

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Friday 12 April 2002

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

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT (GRAFFITI) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr WOODS (Clarence—Minister for Local Government, Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs) [10.00 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill is an extension of the existing graffiti provisions in the Local Government Act 1993, which facilitate agreements between councils and owners or occupiers of private land for the timely removal of graffiti. The legislation will enable councils to remove graffiti on property without the agreement of the owner or occupier if the graffiti is visible and accessible from a public place. The Government is committed to addressing community concerns about the financial and social cost of illegal graffiti. To this end a number of initiatives have been taken through the New South Wales Graffiti Solutions Program and work by agencies including the Attorney General's Department and the Department of Local Government.

Among those initiatives is the Local Government Amendment (Graffiti Removal) Act 2001, which commenced on 1 July 2001. It provides a mechanism for the timely and effective removal of graffiti from private property through voluntary formal agreements between councils and owners or occupiers. One of the most effective strategies in reducing graffiti is to remove it as quickly as possible, that is within 48 to 72 hours, and to persist in removing it. The legislation has been received favourably by local government and the community. However, some councils have occasionally found it difficult to obtain agreements in some instances with private property owners, particularly of commercial blocks.

In some cases this is due to the fact that a number of different entities may be partly responsible for the maintenance of building walls and other surfaces. Therefore, it can be difficult and time consuming to obtain consent from all responsible parties. Consequently, the proposed additional powers will allow the removal of graffiti, without having to first obtain the agreement of an owner or occupier. I should stress that this is only in cases where the graffiti is visible from a public place and it can be removed from a public place. In those situations the community will benefit from the speedy removal of illegal graffiti which otherwise detracts physically from the area and affects property values, community wellbeing and civic pride.

Under these provisions, council will be able to remove graffiti from property which is particularly susceptible to illegal graffiti and highly visible from public places such as roads, bridges, wharfs and parks in a timely and efficient manner. This, in conjunction with community support and other strategies already in place, will go further in providing an effective deterrent to graffiti. Moreover, it will encourage councils to take an active and participatory role in graffiti prevention, particularly as local communities often look to councils to assist with their concerns about graffiti. Following graffiti removal, council will be required to notify affected owners or occupiers of its action. This will inform owners or occupiers of the work that has been undertaken to their property and provide an opportunity for them to raise any concerns about damage if applicable.

As council will not need to notify the owner or occupier or obtain their prior consent, particular care will be required to ensure that the means used to remove the graffiti does not cause damage to the surface bearing the graffiti. While the council should endeavour to leave the affected surface in a similar condition to what it was in prior to the graffiti it will not always be possible. For instance, painted surfaces may prove difficult to restore, as it will not be possible to always match the colour of the surface. In those situations the owner or occupier may wish to repaint the surface once council has removed the graffiti. This is considered to be reasonable given that the costs associated with removal of the graffiti will be borne by council.

Furthermore, council will be liable for any damage caused as a result of activities to remove graffiti, such as damage to the property subject of the removal activity, and any other property. That is to provide some protection for owners and occupiers given that their consent prior to removal may not have been given. When a dispute arises concerning damage caused by the graffiti removal work the parties may agree to refer the matter to arbitration for resolution. If agreement cannot be reached the parties can refer the matter to the Land and Environment Court for determination. When council is carrying out work on property and is using public funds there is a need to ensure accountability. Presently council must keep a publicly available register containing details of graffiti removal work it has undertaken under agreements with property owners or occupiers. This requirement will be extended to graffiti removal work performed under the current proposal.

Consequently, there will be available as a matter of public record, under section 12 of the Act, itemised expenditure identifying the owner or occupier of the premises where the work was carried out, the nature of the work, and the cost of carrying out the work. Such a register will enable property owners, occupiers and interested members of the public to access information about council activities pertaining to graffiti removal. Section 67 of the Act imposes conditions on councils for performance of work carried out on private land. As with graffiti removal carried out in accordance with an agreement between council and an owner or occupier, this section will not apply to removal of graffiti under the current proposal. Council will therefore not be required to fix a cost for graffiti removal.

Section 356 of the Act places obligations on councils when providing financial assistance for the purposes of exercising its functions. Under this bill, when council removes graffiti from private property it will pay the costs and therefore the owner or occupier will benefit. Allowing councils to fund the removal of graffiti that is highly visible from public places is also of benefit to the community. Council will need to have passed a resolution for a program to fund the removal of graffiti under section 356 (1) of the Act. Once this has been done, and removal of graffiti is consistent with the program, then the public notice requirement in section 356 will not apply.

In conclusion, graffiti affects people's perceptions of an area, property values, community wellbeing and civic pride. This is particularly so where the graffiti is on property that is highly visible from public places such as roads, wharfs, bridges and parks. Evidence indicates that timely and persistent removal of graffiti is an effective deterrent. The current proposal adds to the strategies adopted by the Government to deal with illegal graffiti and will assist councils in this challenge. In turn, communities will benefit. I am sure that the Opposition will endeavour to criticise this bill by raising the question of unfunded mandate.

It should be remembered that these provisions confer an ability on councils to remove graffiti—not an obligation. The provisions of this bill are, therefore, consistent with the principle that councils are autonomous organisations that have the ability and capacity to spend their resources in the most appropriate way in which they see fit for their communities. Because we elect 1,700 councillors in New South Wales every four years at a cost of \$15 million, it is clearly appropriate that councils determine their priorities, otherwise why elect them at all? This bill simply gives councils a greater power than ever before to remove graffiti should they themselves deem it a priority. It brings New South Wales councils into line with municipalities in cities such as Los Angeles and Chicago. The New South Wales Government is committed to giving every stakeholder in the fight against graffiti the very best weapons to win the war. This is the next part of that process. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Maguire.

CRIMES AMENDMENT (BUSHFIRES) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary), on behalf of Mr Debus [10.11 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

All honourable members will recall the bushfires that damaged the State in December and in January. The men and women who fought on the front line—volunteer and professional firefighters, police and those involved in planning, communications, catering and welfare—worked together in partnership in unforgiving weather conditions. Many risked their lives. They were defending thousands of homes—and in thousands of cases, they

succeeded. They were stunningly successful. The volunteer forces that come together at times of significant natural disaster are almost unique to Australia and New South Wales has achieved the highest standards in this regard. The bill before the House seeks to emphasise the gravity of the danger that bushfires represent by enacting a special offence of causing a bushfire.

In introducing this bill the Government is seeking not to fill a gap in the criminal law but, rather, to seek to emphasise society's abhorrence and condemnation of the deliberate lighting of bushfires by making specific provisions against it. In doing so the Government is further implementing reforms to the criminal law arising out of the Model Criminal Code. The code has been drawn up by the Model Criminal Code Officers Committee of the Standing Committee of Attorneys General. It is a committee in which this Government has been heavily involved since its inception. This new offence is yet another example of this Government taking the best options for law reform and adapting them to suit the needs of this State. The Government has previously enacted legislation based on the Model Criminal Code in the areas of computer offences, sabotage, contamination of goods and sexual servitude.

The bill proposes to insert into the Crimes Act 1900 a new offence of causing a bushfire. This offence will be committed if a person intentionally causes a fire and either intends to spread the fires, or is reckless as to the spread of it to vegetation on any public land or land belonging to another. I note that has been a matter of major concern to the all honourable member of this House, particularly the honourable member for Peats and the honourable member for East Hills, who are present in the Chamber and who are almost constantly reinforcing the need for controlling the spread of fires. This bill addresses those concerns but the offence is not intended to be a catch-all arson offence. The Crimes Act 1900 already contains more than adequate offences of malicious damage to property. Currently, section 195 (b) of the Crimes Act 1900 provides for up to 10 years imprisonment for maliciously damaging property by the use of fire or explosives. A person who recklessly damages property in this way acts maliciously. Under section 196 (b) the penalty rises to 14 years if the property is damaged with the intention of injuring a person, and under section 198 a maximum penalty of 25 years imprisonment can be applied to a person who maliciously damages property with the intention of endangering life.

I now turn to the provisions of the bill. Schedule I inserts a new subdivision 5 entitled "Bushfires". This new offence is bushfire specific and it is targeted to catch those persons who intentionally set fire to our bush. Proposed section 203E (1) establishes the new offence, which requires that a person be reckless as to the spread of fire to vegetation. If buildings or other property are damaged as a result of the spread of such a fire, such damage can be taken into account in sentencing. When appropriate, additional charges may be laid relating to the additional damage. The penalty for the new offence of causing a bushfire will sit in the middle of the existing range of property damage penalties. The danger to life and property that a bushfire represents in a continent as dry as Australia means that the offence should be seen to be a special aggravated form of damage to property. The bill therefore will enact a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment, placing the offence on a par with the offence of damaging property with the intention of injuring a person.

It should be noted that for the purposes of consistency the Government has chosen to depart from the Model Criminal Code's suggested 15-year maximum penalty, to maintain consistency in the application of 14-year imprisonment penalties in the Crimes Act 1900. However, this offence will not require that the person deliberately intends to cause any damage to property or that the person intends the fire to spread. The emphasis of this offence is on recklessness as to the spread of fire to vegetation. The speed at which fire can spread and the need to take immediate preventative action means that it is appropriate for persons to be expected to light fires only in circumstances where they are in a position to control the fire and to prevent it spreading to vegetation.

"Recklessness" remains a common law term in New South Wales. It has a number of meanings in different contexts. In this context "recklessness" will mean that the defendant was aware when intentionally causing a fire that there was a possibility that the fire could spread to vegetation on any public land or land belonging to another in a way that was out of the defendant's control. The definition of the term "spread" contained in proposed Section 203D gives a special meaning. It is important to note that the offence contemplates recklessness as to the spread of the fire, not any thought as to the extent of damage that such a fire might cause. The aim is to prohibit conduct that creates an unacceptable risk of damage. The offence is therefore aimed at preventing conduct that might lead to damage, rather than waiting until the damage has occurred. The offence sends a strong message to those who light fires to be extremely careful. If a fire is carelessly lit, it may be an offence even if the fire is, by good luck, extinguished before damage occurs. That message needs to be strongly asserted.

