I understand that the parents and citizens association, the headmaster and teachers are relatively happy with the latest proposal. This year I hope there will be a continuation of the capital works program for which a budget allocation was made in 2001.

Last night I referred to the 30-year-old Ulladulla High School, which is really in a shocking state. Rather than deal with that topic in detail at this stage, I merely refer honourable members to the speech I made yesterday outlining the problems there. I am sure that my colleague who represents the neighbouring electorate of South Coast will support my requests for funds to upgrade the high school, because many of the students who attend the Ulladulla High School come from his electorate. I am doing all I can to make sure that this year funds are allocated for a major upgrade of that school. For many years increased funding for the Bega West Public School has been mooted, but the funding has ever been forthcoming. The school is situated on a small block of land and it would be desirable to relocate the school to a block that was earmarked a number of years ago.

I am pleased that ongoing capital works funding has been provided for this project. The school is to be built on the site of a cemetery. Therefore, either the graves will be removed or the school will be built over them, with the agreement of the relatives of those buried there. I hope that the project continues until its conclusion. I refer to public housing in my electorate. There is a chronic shortage of public housing in my

electorate. The number of houses being built has decreased dramatically over the years. Often people who require public housing do not have an alternative. The public housing list is far too long. I look forward to more houses being built for low-income earners in the Bega electorate. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Roads are the lifeblood of my electorate because it does not have the advantage of rail services. The Princes Highway is nothing more than a narrow, winding road from Wollongong to the Victorian border. It requires a large injection of funds. Some time ago the Minister announced that \$380 million would be spent on the Princes Highway. However, this funding is to be made available over a 10-year period. An allocation of \$38 million per year for a road that is approximately 500 kilometres long is insufficient. Considerable funds are needed to enable the Princes Highway to cope with traffic growth and to bring it into line with the improvements that are being made to the Pacific Highway and the Hume Highway. Quite some time ago a corridor was selected for the Bega bypass. That development is now critical, particularly as the Bega cheese factory now uses B-double vehicles that have difficulty travelling on the roads in the township.

The northern approach to Narooma is so narrow that semitrailers of even normal length must break the law and cross the centre line to get onto the Narooma bridge. For a number of kilometres south of Narooma the road is winding and narrow. Massive sums of money are needed to upgrade that road and the Narooma bridge. The bypass at Brogo is in a shocking state and needs major work. The Government has allocated \$3 million to replace the Pambula River bridge, which, unfortunately, is a flood plain area. The Roads and Traffic Authority has decided to replace the existing timber bridge with a similar bridge. I consider it a waste of money to build a bridge that may last 50 years but will be flood prone. Every 18 months or so the road will be cut, which will affect commerce and tourism in the area. The Eden community will not have access to the hospital at Pambula and schoolchildren from the Merimbula-Pambula areas will not be able to attend Eden High School. It will create chaos.

Plans for the Ulladulla bypass should proceed. The delay has caused considerable angst to people endeavouring to sell land in that corridor. Therefore, I urge the relevant authorities to start construction on the proposed bypass. The Kings Highway, which is the link between Batemans Bay and Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory, is also in urgent need of repairs. The section between Governors Corner and Pooh Bear Corner—as it is known locally—has an extremely slippery surface and accidents constantly occur in the area. The RTA is aware of problems with this section of the road but says it does not have sufficient funds to rectify it. I believe the RTA should review its programs if it cannot find the necessary funds to make this dangerous road safe for travellers.

Home owners warranty insurance for builders is also a matter of concern to my electorate. Almost daily builders ring my office because their insurance has run out and they cannot get satisfaction from the remaining two parties involved in this insurance area. Builders cannot complete their building works without insurance, which the State Government has made compulsory. The Government should sort out the problem so that insurance is available when builders require it. The increasing problem with public risk insurance has been debated recently in this House. This type of insurance is necessary for the running of local shows and community activities. I appeal to the Government to attend and participate in the Federal Government meeting so that the problems with public risk insurance can be solved and local communities can continue to hold community activities. I would like to refer to a number of other issues, but I shall postpone speaking on them until the budget is brought down. At that time I will have more to say on behalf of my electorate.

Mr HICKEY (Cessnock) [11.38 a.m.]: It is with pleasure that I speak in reply to the Speech of Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir on the opening of the Parliament. I congratulate her on her role as Governor of New South Wales. Everywhere I go in my electorate people pay tribute to her dignified manner and compassion, the way she relates to individual groups, and her understanding of the issues facing each and every Australian. I am aware that Her Excellency the Governor visited Weston some time ago. It was her first visit to the Hunter. The honourable member for Maitland, the honourable member for Swansea, the honourable member for Newcastle, the honourable member for Wallsend, the honourable member for Lake Macquarie and a number of other dignitaries in the area attended that function. Her Excellency was accepted by the community as one of the locals, which shows what a common touch she has and what a tremendous role she plays.

This year is the centenary of women's suffrage. The honourable member for Bega referred in his contribution to the Address-in-Rely debate to the hospital system and to dental clinics. He should remember that the Federal Government cut a substantial amount of money from this State's budget and that has restricted the ability of the Government to provide necessary services. He should take up that issue with his Federal colleagues. The honourable member for Bega referred also to public liability insurance. New South Wales is leading the country in dealing with that problem. The Commonwealth Government, which is lagging behind, is being forced by this State to address issues that impact on all Australians.

Australia is a country of contrasts. New Year's Day 2002 marked the beginning of the Year of the Outback and it also marked the end of the International Year of Volunteers. Christmas was a sad period because of the bushfires. Local fire services at Cessnock were tested to their limit. Areas in Cessnock and Singleton that were declared natural disaster areas bore the full force of hot, windy days and arsonists. The Bulga fire, which was burning in the Wollemi National Park and threatened to enter the Singleton coalfields, engulfed more than 64,000 hectares of land. That fire, which commenced burning on 21 December, threatened the town of Broke and large mining complexes were exposed to danger. If the coal dumps at the Singleton coalfields had caught on fire it would have been almost impossible to put them out. That could have had a serious economic impact on Cessnock and the rest of the State, an issue that was uppermost in most people's minds.

A separate fire was burning 10 kilometres to the south in the Yengo National Park. If that fire had linked with the Bulga fire it would have spread to the Broken Back range and threatened Cessnock. Fire control informed my office that it had identified someone who was believed to have started the Bulga fire. Honourable members would be aware that 90 per cent of bushfires were started by arsonists—a frightening statistic. One wonders about the mentality of people who start fires in such conditions. At the Bulga fire control base 250 personnel from a variety of emergency services were used to contain the blazes. Fire service personnel, many of whom were volunteers from other areas and States, protected our community with bravery and skill.

Many volunteers from within my community were involved in putting out those fires. I take this opportunity to thank some of the volunteers from the Rural Fire Service headquarters at Cessnock—Robin Rogers, Colin Turnbull, Glen Byrnes, Nadia Southwell, Paul Jones and Robin Scott; Peter Hollier, Steve Marsh and Cathy Burns from Wyong; Dave Allan and Grahame Downing; Brett Pengelly, Jenny Farrell and Rob Sheath from the National Parks and Wildlife Service; Craig Davis from Rylstone; Guy Duckworth from Port Macquarie; Gary Pont from Maitland; Superintendent Mick Johnson, Greg Lewis and Glen Batty from the New South Wales Bush Fire Brigade; Ken Maxwell from Kurri Kurri; and John McNamara from Sydney.

Aircraft were constantly in the air and helicopters were used to water bomb the fires. I thank Jim Blackmore from Taree, the air observer, who did a tremendous job in fighting those fires. I also thank local Rural Fire Service crews from Rothbury, Kearsley, Greta, north Rothbury, Pokolbin, Central, Neath, Benwarrin, Mulbring, Quorrobolong, Wollombi and Laguna, who were all fighting those fires. The Deputy Premier visited the area and saw first-hand volunteer firefighters protecting our community with vigilance and dedication. The Premier also visited the Cessnock area. After the Premier's unscheduled visit to the Cessnock electorate I expressed gratitude to him for his support for the local community and the fire service. I was honoured that the Premier chose to visit my electorate the weekend after the devastating fires took hold.

The Premier and the Federal Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Jenny Macklin, visited the area to review the situation and to make informed judgments about the needs of the local community. The Premier, Ms Macklin and I attended a briefing by Mr Rob Rodgers at the Cessnock fire control offices on the fire situation across the electorate. Mr Rodgers gave an overview of the damage to the area and the service's forward plan. The Premier and Ms Macklin flew over the fire-ravaged areas and took stock of the damage that had been caused to properties and State assets in the Wollemi and Yengo national parks. At that time the Premier made a strong commitment to rural and regional areas. The Premier and the Federal Deputy Leader of the Opposition took time out to meet and speak with residents at local shopping centres—a demonstration of the down-to-earth nature of our Premier.

Over the past seven years the Carr Government has made a strong commitment to the New South Wales Rural Fire Service. The Government allocated \$8.37 million to the Cessnock rural fire district for the purchase of bushfire equipment and to assist in the day-to-day running of volunteer brigades, which equates to a 141 per cent increase in funding compared with the \$3.4 million that was allocated by the former Coalition Government during its seven years in office. An amount of \$1.9 million was allocated to purchase 16 fire tankers and \$840,300 was allocated for the construction of seven brigade stations and one fire control centre.

An amount of \$940,000 was allocated for the purchase of new fire engines at Cessnock, Abermain, Paxton and Bellbird; \$83,000 was allocated for the refurbishment of fire engines at Paxton, Branxton and Kearsley fire stations; \$354,000 was allocated for the construction of a new fire station at Bellbird; and \$6.147 million was allocated to the Singleton rural fire district for the purchase of bush fire fighting equipment to assist in the day-to-day running of volunteer brigades. That is a 292 per cent increase in funding compared with the \$1.5 million allocated by the former Coalition Government. An amount of \$1.54 million was also allocated to purchase 17 bushfire tankers, \$151,000 was allocated for the construction and renovation of five bushfire brigades, \$280,000 was allocated for the purchase of a fire engine and \$30,000 was allocated for communication equipment for Singleton fire brigade station. The Christmas fires had a significant effect on my electorate and the hard work of those volunteers should never be forgotten.

The Government is also addressing the issue of mental health. People in the Cessnock and Singleton areas now have an opportunity to be part of a new treatment initiative developed by the Hunter Area Health Service's Mental Health Unit. This new project is led by the Rural Depression Manager, Megan Wright, and involves holding free classes to assist people living with depression to gain further skills and cognitive behavioural therapy techniques. To be eligible for the classes, participants must be aged over 18 years, they must be undergoing treatment for an existing or past depressive disorder and they must be referred by a doctor. It is important for the participants to remain in contact with their doctors, as they will be their primary support agents. The classes involve individuals who live with depression learning ways of modifying their moods by changing their way of thinking about their illness. The free six-week course will be conducted at Cessnock on Wednesday mornings and at Singleton on Thursday evenings. It will be presented by qualified staff from the Hunter Valley mental health team.

The Cessnock electorate has received \$26,000 from the Minister for Sport and Recreation to address local youth crime. That money was presented to the Singleton and Cessnock police and community youth clubs, which will use it to divert troubled young people into positive, long-term sport and physical activities. If the Government and the community can get our young people involved in worthwhile projects before they go off the rails it will, hopefully, reduce the incidence of truancy and youth crime. The Singleton Police and Community Youth Club received funds to send 12 young people to a jillaroo and jackaroo school in the Central West. The Cessnock Police and Community Youth Club was granted funds to allow up to 40 young people to attend four separate eight-week programs that began in term three last year and will finish in term two this year. Participants in the program will take part in sporting activities and gain qualifications in refereeing or coaching. Both projects aim to improve participants' self-esteem and understanding that they have positive skills that are worth developing.

The State Government also provided funding for the Singleton Youth Centre, which will give one of the town's few facilities for young people the opportunity to buy much-needed equipment. The centre recorded more than 2,500 visits last year, and about 50 young people aged between 12 and 17 use the centre every week. The new equipment will expand the services on offer and attract more young people to the centre. The \$10,000 grant will be used to build a half basketball court, purchase computer equipment—including a digital camera—and refurbish two pool tables. Young people who visit the centre can play video games and pool, have free access to the Internet and enrol in cooking and craft programs. According to Mr Paul Price, the centre's co-ordinator, the centre is an important meeting place for many young people in the Singleton shire. Mr Price should be commended for his hard work and dedication to the youth centre in trying to address youth problems in the Singleton area. The funding is a recognition of community spirit, which is alive and well in rural and regional New South Wales.

The Minister for Juvenile Justice, the Hon. Carmel Tebbutt, visited the Cessnock electorate to award a grant of \$1,000 for graffiti art. The graffiti will adorn the back wall of the police and community youth club, which is not visible from the street. Although I do not condone acts of vandalism under any circumstances, these young graffiti artists have talent. If they are given a legal local space to develop their skills, their art will not be viewed as antisocial—and the Cessnock Police and Community Youth Club offered to create such a space. It was great to have the Minister come on board and support the proposal with a small grant. It means a lot to those young people. Singleton Public School in Hunter Street was recently permitted to purchase an adjacent property, which will allow the school to grow. More than \$1 million has been allocated for school refurbishments and the like. The King Street Public School at Singleton needs a new hall and the Milbrodale Public School has storage problems. I am sure the Minister for Education and Training will address those issues in the near future.

The Cessnock community generally has embraced the Government's stance on education and its high level of commitment to this important area. The Assistant Treasurer, the Hon. John Della Bosca, has provided funding of \$300,000 for the one-stop shop at Cessnock High School to address many of the drug problems in the local area. The Magistrates Early Referral into Treatment [MERIT] program will begin in the Cessnock area on 1 April. There is community concern about the incidence of repeat offending, particularly drug crime, and I expect the MERIT program and the repeat offenders legislation to address that issue in the near future. The Government is on the front foot in dealing with illegal drugs, and I congratulate everyone who has had input into the process.

The Deputy Premier, and Minister for Planning indicated his clear support for the Singleton community's views when he rejected the Ravensworth dump proposal. There was clearly no constant demand for such a facility. The Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads is focusing anew on the Cessnock electorate and is developing a \$10 million plan to refurbish the Vincent Street area. The money will be spent on

main street upgrades and will clearly benefit the community. However, the Government must address the many problems caused by lack of infrastructure between the F3 Freeway and the New England Highway. If there is a more important road in Australia, I would like to see it. The Federal Minister for Transport and Regional Services, John Anderson, should support this proposal as his electorate will benefit from the upgrade.

The Minister for Planning recently announced the establishment of the Hunter employment zone at Tomalpin, which will create thousands of jobs for the Cessnock electorate. It involves an 800 plus-hectare industrial development and a doubling of the conservation area around Tomalpin to deal with environmental issues. I congratulate the Deputy Premier on his efforts to address many of the problems in Cessnock.

Ms HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [11.58 a.m.]: I respond with great joy to the Governor's Speech. Her Excellency is a wonderful role model for women across the State and a terrific Governor. Her sense of style, natural intelligence, commonsense and her experience in a wide variety of fields confirm the fact that she was an excellent choice for Governor. I look up to her, as do many other women in this place as well as professional and non-professional women across the State. We are proud to have a female Governor in this State. She is performing her role beautifully. However, the Speech that was written for her by the Government was not as accurate as it could have been in regard to rural and regional areas. For the benefit of honourable members, particularly Government members, I shall clarify some of those issues as they relate to my electorate of Burrinjuck.

The Governor spoke about education, health, policing, bushfires, transport and roads. I, too, shall refer to those issues in my contribution to this debate. Honourable members would be aware that the Police College is located in the city of Goulburn, which is in the Burrinjuck electorate. Recently my electorate has expressed concern about the guarantee regarding the retention of the Police College in its present location. Goulburn, with its clean air, has an ideal climate that encourages study; it is an ideal place for a university. The city is situated at the end of the City Rail line, which means easy access to transport to Sydney. Access to Canberra is also easy as Goulburn is only three-quarters of an hour from Canberra by road. There is plenty of room at the university campus and, basically, there is plenty of access to everything.

As the local member I have called on the Minister for Police many times to provide a guarantee to Goulburn and its businesses that the Police College will remain where it is. The Opposition has given that guarantee and I am now pleased, and relieved, that Minister Costa has also given that guarantee. However, there are still rumblings about that guarantee. We want to make sure that any uncertainty regarding the location of the Police College is put to rest and that the college will not be moved from Goulburn. The retention of the Police College is a big issue for the town and we need to make sure that all rumours about its future are put to bed.

The electorate of Burrinjuck is experiencing a serious shortage of front-line police. In January the many reported thefts could probably be attributed to the Christmas period, when residents were away on holidays, and an influx of people at local shopping centres. More theft at that particular time of the year is expected, but during January the level of retail theft in many parts of my electorate was unprecedented. Shopkeepers have told me that they are dissatisfied with the level of front-line policing. I hasten to add that the police in my electorate do an outstanding job. I am in awe of what they do: they work hard and need our continued support. They often do the jobs of two people in one day. I have the utmost respect for the police because they do a great job, but we need lots more of them.

The Governor spoke in her Speech about jobs. Last week in Goulburn the Minister for Corrective Services publicly reneged on a Labor 1999 election promise to relocate Corrective Services headquarters to Goulburn. Naturally, the people of Goulburn are upset at the breaking of yet another Labor election promise. I shall refer in more detail to that on another occasion. The future of cook-chill jobs at Kenmore Hospital is a major concern. The Kenmore Hospital site is to be sold, and we need a commitment from the Government that the cook-chill jobs will remain in Goulburn. The city has suffered considerable job losses under the Government.

It must be remembered that a government job is a secure salaried job and businesses rely on secure salaries for their existence. I have been involved in the retail industry since 1989, so I am well aware of the impact of salaried jobs in a regional town. Businesses need to have job certainty and so much uncertainty about whether businesses will remain is not good for any town. The local railway service has lost many jobs: since 1997 the numbers have decreased by 100. I welcome the new work that is being undertaken at the railway workshops, but more has to be done.

Health services is a huge issue in country New South Wales. It is clear from the annual report of the Southern Area Health Service that service standards have declined. I shall not refer to all of the details, but the

statistics regarding health services are interesting. Nurse safety has raised a few eyebrows. The House will be interested to know that the Southern Area Health Service had to factor into its budget almost \$250,000 as a result of the number of assaults that have occurred in hospitals in the area. Since 1995 \$250,000 has been lost in work hours and compensation, yet only \$8,500 per annum is being spent on security. It does not take much commonsense to work out that more money needs to be spent on protecting our nurses and making sure that they work in an appropriate occupational health and safety environment.

Bed space in Goulburn Base Hospital also is a big problem. Adult patients are regularly placed in maternity and children's wards. Last week it was brought to my attention that a 90-year-old patient was placed next to a mother who had just given birth by caesarean section. The 90-year-old patient needed rest and was unable to have that rest because of the inappropriate placement in the same ward as the mother with the newborn baby. We need more nurses and more beds. Currently, the waiting list for elective surgery at the local hospital stands at 283. Nine of those on the waiting list have waited for more than 12 months. When the Carr Government was elected the waiting list was 165. The Government has failed to address this problem over the past seven years. The Goulburn Base Hospital lacks dialysis facilities. I am aware of at least 10 patients who would use this service if it were available. The hospital has two nurses trained in providing dialysis care, those requiring the service are waiting for treatment, but the equipment is not there to provide it.

The Southern Area Health Service is in debt to many local businesses. The level of debt increased from \$7.5 million actual in 2000 to \$10.3 million actual in the 2001-02 budget. Because of those outstanding debts local businesses are suffering; many have been waiting months for payment. The Yass car pool has had the number of vehicles it uses for community health services to outlying areas severely reduced. That has caused immense concern to the local community. Overall, a disturbing picture is being painted of the Southern Area Health Service: fewer patients are being treated, more complaints are being received, waiting lists are increasing, more debts are being incurred and services are reducing.

Is it any wonder that members representing country electorates talk continually about the provision of health services in this Chamber? Those matters are continually brought to our attention as local members, and it is our job to bring them to the attention of the Government. The Minister for Health has a responsibility to take positive action rather than leaving it all to area health services to work out. He should be looking at what is going on. If he saw some of the facilities, he would not be surprised at the poor health services available to those in rural New South Wales.

The Governor spoke about education. On 20 October 2000 the Government promised that \$400,000 would be provided for an industrial arts block at Crookwell High School. We are still waiting for that money; we hope it appears in the budget this year. I remind the Government that it made that commitment and that the money is still definitely needed. The school was very excited when the Government made the announcement, as was I. It was wonderful to hear that a local school would receive almost \$500,000 in funding. However, the school is yet to receive that funding. Hopefully, the allocation will appear in this year's budget, and I call on the Government to ensure that it does.

Mulwaree High School is renowned for having one of the State's best woodwork faculties. In fact, in the past two years the school has been awarded second and third prize at a State level. However, the Department of Education and Training has refused to provide funding for a couple of new router tables that are needed. They would not cost very much. The school also needs a facility to properly house its World War I and World War II collection. The school's collection is second only to the Australian War Memorial collection, yet it is housed in a tiny room and can hardly be properly displayed at all. The school desperately needs a proper facility to house and display this brilliant Australian memorabilia, and I call on the Government to provide funding for that in the coming budget.

Computer Internet connection times for country schools is a big problem. This week I was pleased to lead a delegation of principals and information technology teachers to the office of the Minister for Education and Training so that the issue could be discussed. Crookwell High School has 60 computers connected via digital fibre optic cabling inside the school. The school is connected to the telephone network by digital fibre optic cable, but there is only one 64-kilobyte integrated services digital network line between the school and the Department of Education and Training mainframe. There is no point in students having computers if they cannot use them.

At this week's meeting with the Minister's office teachers expressed the most incredible sense of frustration about the fact that they are often forced to sit in classrooms for 45 or 50 minutes with a room full of

blank faces because students are not able to connect to the Internet. The inability of students to get online makes the Internet and information technology difficult to teach. In fact, one class even had to resort to a faxed lesson from the department. Faxes had to be sent between the school and the department because students could not get online—and the subject involved information technology. As I said earlier, it is difficult for teachers to teach a particular subject when Internet connection is not possible.

Franklin Public School needs an extension of its library, and Yass Public School needs an assembly hall. The Department of Education and Training gave a verbal commitment to fully fund improvements to Yass Public School car park. However, Yass ratepayers recently discovered that council will have to pay \$18,000 of that funding. All sorts of funding is being promised, but not much action is taking place. I call on the Government to address those issues and to realise that if it makes a commitment to fund certain projects it should follow up those commitments with action.

Naturally, I am very concerned about ovine Johne's disease; it is an issue that seriously affects the electorate of Burrinjuck. The Government recently announced an extension of the zones, adding yet another layer of bureaucracy and more uncertainty for sheep producers. The Ovine Johne's Disease Advisory Committee has recommended delaying the extension of the zones because of insufficient consultation. We found out about it through the *Southern Weekly* magazine. Indeed, many farmers in my electorate were in the same boat. Not one rural lands protection board that was to be affected by the new zoning system was informed about it.

The new zoning system has also resulted in increased complexity. The Wagga Wagga Livestock Marketing Centre has had to declare individual sheep and lamb pens as protected or controlled zones. Red tape has gone mad in relation to ovine Johne's disease, and the Minister has lost the support of the sheep industry because of his disastrous policies. We still have not been told what happened to the proceeds of the ovine Johne's disease levy. Why will the Minister not release the budget figures for the 2000 levy? Is he afraid of a backlash from producers about inappropriate spending? Rumours have been going around that some of the funding has been used to buy cars for bureaucrats. Farmers are not happy about that. I ask the Minister to put an end to the rumours and to come clean about how the levy was spent.

In the Year of the Outback, the Minister should admit that he has been wrong about ovine Johne's disease. His policies have already caused too much pain and suffering. There should be unrestricted access to the Gudair vaccine, regardless of whether a flock is infected by the disease. The vaccine has been shown to stop shedding and hinder transmission of the disease. Freedom of trade is a basic necessity for farmers. There must be an easing of trade restrictions between zones based on vendor declarations and the buyer beware principle. More direct and focused research on an Australian-developed vaccine is needed, with the aim of allowing producers to manage the disease on their properties. If the slaughter of a stud animal or a flock of sheep is required to control the disease, there must be some form of compensation for those losses. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The Goulburn saleyards had a sign that read "Slaughter Yard". Someone has taken off the "s", so the sign now reads "Laughter Yard". That demonstrates the effects that ovine Johne's disease policies are having on farmers. Farmers are so hysterical about it that they are laughing about it, saying that slaughter yards have now become laughter yards. Another issue of concern in my electorate relates to the Sydney catchment area. The Sydney Catchment Authority draft regional environmental plan for the Sydney catchment area will soon be released. I call on the Minister to ensure that there is a long period of public consultation. Many locals fear that the new plan will have a negative impact on local businesses, agriculture, and the right to farm.

In her Speech the Governor also referred to roads. Many roads in my electorate need immediate attention. One of them is the Lachlan Valley Way. The Boorowa Shire Council has expressed concerns about the repairing of patches on that road. The Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] will not authorise sufficient funds to enable resheeting, which would be more economical and efficient. Scarce taxpayers' dollars are being wasted. Boorowa Shire Council is a small council that does not have a lot of funds. It has a huge road network, so it costs a great deal of money to repair those roads. On the Lachlan Valley Way there is nowhere for motorists to overtake and it is, therefore, a very dangerous road. There have been many accidents and many fatalities on that road.