Accordingly, the phrase "spread of a fire" is given a special meaning in the definition in proposed section 203D. The way the fire might spread must be such that it is beyond the capacity of the person who causes it to then extinguish it. Thus it is not an offence under this provision to light a fire with the intention of letting it spread across land, provided that the person who lit the fire has taken sufficient precautions to ensure that the fire is at all times controlled. Whilst a person in such circumstances may not be guilty of the proposed bushfire offence, the person may still be guilty of the lesser offence of malicious damage to property. The offence also requires that the person causing the fire was aware of the possibility of the fire spreading to property owned by another, regardless of whether that be public or private land. This means that fires lit by landowners on their own land will not fall within the scope of the offence unless there is the possibility that the fire could spread beyond the boundary of their land. On the other hand, a firebug lighting an uncontrolled fire on public land such as a national park will instantly fall within the scope of the offence.

In some circumstances lighting a fire which may possibly spread to another's land or to public land is clearly for a justified reason, such as when firefighters carry out bush fire fighting or hazard reduction operations. In recognition of this, a specific exemption from prosecution for such persons is created by proposed section 203E (3). This will act to avoid any impression that the new offence might in any way hamper the ability of firefighters and emergency workers to make quick decisions in emergency situations. It is important to note that this bushfire offence recognises the fact that innocent people can be caught in dangerous situations involving bushfires. The definition of causing a fire in proposed section 203D includes failing to contain a fire. However, two key exceptions are provided that significantly qualify this position. Under the proposed definition a person does not cause a fire by failing to contain a fire which was lit by another person. Further, a person does not cause a fire by failing to contain a fire which is beyond their control.

This second exception directly envisages a situation such as a person safely lighting a fire, such as a barbecue, and for some unforeseeable reason the fire goes beyond the person's control. An example might be an unexpected and freakish sudden strong gale of wind that instantly causes the treetops surrounding the barbecue area to catch fire and that fire is instantly uncontrollable. This person is not guilty of lighting a bushfire and cannot be reasonably expected to put themselves at risk in attempting to contain the fire.

The offence created by this bill is aimed not to comprehensively rewrite the law as it relates to bushfires. Significantly, it will work as a direct complement to the offence currently contained in section 100 (1) of the Rural Fires Act 1997, being an offence of strict liability. That offence relates to the setting of fires, without lawful authority, and carries a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment or a \$110,000 fine. New section 203E (4) of the Crimes Act 1900, as created by this bill, provides that the offence under section 100 (1) of the Rural Fires Act is available as an alternative verdict in a prosecution under the new offence. This will facilitate the complete integration of the new offence into the existing fire related offence structure whilst maintaining the Government's strong position in condemning any person found lighting a dangerous fire of any kind.

The toll exacted against our community due to the recent Christmas and New Year bushfires will not be forgotten quickly by those directly affected or by those who watched daily their neighbours and friends suffering so greatly. It is inevitable that bushfires will occur in such a hot and dry place as New South Wales—we have had to put up with that historically. The mission of this Government is to take every step possible to prevent their occurrence, their force, their regularity and, most importantly, their being lit deliberately. This bill directly confronts, in a preventative manner, the deliberate lighting of bushfires by imposing a heavy penalty on such illegal acts. I strongly commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Maguire.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Seventh Day's Debate

Debate resumed from 22 March.

Mr WEBB (Monaro) [10.25 a.m.]: I continue my reply to the Governor's Speech. The Governor referred to making our communities safer, a timely statement because of the recent regrettable loss of a policeman's life and changes to police portfolios brought about by the recent resignation of the Commissioner of Police. Police numbers are a major concern. I believe that people have a right to feel safe in their homes and communities and, therefore, it is important that even small police stations are fully manned. Officers who reside in small towns often travel to major country centres, leaving small police stations unmanned, let alone not manned 24 hours a day.

Petty crime is a significant problem and I congratulate the Government on introducing the Bail Amendment (Repeat Offenders) Bill. The 000 emergency telephone number response is of great concern to people in Braidwood, Cooma and other areas in my electorate. Significant delays are being experienced in reporting emergencies because of that inadequate service, which has an impact on one's sense of security. Rural areas are experiencing considerable problems with agricultural crime and stock theft. The national livestock identification scheme should be introduced to alleviate those problems. Rural lands protection boards administer livestock identification throughout New South Wales and they must be given the necessary resources to do that efficiently. Stock theft affects the whole State and nation because of the increasing value of agriculture.

The Coalition has outlined an initiative for an additional 32 specialist rural crime police for the stock squad. That is an initiative that should be supported by the Government. Having 32 existing police officers carrying out beat policing duties rather than investigating stock theft does not augur well for police representation in regional and rural areas. The Government should encourage rural communities to set up rural watch community organisations to assist police.

Changes to the fishing industry on the far South Coast have had an adverse impact on indigenous communities, which have been left out of the consultation process. I do not believe that reconciliation has gone far enough. Indigenous communities should have more self-determination to enable them to provide jobs for the young people, to be involved in tourism and to have the necessary resources to educate the broader community on aspects of Aboriginal and indigenous culture. Indeed, our national parks would be better managed if there were greater involvement from Aboriginal communities and indigenous people, who have a spiritual and historical connection with the land.

Televised education programs, teacher shortages and class sizes are all issues that must be addressed by this Government. As I said earlier, the Department of Education and Training should take over the management role of preschools rather than leaving that role to the Department of Community Services. I applaud the Government for its recent announcement to conduct 23 trials across New South Wales. I hope that one of those trials will be conducted in Monaro, and particularly in Queanbeyan, which is a rapid growth area. The Government must provide additional funding to maintain schools and school resources. I have written to the Minister for Education and Training about the development of stage two of Jerrabomberra school. A working party at Jindabyne is assessing the desirability of a central school process. I thank the Government and various government departments for allocating sufficient funding to build a school hall at Braidwood.

Roads are a vital link in the provision of services to our communities, particularly in my electorate of Monaro. I cite Pambula Bridge as a case in point and refer to the bridge construction options put forward by Bega Valley Shire Council and to community concerns about that bridge. The Government has allocated much funding for the maintenance and upgrading of roads, but more is needed. The Government must be mindful of the tourism industry and of the benefits that flow from that industry to agriculture. Regional development can only be achieved if we have a stronger State economy. Ski resorts in my electorate contribute approximately half a billion dollars to the economy of New South Wales. Much-needed funding is required to develop the head lease at Perisher, Guthega and Smiggin Holes. The summer tourism capabilities of the Snowy Mountains should not be forgotten.

The oyster problem at Wamboin Lake and the impact of the aquaculture industry have greatly affected coastal producers and the fishing industry. The Government has not adequately addressed those problems, nor has it adequately addressed water management and rural resource development. The Government's Plan First project at Boydtown in Twofold Bay is impacting on local government, which needs compensation for a loss of rights. Stewardship payments should also be made to landowners who regularly carry out conservation initiatives. Local government requires simplified and fewer regulations. I refer to Bombala Mill, to Austral's failure in Bombala and to the commitment by this Government to provide 450 jobs. Only 13 jobs remain at that mill. This Government, through State Forests, must support the Bombala community and maximise softwood resources.

Populations must be decentralised to regional and rural New South Wales to assist in alleviating the impact of growth in Sydney and coastal regions. Rural and regional areas must be strengthened. I support the decentralisation of government authorities, businesses and populations into rural and regional areas. Decentralisation is really linked to natural resource management and to promoting our primary products. There must be a whole-of-government approach to the conservation of our environment, to tourism, to our heritage and to the historical aspects of country towns. Growth projections for Sydney and coastal regions are simply untenable when we take into account the fact that country and regional areas are suffering. Farmers and small businesses are the backbone of our country. We must work with those people rather than encourage the National Parks and Wildlife Service to impose fines for minor regulatory breaches.

The Vegetation Conservation Act has impacted greatly on country people. Deferring development applications to the Land and Environment Court is a costly and time-consuming process for many councils in my electorate. Feral animal control, the control of weeds, and the threat of bushfires are major burdens on country people. The Game Bill and the Joint Select Committee on Bushfires will address some of those problems. However, the Government must look closely at that committee's recommendations and implement them. Wild dogs continue to kill sheep and attack cattle. The problem of foxes—a major problem throughout the Monaro—has not been adequately addressed by this Government. Landowners, managers and graziers must be given adequate resources to control feral animals—a problem that has resulted in significant social, production and environmental costs to my community.

The Government must have regard to our threatened species, and implement the recommendations of the scientific committees. If action is not taken in this area there will be a severe impact on tourism, recreation and agriculture. Many socioeconomic factors must also be addressed. I refer to the insurance and home warranty crisis, which is a State issue, and I urge the Government to work with the Master Builders Association, local government authorities, and umbrella groups across the State to maintain cultural diversity in country towns and villages through sporting and annual events. Small businesses and builders need this Government's support. Important issues to be addressed by this Government include insurance—public liability, home warranty, and medical professional—and the decentralisation debate.

Mr ASHTON (East Hills) [10.35 a.m.]: I thank Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir for her Speech. I thank her again for attending last year's Picnic Point High School Anzac Day function—her first official function as Governor. Her dignity and the dedication she has shown in her position—which I am sure she will continue to show—and the dignity and dedication of her husband, Sir Nicholas Shehadie, have been a great inspiration for the citizens of New South Wales. I look forward to the Carr Government continuing its achievements for the people of New South Wales—achievements that were outlined by the Governor.

I shall refer to some of the works that are under way, and particularly to those that affect my electorate of East Hills. Schools are an essential component of a good, progressive society. In February the Government announced an additional \$70 million for capital assistance grants and urgent school maintenance. My electorate of East Hills gratefully received more than \$1 million for maintenance, rebuilding roofs, carpeting, resurfacing of floors, perimeter fencing, and new telephone services. I acknowledge the appreciation of the principals, staff, parents and students for that funding, and the positive comments they have made to me about that bonus money that will be spent by the middle of the year.

I will list the schools in my electorate that have received funding as it is important to give honourable members an accurate idea of how many schools benefited. Bankstown West Public School received \$27,500, Bass Hill Public School \$145,000, Carolyn Chisholm school \$35,000, Condell Park Public School \$2,500, East Hill Boys High School \$188,000, East Hill Girls High School \$91,000, East Hills Public School \$21,000, Georges Hall Public School \$27,000, Milperra Public School \$18,000, Padstow North Public School \$41,000, Padstow Park Public School \$74,000, Panania North Public School \$15,000, Panania Public School \$118,000, Picnic Point High School \$60,000, Picnic Point Public School \$11,000, Revesby South Public School \$52,000, Sir Joseph Banks High School \$32,500, Tower Street Public School \$70,000, and Wattawa Heights Public School \$108,000. They are considerable budgetary allocations that are most appreciated by the students who attend those schools and their parents.

Schools in my electorate have benefited from many other things. Recently I was successful in obtaining, for want of a better term, lollipop men or ladies in front of the junior schools in my electorate. A lot of money has been spent by councils on roads and on erecting 40 kilometre signs and the like. Whilst my electorate is not growing to the extent of some other electorates, which leads to demands for new schools, it is facing increasing demands for maintenance and the rebuilding of older schools such as Bass Hill Public School, which was built in 1928, East Hills Girl High School, which is 50 years old this year, and other schools that on average are between 40 and 50 years old. I welcome the staffing agreement that was recently signed by the Department of Education and Training and the New South Wales Teachers Federation. With the recently announced moves by the Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. John Watkins, to encourage teachers to go to areas that are more difficult to staff, real progress is being made. As a former teacher I acknowledge the accuracy of this statement by the Governor:

Our society rightly values teachers. This year the Government will implement a range of strategies to enhance the standing of the teaching profession.

I turn to the health system. New South Wales Health operates 206 public hospitals, three children's hospitals, 13 multipurpose services, including ones in small rural hospitals, 280 community health centres, and 500 early

childhood centres. Each day in New South Wales 3,600 people are admitted to public hospitals—1.32 million people were admitted last year; 17,000 people spend the day in a hospital bed; 56,000 non-patient services are provided; 5,000 people, or three every minute, are seen in emergency departments; and the Ambulance Service responds to 1,800 calls. Our health system is treating 12 per cent more patients in hospitals today than in 1995 and 14 per cent more patients in hospital emergency departments. The Government has increased the number of cataract operations by 43 per cent since 1995—which is an extra 4,000 operations every year. We have increased the number of coronary artery operations by 10 per cent since 1995—an extra 600 procedures are performed every year—and we have increased chemotherapy treatment by 85 per cent in the past four years.

The Carr Government will spend a record \$7.99 billion recurrent funding on health in 2001-02. We have increased the annual level of health funding by \$2.7 billion, or 51 per cent, since 1995. If that increase had been in line with the 2 per cent or 3 per cent yearly inflation since 1995, it would have been, at best, 15 per cent or 17 per cent. We have allocated a record \$529 million for health capital works in 2001-02 and built brand-new hospitals in many areas, including in my electorate and that of the honourable member for Bankstown, where the new Bankstown-Lidcombe hospital is situated.

The New South Wales Minister for Health recently outlined how the \$5 million in Federal funding that was removed from the asthma program had adversely affected many country hospitals and health groups. The former Federal Minister for Health, Dr Wooldridge, siphoned off the money to pay for the construction of a lobby group building in Canberra and then, magically, was employed as chief lobbyist for that organisation. He was presumably appointed on merit—or because the Liberal and National parties won the recent Federal election. How convenient! The former Federal Minister claimed on radio that the money was surplus. How can any Government say that money is not needed for illness prevention and then spend it on building a facility for a rival group to the Australian Medical Association—a well-known thorn in the side of Dr Wooldridge when he was euphemistically known as the Federal Minister for Health?

The Government has announced extra funds for massive infrastructure projects on our roads and railways. The rebuilding of Padstow railway station has already begun at a cost of more than \$6 million—the project is literally well on track. A new ticket office, covered walkways, lift, shops and a new concourse will greatly enhance the service provided at Padstow station, the busiest station in my electorate. The quadruplication of the East Hills line between Turella and Kingsgrove and the building of turn-back facilities on that line will dramatically improve the speed and reliability of the service.

The improvements at Padstow station will assist not only those who catch trains from the Holsworthy-Cambelltown areas and from the East Hills electorate but also those who travel from the Menai electorate to catch trains from Padstow. That progressive work on the East Hills line is good news for many in southern Sydney. I have raised with the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads the issue of easy access by the elderly, the disabled and young mothers to Panania and Revesby stations, and I know that those stations are being actively considered for access improvements. I congratulate the Carr Government on its easy access program at railway stations across the suburban network.

The new M5 East extension is a fantastic addition to Sydney's road hierarchy. Driving to Parliament from my electorate used to involve a 50-minute or 60-minute battle with semitrailers and a couple of dozen sets of traffic lights through Bexley and Rockdale. Using the M5, M5 East and the Eastern Distributor, I can now reach Parliament House in about 30 minutes. A cashback scheme is operating on the M5, and the M5 East was government funded to the tune of \$794 million and completed ahead of time. Motorists of southern and south-western Sydney and the Macarthur region are proudly singing the new road's praises. I place on record my appreciation for the vision of the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads, and for the enthusiasm that his department demonstrated in pushing to have the road finished early. It is an absolute joy to drive on the M5 East, knowing that I will not be delayed by traffic lights and will reach Parliament on time.

I am fortunate to have the Georges River National Park in my electorate. Fishing remains a popular pastime, and the chance of catching a fish in the Georges River has been enhanced by using licensing funds to stock rivers and estuaries with fish. My electorate is bounded for the most part by the Georges River. The Georges River National Park recently received more than \$1 million for the construction of a new toilet block and a path across the Yeramba Lagoon Creek, which leads to Fitzpatrick Park and a popular fishing site known traditionally as Blackwall. This funding resulted from my representations to the Minister for the Environment, and I am pleased to announce that the park will once again be a picnickers' haven. I inspected the park about two weeks ago and it was a joy to see those facilities. The new toilet block will soon be completed, and a permanent mowing contract has been awarded.

It is appropriate that Georges River National Park entry fees will be spent in my electorate and not merely added to consolidated revenue. A particular nuisance on the Georges River is created by people who drive private craft or jet skis at speeds faster than motorists are allowed to drive on our roads. I warn those jet ski hoons that if they continue to use the Georges River as a water-based Eastern Creek Speedway they will have no-one to blame but themselves if there are calls for their banishment.

I am particularly concerned about damage to the Georges River that may occur in the next few weeks. I refer to the reasonably secret announcement that was the subject of yesterday's urgency debate initiated by the honourable member for Menai. The Federal Government seems determined to sell what it considers to be surplus defence land on the banks of the Georges River for housing development. I call on the Federal Government to transfer this land to the Georges River National Park so that this environmentally sensitive bushland can be maintained in public ownership and managed appropriately by the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service to the advantage of southern and south-western Sydney.

The Federal Government's record of land sales in this area in recent years is appalling. For example, thousands of people invested their hard-earned money and built their dream homes in the Wattlegrove area only to hear the Federal Coalition Government announce Holsworthy as the preferred site for Sydney's second international airport. Land at the Sanctuary at Voyager Point was sold recently and hundreds of houses were built. The developer advertised that residents would be only 35 to 40 minutes from the city by train. However, only a few months ago the Federal Government refused to upgrade the East Hills footbridge. It planned to close it permanently and landlock many hundreds of people who had purchased this "surplus" federal land on the basis that this historical footbridge provided a five-minute pedestrian access to East Hills railway station rather than a 40-minute trip by road.

The Federal Government reconsidered its decision to close the footbridge only after strident local opposition led by the honourable member for Menai and me, and councillors on Bankstown and Liverpool councils. However, it cruelly demanded that Bankstown and Liverpool councils take on the recurrent expenditure needed to keep the bridge operating. What was the Federal Government's main motivation for rebuilding the bridge? It was of course last year's Federal election. The Federal Government's plan to sell three kilometres of land along the Georges River on the Menai side and on one side of my East Hills electorate will result in the loss of 175 hectares of bushland between Sandy Point and Alford's point. Hundreds of extra homes with accompanying road and sewage infrastructure, services, cars and pollution will destroy the aesthetics of this riverscape. The run-off from houses will end up in the river, destroying much of the State Government's work to clean up the Georges River.

The area is abundant in flora and fauna and contains more than 420 Aboriginal relics and sites. Community groups have indicated that they will oppose any plan to sell the land for housing. Potential buyers should also be wary of buying land near the soon-to-be-built nuclear reactor at Lucas Heights. The Federal Treasurer has indicated that the number one priority for his budget will be defence so the revenue from the sale of surplus defence land will be an essential component of the money he will need to finance defence expenditure. It is outrageous that once again southern Sydney can be carved up for development in such a sensitive area. One could imagine the outcry if a 150 or 175 hectare development were to take place in the mad monk Rasputin's electorate on the North Shore.

Mr Tink: Who's that?

Mr ASHTON: Tony Abbott. I call on the Federal Government to do something positive for our area, give the land along the Georges River to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and allow thousands of people to use that area positively for all time. With regard to the Federal Government's decision to expand and sell Bankstown Airport, the local community and the State Government will oppose such vandalism in our area.

Policing is an issue that in recent times has never been far from the news. I am pleased about the new program to get police out of police stations and onto the beat. Bankstown local area command will benefit because, as the largest command in New South Wales and, I am told, Australia, clearly more police will be able to leave regional commands and return to an active policing role. I have said before that I would like to be able to visit Bankstown police station and see empty desks—an indication that the police are on the beat protecting the community of my electorate of East Hills. I am hopeful that the unsatisfactory working conditions of police at Bankstown will soon be improved. The honourable member for Bankstown, other local members around the Bankstown area and I have been working hard with the police Minister, the Attorney General and Bankstown council to try to find an appropriate site for a new Bankstown police station. The present site accommodates well over 200 police officers, in two or three rented buildings that were built some years ago. Our aim is to accommodate those officers in one building in a satisfactory location.