Boorowa Shire Council has also expressed concerns that the Roads and Traffic Authority will soon make councils liable for all maintenance of all roads in the electorate, including State roads, thereby removing the State Government's legal liability. We are left to speculate about the additional impost on councils that that will cause. It is an example of the State Government shirking its responsibility. The road from Yass to Harden

still requires significant improvement, especially near Big Hill. Tumut Shire Council is spending all of its Federal Roads to Recovery and State funding for this year on Gocup Road between Tumut and Gundagai, as well as about \$180,000 of ratepayers' money on patching work. Tumut Shire Council estimates it will need about \$5 million in funding to make the road safe. Excessive damage is being caused by logging trucks. The Premier promised extra funding for roads when Visy was being investigated. The future growth that was spoken about at that time has now happened. The Premier has reneged on his promise for extra funding for roads. Urgent action must be taken by the Government.

Roads throughout the south-west slopes area, including Gocup Road and the Snowy Mountains Highway, are in desperate need of proper maintenance, which the State Government simply will not provide. Many Cabinet Ministers were sent a video showing the condition of those roads, and I have presented petitions containing thousands of signatures to this House. The intersection of the Snowy Mountains Highway and Batlow Road at Gilmore is also of concern. The school bus driver, Charles Manning, whom the Parliamentary Secretary at the table, the honourable member for Cabramatta, has met, has to dodge B-double timber trucks turning at the intersection. The Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] is applying band-aid solutions by putting in turning lanes, but visibility is not good and the whole intersection should be upgraded. Truck movements are increasing daily and the intersection is not safe for truck drivers and their loads, and it is certainly not safe for the bus driver and his precious cargo. We should have an efficient road network to cope with increasing truck movements in the Tumut area, local traffic, Victorian traffic and tourist traffic.

I have spoken in Parliament about the Grabine access road in the Crookwell shire. I will not go into detail now except to say that the Government has been sponging off Crookwell ratepayers for years and not accepting its responsibility for maintenance of the dangerous gravel Crown road. It is a disgrace that this is the only access road to a State park in New South Wales that is not sealed. Other roads in need of attention include Main Road 241, the Rye Park to Gunning Road, the Back Creek Road at Yass, Oallen Ford Road in Mulwaree shire, the Gunning to Collector Road, and the Bombowlee Creek Road in Tumut shire. They are examples of the roads that are deteriorating because the State Government is not accepting its responsibilities.

Other transport matters have been drawn to my attention. There is no train from Goulburn to Sydney between 7.28 a.m. and 2.52 p.m. on weekdays. The time when people are likely to want to travel should be considered in formulating train timetables. It does not take a lot of commonsense to do it, or to consult with passengers. I have written to the Minister about this issue, but I want to put it on the record in the House. Train timetables have been a big issue in Sydney for years, but they are also an issue in the country. Access to public transport in rural areas is another issue of concern. Pensioners are eligible for a \$2.20 daily excursion pass but generally in country areas they can travel only one way each day because of the lack of train routes. There is clearly an inequity in the treatment of city and country pensioners. For example, a pensioner in Bowning can travel to the Australian Capital Territory for a medical appointment but he or she has to pay about \$60 for the return fare on the same day or pay for overnight accommodation.

I have recently referred in Parliament to the lack of public community transport for long-term oncology and dialysis patients in rural areas. The new RTA driving and knowledge tests discriminate against country kids, particularly those with a mild intellectual disability who can drive but who just have trouble passing the written part of the test. They have to sit for the knowledge tests on numerous occasions. There is minimal public transport in the country and a driver's licence is the key to finding employment and having a social life. Some kids are sitting these tests 15 to 20 times. They have to pay each time and it is costing them a fortune. But they have to get a driver's licence if they are to get from point A to point B and eventually stop relying on mum and dad to get them around. The Government should recognise the size of this problem.

The State Government should also take action to deal with the problem of public housing. In some cases there are waiting lists of up to five years, and significant problems with maintenance. The recent reorganisation looks good and gives the impression of change but to my eye it seems like not much has improved. In my electorate—I am sure it applies across the board—there are problems with disorderly tenants who leave public housing in an absolute mess. They walk out and get another house straightaway. Various current affairs programs have featured the problem. There should be a proper penalty for people who destroy houses and who waste the department's time and money. They do not deserve to be in the public housing system. Perhaps an alternative would be to move them to a different area: if they are going to destroy the public housing in Sydney they can be moved to, say, Wagga Wagga. That is something that should be considered.

There is uncertainty in Batlow about the site of the multipurpose service [MPS]. The Government said that work will commence in 2002-03, yet the site has not yet been selected and there are local concerns that the

site preferred by the MPS working party in the old railway yards may have contaminated soil. The Government has refused the local community's request for soil testing. Last week it was a terrible local tragedy when the icon Mountain Maid factory closed. The Government needs to act to support the local workers and creditors. The preferred solution would be for the factory to be sold as a going concern. I encourage the Government to assist with all the plans so that as many jobs as possible can be saved.

I turn to a few miscellaneous issues. The new legislation on justices of the peace requires all JPs to reapply every few years and be charged an additional fee. That is seen as nothing more than a tax grab. During the recent fires excellent work was done by the local State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service [RFS]. There were 27 fires in the Burrinjuck electorate over the Christmas-New Year period. Hundreds of firefighters from the electorate were deployed to fires in other parts of the State. I know that the parliamentary inquiry will address the problems of funding and risk prevention. Concerns were expressed to me about equipment levels. For example, the ACCO International tanker of the Big Hill brigade from just outside Marulan is so old that the water had to be emptied from it before it could get up the hill to fight the fire. Smaller tankers then ferried water up to the ACCO. I raised this issue with the Minister for Emergency Services, but I am still waiting for a reply. The volunteer firefighters do so much for the community and they deserve better than this.

Noxious weeds are a big issue, particularly for local government. In the Crookwell shire some farmers are spending \$15,000 to \$20,000 a year to prevent the spread of serrated tussock but are only just keeping level with the spread of the weed. More funding is needed for the control of weeds on public lands to ease the burden on farmers. The Gundagai *Independent* recently noted that Gundagai council was largely behind a push for major changes to noxious weed eradication funding and the way campaigns are handled. At a recent G Division conference of the Shires Association Mike Montgomery, the president of the association, stated that there is a State budget surplus of \$713 million but it does not seem to be heading towards the RFS or to rural issues as a whole. More rural surgeons and general practitioners are needed in New South Wales. There have been many editorials on that issue.

The Tumut Hospital Planning Committee was formed as a result of public concern that the current Tumut hospital is based in an old building that has been remade a number of times with numerous additions. The hospital is becoming increasingly inefficient. It is not catering for current medical practices and it will not cater for the growth expected in the shire as a result of developments in the plantation timber industry. With the completion of the \$4 million Visy pulp and paper mill on the outskirts of Tumut during 2001 the area has had enormous population growth, which has highlighted the inadequacy of the hospital building and called into question the ability of the hospital to serve the region. The committee is anxious to get a new hospital up and running in Tumut, and it has my wholehearted support. The committee has written to Minister Knowles inviting him to come to Tumut to inspect the hospital and to discuss the upgrade program. I hope that the Minister will accept the invitation.

In the remaining seconds of my speech I draw attention to the fact that the States were recently blamed for child care shortages. On 29 January 2002 the *Australian* reported that child care agencies have united with the Federal Government to lay the blame for an acute shortage of before school and after school child care on the States. More than 20,000 children will be denied out-of-school-hours care because the Government underfunded the industry by about 62,000 places. The area assistance scheme applies only to the metropolitan area. It should apply to the Adelon Theatre company. The Tumut library needs— [Time expired.]

Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [12.28 p.m.]: One of the perhaps least commented upon aspects of the Governor's Speech is that relating to information technology. The Governor noted that her Speech was the first parliamentary speech video-streamed live on the Internet. The Speech also referred to the State Government's e-government plan being well advanced. It is proposed that by the end of 2004 the system will be fully operational. This will allow people to apply for up to 90 different occupational licences over the Internet. While I do not oppose these initiatives, I suggest that they be viewed sensibly. That is, all the hyperbole and extreme rhetoric about the new economy and information technology generally should be tempered with a good dose of reality, as should some of the specific claims and programs associated with it.

Extraordinary claims were once made about the so-called new economy that was based on new information technology and the Internet. There was a remarkable amount of media hype. The boom-bust cycle of traditional markets would be overcome and ever-increasing growth and ever-increasing profits would result. Boris Frankel, in his book *When the Boat Comes In*, talks of the cargo cult mythology about new technology. He has pointed to the rash of superficial commentaries about the new economy by various commentators and the odd politician. Recent events have demonstrated that the new economy is just as prone to boom-bust cycles as

any other part of a capitalist market. As Boris Frankel notes, most of the characteristics of the new economy—such as downsizing, reducing wages and conditions, and a race to the bottom in wages by moving investment to low-wage societies—were very characteristic of the old economy.

Using those somewhat sceptical perceptions, it is worth reminding everyone of the reality of distribution of income and, thus, access to the Internet. Applying for licences on the Internet is all well and good if people have Internet access. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that in 2000 only approximately 33 per cent of Australian households had Internet access. It also indicated as follows: older respondents were less likely to access the Internet than younger respondents; employed people were more than twice as likely to access the Internet as unemployed people; and accessing the Internet was significantly less common for people earning less than \$40,000 per annum than for people earning that amount or more. To put it simply, Internet access is much more likely for the rich.

The countervailing argument is that, with students being educated in information technology and with what is predicted to be a progressive reduction in costs of provision, access to the net will broaden dramatically. That is certainly the hope—only time will tell whether it becomes a reality. This is not to argue that these programs, to which I have referred, should not be pursued. It simply requests that there be some reality about it. It is also an acknowledgement that such programs are much less relevant to my electorate than to some other electorates.

The Governor expressed sympathy for those who suffered loss during the Christmas-New Year bushfires, and expressed thanks to the firefighters who provided aid and support. I echo her comments. The Liverpool electorate was largely spared significant damage during the bushfires, although there was a significant blaze across some open space at Cecil Hills which was of concern to residents in that area. Certainly, one fence was damaged. There were also some fires nearby in Prestons. Additionally, one resident advised me that on Christmas Eve he observed people letting off fireworks in the vicinity of Elouera Nature Reserve, causing apprehension on his part that there would be an ensuing bushfire in the area.

That incident reflects the significant incidence of unauthorised use of fireworks in my electorate and in Western Sydney generally. The constituent who raised the issue with me also indicated that the proprietor of one shop in Liverpool persistently and continuously sells fireworks with no regard for the legal requirements. I have asked the Minister responsible for WorkCover to investigate that matter, and I am awaiting his response. The other relevance of the bushfires for Liverpool was the large number of local firefighters who participated in fighting the fires in other parts of the State. It is worth placing on record that the Liverpool community has expressed its great thanks to those firefighters.

On 1 March Quota International of Liverpool Incorporated organised a thank you function for the volunteer firefighters in our area. It was held at Hunts Motel in Cross Roads. I was invited to attend the function by the President of Quota International, Margaret Rudling. I was unable to be there, although I sent my apologies and a donation. I understand that a successful night was had by all. In addition, the Australian Hindu education and cultural centre held a function on 9 February, to which I was invited by Mr Noel Lal. A number of volunteer firefighters were present at the function, to whom the community expressed its thanks.

While Liverpool did not sustain much direct damage during the bushfires, the same cannot be said of the storms that struck on the weekend of 16 and 17 February. These were the most ferocious storms that anyone in Liverpool can remember. An immense amount of damage was done. The storms struck while, with other members in this place, including the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition, I was attending the Vietnamese New Year celebrations at Warwick Farm Racecourse. On my way home the Hume Highway near Orange Grove Road was flooded in a southerly direction, and cars were simply unable to get through. Many trees were knocked down and there were many power cuts. Electricity to my home was cut for about 30 hours and for similar, and indeed longer, periods for many other people.

I inspected the damage in the electorate the next morning. Miller Shopping Centre was badly affected and was closed on the Sunday. Busby Road was closed by a fallen tree. Parts of Cartwright looked like a war zone. Later on the Sunday the Deputy Premier and I attended the State Emergency Services headquarters in Rose Street, Liverpool, and spoke to some of the workers there. It was a horrific series of events. One issue raised in the Governor's Speech was the provision of transport services. Liverpool has done extremely well out of the current Government in relation to transport. The most obvious example is the redevelopment of the transport interchange at Liverpool railway station, which was a substantial capital investment and has undoubtedly dramatically improved the quality of public transport for many people in my electorate.

Some other significant projects referred to in the Governor's Speech are under way. One project is the development of the Liverpool to Parramatta transitway, about which I have spoken on quite a few occasions. That is a particularly significant development for Western Sydney. It will have tremendous benefits for Liverpool. In peak periods a rapid bus transit arrangement will mean that buses are travelling every five minutes, conveying people from Liverpool to Parramatta and from Parramatta to Liverpool. It will link into a range of facilities, including employment opportunities and educational facilities, in an area that is currently not well served by public transport.