One of the ironies of the teaching service is that the better a teacher teaches in the classroom or lecture theatre, the more likely it is that he or she will be promoted and leave the classroom. So it is in policing: when a police officer is promoted, he or she moves further into the bureaucracy, the paperwork takes over, and the officer's policing and detective skills are not utilised. The Carr Government's radical changes will bring about more front-line police. Police will be more visible, and this will have a dramatic effect on lowering crime. *[Extension of time agreed to.]*

Revesby police station will remain an active station. The Government has promised that there will be no police station closures. I hope the new commissioner, whoever he or she may be, will, in consultation with the Government, look closely at placing additional officers at Revesby. I do not mean this to be controversial, but under the previous commissioner, despite the great areas of reform overseen by him there was a tendency to move police into large command centres that had large offices containing lots of computers and additional facilities that police need.

I am sure members would agree that the community would like to see many of the downgraded police stations restocked with extra police. As I have said to the Minister for Police, I do not want Revesby police station to have just two or three police officers and a highway patrol and intelligence centre operating at times. I want 20, 30 or 40 police officers to be stationed there, so they can more quickly get to sites in the southern area of Bankstown, which includes Padstow and Padstow Heights in the Menai electorate.

Digressing back to schools, in my opinion it is better to have smaller schools in various communities rather than one large school. America has 10-storey schools with about 12,000 students, all of whom have to be checked for guns and other weapons before they go to their classrooms. Australia has a much better system. For example, in my electorate alone there are schools in Condell Park, Revesby, Panania and Picnic Point. I know that when populations drop in certain areas it becomes difficult to continue to fund very small policing operations. However, the people of the electorate of East Hills continue to say to me, "When are we going to get some extra police at Revesby, and are we going to keep the extra police in Bass Hill?" Perhaps the honourable member for Fairfield will say something about that matter. I urge the Minister and the Government to consider allocating additional police to all of those smaller police stations, to ensure an improvement in police response times and police visibility.

The Action Stations program, promoted by the Keep Australia Beautiful organisation, has brought together the citizens of Revesby, Bankstown Council, the State Rail Authority and the Revesby Workers Club to plant trees, clean up rubbish, and generally improve the appearance and safety of the railway station and its surrounds. The Revesby urban village improvement plan has been adopted and will see more than \$500,000 initially spent on redesigning and developing a more attractive and accessible area for residents, shopkeepers, shoppers and railway commuters. The initiative involves the establishment of various planning zones, to ensure a better mix of residential and retail development and the use of Revesby railway station as a hub for access to the city, northern and southern Bankstown, and Macarthur, and to provide rail access to the residents south of the Georges River.

This morning the Minister for Local Government spoke about the new bill concerning graffiti clean-up. The Government's program to help councils to clean up graffiti has certainly worked in my electorate of East Hills and in much of the Bankstown area. Adjacent to my office there is a Wesley Mission operation that assists people to find jobs. For two years the building was constantly graffitied. However, since the implementation of the new program, every time the building has been graffitied it has been cleaned up very soon afterwards, the result being that the building has not been graffitied for about six months. So the message soon gets around: the quicker you clean up graffiti, the more likely you are to deter people from doing it. It is not just young people who graffiti. One of the worst graffitists in my electorate is a 28-year-old father of three. He also destroys bushland near where he lives. However, police are faced with the difficulty that they have to virtually catch him with a spray can in his hand or while cutting down trees. We tend to think of young people committing such crimes. In this case young people are probably involved because dad takes them out to see what he gets up to, which is quite incredible.

The State's budget is in a very sound position. The Carr Government continues to spend record sums on health, education, police and justice, community services, and roads and transport. I look forward to another Carr Government budget being well and truly in the black. I do not think the Treasurer would dare to turn up in this Parliament with anything other than "a traditional Labor budget", as the Treasurer would say. I know that the State budget will once again deliver for the people of New South Wales and the constituents in my electorate of East Hills.

I am sure all members would acknowledge that the State of New South Wales receives nowhere near its fair share of revenue from the Federal Government. The people of New South Wales are not averse to making our contribution, as Australia's wealthiest and most populous State, to the common good of Australia, but there is no doubt that the Federal Coalition Government is denying New South Wales even close to its fair share. There is no doubt that New South Wales must make that extra contribution. We are the engine-driving State of the Australian train, if you like, and we have to drag Tasmania and South Australia and other States along with us. That is as it should be, because traditionally that is the way Australia works.

It was probably once called socialism, but today it is expected that, in a sense of co-operation, the richer States must help the poorer States, which have less infrastructure and do not attract the same degree of investment. The apportionment of revenue that it is suggested will come from the GST—and it must be remembered that we will not break even on GST until 2007—is still largely at the behest of the Federal Government. I urge honourable members to imagine how much more we could do if the Federal Government were not wasting more than \$500 million propping up an unsustainable pacific solution for asylum seekers. Let us examine the waste of the Federal Treasurer, who has gambled billions on the foreign exchange market. If he were to turn up at Star City Casino, he would be turned away as a problem gambler.

I also acknowledge the efforts of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service, Commissioner Phil Koperberg, the State Emergency Services, the other State fire authorities, New South Wales Police and the Ambulance Service for their efforts during the December-January 2001-02 bushfire crisis. I live in the worst bushfire-prone area of Bankstown city—as well as the worst flood-prone area, although I have the advantage of being above the flood level—and I know that bushfires are scary events. When I was up on my roof throwing leaves off and taking other preventive measures—jobs I probably should have done during winter—I realised the potential for homes to be destroyed quickly by fire. We learnt a great deal from the January 1994 fires, when, I believe, there was a degree of panic among authorities as they dealt with that crisis. During those fires, lives and many more houses were lost.

Fortunately, from the lessons we learnt at that time the Government has improved its co-ordination of firefighting so that during the last bushfires, whilst property was inevitably lost, there was no loss of life directly attributable to the fires. During the fires last December and January, one man lost his life on the South Coast. I often think of him when people say that no life was lost during the fires. That man, who was involved in one of the Shoalhaven firefighting groups, died on the way home from having fought a fire all day. Whilst trying to remove a large branch that had caught under his four-wheel-drive vehicle, the vehicle collapsed on top of him. Lives are lost, even though they are not directly attributable to the fires. I thank the volunteer bush fire fighters who came from virtually all the States of Australia to help us in New South Wales. If bushfires had broken out in those States at the same time as we had them in New South Wales we would have been in much greater difficulty. The death toll could have been in the hundreds and we would have lost thousands of homes.

Thanks to good fortune, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania were able to make a contribution. Whilst a lot of the credit went to *Elvis* and *Georgia Peach*, the great firefighting machines that dumped huge buckets of water on the fires, we should not forget the thousands of men and women who were on the ground fighting the fires with hoses. As I said recently in the House, Revesby Workers Club raised \$60,000 on behalf of the Sutherland bush fire fighting organisation. I place on record my acknowledgement of the roles played by the Minister for Emergency Services, the Deputy Premier and the Premier in the State's firefighting efforts. However, the greatest credit must go to the men and women who did so much to fight the fires with their bare hands. The Governor's Speech outlined the State's programs over the next few years under the Carr Government, and the Treasurer will outline our fiscal position in his Budget Speech, which he will deliver in a couple of weeks. I am pleased to have the opportunity to reply to the Governor's speech and I congratulate her on it.

Mr TINK (Epping) [11.02 a.m.]: I place on record my congratulations to her Excellency the Governor on her appointment. Her appointment by the Government is an outstanding one, as I am sure every member of Parliament would recognise. Professor Bashir is an extraordinary individual in her personal life and her professional life, both medically and academically. She has a peerless reputation. I know personally of that reputation from my parents' involvement in the medical profession. As a member of Parliament who represents an electorate with a large Lebanese community in Pennant Hills—and particularly in the Thornleigh and Normanhurst areas, which has one of the largest Maronite Christian churches in the State—I can say that my constituents are delighted with this appointment.

With the appointment of Professor Bashir comes the involvement of her husband, Sir Nicholas Shehadie, who for decades has been an outstanding public figure in New South Wales as a former Lord Mayor of Sydney and an outstanding sportsman, and in a number of business and sport-related roles. He is a great role

model to young people throughout the State. I offer congratulations and best wishes to her Excellency on behalf of, I am sure, every member of my electorate. In her Speech on behalf of the Government, the Governor referred to a number of police-related matters. She spoke about resourcing, the safety of police and the other matters that need most careful consideration.

During my time as shadow Minister for Police, one of the most distressing issues for me has been the number of police who have died in the line of duty. That count now stands at four: David Carty, Peter Forsyth, Jim Affleck and now Glenn McEnallay. It is an appalling toll of young people who have given their lives in the service of the State and have paid the ultimate sacrifice. For that reason the Opposition is extremely determined in its commitment to introduce compulsory sentences of life imprisonment for people who kill police officers in the line of duty. We believe it is an eminently doable policy and one that should be followed through, and can be followed through by the Government if it is willing to do so.

The issue of resources is an important one for the police force. Members on both sides of the House constantly speak about the level of resourcing devoted to policing. For that reason the developments over the last few days as to the proposed payment to the Commissioner of Police are important. I understand—and I believe this is an issue that is important in this debate—that the Governor has the final say on the recommendation of the Government as to the payment. In that regard, the Police Integrity Commission [PIC] has a statutory role to review the material that is to be presented to the Governor. As I indicated yesterday, the Opposition will submit material to the Police Integrity Commission in the same way that the Government has submitted material to it. This issue ultimately involves the Governor because she will make a decision on the advice of the Executive Council.

The issues I have raised with the PIC—and I am not in any way being determinative against the police commissioner, the Minister for Police or others—cover a range of matters that properly need to be taken into account by the commission. On 10 April the Minister for Police wrote to the PIC advising it of his intention to recommend that the police commissioner be removed from office. I understand that the PIC is given a reasonable opportunity—indeed the Parliament is required to give the PIC a reasonable opportunity—to comment on the recommendations. We will be submitting a number of matters to the PIC. As was indicated yesterday, an opinion has been obtained from Mr Moses, legal counsel, which raises a couple of key issues about whether the payment of public moneys to the police commissioner is based on a sham and whether the Government's proposal to recommend to the Governor that the commissioner be removed is the exercise of a ministerial power for an improper purpose.

Those questions need to be looked at by the PIC, and we put them on that basis. I understand that much depends on whether the contract is being terminated, as is asserted in the documents tabled in Parliament yesterday. If it is a termination, then a lump sum on termination may be payable. However, if the commissioner has resigned, no lump sum should be payable and the only entitlements he should receive would be relatively small payments to cover matters such as annual leave and sick leave. Although the documents assert termination, I am concerned that on Wednesday in Parliament the Minister for Police said that the commissioner approached the Government, the commissioner decided to resign, it was Commissioner Ryan's decision to resign. Those statements, together with other public statements by the relevant parties, indicate that the commissioner approached the Government to resign. If that is so there is a problem with the Government's decision to pay the commissioner a substantial lump sum of public money, and there is a question about his entitlement to receive it.

The fundamental question is: How can the Minister recommend the commissioner's removal to the Governor when the Minister for Police told Parliament that the commissioner was resigning. I am particularly concerned by the Minister's assertion to the Police Integrity Commission that the commissioner's solicitors noted that the major changes identified for Mr Ryan have been substantially achieved. The letter from the solicitors indicates that the major expectations identified were continuing reform, ensuring security at the 2000 Olympics, and nurturing staff so that there is a succession plan. It appears from the Minister's letter to the PIC that he accepted these assertions as the major expectations, when the major and primary expectation from the performance agreement was to place "the greatest emphasis on crime reduction and safety".

In the table of key accountability and performance measures, community safety and crime reduction rank at the very top, ethical and professional practice ranks number four, Olympic security ranks number six, and succession planning ranks number 10. Yet this and 13 other accountability and performance measures were not mentioned by the solicitors or put to the PIC by the Minister. The Bureau of Crime Statistics figures for 1999-00 and 2001, the relevant period since the contract was renegotiated, show that in key crime categories

that most affect the public—assault, robbery, break and enter, motor vehicle theft, fraud and malicious damage—crime is going up or is stalled at very high levels. Robbery with a firearm has risen 34 per cent in the last 12 months.

Even more bizarre is the proposal implicit in the Minister's letter to the PIC that proposes the removal or termination of the commissioner for his allegedly strong performance in three performance criteria nominated by the commissioner's solicitors. Surely, removal or termination based on alleged strong performance is strong prima facie evidence that what is proposed to be put to the Governor is a sham, and that Mr Costa's original advice to Parliament that it was a resignation is correct. In these circumstances, and considering that according to the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 11 April contact between the Government and the commissioner's representative may have commenced as early as 3 April, a full five days before the Clayton Utz letter was written, a key issue is the substance of the contact between those parties during that period.

This question is even more important given allegations in today's press that the commissioner has been negotiating employment in Athens. Antonis Furlis from the Athens Olympic Organising Committee is quoted in today's *Australian* as saying, "This has been discussed for some time." If that is so, surely it supports the Minister's assertion in Parliament that the commissioner resigned and that he is not being terminated or removed. I also draw to the attention of the House the parliamentary report and the contract of employment of 29 January 1999, together with some related correspondence. The Government's claims must be fully tested by the Police Integrity Commission. My greatest concern is that the Minister for Police has either misled Parliament or is proposing to mislead the Governor, depending on which of his contradictory statements about whether there has been a resignation or a termination is accepted.

Most importantly, it was never put to the Crown Solicitor that Mr Ryan was resigning. His advice seems predicated upon removal. Section 31D of the Police Service Act specifically provides for the resignation of a Commissioner of Police. If this is the substance of what happened then it cannot be dressed up as a removal to fall within section 31C, or represented to the Governor in that way. Together with the payment of \$450,000 of public money to Mr Ryan, getting towards 50 per cent more than the annual salary proposed to be paid to his replacement, these are very grave matters for consideration. They warrant a full and urgent investigation. The very high salary paid to Mr Ryan when compared to that of his successor highlights the terms of his contract, which made no provision for a lump sum payment on resignation: the salary was such that no resignation pay was necessary. It is vitally important that the Police Integrity Commission report to Parliament on this matter urgently.

If we accept the Minister's proposal, it follows that Parliament has been very seriously misled by the Minister's claim that the commissioner resigned. Either the Minister was misleading Parliament when he said that the Commissioner of Police resigned, or he is proposing to mislead the Governor by asserting that the contract of the Commissioner of Police was terminated. That is a very serious constitutional matter, and one that the Police Integrity Commission must examine thoroughly and report to this Parliament upon. Implicit in the problem is the clear indication that if what the Minister is putting to the Governor—that there was a termination—is correct, then this Parliament has been actively misled and deceived by the Minister saying that the Commissioner of Police resigned.

This is not the first time we have had problems in this area. On the last occasion a parliamentary committee stepped in to look at the contract of employment entered into controversially between the commissioner and the Minister just before the last election. That contract drew concern from the Auditor-General, who especially reported to Parliament on it. Advice from the Crown Solicitor was that parts of the contract were invalid, and the parliamentary committee stepped in to do an excellent job in bringing more of those matters to light. In relation to one of the exhibits tendered to that committee, a letter of 29 January 1999 from Mr Gleeson, the Chairman of the Statutory and Other Officers Remuneration Tribunal and the Director-General of the Premier's Department, these things were said in relation to spouse travel:

It helps to spell out that we are helping him [that is Mr Ryan] and then in addition it will not be forgotten in future years.

We cannot have Ryan pushing us to the brink and then putting pressure on the Minister.

In other words, they are saying that the then Minister, the Hon. Paul Whelan, has to be quite firm that he will accept their advice on the contract. The unfortunate truth is that in prior contractual arrangements between the commissioner and the Governor there had been legal problems, auditing problems and other problems that had drawn strong criticism from a parliamentary committee. Given that background and given that so many questions remain about the current arrangements, the Police Integrity Commission must get involved in this

matter, follow up, use its jurisdiction to investigate and report to the Parliament. The letter from Mr Gleeson is to Dr Gellatly, the person involved in the current arrangements. This information is on the record, it was tendered to the parliamentary committee: "We cannot have Ryan pushing us to the brink and then putting pressure on the Minister."

That is what happened last time, but what is happening this time? I do not know. Perhaps things are okay. But there are certainly a number of questions that need to be answered. Counsel has questioned whether this is a sham or whether the Minister is acting with an improper purpose. These are matters that the Police Integrity Commission must investigate. Last time it was the parliamentary committee that took on the job, this time it must be the Police Integrity Commission. The bottom-line constitutional problem—and they do not get much more fundamental than this—is whether the Minister is misleading the Parliament or whether he is proposing to mislead the Governor. If it is a resignation, as the Minister told the Parliament it was, then he is clearly proposing to mislead the Governor. If it is a termination, as the Minister is proposing to put to the Governor, then plainly he has misled the Parliament. Either way it is a damned mess, at best, and the Police Integrity Commission must examine it closely and thoroughly.

The Coalition is concerned about the proposal of the Minister for Police to hire out police. We do not have a problem with hiring out police for large football games or other sporting fixtures that attract large crowds in a specific location. But we do have a problem with hiring out police for private interests. It is fundamental to Coalition members that members of the public can seek assistance from a police officer in uniform, with one exception. The police officer may say, "I am sorry, I can't help you because there has just been a fatal accident down the street, there is someone critically injured as well, and I have to get down there." Members of the public understand that prioritisation of work.

However, I do not think the public will understand or accept—and I cannot accept this—that a police officer in uniform might be able to say to a person seeking assistance, "I can't help you today because I am working for the Commonwealth Bank to guard the bank" or, "I can't help you today because I am working for Westfield to guard Westfield premises." That calls into question the fundamental role of police officers. I believe that police officers on duty should be working for the public generally, subject to the exception to which I referred a minute ago. For example, imagine that a police officer is guarding a bank when he is approached by a member of the public who says, "There's a domestic violence dispute down the street. Will you help me?" I think most police officers would help that person.

However, if the police officer is contractually engaged by the bank to protect it and the bank gets robbed in the meantime or the call to the domestic violence dispute is a deliberately false lead to get the police officer away from the bank—and that does happen—it leaves the Government and the police officer in a terrible quandary. I say "government" because I assume that the bank will make a claim for damages because it has a contractual arrangement to be guarded by a police officer in uniform. Police work is hard enough these days without front-line police having to face conflicts of interest. It is precisely the sort of conflict of interest that was warned of by the police royal commission and, more recently, the Police Integrity Commission. Whatever steps the Government wants to take to get police in uniform on the streets prior to the next election, it should not put police in uniform on the streets in circumstances in which they are contractually obliged only to protect certain commercial interests. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

It is fundamentally important that police protect the community at large. The Coalition has strong views about what needs to happen, not least to deal with the problem of police who are on sick leave with stress anxiety. It is astonishing that in 1995 only 21 police were on sick leave with stress or anxiety; now more than 600 police are on sick leave with stress anxiety. In addition, other police are on sick leave with physical injuries. Further inroads into police numbers show that people who are working permanent part time are not counted ultimately as working full time, although they are counted as police officers. When that is factored in—and the Government has never denied that—in fact fewer police are available for duty today than there were seven years ago, as distinct from the number of police on the books.

Something must be done about the number of police on stress leave, and a number of matters must be tackled. We must face up to the shortcomings of the current workers compensation scheme in terms of the assessment of stress and psychiatric illness. Late last year the Minister was given an opportunity to do something when workers compensation legislation was before the Parliament. Amendments strongly supported by the Opposition were proposed. The Minister, for reasons which I still to this day do not understand, refused to countenance amendments relating to agreed medical assessment guidelines for the assessment of stress among police, which is of great concern to the Police Association. I was astonished that the Minister, as a former President of the Labor Council, was content to let the amendments be defeated.

That was a sad day, because the opportunity to do something for police officers on stress leave was lost. In my view, the problem must be defined before it can be dealt with. The development of assessment guidelines for stress is a starting point for defining and professionally assessing the problem. That is what is missing here. Around such guidelines can then be developed programs for making the workplace a better environment and for identifying people at risk and assisting them to get over their stress or by putting them on light duties so that there is no risk of their stress degenerating at the same time as they are being treated. These things cannot be planned or done until the problem is measured. Unfortunately, at the moment there is no sign that the problem will be measured.