As part of that development, there will be a redevelopment of Hoxton Park Road, which is probably the prime transport difficulty in Liverpool at present. At the end of this process, Hoxton Park Road will be widened to two lanes in both directions, together with the transitway. That will include widening the bridge on Hoxton Park Road at the intersection with Hill Road, which is a diabolical bottleneck at the moment. This work is imperative; it is being driven by the massive residential releases to the west of Liverpool. Essentially, many more people are living there than when the roads were originally built. The roads must be widened, otherwise people will simply be unable to move around.

Another significant transport initiative in my area is the Western Sydney Orbital, about which I have spoken many times. On behalf of my residents I have on many occasions expressed my horror and anger at the fact that a toll is being imposed on this roadway because the Federal Government, in its appalling manner, has refused to meet its responsibilities to Western Sydney. It has made a cynical decision that it wants to pour lots of money into roads in other parts of Sydney but not into Western Sydney and, therefore, Western Sydney must cop yet another toll. Additionally, there is a real issue about the route of the orbital through Cecil Hills. There has been a move from the original RTA proposal, and the proposed route has been moved somewhat to the west. That is a good thing. My only regret is that it has not been moved far enough to the west.

Having said that, and despite those two problems, the Western Sydney Orbital will nonetheless be a positive thing. It will allow a large amount of traffic to be taken off the Hume Highway and Orange Grove Road. That will have immense benefits for all the residents not only in my electorate but in neighbouring electorates who use those roads. Another road I should mention is Cowpasture Road. I have said, as have others, that Cowpasture Road is largely as it was 200 years ago. It needs to be substantially widened, certainly in that part of the road in my electorate, which is roughly from Elizabeth Drive down to Hoxton Park Road. Over time some money has been allocated for part of the road to be widened, and I look forward to that money being spent expeditiously on widening the road.

Another item mentioned in the Governor's Speech was the allocation of money for public education. Earlier this year the Minister for Education and Training allocated \$70 million. Some \$1.4 million of that was allocated in my electorate. I would like to mention some of those amounts, because they are very needed and greatly appreciated. Ashcroft High School will receive \$23,000 to replace floor coverings; Ashcroft Public School will receive \$5,000 to replace a telephone system; Busby Public School will receive \$12,000 to replace floor coverings and a telephone system; and Busby West Public School will receive \$50,000 to replace floor coverings. Busby West will lose part of its property to the Liverpool-Parramatta transitway, which will necessitate considerable changes to the school: the entrance to the school will no longer be from Rundle Road but from a road further to the west. I hope the redevelopment of the school necessitated by the transitway will incorporate a school hall.

I note that James Busby High School, which is quite close to Busby West, will also lose land to the transitway. I hope the money gained from the loss of that land will be channelled back to the schools to develop a hall for both James Busby High School and Busby West. Neither I nor the schools concerned are greedy. We would be quite happy if one hall met the needs of both schools. It is also worth noting that Busby Public School, which could also do with a hall, is quite nearby. One hall may be able to serve the needs of three schools. Part of the funding for such a hall may come from the acquisition of school land for the purpose of the transitway. Green Valley Public School will receive \$48,000 to install security grilling, replace roofing and replace floor coverings. Green Valley Public School has a massive growing school population because of new release areas. Funding was provided for a number of buildings, but more building is needed. Heckenberg Public School, which I attended several weeks ago for the induction of the new school captain and the Student Representative Council, will receive \$55,000 to replace floor coverings, roofing and a telephone system.

Hinchinbrook Public School will receive \$46,000 for cabling and security shutters for the library. Both Hinchinbrook and Heckenberg public schools have active school communities. The ceremony at Heckenberg Public School took place under a new covered outdoor learning area, which was funded partly by community

efforts. Towards the end of last year I attended Hinchinbrook Public School for the official opening of an oval, which was funded largely by the efforts of the local school community and the Mt Pritchard Community Club. Hoxton Park High School will receive \$133,000 to install a security fence and replace a telephone system. James Busby High School, which I have referred to previously, will receive \$117,000 to replace roofing and floor coverings. Miller Technology High School is a particularly impressive school. Peter McSeveny, the principal, has done extremely good work, as have the rest of the staff. It will receive \$293,000 to extend the existing school hall and replace a telephone system.

Miller Public School will receive \$72,000 to replace roofing and floor coverings. Mark Myles, the principal, joined the school only recently but he is continuing the work of Ross Neich, a long-serving principal of that school. I place on record our appreciation and respect for Mark Myles and his staff in the way they coped with the appalling siege at Miller Public School at the end of last year. The siege involved someone who had no connection at all with the school or any of its students. He simply chose Miller Public School as the place to carry out his actions. Warwick Farm Public School will receive \$6,000 to replace floor coverings and a telephone system. Although that is not a complete list, it is an indication of the substantial amount of money to be spent on public education in the electorate of Liverpool, which is much appreciated by the local community.

Another topic mentioned by the Governor—and this matter has been mentioned in this House of late—is public liability insurance and the cost of premiums. A number of people in my electorate have approached me, as other groups in other electorates have approached members, about the cost of public liability insurance. I am very disappointed by the appallingly low level of debate in this place about that matter. The almost universal approach has been simplistic and quite inadequate. The common approach by just about everyone has been that people should stop suing each other and that we should reduce the money paid to those who are injured. That is based upon an inaccurate assumption that, somehow or another, those things will reduce the level of public liability premiums. The rise in premiums is not the result of a dramatic increase in the level or quantum of claims; it is caused by other factors. If you ignore those other factors then logically you can have no impact at all upon the level of public liability premiums.

These quite logical arguments are largely ignored in this debate. Some recent proposals may well be desirable in their own terms, but we should not dishonestly raise the expectations of the community that what has been talked about recently will have any impact on the level of premiums. For example, restricting advertising by lawyers will have no impact at all, so far as I am concerned, on the level of premiums. It is something I welcomed. When I was in practice and restrictions on advertising were first changed, I was horrified. It is quite interesting to note that people who, in those days, talked about the need for the legal profession to come into the real world, into the twentieth century, to compete and do all the sorts of things that everyone is supposed to be doing, are the same people who are now calling for restrictions on advertising to be reimposed. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Recently I received material from the Australian Plaintiff Lawyers Association [APLA], which deals much more realistically with what is behind the rise in public liability premiums. Part of a letter dated 5 March states:

Public liability insurance premiums are rising and causing concern for community and not-for-profit organisations within our community.

APLA is a deeply concerned at the impact increasing premiums are having on these sectors.

However, in finding workable solutions to the rising premiums problem, we ask that you carefully consider the real reasons behind the premium rises.

It has been suggested that restrictions on injured people's ability to be sued be introduced. There is no evidence linking premium rises to litigation. It therefore follows that any attempt to alter the legal rights of injured people will not address the rise in public liability premium costs.

The discussion paper that APLA enclosed has some very interesting and useful material, and reads in part:

Premiums for all risks in Australia declined in the latter half of the 1990s. At the same time, Australia experienced a sustained period of economic growth and prosperity. Premiums were down because of competition between insurers, a generally stable reinsurance market, and stable risk factors throughout the latter part of the 1990s. These low costs coincided with high business prosperity and high levels of consumer confidence.

Insurance was too cheap for part of this period as competition resulted in the depletion of reserves and a decline in insurance company profits. Towards the end of 1999, premiums started to increase. In 2000, they had gone up by about 15-20%. The upward trend in premiums has continued throughout 2001 and into this year.

There are several reasons why public liability insurance premiums have increased so dramatically, including:

- Lack of regulation of the insurance market place
- Aggressive competition between insurers
- Renewed focus on profitability
- Increased reinsurance costs
- Alteration in the international risk environment
- Alteration in the earnings environment
- The cyclical nature of insurance profitability and premiums.

Perhaps this is neither the place nor the time to go into a lengthy debate about the cause of the rise of public liability premiums. However, it is considerably more complex than the tabloid media is prepared to allow, and considerably more complex than is allowed by politicians who seem to be determined to respond only to the tabloid media rather than deal with the substantive issues. We do the public in this State no service at all if we deal with what seems to be superficially attractive options that do nothing to deal with the underlying causes of the issue. If that is all we do, we are simply raising an expectation that we are solving a problem when, in fact, we are not solving the problem in any way, shape or form. Perhaps one of the most frustrating parts of public policy is that too often public policy making and short-term solutions are talked about and presented as a real solution to what are quite substantial and significant issues. Regrettably, that has been the course of public debate on all sides on this topic.

Mr WEBB (Monaro) [12.50 p.m.]: In responding to the Governor's Speech I ask: Why was it necessary to reopen Parliament? Did we need the Address by the Governor to reassure the people of New South Wales about the Government's agenda for the next few months? What did that exercise cost the people of New South Wales? Has the Government lost its way? Does it need redirection? Is the Government seeking reassurance and confirmation from its own members that it is still on the city-centric track on which it has been for the past few years? The Governor took the opportunity in her Speech to speak about the bushfire tragedy in New South Wales over the summer period. Fighting those bushfires, which burnt more than 700,000 hectares, required the co-operation and very hard work of some 20,000 volunteers, whose contribution, valued conservatively at \$1,000 per volunteer, equates to \$20 million. That effort was provided by the Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Services and local people throughout New South Wales. I take this opportunity to offer my congratulations and thanks to all of those participants.

The bushfires exemplify the need for constant hazard reduction and prescribed burning right across New South Wales on public and private lands in order to manage the real threat of bushfires, which occur year after year. The other alternatives are expensive. They lack the ability to control bushfires in the way that hazard reduction and strategic burning does. We have all heard about the efforts of back-burning literally at the last minute, and this has its own risks at hot fire times. The means other than fire to control hazard reduction and reduce the risk of bushfires are never really spelt out. There are mechanical controls, the redistribution of fuels and chemical retardants and so on, but at the end of the day a box of matches is the most sensible approach. Cool winter burns preserve the environment and reduce the risk of bushfires.

At the moment there is a massive warning in relation to the Kosciuszko National Park for 2002-03. Prior to Christmas I moved a notice of motion that alerted the Government to the massive fuel build-up through seasons in the Monaro, and the potential risk of bushfires. I asked at that time for the Government to alert its authorities. I also queried the significant amount of funding of local brigades and rural fire service areas that is paid back by way of program costs to administrative areas regionally and in the State. This is a major concern to local people. The whole issue of rural fire service funding needs to be readdressed, and I am pleased that this important inquiry will be conducted. I hope that the warning bells ring and we get proper funding and proper methods of hazard reduction control.

I hope the increased powers of the Rural Fire Service Commissioner and officers to enter land and carry out fire control burning will work for us. The legislation must be amended in other ways also. I refer to the provisions of the Environment Protection Act relating to the possibility of smoke going over urban areas and the risk to water catchments. The recommendations of the district fire management committee relating to the carrying out of hazard reduction burning or fuel reduction programs must be carried out, and government agencies or other bodies should not be able to protest and postpone or prevent the implementation of those recommendations. The weather has a significant effect on fire and fuel management. The windows of opportunity to use fire to reduce the hazard are quite small, and prior approval has to be received before such activity goes ahead. We have also heard about local government development applications for bushfire risk appraisals being rejected in the Land and Environment Court. How can we possibly go on building and developing in fire-prone areas and have the courts ignore the concerns of people on district fire management committees, fire control officers and the like.

This year being the Year of the Outback and the International Year of the Mountains, I take this opportunity to promote the Snowy Mountains of New South Wales, our prestigious ski fields, the summer and winter opportunities for tourism and recreational and sporting activities. In relation to the comments of other honourable members and the Governor regarding healthier communities, I want to talk about the need to urgently upgrade Queanbeyan district hospital. Queanbeyan hospital has been allowed to run down by this Government. For some time there have been calls to make much better use of the facilities, to reinstate the bed numbers to previous levels, to better utilise the theatres within Queanbeyan hospital, to allow private practitioners access to those theatres and beds for day surgery, to make better provision of health services, and for equitable access by people in Queanbeyan and district, who have to use Australian Capital Territory services at a premium price.

Recently I heard that it costs two to three times more to perform neurology and other types of operations in the Australian Capital Territory than it does in New South Wales. When New South Wales people access those services within the Australian Capital Territory the taxpayers of New South Wales pay for the services at a major premium. The New South Wales Government and the Department of Health must move quickly to address those inequities. The provision of other health services throughout my electorate is important. For some time we have called for dialysis services in Cooma. People from Cooma have to travel 700 kilometres a week for dialysis in the Australian Capital Territory. The clinical services plan recently promoted by the Southern Area Health Service is significantly flawed with regard to population projections and demographics for Monaro.

There is also a need for the Government to address the shortage of dental practitioners. In need of attention also is the shortage of nurses and their training and retention. Health equipment throughout the Monaro health service must be urgently upgraded. We must work with the Australian Capital Territory system, rather than against it, and telemedicine and teleconferencing prognosis and diagnosis are perhaps ways of doing that. The premiums that New South Wales people have to pay when accessing Australian Capital Territory systems certainly are not fair.

The Queanbeyan hospital upgrade can provide opportunities with urology and other clinical procedures to attract Australian Capital Territory people to New South Wales. In that way there may be an opportunity to balance the books and to provide services right across New South Wales in a much more equitable manner. The inequities in communication services in regional and rural New South Wales, particularly Monaro, should be addressed by the Government. The co-location of community technology centres and rural transaction centres could help to provide fundamental services to rural people. There should be a more equitable provision of online employment and other one-stop shop services to New South Wales.

Debate adjourned on motion, by leave, by Mr Webb.

[Madam Acting-Speaker (Ms Beamer) left the chair at 1.00 p.m. The House resumed at 2.00 p.m.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Private Members' Statements: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr Moss agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow the taking of private members' statements forthwith.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MILTON-ULLADULLA HOSPITAL

Mr R. H. L. SMITH (Bega) [2.00 p.m.]: I speak on behalf of residents in the northern half of the Bega electorate regarding the upgrading of Milton-Ulladulla Hospital. It is almost a year since I spoke on this issue and the necessity to upgrade this hospital is as great as ever. I point out that Milton hospital is located just outside my electorate in the electorate of South Coast, but it serves a significant proportion of my constituents from Burrill Lake, Termeil, Ulladulla and surrounding areas. Milton hospital is the missing link on the South Coast as far as health services are concerned. Most of the other hospitals have had relatively major upgrades over the past 10 years, but Milton hospital has simply stagnated. The Minister for Health visited the Milton hospital in August 2000 and agreed that an upgrade was necessary. He said that, "funding is available to begin planning for the redevelopment of the Milton-Ulladulla health service".

There was no mention of Milton hospital in the 2001 budget and there was no allocation for either planning or capital works. Last December I was informed by the Minister that "special funds have been made available to carry out a feasibility study with regard to the upgrading of Milton-Ulladulla Hospital". Apparently this study has been completed and submitted for the consideration of the Department of Health in its 2002-03 asset acquisition program submission to the Treasury. I was further informed that Dr Tony Sherbon, the Chief Executive Officer for the Illawarra Area Health Service, was instructed to keep me informed on the capital developments relating to Milton-Ulladulla Hospital. I am yet to hear from Dr Sherbon on this matter and my constituents are anxious to hear what the outcome of the feasibility study was. This hospital needs to be upgraded and soon. The Ulladulla area is fast growing.

I was informed earlier this month that real estate figures show that approximately 200 families have moved into the area since December. This is a huge increase over three months and surely it must place an added burden on the already stressed Milton hospital. This area is a popular retirement area as well as a tourist area. Because of its popularity as a retirement area, there are additional demands on health services. However, I have been advised that many older newcomers relocate away from the Milton-Ulladulla area because they find that when they require specialist care such as ophthalmic and orthopaedic surgery they have to travel to Nowra, Wollongong, Batemans Bay or Moruya to obtain that care. This has an impact on the commercial sector of Milton, as people who have to travel out of their area to obtain medical assistance often also shop out of the area.

The upgrading of Milton hospital is not only overdue, but is vital to the overall development and future of the district. I cannot stress strongly enough to the Minister for Health the need for this upgrade. In 2001 there were only 20 beds in this hospital to cope with the ever-increasing population. Over the Christmas-New Year tourist season the population more than doubles in the Ulladulla area as families arrive to enjoy the coastal delights. Because Milton has a small population of approximately 2,000 people, Milton hospital has been neglected and has not been considered an important medical facility. However, the people of Ulladulla regard it as their community hospital. According to the 1996 census Ulladulla's population was almost 9,000 and I know it has increased since then.

I remind the Minister of the promises he made following his visit to Milton hospital in August 2000 and call on him to fulfil those promises. The people of Milton and Ulladulla deserve to have a medical facility that is modern and well equipped to enable it to handle the increase in demand that is currently being placed upon its staff and medical officers. I urge this Government to ensure that funding is available in the forthcoming budget to commence redevelopment of this vital medical facility. After all, this Government is flush with money, and it is high time that some of it came back into the communities that need it—and Milton hospital needs it now.

LIVERPOOL TRANSPORT INTERCHANGE TOILET FACILITIES

Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [2.05 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House, and of the Minister for Transport, issues concerning the Liverpool transport interchange. The interchange includes a new railway station. The new station was a dramatic and significant improvement over the earlier structure. It is a substantial positive addition to transport infrastructure in Sydney's south-west generally and Liverpool in particular. Its significance is underlined by recent announcements relating to the Liverpool to Parramatta transitway—the interchange, of course, being one of the points of origin for that transitway. The interchange was developed with significant community consultation. It has generally been the subject of very supportive community comment.

However, a number of constituents of mine have raised with me particular problems relating to the station. The problem relates to the inadequacy of the public toilets at the station—in short, the complaint is that there are not enough toilet cubicles. My complainants have been older men, although logically that would not be the only class of commuter who would be affected by the insufficiency of public toilet cubicles. One of my constituents sent me a letter about this problem. Part of the letter reads as follows:

In relation to the gents toilets at Liverpool Railway Station, there are only two cubicles and they are always occupied. There is no blue light and no urinals. I have frequently seen up to eight men waiting to use the cubicles and being severely embarrassed. Obviously after an hour's journey from the city after a certain age it is urgent for a man. You do not have to be a drinker to have an urgent need. I have missed my bus many times through this.

This constituent obviously makes the point that for older men after travelling back from the city to Liverpool there is an urgent need to use toilet facilities. I raised this issue with the Minister last year. In response I was advised that blue lighting would be installed in the near future. The Minister's Parliamentary Secretary also wrote as follows:

CityRail has advised me that during the project planning phase, it was considered that lockable, single cubicles would provide a safer environment than common urinal areas. Therefore, at this stage, there are no plans to alter the present layout.

I subsequently received a response from my constituent to this reply. Rather pungently my constituent said:

It would seem the decision is made by a young woman who would have no knowledge of the problem for men who don't have to be a drinker either. I have spoken with station staff who of course have seen this need.

I should point out that not only old men have this need; some would argue that young women, especially if they are pregnant, would also have acute need for adequate toilet facilities. Another of my constituents more recently raised the issue with me. This too was an older man who regularly uses Liverpool railway station on returning from the city by train. Because of a medical condition experienced by many older men, this constituent often has to try to use the lavatories. This particular constituent, having been forced to wait, has severely embarrassed himself on a number of occasions.

It is worth making the point that this is an issue specific to public transport commuters. There is an equity issue here: some of my constituents cannot afford to travel by private motor vehicles—as is the case with the two men who have spoken to me—and therefore must use public transport. That, because of the nature of things, means that journeys are longer, increasing the likelihood that they will need to use toilet facilities. On occasions that I have been travelling through Liverpool railway station I have noted queues outside toilet cubicles at the station. There are in total five cubicles: two for men, two for women and one for a babies change room. That, on any view of it, is a very small number of cubicles, given the very substantial number of people who use that railway station.

I should also make the point that when issues like this are raised there is often a tendency to resort to lavatory humour and basically do a bit of sniggering. In fact it is a quite serious issue. I ask officers of the Department of Transport and the State Rail Authority to have a close look at this matter. It is not, as some tabloid media might try to make out, an insignificant issue. It is a very real issue affecting the quality of life of people such as those who have spoken to me.

Mr MOSS (Canterbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [2.10 p.m.]: The honourable member for Liverpool has raised a very important issue. It is certainly one that we should not snigger at. I will take his representations to the Minister to see what can be done. I am surprised that blue lights have not been installed in the cubicle at this stage. Railway station toilet cubicles are often used by drug addicts who will go to sleep in them, locking everybody else out. The blue lights inhibit drug users from attempting to shoot up in those cubicles. The honourable member has raised the need for more cubicles at Liverpool railway station, and I am sure the Minister will look closely at that matter.

EASTERN SUBURBS BUS SERVICE REVIEW

Mr DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [2.12 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House an issue of great concern to my community. It is the current eastern suburbs bus routes review. I think this is the first time that there has been a review of this magnitude in about 10 years. This is a review of all bus routes within the eastern suburbs and into the city. Naturally, any review of this type always raises a number of concerns. I have received a number of petitions, signed by thousands of constituents, relating to one of those bus routes. I note the subject matter of the petition:

Brings to the attention of the House the intended abolition of Route 321 bus service between Bondi Beach and Bondi Junction via Rose Bay. Bus commuters will thereby lose:

- (a) Direct link with the ferry service operating out of Rose Bay.
- (b) Direct bus route to Bondi Junction along New South Head Road, Rose Bay, then south along O'Sullivan Rd etc.

Residents would have to join a new service at either Dover Road, Rose Bay or Victoria Road, Bellevue Hill, an estimated 1500 metres apart; commuters would have to travel up to 750 extra metres to access either alternative routes. The Plan would fail to meet Sydney Buses stated aim to ensure services for people "within 400 metres – 6am to 6.30pm" weekdays. The "Better Buses" plan will not meet the needs of this ever-expanding population.

The undersigned petitioners therefore ask the Legislative Assembly to have the 321 route continued and extended from Vaucluse and beyond Bondi Junction south to become part of the 359 Route (Bondi Junction/Pagewood), to provide essential cross regional connections with the major Health and Educational facilities, especially to the entrances to the Prince of Wales Hospital, Prince of Wales Private, Royal Hospital for Women, the Sydney Children's Hospital and the University of New South Wales.

The petition raises issues related to bus route 321 and the hospital bus. Both matters are of concern. Changes to the 321 bus route have generated several thousand signatures on a petition. The proposal regarding the hospital bus is one that I have pursued with State Transit for as many years as I can remember. There is a need in many suburbs and regions to provide this sort of service around medical and educational facilities. In the eastern suburbs a fairly easy bus route could be established. I really have to say that I do not understand why State Transit has resisted doing so over the years.

A north-south route to service those medical facilities and the university could easily be established. If necessary, it could run between morning and afternoon peak hours. For some strange reason bus service providers have been extremely reluctant to adopt the proposal. I ask the Minister to have another look at that proposal and the proposal to drop the 321 bus service. There is another aspect to the whole of this bus review; it relates to the timetable. Apart from proposing changes to bus routes, the question of frequency of services has not been openly discussed. Along with a number of people in the community, I am concerned that we will see a dramatic reduction in the frequency of some services.

We have called upon the Department of Transport to undertake another round of consultations prior to implementing the current proposals. A number of changes have been made to the initial proposal to change routes, but it is clearly time to put the department's latest proposal out again for another quick round of consultations so that people can be aware of whatever final plan is proposed to be implemented. That round of consultations should include discussion of the very important issue of timetabling. Again I say to the Minister for Transport that this is a critical review. It is the first of its type in 10 years. Do not ambush the community on either timetables or routes. We need another round of consultations. That can be done relatively quickly, before the bus routes are changed. I would like to see that done before mid-April.

Mr MOSS (Canterbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [2.17 p.m.]: The first matter raised by the honourable member was abolition of bus route 321. Without having the details in front of me I would hazard a guess that the reason for that proposal, if a review is under way, probably would be the same reason that services are usually abolished. State Transit is very reluctant to abolish bus services except in one circumstance—insufficient patronage. That may well be the reason for the proposed abolition of bus route 321. The honourable member's concerns and the petition will be taken seriously by the Minister. I believe the honourable member raised the north-south route as an alternative. Is that so?

Mr Debnam: No, as an additional service.

Mr MOSS: That is another matter that should be looked at. As to frequency of services, I am sure that in any thorough review on-time running would be very much to the fore in the deliberations of State Transit. It is for that same reason that there is a current review of railway timetables. Of all the concerns with our railways—vandalism, cleanliness, whatever—the most contentious issue is on-time running. Naturally, people want to get to work on time, but they do not want to set off for work a lot earlier just in case their usual transport service is delayed. I am sure that issue would be at the fore of considerations of State Transit, which I am certain will be taking into account frequency of services—which of course relates to on-time running—in the current review of eastern suburbs bus services.

INVERELL BUSINESS INITIATIVES

Mr TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [2.18 p.m.]: I draw the attention of the House to an initiative that the town of Inverell has taken to secure a better economic future. I am also advised that the community will be seeking government support for the venture through some funding for the salary of a project director to assist the community to expand on that initiative and market its products. In 2000, a partnership between the Inverell Shire Council and the University of New England sought support from the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services for a study into the potential for expanding the markets of Inverell businesses. The town's major employer is an abattoir, Bindaree Beef, which provides a critical base to the town's economy.

The research, undertaken over a period of 15 months, indicated that the light manufacturing sector presented a major opportunity to diversify Inverell's economy. The manufacturers met and agreed that there were many advantages in working together as a group—retaining skilled employees in town, networking equipment, subcontracting work within Inverell, and reducing costs. They also identified a need for market research and development, staff development, and access to computer-aided design courses. Several firms are active in product research and development in Inverell and access to this training is essential.