Recently the Government gazetted a workers compensation regulation. A disallowance motion was moved in the upper House because the regulation covered all workers and because, under parliamentary procedure, a regulation cannot be amended; a regulation can only be wholly or partly disallowed. There was no opportunity to identify police and emergency workers as an exception to the regulation. But I can say this: a Coalition government would identify those people and deal with them on a separate basis, as I believe they are entitled to be dealt with. The police workplace will always be the most dangerous workplace in New South Wales. There is no getting around that. I have attended four funerals for police officers who have died while on duty in tragic situations. Regrettably, over time there will be more funerals for police officers who have been killed while on duty.

How such situations are handled, how counselling comes to the fore and how other stress-related matters are dealt with can make a difference to many police who will not have to pay that price but who may, nevertheless, pay a very high price for being invalidated out of the police force when other options may have been available if the problem had been identified, measured and dealt with comprehensively. My plea is that we must address that issue. As a starting point, we must be prepared to identify police and emergency workers. I know that some controversy is attached to that, just as it is attached to mandatory life sentences for people who kill police officers.

Every human life is of immense value. What differentiates police in terms of stress—which makes a special place for them appropriate—and in terms of things like mandatory sentencing, is that police officers on duty step forward when the rest of us can step back. Police have a legal duty to step forward, and that is what differentiates them to the point that they warrant special protection and special rules. I say that without in any way devaluing the appalling crime of murder in relation to anyone else. Police officers who are killed not while on duty but in their private capacity are in the same position as ordinary members of the community. However, police officers killed while on duty are in a different position. That is the difference. The same could be said about stress. There are other roles that police officers can play to assist in the goal that we all want: public safety. A number of light duties roles can be performed.

[Debate interrupted.]

PARLIAMENTARY REPORTING STAFF

Mr WHELAN: I am grateful to the honourable member for Epping for permitting me to make a short announcement. Thea Brown will retire on 24 April after 10 years with Hansard. She is present in the Hansard gallery at the moment and will no doubt make this short address of mine sound much more eloquent. Thea, on behalf of everyone in the New South Wales Parliament I take this opportunity to thank you—and at the same time thank all members of the Hansard staff—for the wonderful job you have done. Ten years service in the Parliament is indeed a long time and Parliament and Hansard are very grateful for your valued service over those 10 years. On behalf of everyone I wish you a very happy retirement.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Seventh Day's Debate

[Debate resumed.]

Mr TINK: Let me say that I do not normally like yielding to the honourable member for Strathfield but on this occasion it is a positive delight. He speaks on behalf of everyone but, on behalf of those on this side of the House, I second his comments and wish Thea Brown all the best for the future. I hope that what I have been saying has not been too difficult to take down. This is probably a good point at which to bring my speech to an end.

Mr TRIPODI (Fairfield) [11.31 a.m.]: I appreciate the opportunity to address the House with respect to some of the developments that have been occurring in the electorate of Fairfield. I am pleased with the progress of developments in my electorate, and the services and infrastructure that the New South Wales Government is providing. I shall report to the House on just some of the developments that have occurred over the past three years. There is some good news so far as train stations are concerned. Fairfield railway station is in the process of receiving an easy-access upgrade, and lifts will be installed. Fairfield railway station, which is one of the oldest train stations in Australia, is heritage listed and a number of constraints were placed on any development. The station's significant heritage flavour extends to its footbridge. It took some time, working with the people from State Rail, to come up with the right design for Fairfield station. It required a substantial change in the original plans.

I thank Fairfield Council for the professionalism it displayed in its dealings with the State Government in regard to this issue. Through a process of consultation we were able to come up with a plan that is acceptable to all parties. The plans have been lodged with Fairfield Council for consideration, and I hope that work will commence soon on the Fairfield station easy-access upgrade. At Chester Hill station an awkward situation has existed where the station platform has been considerably lower than the entry point or floor of a train carriage. A number of Chester Hill residents are elderly and they—and many of the younger residents who have moved into the area—have found it difficult to safely board and alight from trains at that station. I was approached by some long-term residents of Chester Hill who drew this matter to my attention.

With the co-operation of the Minister for Transport, the Hon. Carl Scully, I was able to put on the agenda for that train station the possible raising of the platform so that boarding and alighting from trains would be safer for elderly residents and other commuters who use that station. It was necessary for State Rail or the Rail Access Corporation [RAC] to examine and consider the different options that were available. That assessment process has taken quite some time. Towards the end of last year we finally secured an agreement about what should be done, and there has been progress in respect of that matter.

For the benefit of honourable members who may not be aware of it, the Georges River flows through my electorate. For some time the Government has been committed to improving the recreational value of that river. It recently announced funding of approximately \$1.5 million in that regard. The honourable member for East Hills referred to the fact that major funding is being channelled into the rehabilitation of the banks and recreational areas adjacent to the Georges River and it is pleasing that the Government continues to be committed to that upgrading. Honourable members are not doubt aware that recreational opportunities for the people of western and south-western Sydney are not as plentiful as those available to residents in other parts of Sydney. Mirambeena regional park is highly valued and many of us who live in the area take advantage of everything it has to offer. Many people go there, particularly on weekends, for picnics and to spend time with their families. It is fantastic to see them enjoying this wonderful asset that is available for all the people of Georges Hall and the people of south-west Sydney more generally.

Recently, the Minister for Sport and Recreation—who is at the table—came out to Bass Hill to announce the allocation of some sports funding for the upgrading of ovals in Georges Hall and Bass Hill in my electorate. That funding has gone to Bankstown City Council, which is in the process of building the new assets made possible by the State Government's commitment to the provision of sporting facilities for that area. I am pleased to report on that aspect. With regard to Bankstown Police Station, the honourable member for East Hills and the honourable member for Bankstown expressed concern about the quality of the facilities available for Bankstown police. I have had a meeting with the union delegate at the Bankstown patrol and he outlined his concern to me. I agree with him, and I understand that the Government is slowly progressing towards a better outcome in respect of that issue.

I take this opportunity to thank the Police Service personnel based in Bankstown for working in very difficult circumstances and unsatisfactory facilities. I am committed to trying to assist them to advance the quality of the accommodation from which they have to run their service. I take this opportunity to thank them for enduring those circumstances and assure them that I will continue to bring this matter to the attention of the Government and work towards a solution. The honourable member for East Hills also touched on the issue of Bass Hill Police Station. The current state of Bass Hill Police Station has been of concern to me. In the future, when the Minister for Police finally brings in his amendments to allow pact arrangements, stakeholders will be able to have direct input into the allocation of police resources and distribution of staff.

The priorities of the local community will be able to be bound up into an agreement with the local area commander. When that opportunity arises, after changes to legislation that are necessary to make it happen, I

will draw to the attention of the Bankstown patrol the fact that Bass Hill needs to be given far more attention in the allocation of resources than it has received in the past. I have written to the Bankstown patrol commander on several occasions, raising issues about flare-ups that occur in the northern suburbs of the Bankstown patrol, and have expressed the view that things could be done better. I look forward to the opportunity to have a direct input into the distribution of resources in the Bankstown patrol. I will be endeavouring to make sure that the Bass Hill police station receives more attention than it has in the past.

I also draw the attention of the House to the fact that a new Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] office is under construction in Fairfield. Staff at that office, as is the case with many public servants, have worked in difficult circumstances. The current office is old and I am pleased that the State Government has committed resources to the construction of a new RTA office adjacent to the existing office. When the new office has been completed the old building will be demolished to make way for a car park to service the new building. We hope that the new facility will be opened at the end of this year.

In relation to roads generally, the RTA has resumed land from the front of homes along The Horsley Drive up to Polding Street, Fairfield—a very expensive and slow process—to put in a slip lane. The slip lane will significantly improve the flow of traffic in Fairfield and the outer suburbs of the Fairfield local government area. The announcement, which was slow in coming because of the difficulties associated with resuming land, has been well received. I have been heavily involved in ensuring that the owners of the land resumed will be fairly compensated. One of my priorities has been to draw attention to what I refer to as the eastern suburbs, the older suburbs, of the Fairfield local government area. Their infrastructure and assets have declined over time and they have not received the attention they deserve. I have tried to improve the quality of lives of the people in those suburbs—Carramar, Villawood, east Fairfield, Yennora and Old Guildford—and I have had some great results.

In the past I have referred to some of the results that have been achieved. What used to be referred to as Carramar Bridge—now known as the Charles Peel Bridge—has had a \$20 million upgrade along The Horsley Drive, which crosses the Carramar to Villawood railway line. Charles Peel served on Fairfield council for many years. He is well known and respected by the local community and he recently had the honour of having the bridge named after him. We have worked through the many challenges in the reconstruction of that bridge to ensure that the people directly affected by the project were not adversely affected. After some diligent and sensitive work by the RTA the bridge is functioning and is a valued asset in the Fairfield electorate. It has improved the travel times for people along The Horsley Drive and it has contributed to the quality of life generally of the people in Carramar and Villawood.

In the past I have also drawn the attention of the House to the east Fairfield Housing Estate, which is sometimes referred to as the Bronx, in the eastern suburbs of the Fairfield local government area. It took me a long time to convince the Minister to demolish such a major asset and I am pleased to say that it has now been demolished. Private residents are slowly moving into the new Hamilton Grove estate as construction proceeds. Not only do the new residents enjoy a much better quality of life than those who lived there previously, but all the people in the neighbouring area—who went through hell—are not exposed to the plague of crime and horrible experiences that existed in 1995 when I was first elected to Parliament. The Government took a tough decision to demolish such a major asset in public housing but it was the right decision. I was convinced that it was right when I first encountered the problem and continually pressed that point of view with the right results. Bellevale Homes is working hard to complete the construction of new homes in that area and its design to date has been fantastic.

I am happy to report to the House that there is slow and steady progress in the refurbishment plan of the old homes in Kamira Court, a Department of Housing complex, near the Villawood shopping centre. The refurbishment will ameliorate the quality of life of residents. When I was first elected to Parliament the Villawood shopping centre was the first issue in which I became involved. It was old and abandoned, it had no tenants and it was completely unkempt. Fairfield City Council, particularly its place manager, John Price, and I have worked hard to improve the services in that area. The location of the Aldi supermarket was exactly what was needed in Villawood, and it was extremely well received. Aldi focuses on a limited range of products but provides them at the cheapest possible price. Aldi has attracted more people to Villawood, has brought the shopping centre to life, and will make it economically viable for other businesses to establish themselves at the shopping centre. The elderly in Villawood are physically challenged in many ways and are not capable of going to other shopping centres, such as Bass Hill, Chester Hill or Fairfield. Lack of transport is also an issue. The Villawood shopping centre is important and has been a high priority for me. People are again using the shopping centre. The results are coming to fruition after six years of hard work.

In relation to east Fairfield, the road along The Horsley Drive in front of Patrician Bros High School at Fairfield has only two lanes. I hope that resources are provided in the next budget to widen it to a four-lane road. The road narrows further south of the high school where there is a bridge. The Horsley Drive from the Hume Highway is a major road, practically a highway, that is used by trucks and an enormous number of cars every day. It needs to be upgraded to a four-lane road across my electorate. I hope that the Minister for Roads will give this section of The Horsley Drive the attention it deserves. Also in relation to the eastern suburbs of the Fairfield local government area, last Saturday lots of residents and I attended a public meeting at Springfield Park, Old Guildford, organised by Julie Boulous and Jim Newell, who are local resident activists. They are concerned that Springfield Park is to be sold by the council.

I consulted with the mayor and the Labor councillors on Fairfield council and expressed quite strongly that we should not be in the business of selling off community assets. The mayor had a meeting with his Labor caucus and it voted overwhelmingly to reject the proposal. Last Saturday the mayor expressed the view that the Labor councillors, the majority on Fairfield council, would not support any proposal to sell off that important asset. Springfield Park has been there for a long time. It is an historic part of the Old Guildford community. I am happy that the announcement was made. The council process still has to be undertaken but the Labor councillors' position is to oppose the privatisation of that important community asset. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I turn now to schools in the Fairfield local government area. There has been continuing media speculation about whether there is criminal activity around schools. All New South Wales schools are at risk of criminal activity or violence breaking out. The Fairfield local government area is no different from any other area but, for whatever reason, continues to receive an inordinate amount of attention from the media. I thank the principal of Canley Vale High School, Geoff Garland, for being so outspoken in this matter. There is probably no-one more qualified than he is to express a view, and he has stated that there is no gang activity occurring at Canley Vale high school. As with any other school, it is challenged with regard to this type of activity in that activities occurring outside the school can spill into the school. Geoff Garland and all the teachers at the school have stated that the school is a good school, the teachers are very good teachers and the students are great students.

People in the Canley Vale community are achievers. That is the message that the principal has consistently sent out. I have visited the school many times. I am very proud to represent the people associated with the school. They are committed to the achievements they generate. There are kids with enormous talent and kids who have faced enormous challenges. Many lived in refugee camps before they came to Australia. Many come from lower socioeconomic areas. The last thing they need is to be labelled as coming from an undesirable suburb. The people of Canley Vale are very lovely and decent people. There is no doubt that there are challenges but the school has been maligned and is characterised as having more problems than it does. I thank Geoff Garland, the teachers and the student leaders for being outspoken in protecting the reputation of Canley Vale High School.

Westfield Sports High School is a flagship school. The Government has provided \$5 million to \$6 million for major upgrades, particularly for sports facilities and academic facilities. Major refurbishment has been carried out on office blocks. A new administration block has been built and the school hall that was burned down two years ago has been replaced. A weight training centre will be attached and more resources connected with the assembly hall will be provided over time. The Government is investing in the assets of education. The kids who graduate from the school are fantastic achievers in sports and are making an enormous contribution.

Some great stars have been educated in the first sports school in New South Wales. It is often reported in the local newspapers that real estate prices have increased in the area around the school because parents want to live in the catchment area so that their children can attend Westfield Sports High School. I thank Phil Tucker and the rest of the teachers there, who have been working very hard to make the school the success that it is. It has designed and developed the curriculum for later sports high schools to emulate. Teachers at the school have worked with passion and come up with concepts and ideas that they have driven and made a success of.

Fairfield Heights Public School will also be upgraded. The school has existed for a long time and the upgrades are very much deserved. I thank the people involved in the process. We have progressed past the public consultation phase and the school will finally receive the attention and assets that it deserves. Yennora Public School is often challenged but its new challenge is the co-location of a new behavioural school on the school grounds. The Government is investing more resources in helping children with behavioural problems. We are very happy that the Government has decided to locate one of these schools in my electorate, because it will enable us to identify kids at risk, students who need particular help with behavioural problems and challenges. They will receive far more teaching attention than they would in a normal school.

Even though this represents a challenge for the people of Yennora and the Yennora Public School they have embraced the challenge. They have seen that the project has value and have accepted that it is part of the contribution they must make, and they have engaged it responsibly. They have seen the value of this kind of Government initiative. I am very happy that it is happening in the Fairfield electorate. I look forward to progress with the project. I understand that we are almost at the stage where a development application will be lodged with the council to progress the capital works necessary to site the school in that area.

I turn now to the Fairfield police local area command. In the local newspapers this week it has been reported that the geographic catchment of, and the population within, Fairfield local area command will be doubled. I have met with the patrol commander, Geoff Cavanagh, and discussed the matter. I have also discussed it with the Minister for Police. The local police have been fantastic in reducing crime in the Fairfield area but they are concerned about what increase in resources they will receive. That is currently being considered. More meetings will be held next week. I am very much committed to ensuring that the police will receive the resources they need.

The fact that the local area command has been given this challenge confirms its success in reducing crime in the Fairfield area. The concept of visible policing, the on-street presence of police, has increased substantially under the present Minister for Police. It has been very well received by the community. I get great feedback about how reassuring it is to see so many police on the beat, particularly in the Fairfield central business district. People feel much safer as a consequence. Fairfield, like every other area, has its challenges in terms of crime reduction. It is never easy. The young officers in the Fairfield patrol handle themselves professionally and have passion, commitment and pride in carrying out their work. All this has been noted by the community. I thank the officers of the Fairfield patrol. They are very hard-working people. They now have a new challenge.

I will work together with them on this new challenge to ensure that they deliver great quality service for the people of Fairfield. That is what they are committed to. The concern of police about the boundary changes relates to whether they are capable of providing the service that people deserve. I congratulate them on being so committed to that, on taking so much pride in their work, on caring, and on being outspoken and diligent in the way that they pursue their work. We will work together to ensure that there is a resolution to the satisfaction of most people involved. I take this opportunity to thank police for the way in which they have used the new drug house legislation. That legislation has been fantastic. It has substantially improved the quality of life of people living in the suburbs of the Fairfield electorate.

I often get from the community feedback on police raids on houses involved in drug dealing. I invite people in the community to come to my office and contact me if they believe drug dealing is occurring in their streets or neighbourhoods and let me know about that. It is my role to draw that to the attention of the Fairfield patrol, and I will be diligent in doing that. Even if people have mere concerns, and are not 100 per cent sure that activities are drug related, I ask them to bring that to my attention so that I can then pass on that information to the Fairfield patrol.

At the moment, Fairfield council is considering a development application for an adolescent mental health unit to be located at the Fairfield Community Health Centre in Carramar. That is a much-needed resource. Problems presented by mental health and those suffering from mental health problems are now, and have been for a long time, a big challenge for Fairfield. It is part of the side effect of having a significant drug problem. It is particularly significant that the facility is targeted at adolescents and will complement other services located at the Carramar site. I am quite ecstatic that the development application has been lodged, construction will soon begin and we will get more medical officers within the community providing treatment for mental health problems. At the moment, the Fairfield community is heavily dependent on resources and services based at Liverpool Hospital. The location of some of those services closer to the community in need says much for the commitment of the Government to improving the quality of life not only of those suffering from mental health problems but their families and friends as well as all other people who are affected, directly and indirectly, by those problems.

Mr STONER (Oxley) [12.01 p.m.]: I would first like to place on record my respect and admiration for our Governor, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, AC, who delivered with great aplomb a speech reflecting the seventh year of the Carr Labor Government in office—a tired, uninspiring Government that is big on spin and little on delivering the services that the citizens of this State deserve. Among the spin are many re-announcements. One example is the cross-city tunnel, first announced five years ago, and promises of new train carriages, first made in 1997. We will believe it when we see it!

What the Government spin is light on, however, is a vision or a plan for the future of this State. It is also light on its failure to deliver the extra 2,100 police officers that it promised in the election campaign in 1999, or the details of the huge increases in State taxes, fees and charges it has presided over, including the tax on a tax—stamp duty levied on GST-inclusive prices—and new taxes on the everyday pursuits of many residents of Oxley and other electorates, including fishing and going to a local beach that happens to be enveloped by a national park. I might mention also the disgraceful increases in fees for learner drivers for their driving test and purchase of the drivers handbook. That is slugging a section of the community—especially young people, often unemployed, or students—who are least able to afford the Government's insatiable appetite for additional revenue.

I turn to some of the specific detail of the Speech as it relates to the electorate I represent, Oxley, on the beautiful mid North Coast. The Speech talks about key objectives of modernising the State's infrastructure. Sadly, little of that is evident on the mid North Coast. I refer to the North Coast rail line. The track is dilapidated. In many sections it obliges trains, including the so-called XPT, to slow down considerably, often to as little as 10 kilometres per hour. My electorate is full of stations, overbridges and other infrastructure that was developed many years ago, often in the post-war years, or even earlier, at the turn of the century. There has been no significant investment in this rail infrastructure for many years.

Kendall railway station is in the beautiful Camden Haven district. That station was built around 1910 and has been looked after by State Rail. I give State Rail credit for that. However, the station services a large and aging population of nearby towns such as Laurieton, Bonny Hills and Kendall. The station, sadly, has no attendant. As one would imagine, with XPT services often arriving late at night or in the early hours of the morning, elderly people in particular struggle with luggage. We desperately need an attendant for the station.

I now move to roads infrastructure. Recently, the State's worst roads were announced after a survey by the NRMA. The list included the South West Rocks road between Kempsey and South West Rocks; the Stuarts Point road; and the Kempsey to Armidale road. On the very same day that the worst roads were announced the Premier announced a \$10 million upgrade of the Cahill Expressway to give pedestrians a better view of Sydney Harbour. I have to say to the Government that people living in country areas and driving on roads such as the South West Rocks road—which has a high traffic volume, is pot-holed and dangerous and has been the scene of a number of accidents—are disgusted when they hear such announcements. They are disgusted that \$10 million will be spent simply so that pedestrians and joggers can have a better view of the harbour. Let us get real about delivering infrastructure to country areas. This Sydney-centric Government is out of touch in that regard. It has a terrible record. The Country Labor faction has failed completely in relation to infrastructure in country areas.

The Speech went on to the Christmas-New Year bushfires. Large areas of the State were affected by the devastating bushfires that occurred in what was the worst bushfire season on record. On the mid North Coast that bushfire season started in September, following droughts which in some places again were the worst on record. In September-October serious fires occurred in the Kempsey area at Kundabung and Toms Gully. In those fires half a dozen houses were destroyed, along with fences, sheds, farm equipment and so on. The fire at Toms Gully was deliberately lit by a group of Aboriginal women who were on a property that was overgrown. It was formerly owned by the Indigenous Land Corporation. That fire was started during a total fire ban.

Residents report to me that the owners of the properties on which five houses were destroyed in the Toms Gully fire suffered an average loss of about \$120,000. That monetary loss does not include the loss of the houses; it related only to the damage to sheds, farm equipment, fodder and so on. Those people have been devastated. In most cases they were uninsured against those fires. I requested of the Government that those fire victims have access to the \$10,000 grant through the Department of Community Services and the Government-established fire appeal, which recently topped \$10 million due to the generous contributions of members of the community, having been started off with a \$1 million contribution by the Government. Thus far, my requests for access to that assistance have been refused. I am at a loss to understand why those fire victims should be treated any differently from fire victims in areas around Sydney.

It has been suggested to me that the fire appeal related to fires during the period 1 December to 16 January. The Toms Gully fire was on 31 October, but I regard that as being in the same bushfire season. The citizens of Toms Gully should be able to access the appeal funds as other citizens of New South Wales did. Recently the Minister for Community Services announced that victims of fires in the Sydney area were to get a further top-up from the \$10 million fund. I appeal to the Government's sense of fairness and equity to grant financial assistance to the victims of the Toms Gully and Kundabung fires from that fund.

I have the utmost respect for the volunteer firefighters from my area on the mid North Coast, and I congratulate them. Many of them travelled to Sydney to assist in the Christmas-New Year fires. Honourable

members should bear in mind that the bushfire season on the mid North Coast had started in September and those firefighters had already spent three months fighting some of the worst fires for decades before they assisted with the Sydney fires. I cannot speak highly enough of the various volunteer organisations including the Rural Fire Service, State Emergency Services, the Volunteer Rescue Association, the Salvation Army, and the local GlobalCare arm of the Christian Outreach Centre, who assist people in their time of need.

The Governor said that employment in rural and regional areas was a priority of the Government. The Minister for Fisheries is intent on closing a number of fisheries on the mid North Coast to commercial fishing. They include fisheries at Hastings and Camden Haven. Fishermen, co-operative employees, downstream suppliers and eel exporters are at risk of going out of business. The closures will take \$1 million per annum out of the local economy and result in the loss of many jobs. The Minister's stance on fisheries closures thus far has been appalling. He stated that he had consulted widely, but at meetings conducted by New South Wales Fisheries an all-or-nothing option was given: there would be either full access for commercial fishing or full access for recreational fishing. The department left no room to negotiate for the co-existence of commercial and recreational aspects of the industry.

Representatives from the Hastings and Manning co-operatives travelled to Sydney to meet with the Minister in an endeavour to negotiate a compromise, but no talks were entered into. The Minister simply said, "No, we are going to close those estuaries totally." The Minister claimed that many fishermen expressed interest in a buy-out of their licences. However, it was put to me that that was merely a case of fishermen putting their toes in the water to determine whether it was worth selling their commercial fishing licences. Many of them still do not know how much they would receive from surrendering their licences. Most fishermen want to stay in an industry that has been good to them and, in many cases, good to their families before them.

The Minister said that co-operatives will not get any compensation, because they are employees of fishermen and, therefore, that would be double dipping. Try telling that to an employee of a co-operative who is about to lose his job and who will have no recompense by way of redundancy or other compensation! The Minister claimed that fish stocks will recover and more jobs will result from recreational fishing. That claim ignores the fact that most species taken from those catchments are non-recreational species, for example, mullet and eel. The Minister also ignores the fact that migratory fish travel up the coast and move in and out of estuaries for breeding and feeding. Ultimately, many species are taken in Queensland by fishermen.

The Minister said that fishermen can transfer their licenses from estuary to ocean fishing, but their boats are not suitably equipped to deal with ocean bars and other conditions outside estuaries. The Minister has a head-in-the-sand mentality. He is driven by an ideological agenda and he is killing more jobs in regional and rural New South Wales to go with those already lost in the timber and dairy industries under this Sydney-centric Carr Labor Government. The Government said that another 1,500 or more government jobs will be created in or relocated to regional areas in the next three years. The policy of decentralisation of government departments has been a National Party policy for many years and, clearly, that is another policy that has been pinched by the Government.

The Government has certainly moved to relocate jobs from Sydney into regional areas, but it appears that those jobs are going to marginal Labor seats or to prop up Independents in former National Party seats. For instance, Maitland, Lithgow, Dubbo, Nowra and Wellington will benefit from this policy of relocating government jobs. On a needs basis the Nambucca shire should be the first to receive a decentralised government department. Previously in this House I have spoken about the "Unequal In Life" report by Professor Tony Vinson, which clearly showed that the Nambucca shire had one of the highest unemployment rates and in the context of an overall disadvantaged measurement was one of the most disadvantaged shires in New South Wales.

The Government has stated that key natural resource management plans, including catchment management blueprints, water-sharing plans and regional vegetation management plans, will be finalised. In the Oxley electorate and, indeed, across the mid North Coast, there is a huge level of concern about processes currently being undertaken by the Government and committees it has established. The mid North Coast catchment management blueprint, which was delivered to the Minister with minimal consultation, is full of impractical recommendations. A highly questionable process has been undertaken which has involved insufficient land-holder or water-user representation. Several months ago I called on the Minister to clarify the recommendations concerning the fencing of watercourses. I specifically asked the Minister to rule out compulsory fencing of watercourses. In many cases the identified watercourses contain water only during floods.

Fencing on larger rivers and creeks is swept away by floods and chokes up the watercourses. The lack of response after several months has increased the suspicions and cynicism of land-holders on the mid North Coast. The Government has spoken about plans to upgrade facilities in schools. An upgrade of schools in my electorate would be very welcome. I always give credit where it is due. However, for some time I have requested that the upgrading of certain schools should have priority. My requests continue to be ignored. I mention the small Byabarra Public School, which is just outside Wauchope, and the Crescent Head Public School. They both have inadequate and unsafe facilities, particularly in the staffrooms. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The Government has claimed that it will implement a range of strategies to enhance the standing of the teaching profession. That is a good thing. I am a product of the public school system and a great supporter of public education. However, thus far the television advertisements have been fairly useless and have generated a lot of negative feedback from my constituents. The Government should get the message that it needs to do more than provide sandstone gates for public schools. It should turn its attention to student discipline, teacher training and support for teachers during policy implementation phases, such as during the introduction of the new Higher School Certificate [HSC], and by the provision of adequate facilities.

If the Government's intention is to support public education, it needs to do better. It is outrageous that the Teachers Federation is displaying propaganda material on public schools. "The Issue is Public Education" signs are stuck on public schools throughout my electorate. If another interest group or lobby group sought to display its material on public facilities, I am sure there would be a huge outcry. The Government has done nothing to address this issue, and I have no doubt that that is linked in some way to the very generous contributions made by the Teachers Federation to the Labor Party.

The Governor referred to the \$100 million three-year mental health services program, which is midway through implementation. The program is designed to significantly increase mental health facilities in New South Wales. Mental illness is a major and growing problem throughout this State, including my electorate. It is proposed to build a new facility at the Kempsey District Hospital. For 10 months Kempsey has been without any mental health facilities since the closure of the mental health ward after the tragic murder of a patient and the assault of two nurses. Unfortunately, the new facility, which will be opened in September this year, does not include scheduled beds and is for voluntary admissions only. In my view, even with the new facility, the district between Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie will still be underserved.

Instead of pouring money into new facilities, the Government should be taking a preventive approach and should try to find the reason behind the increase in mental illness. I am convinced of the link between psychiatric illnesses and drug abuse, particularly the use of marijuana, which is prevalent throughout the mid North Coast. A recent large drug bust on the mid North Coast involved marijuana. Young people who smoke it are unaware of the dangers. Because of advice I have received from Dr John Anderson, who is a specialist in this area at Westmead Hospital, I am convinced that there is a strong link between heavy marijuana use and psychological problems ranging from depression to psychosis and schizophrenia. If the Government is serious about addressing mental illness it should take measures to prevent young people from becoming involved in illicit drug use, particularly marijuana.

The Governor referred to community safety, crime prevention and law enforcement. I note the resignation, or forced departure, of police commissioner Ryan, which has attracted a lot of media attention. The following is part of an article that appeared in this morning's *Sydney Morning Herald*:

The Premier, Bob Carr, says NSW became a better and safer place under Peter Ryan, but statistics show crime rose in almost all categories during his reign.

Since Mr Ryan started work as police commissioner in June 1996, four of the crimes which have the greatest impact on citizens—burglary, car theft, assault and robbery have all risen.

The director of the Bureau of Crime Statistics, Don Weatherburn, said yesterday that despite temporary drops in break and enter offences, car thefts and robberies, assaults had gone up while Mr