The first significant group achievement was the successful application to the New England Institute of TAFE which provided funding for the purchase of software and the teaching of four computer-aided design modules. The training commenced in November 2001 and has been welcomed by all firms. It provides young people with high-tech training and is more likely to keep young people in the town, opening up challenging career opportunities. The training and support from the group encouraged Tom Graham, Director of Sapphire City Engineering, to proceed with a planned purchase of a second-hand laser cutter from Japan at a total cost of \$350,000. This computer-controlled machine cuts material up to 12 millimetres thick and receives instructions through emails from other businesses in town as well as further afield including Grafton, Kempsey, Tenterfield, Moree and Tamworth. It operates for over eight hours a day and has been used for cutting components for utility trays, harvesting equipment, cattle handling equipment and other products.

Through its outlay, Sapphire City Engineering has created another arm of its business and has employed more people, with more than 20 employees now on the payroll. Mr Graham can see that if the momentum continues his company can expand its operations further and buy more computer-controlled machines to value-add to products of the light manufacturing firms in Inverell. These other businesses have already received considerable benefits from access to the laser cutter through increasing their output, cutting costs and expanding their markets. They are now most enthusiastic about the concept of working in a cluster and networking to boost their businesses and have decided to maintain the group beyond the completion of the study.

The success of Inverell's venture, backed by the local council, the Department of State and Regional Development, the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services and the University of New England, has created a clear need for further strategic business development. The group has already increased employment, improved infrastructure and invested in high technology machinery and training, and has reached a stage where it is poised for further expansion. To achieve this it requires the input of a full-time business strategist and marketing professional to review the scope for further product development and researching broad markets for the Inverell group's products.

It is expected that the appointee would provide long term benefits for the firms involved in the initiative through training personnel in market research and development. The person would supervise the establishment of an industry web presence to promote the cluster and its products. I will support approaches to the Minister for Regional Development to assist with funding for this position because I believe it is in the best interests of the group in Inverell which has shown such enterprise and for the State Government, which has a responsibility to rebuild the inland and create prosperity for country people. In addition, there will be important multiplier effects in the town's economy. Two additional firms have already been established, largely on the basis of this initiative, and career opportunities will continue to grow.

This project has the backing of its community, it has moved forward into the area of high technology and it has demonstrated a collaborative and united approach from the firms in the town which at one time would have competed against each other. I commend this project to the House as one which could be duplicated in other community centres where the people are prepared to help themselves but also need specialist expertise and training at certain critical times from government at all levels and of all political persuasions, and from government agencies.

ALBURY YOUTH VIOLENCE

Mr GLACHAN (Albury) [2.23 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House a very dangerous trend that has developed in Albury: incredible violence in the streets late at night or early in the mornings, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights, as a result of people consuming too much alcohol. In January in the main street of Albury a young man was murdered. He had attended the Globe Hotel to celebrate his sister-in-law's birthday in company with his wife and other members of his family. At 3.40 a.m. the party was leaving the hotel to get into a taxi at the taxi rank near the hotel when someone made a rude remark to one of the women in that party. A fight began, a brawl erupted and as a result that young man was stabbed in the chest and later died in hospital.

Despite the best efforts of the police, no-one has been arrested for that murder. A lot of people, including taxidriviers, were in the street and a lot of people saw that incident but no-one has been able to name the person who committed that crime. This has caused a great fuss in Albury and people have begun to think seriously about what happens in the main streets at night. A local television station sent its cameramen out to take some footage, which I saw later, of teenagers pushing and shoving one another in the early hours of the morning. On that footage I saw children aged no more than seven or eight in the streets in the early hours of the morning. One wonders where their parents are and what those parents are doing.

On a recent Saturday evening in Albury at the Matador Hotel, on the highway, a young chap, whose family recently bought that motel, was at the front desk when he heard a commotion. It was about 12.30 a.m. and he went outside to see what was happening and was confronted by a group of 20 young men. It was obvious that they had been put out of a nearby hotel. The young people were throwing bottles through the windows of the motel and kicking down signs. The group set upon him like a mad, frenzied mob and bashed him within inches of his life. His parents heard the commotion, looked out the window and saw someone being assaulted, but they did not know that it was their son.

The parents rang the police and later discovered that it was their son who had been so seriously injured. The son was operated on in hospital and, fortunately, will survive. But he could have been killed! Passers-by heard that mob of men saying, "Kill him." I wonder what is happening to our society when mobs of young men set upon someone for no good reason and threaten to kill them—and very nearly do so. Immediately I heard about this I spoke to the Minister for Gaming and Racing about this problem of people drinking too much alcohol and then misbehaving. The Minister was most sympathetic and listened to what I had to say. He was very helpful and said he will do all he can to ensure that that sort of thing does not happen again. But what can we do? I have spoken to hotel keepers whom I know very well, and to club managers, and they do not want this type of behaviour to happen. They give their staff special training in the sensible serving of alcohol.

But what has happened to society when people drink to excess and then do terrible things to others? Why do people have to drink after midnight? Why is it that people are drinking at 3 o'clock and 4 o'clock in the morning? Why is this so? I cannot understand it. If people cannot get enough to drink before midnight, what is their problem? The Minister explained to me that there cannot be a blanket change to drinking hours, but I would like to do that. I have arranged a meeting with police, the Mayor of Albury, hotel owners and club managers to be held next week in Albury. I hope that we can do something about this problem. But, really, human nature needs to change, people's behaviour needs to change, and somehow we have to get a message through to people that they cannot go around bashing innocent people.

Mr MOSS (Canterbury—Parliamentary Secretary) [2.28 p.m.]: No-one condones that sort of moronic behaviour, which seems to be getting out of hand. The tragedy is that instead of having a punch-up in a back lane, people pull out guns and knives without any regard for another person's life. It seems that there is much pent-up anger, particularly among young people, and that has led to this deplorable situation. I do not know that stopping or banning the sale of alcohol after midnight, or closing hotels and clubs after midnight, will solve the problem. I know a lot of decent young people who do not go out until midnight. Their evening's social activities kick off at midnight. My sister complains to me that when she was the age of her children, if she was not home by midnight her father would be very annoyed, but her children begin their social activities and go out to discos and other places at midnight.

People who are behaving in the manner described by the honourable member for Albury are those who begin their social activities very early in the night. Even if pubs and clubs were closed at midnight, some people would probably be just as drunk at that time as those described by the honourable member for Albury. I am not trying to condone what goes on. It is a real problem, and it needs to be tackled by our society, that is, by the community, by the police, and by the Government. I am sure that the Minister for Police will take the comments made by the honourable member for Albury very seriously.

HAROLD CORR RESERVE SPORTING FACILITIES

Mr ANDERSON (Londonderry) [2.30 p.m.]: I bring to the attention of the House an event that occurred in my electorate last Sunday, 17 March—St Patrick's Day. The Mayor of Penrith City Council, Pat Sheehy, opened a change-room facility at the Harold Corr Reserve at Werrington, in my electorate. That facility is not big or special other than that the buildings were constructed by a group of volunteers. A little while ago the Penrith Rovers Soccer Club approached me about facilities needed to run a soccer that did not have a permanent home ground. I entered into negotiations with the club, Werrington Little Athletics and the Penrith City Council to try to arrange facilities for them, and we came up with a piece of land that had been a cricket ground in the past. The cricket organisation had left the facility and had taken with them a turf wicket.

The group informed the council that that was where they would like to construct the facilities and establish the home ground, so we negotiated a reasonable deal with the council for the use of the land. I also approached the then Minister for Sport and Recreation and obtained a capital assistance program [CAP] grant to assist establishment of the club and sought the help of a local building contractor and businessman, Mr Brendan Bourke. He agreed to be the project manager for the facility in conjunction with the Penrith City Council, which

drew up a plan for the building's extension. This local builder took on the responsibility of supervising the project and the local soccer club's players constructed the building. The bricks were purchased at a very reasonable price and the roofing materials and other necessary building materials were purchased to complete construction of the facility. Over a number weekends, volunteers were organised to lay the concrete foundation and to work on other parts of the building. Last Sunday, while waiting for the mayor to arrive, the electricians and plumbers were still working on the amenities part of the building to make sure it was finished in time for the mayor's grand opening ceremony.

The essence of my purpose in bringing this to the attention of the House today is that this is an example of a group of people being prepared to contribute their time and effort to provide a facility not just for themselves and the players but also for their children and other people's children in the local area. These people were prepared to sacrifice many hours until late in the evenings and on weekends to make sure that a facility was available to make it possible for the soccer club to enter into the Nepean District Soccer Association's competition. They did an outstanding job. I offer my congratulations to a number of people on coming up with such a worthwhile project. I thank the Mayor of the Penrith City Council for the support that was received from the council. I thank also the council's parks and gardens manager, Raphael Collins, who was involved at every level of the development, for his time and advice.

I thank the Penrith Rovers Soccer Club's executive, particularly Mr Kieron Manning, and his wife, Mrs Kathleen Manning, who were at the site every day and every night to make sure that the building progressed. They contributed a great deal of time and effort and the district has been rewarded with an outstanding facility. The Penrith Gaels Cultural and Sporting Club contributed some funds to assist in the construction of the amenities building, and the club's contribution was greatly appreciated. In the future, the Londonderry electorate will have a soccer facility as good as any to be found in the whole of western Sydney. That will assist the young people of western Sydney to participate in really worthwhile sport. I offer my congratulations to all the people and organisations I have mentioned. I hope to continue working with them.

BOMBALA SOFTWOOD MILL

Mr WEBB (Monaro) [2.35 p.m.]: If this House could speak, it could well refer to a sense of *deja vu*, because I echo the words spoken in November 1997 by a previous member for Monaro, Peter Cochran, who brought to the attention of the House the dilemma faced by the Bombala community with respect to its softwood mill. At that time he referred to the CSR proposal but I intend to refer to the Austral Softwoods proposal. In November 1997, Peter Cochran referred to the proposal by the Coalition Government and CSR to develop a major processing plant which would employ 450 people. The proposal was repeated by Premier Carr after the 1995 election and supported fully at that time. I understand that times change and that the Visy mill at Tumut caused some rethinking in the softwood industry. Nevertheless, Bombala's predicament is a matter of grave concern to me, to the people of the Bombala community and to the Government. I call on the Government to take whatever steps are necessary to attract prospective mill owners, developers or purchasers to the Bombala area to make the best use of the softwood resource that is ever-expanding.

During the last financial year the New South Wales Government committed \$463,000 for site preparation for the planting of *pinus radiata* plantations. One wonders why the Government would make such an allocation if it had no intention of supporting Willmott's private concerns in the Bombala delegate area and if a commitment had not been made by the Government to a softwood mill. It is interesting that after the 1995 election the Carr Government was discussing the possibility of a softwood mill being constructed at Bombala and that prior to 1995 the then Carr Opposition had been making election promises about the project. Strong action needs to be taken to set up the development of the industry. It is an absolute necessity. The Premier promised in 1995 that the CSR project would proceed and that 450 jobs would be created to replace the jobs that had been lost when the hardwood industry ceased operations.

A major flaw in the Premier's workforce transition argument is that the hardwood industry transferred to Eden out of Nimmitabel, Bombala and Cooma but was not replaced by regional development. That resulted in a loss of jobs and those communities suffered a major setback as a result. As Peter Cochran said in 1997, CSR did not fulfil its contractual obligations to State Forests and the people of Bombala, and history is repeating itself because the same criticism applies to Austral Softwoods, which has not fulfilled its contractual obligations to the New South Wales Government or to the people of Bombala.

A short time ago the honourable member for Albury referred to this matter because Wagga Wagga, Burrinjuck and Bega electorates also have a major stake in this industry. This development is about managing

New South Wales State Forests resources and supporting those private land-holders in the electorate of Monaro who have invested in softwood and hardwood plantations. This industry will help to promote carbon credits and reduce emissions as set out in the Kyoto protocol. It is also in line with the natural resources and plantation legislation that went through Parliament a year or so ago.

The New South Wales Government must continue to develop the industry by supporting the proposal to fund this new mill in the Bombala area. It must work in co-operation with regional development business, Bombala council and the community to develop a prospectus. I have been in contact with three prospective purchasers of the facility. Also, I have asked questions of the Minister for Forestry regarding the debt to the State Government, the terms of the contract, licence arrangements and the timber resources. I have queried also the three memoranda of understanding that were signed by the State Government. We must work together to resolve this problem once and for all for the people of Bombala, for the people of the State, and for the softwood industry.

ST CHRISTOPHER'S PANANIA GOLDEN JUBILEE

Mr ASHTON (East Hills) [2.40 p.m.]: On Friday 15 March my wife and I had the honour to be guests at the Golden Jubilee celebrations held to recognise the first 50 years of St Christopher's parish at Panania. St Christopher's has been a wonderful institution in the Panania area since its creation in 1952. The parish was formed on 1 February 1952 with the arrival of the first parish priest, Father Patrick "Paddy" Landers—and yes, he was from Ireland. Father Landers was known and respected by everyone in the Panania area, including Protestants, Catholics and even some atheists.

The establishment of St Christopher's tells the wider story of the growth of the East Hills electorate after the Second World War. With the great population growth experienced from immigration and the arrival of the baby boomer generation, the need for a Catholic parish in the Panania locality became obvious. Three lots were purchased in 1951: one in Tower Street and two in Eddie Avenue. A cottage that was built on the premises in about 1897 became the first St Christopher's church. The first St Christopher's fete was held on 31 October 1952 and raised the then large sum of £470. Tomorrow, 23 March, St Christopher's will hold a well-publicised fete once again.

In 1955 two sisters of St Joseph arrived to teach 122 children in kindergarten, first class and second class at the new school. Many of my friends who attended St Christopher's school over the years would always describe the huge numbers in their classes. Clearly, we never want to see a return to the class sizes of the 1950s and the 1960s in government or non-government schools. However, as a student of the government school system I can recall being amused that in those days kindergarten classes comprised 80 or 90 students. The education the students received from the nuns at St Christopher's was outstanding and second to none.

The school and church provide excellent social events for parishioners. Indeed, they provided opportunities for people such as Bryan Brown to develop his acting talent. The growth of St Christopher's church and school continued throughout the decades, and in March 2000 Bishop David Cremin official blessed and opened the new buildings, accompanied by Father Colin Mason and Mrs Debbie Gilmore, the school principal. I also had the opportunity to be present on that wonderful occasion. St Christopher's has provided a wide range of social and sporting activities for the youth of my area. The St Christopher's rugby league team is the envy of all other teams in the area because of the astounding ability of its players. The St Christopher's netball team usually gives the Revesby Workers Club team, in which my daughter plays, a bit of a pasting. Indeed, its soccer, basketball and cricket teams are also extremely successful.

St Christopher's is a great example of a church and school providing broader youth involvement for the community and a positive outlook for the young people. I pay tribute to Noreen Foley, whose book *St Christopher's Panania Golden Jubilee—the First Fifty Years* has provided such a wealth of historical and photographic evidence of the church and school. The celebration last week was attended by Bishop David Cremin, Father Colin Mason of St Christopher's, Father Geoffrey Plant of St Luke's, Mayor David Blake, Mayoress Judy Blake, Daryl Melham, the member for Banks, and Principal Gilmore and her husband.

I would like to make one comment about Bishop David Cremin. If he was not such a wonderful Bishop of the Catholic Church he would be an excellent stand-up comedian. He is an outstanding character. Although it may be inappropriate for me to say so, if there were more people like Bishop David Cremin, flocks of people would attend both Protestant and Catholic churches and parishes. He is very good value. More than 300 people attended the festivities last week and it was wonderful to catch up with so many people of Panania's great past. I

would like to take this opportunity to thank the social committee for organising the celebration. As honourable members are aware, these things do not just happen. I congratulate Vic and Doreen Moore, Kathy Carr, Margaret and Eric Ellem, Kath Farrell, Noreen Foley, Cassandra Patterson, Maureen Singleton, John Weeks and Sister Anita and others whom time does not permit me to thank. Also, I congratulate Bill and Kath Creighton whose dedication to the church has been so outstanding for some years.

CAMDEN ELECTORATE TRAFFIC CONTROL

Dr KERNOHAN (Camden) [2.45 p.m.]: On 25 June last year I brought to the attention of the House problems faced by motorists who use Narellan Road, particularly those who travel towards Campbelltown in the 8.00 a.m. to 9.00 a.m. peak hour. I said the road had two major roundabouts that are only 1,100 metres apart and were built by so-called experts 10 years ago. I questioned the expertise of the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] when these roundabouts were built, knowing that roundabouts do not work when roads are at peak capacity, as is now the case with Narellan Road.

Camden Council wrote to the RTA and asked for traffic lights to be constructed at one of the roundabouts but was told that the preliminary estimate to upgrade the intersection from a roundabout to traffic signals was between \$3 million and \$5 million. I quipped at the time that for that price the light lenses would need to be rubies, topazes and emeralds. Last Tuesday I left home at 8.35 a.m. to drive to Parliament House. It took me 25 minutes to reach the entrance of the M5 at Campbelltown, a distance of approximately 15 kilometres, yet it took me only another 40 minutes to complete the next 58 kilometres, via the M5 and Eastern Distributor, to Parliament House. I am grateful that the opening of the airport tunnel has reduced my overall journey by 20 minutes.

However, these problems with Narellan Road will only worsen as more homes are constructed in Currans Hill, Narellan Vale, Mount Annan and elsewhere in the Camden and Wollondilly district. Over the past 12 months an average of 53 people per week have taken up residence in Camden, which is an indication of the growth rate and traffic problems in the area. However, to my amazement the RTA has given permission to install a set of traffic lights on Narellan Road, approximately 300 metres east of the Mount Annan Botanic Gardens roundabout and approximately 1,060 metres west of the M5 exit traffic lights. This is to allow a retirement village complex to be built with access via Narellan Road.

I understand that Camden Council is very disturbed by the proposal and originally required access via a side street. It is sheer madness that the RTA has given permission for traffic lights to be built in such a position on this road. That road will be gridlocked during peak hours unless roundabouts are replaced by traffic lights in the near future. The Minister must put aside the exorbitant and inappropriate costs that have been referred to, investigate the real costs of this project and do something about this road before it becomes gridlocked.

WORLD WAR II BANGKA ISLAND COMMEMORATION

Mr COLLIER (Miranda) [2.50 p.m.]: For Australians and Australian servicemen and women, some of the darkest days of the Second World War fell in 1942. This year we remember the sixtieth anniversary of the bombing of Darwin and the fall of Singapore. On 14 February my wife, Jeanette, and I had the honour of attending the Miranda RSL Club, as guests of sub-branch president Mr Cliff Raatz, to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the tragic events at Bangka Island, which is near Sumatra. In remembering what was one of the worst atrocities of World War II, we also commemorated the courage and heroism of Sister Vivian Bullwinkel and we paid tribute to the thousands of young and brave women who served Australia as nurses in all wars.

Sister Vivian Bullwinkel was the sole survivor of a brutal and senseless massacre. In February 1942 she was one of 65 Australian nurses evacuated from Singapore aboard the *Vyner Brooke* ahead of advancing Japanese forces. Twelve nurses died when the ship was bombed on 14 February and sank off Bangka Island. Sister Bullwinkel and 21 nurses made it to Bangka Island and some of the other nurses who survived came ashore elsewhere. The nurses and a group of British servicemen, who were without food or water, decided to surrender to the Japanese. The men and women were separated and the men were led into the jungle. The Japanese returned, wiping blood from their bayonets, and it was the nurses' turn. They were ordered to march into the sea. In her testimony to the War Crimes Tribunal in 1946, Sister Bullwinkel recalled what happened next:

The conduct of the girls was most courageous. They all knew what was going to happen to them, but no-one panicked. They just marched ahead with their chins up. We waded into the surf and they fired on us.

Sister Bullwinkel was hit just above her left hip and knocked into the sea, where she feigned death. The sole survivor of the massacre, she struggled ashore and hid in the jungle for some 12 days with a wounded British

soldier named Kingsley, who had been bayoneted and left for dead. Finally they had to surrender. Kingsley survived only a few days but Sister Bullwinkel carefully hid the signs of her injury. She, along with other nurses who made it ashore elsewhere, spent the rest of the war on Bangka Island or Sumatra facing the worst of the Japanese prisoner of war camps and tending the needs of fellow prisoners. She was later awarded the AO, the MBE and the Red Cross Florence Nightingale medal.

A magnificent painting of Sister Bullwinkel by local artist Laurie Moran was fittingly displayed at the commemorative ceremony. Among the guests at the ceremony was Mr George Forwood of Caringbah. Mr Forwood was one of the many prisoners of war tended by Sister Bullwinkel and the Australian nurses. I shall never forget my conversation with him. Mr Forwood was recovering from his wounds in hospital when the bombing began. The prisoners and patients who could do so got under their beds for protection. Mr Forwood was too ill and weak from his wounds to do so. He said that Sister Bullwinkel actually covered him with her body during that bombing.

I was deeply moved and inspired by the courage and heroism of Sister Vivian Bullwinkel. It typifies the sacrifice, the bravery and the extraordinary commitment of all Australian women who served as nurses in times of conflict. We all owe a great debt to those women who comforted and tended the wounded, sick, and dying servicemen and women at home and abroad. We and future generations of Australians must never forget their contribution. We should never forget the story of Bangka Island and the courage of Sister Bullwinkel. I thank the Miranda RSL sub-branch for its initiative in organising such a moving tribute, not just to Sister Bullwinkel but to nurses who served their country throughout all the wars. It is a story that my wife and I will never forget. It was an event that we were both privileged to attend.

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS ELECTORATE MEDICAL RETRIEVAL HELICOPTER

Ms SEATON (Southern Highlands) [2.54 p.m.]: Everyone in the Southern Highland knows that medical retrieval services are one of our most important facilities. Although we have a public and a private hospital at Bowral, the major hospitals for acute care and a range of other issues are Westmead Hospital, Campbelltown hospital and St George Hospital. I am glad that the Parliamentary Secretary for Health is in the Chamber as I know that he has had some input into medical retrieval. I am grateful to have the opportunity to address my comments to him.

Helicopter retrieval is extremely important and there is a great demand for medical retrieval services in the Southern Highlands electorate. That area has some great national parks—for example, the Nattai area and Morton National Park—within which bushwalkers come to grief from time to time, need to be rescued from dangerous areas, and require medical attention. Honourable members would be aware that the Hume Highway, which runs through my electorate, tragically is the scene of major road accidents. Local medical retrieval services include services for children, neonatal retrieval, and retrieval of traffic accidents victims in local areas. The population in the Southern Highlands area is ageing and people suffer from cardiac arrests and require immediate medical attention.

At the moment the medical retrieval helicopter lands at Loseby Park—an oval that is adjacent to the hospital—an ambulance team meets that helicopter, and the patient is taken off the helicopter and to the emergency department of the hospital. It takes anything up to 15 minutes to get the patient from the helicopter to the hospital door. Most ambulance officers and doctors to whom I speak say that if a patient is suffering an acute cardiac event, 20 minutes would make an enormous difference. That 15 minutes might not be completely lost but to some extent the life of a patient could be compromised. The road from the oval to the gate of the oval is fairly bumpy. A full ambulance crew has to be taken off the road to take a patient from the helicopter to the hospital or from the hospital to the helicopter, so that crew is not available for other local retrievals. That means that there is one less team on the road between Picton and Bowral.

There is a good deal of community interest in the idea of constructing a permanent helicopter landing pad within the hospital precinct. I have visited Liverpool Hospital and I have seen the facilities there. The helicopter lands on top of the operating theatre and the patient is taken into the theatre via an elevator—an ideal set up. There is a good deal of interest in this idea from those who are involved in Westpac helicopter rescues, Care Flight and Child Flight, which provide vital services in the Southern Highlands. The Parliamentary Secretary has been contacted and he has been asked to hold a meeting with interested people at the hospital to promote that proposal. Land is available at the hospital campus and the ambulance station was recently relocated at that campus.. I am keen to promote this proposal, for which there is considerable community support.

This week I received a letter from Mrs Smith at Bundanoon, who recalls taking a group of children from Mittagong preschool to see one of the earliest helicopter retrievals from Loseby Park in 1978. She recalls

how important that retrieval was then and said she thought she was witnessing history. She was. Little has changed in the relationship between hospitals and the helicopter retrieval service. I ask the Parliamentary Secretary to fully investigate this matter. We must identify sites, examine the cost, and ensure that any future plans take account of the necessity for this service. This proposal must proceed as soon as possible. Fifteen minutes can be vital when the life of a patient is at stake. We must ensure that patients have access to all services quickly and that they enjoy a full recovery, rather than some other adverse consequence. We must ensure that our retrieval services operate as well as they possibly can. It takes more than an hour to reach major acute care hospitals in this State, so the saving of an additional 15 minutes would make a great deal of difference.

Mr McMANUS (Heathcote—Parliamentary Secretary) [2.59 p.m.]: I acknowledge the comments of the honourable member for Southern Highlands. A couple of days ago I spoke to the Chief Executive Officer of Bowral hospital and he informed me of an earlier investigation regarding some land at the hospital. However, concerns were expressed about the size of the land and several safety issues were highlighted. I told her that I wanted to visit the hospital within the next few weeks—which will give the bureaucrats time to conduct another assessment of the area. I am very keen to progress this matter. As the honourable member for Southern Highlands knows, I answer to the Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Minister for Health, whose responsibilities include aeromedical services. The helicopters that we have in the air these days are second to none. There will always be service problems in isolated areas, but we will do our damndest to protect life and limb—particularly in towns such as Bowral and in the isolated communities to its west. I assure the honourable member that discussions are under way. When the date is set for my visit, I will instruct my staff to invite the honourable member to the meeting.

SENIORS WEEK

Mrs PERRY (Auburn) [3.01 p.m.]: Today I draw the attention of the House to the very successful celebration of Seniors Week in my electorate of Auburn. The Auburn Council and the Seniors Planning Committee planned and co-ordinated a program of events that reflected a genuine commitment to celebrating the contribution of senior members of our community, as well as furthering the cause of continued independence and involvement in society. This commitment was also evident in the Bankstown City Council's opening celebrations of Seniors Week, which I had the pleasure of attending. I believe the celebrations in my electorate truly reflected the "Imagine, Interact, Inspire" theme of Seniors Week 2002. I have referred previously in this House to the cultural diversity of the Auburn electorate. During celebrations such as Seniors Week we are reminded of the important contribution of the various cultures that constitute the local communities of the Auburn electorate and the wider community of New South Wales.

The contributions of the various cultures within Auburn are far more extensive than the variety of delicious exotic foods and intriguing and colourful visual and performing arts. I believe that the most significant contributions of each culture are the heartfelt values that are woven into the life of its adopted community—in this case, New South Wales and Australia. We are most fortunate in Auburn to have enjoyed for many years the contribution of cultures, particularly some Asian cultures, that value most precious the wisdom and experience of senior members of families and communities and accord involvement, honour, and consideration to their seniors. In the true spirit of imagination, interaction and inspiration in a culturally diverse community, the celebration held in the Auburn Botanic Gardens on 19 March included English speakers and speakers of Arabic, Turkish, Chinese and Vietnamese. The Auburn Council and the Seniors Planning Committee are to be commended for the sensitivity and enthusiasm with which they have attempted to make Seniors Week a truly inclusive celebration for all ages and cultures.

As part of the celebration of Seniors Week 2002 a number of local individuals were recognised in the Premier's Seniors Week Awards as being valuable, active and inspirational members of the community. Among the individual award recipients from the Auburn electorate were Stanley Kelley, Una Wickremeratne and Glenda Tompkins of Auburn, Kathleen Skulander of Berala, Marie Till and Dorothy Merle Roll of Lidcombe, Allan Jurd and Leo Stanley Nichol of Regents Park, John Mayo of Silverwater, Leonard Thomas Jarvis of Chester Hill and Muriel Stewart of Sefton. The local organisations that benefit from the activity, talent, skills, creative input and the overwhelmingly enthusiastic volunteer spirit of these award winners include Careconnect, the Auburn Aged Day Care Services, Hevington House Day Care, Meals on Wheels, the Auburn Community Care Service, the Berala Aged Care facility and the Bankstown Older Women's Wellness Centre.

In addition, the St Joseph's Outreach Program and the Auburn Generalist Carers Group were recognised in the Seniors Week Community Awards. The St Joseph's Outreach Program, co-ordinated by the Sisters of

Charity, aims to allow elderly people to maintain a good quality of life in their own homes for as long as possible. The Auburn Generalist Carers Group includes a group of older people who care for housebound seniors or for those confined to a nursing home. During Seniors Week each year attention is drawn to the current ageing population trend and the increasing imperative to address the current and future needs of our senior citizens. However, it is important to recognise also that at a local community level there must be a deeper consciousness—as there is in Auburn during Seniors Week and throughout the rest of the year—that stems from cultural values of the importance of the senior members of our community. There are those who strive continually throughout the year to build a community in New South Wales that values and integrates all ages as well as cultures. I congratulate all those involved from the Auburn and Bankstown areas on their hard work before and during Seniors Week.

PODIATRY SERVICES

Mrs HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [3.06 p.m.]: I acknowledge the contribution of the honourable member for Auburn, who referred to Seniors Week. I shall address the House today about podiatry. Podiatry services are important to maintaining the health and wellbeing of older members of society. I have worked with the Podiatry Association for 3½ years, and in that time I have gained much experience and knowledge about the provision of podiatry services. From birth to old age, people must have adequate access to those services. The association's podiatrists whom I have represented—20 or so of whom work in the Hornsby area, either in private practice or in the podiatry clinic at Hornsby hospital—completed a four-year undergraduate degree to become experts in everything to do with feet. I know of a patient who went to a podiatrist for general treatment. The podiatrist, who was a new graduate, noted marked circulatory changes in the patient's feet and suggested that the patient seek further medical—and possibly specialist—advice. The patient subsequently had corrective surgery for an aortic aneurysm. That is just one example of the value of podiatry services. The Northern Sydney Area Health Service lists its key goals in its annual report. The first is:

Healthier people through monitoring health status, promoting healthy lifestyles and implementing disease prevention and early intervention programs.

Disease prevention is very important, particularly for the elderly. Older people may find mobility difficult if they do not receive adequate podiatry care. Inadequate attention could lead to infirmity and, if they become bed-ridden and can no longer maintain a healthy lifestyle, admission to a nursing home might be necessary. Many people in Hornsby and the surrounding areas cannot access adequate podiatry services. If they cannot afford to see private practitioners, they must seek treatment in hospital podiatry clinics. These are high-risk foot clinics and general access is restricted. As a consequence, many people—especially the elderly—fall through the cracks. If we are to achieve the goal of disease prevention, we must ensure that older people can access not only podiatry but allied health services. Fairer access is the second goal of the Northern Sydney Area Health Service. The elderly may suffer from reduced health status and their incomes may not allow them the access to services that others enjoy. The third goal is:

Quality health care through ensuring services are appropriate, are based on best practice and, by coordination and integration, are focussed on patient needs.

We must ensure that everyone in this State, and indeed the whole country, receives the best health care available. The fourth goal is better value health care—which goes without saying. Therefore, appropriately educated and trained health professionals to provide for the population are essential so that experts provide that care. The people of Hornsby and the greater community should be able to access such health services. As I have already said, not everybody can access the type of care needed. Therefore, I will work hard to ensure that access to these services in the Hornsby area is maintained and increased. If someone cannot afford a private practitioner, there must be a way to access care elsewhere. Hornsby hospital offers podiatry services. Those services and the hospital must stay.

PREMIER'S AWARDS

Mr W. D. SMITH (South Coast) [3.10 p.m.]: As we near the end of Seniors Week I highlight to the House the winners of the prestigious Premier's Award from my electorate. The recipients were two community groups, the Ulladulla Stroke Recovery Club and Shoalhaven District Senior Citizens Club; and three individuals, Daryll Cook, Frank Smith and Anne Warren. I shall mention a little about what those community groups and the three individuals have done in our community to warrant receiving this prestigious award. When people leave hospital after a stroke, often they have little idea of what to expect of themselves and generally what shape their life will take. Stroke survivors are frequently assailed with problems such as depression, anger and resentment evolving from their sense of powerlessness. A large percentage of such people in my community are ex-servicemen.

The Ulladulla Stroke Recovery Club promotes self-help, counselling and mutual support, and produces a quarterly newsletter about its activities. The club also helps the carers of stroke victims. Certainly this club is well deserving of this most prestigious award. The Shoalhaven District Senior Citizens Club is a group of elderly citizens who run a senior club for the benefit of elderly people who need to get out of their homes and have fellowship with others in the same situation. This organisation has raised large sums of money through raffles, donations, sales of craft items and things of that nature to benefit our local community and many worthy charities. In the last 12 months the senior citizens club raised \$2,632 for cancer research, gave \$1,927 to the Prince of Wales Children's Hospital for leukaemia research and presented a cheque for \$2,290 to the local hospital for its oncology unit. The club is involved also in Child Flight and Care Flight and donated \$2,958 to those services. Over the last 12 years it has raised tens of thousands of dollars for different community groups and worthy charities.

I mentioned earlier that the Ulladulla Stroke Recovery Club had received the Premier's Award, but one of the great supporters and driving forces behind that club is Daryll Cook. Daryll was one of the individual recipients of the award. He has been a quiet achiever in our community using his intuition and foresight to progress a better lifestyle for others. His steadfastness, compassion and willingness to assist his fellow citizens, especially those less fortunate than himself, demonstrates his exemplary character. Daryll's uncaring devotion to community matters and his diligent attention to fine detail and matters for the needy are carried out without fanfare or publicity. He is most certainly a worthy winner of this individual award.

Frank Smith has been involved in community activities for more than 16 years. He spent much time forming a social group for the aged called the Friends Group. The group's claim was to provide an outing, a meal and organised activities for people who often were housebound and somewhat isolated. That group still meets every Wednesday. Frank has been involved also in a group called the Caring Club and has been its Secretary-Treasurer since 1989. The original concept of the club was evolved more than 20 years ago to provide hot meals and meet the needs of people who were housebound. Frank, by all indications, will continue to be actively involved with the Caring Club for some time.

The final recipient of the individual award is Anne Warren. Anne has lived in the South Coast community since 1987. Prior to that she had special interests in the care and support of children with special needs—those with physical, intellectual and emotional problems. She worked for the Burnside Homes at Cabramatta and for the New South Wales Society for Crippled Children. Anne has been involved in the Shoalhaven district with the Older Women's Network, the Palliative Care Volunteers Association, the New South Wales Lupis Association, Meals on Wheels and the Shoalhaven Women's Health Centre. Some three years ago she suffered a serious eyesight problem. This devastated her for a little while, but she soon realised that life goes on and she continues to be a selfless person and an inspiration to our community.

SALTS BAY RAINFOREST REHABILITATION

Mr ORKOPOULOS (Swansea) [3.15 p.m.]: I am pleased to report progress on the rehabilitation of Salts Bay at Swansea Heads in my electorate. When I last spoke on this topic, in June last year, I praised the excellent work by South Eastlake LandCare, Lake Macquarie City Council, Trees in Newcastle and community volunteers to rehabilitate one of the last significant remnants of littoral rainforest in the Lake Macquarie region. This coastal rainforest is along a beautiful sandy beach at Salts Bay. The weeding, mulching, bush regeneration and rehabilitation undertaken by these groups have uncovered nature's beauty alongside the urban environment. With urbanisation and the increase in the numbers of recreational rock fishermen and women and beach users has come degradation of the rainforest ecosystem. Widespread erosion at the adjoining Black Neds Bay beachfront has led to widespread erosion at Salts Bay.

Salts Bay has suffered erosion since the construction of two break walls in the 1890s at the entrance to Lake Macquarie. The Department of Land and Water Conservation has estimated that had remedial work not been undertaken, a further 27 metres of erosion would have occurred in various places in Salts Bay. Joint funding between the New South Wales Government and Lake Macquarie City Council saw stabilisation works costing \$600,000 undertaken last year. The rehabilitation work undertaken by the Government involved the reconstruction and extension of an existing beach groyne, construction of another groyne and some planting out of the existing beach. On 15 February 2002 I was honoured to accompany the Minister for Land and Water Conservation, the Hon. John Aquilina, and my colleague the honourable member for Lake Macquarie to a site visit to unveil a plaque commemorating the stabilisation of beach erosion at Black Neds and Salts Bay. The Minister said on the day:

This demonstrates that environmental repair is a community issue and needs a community response in tandem with the work carried out by local and State governments.

The visit was an opportunity for the Minister to meet the LandCare Council and the community volunteers who worked so hard to rehabilitate the rainforest and wetland. I am proud of the enthusiastic work of LandCare and community volunteers on this project. Another impact of urbanisation is that seven stormwater drains discharge stormwater onto the beach and the rainforest reserves. If the same subdivision application came before council today, I believe that it would not be permitted under the current environmental regulations. I therefore welcome the announcement this week by the Minister for the Environment, the Hon. Bob Debus, of \$256,753 for a stage 4 Stormwater Trust grant to Lake Macquarie City Council.

This grant will give the council the opportunity to undertake a series of measures, including installing rainwater tanks and constructing infiltration trenches and grassed swales to minimise polluted run-off entering Lake Macquarie. The community, council, I as the local member, and this Government have worked hard to ensure that this small but important part of the electorate receives the financial resources to re-create the coastal rainforests and wetlands that existed prior to white settlement and urbanisation. This achievement is a testament to co-operation and is an excellent outcome for the environment and the local community.

Private members' statements noted.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE GOVERNMENT

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: I report the receipt of the following message from His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor:

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
SYDNEY 2000

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR

The Honourable James Jacob Spigelman, Chief Justice of New South Wales, Lieutenant-Governor of the State of New South Wales, has the honour to inform the Legislative Assembly that, consequent on the Governor of New South Wales, Professor Marie Bashir, being absent from the State, he has this day assumed the administration of the Government of the State.

Sydney, 21 March 2002.

**The House adjourned at 3.20 p.m. until
Tuesday 9 April 2002 at 2.15 p.m.**
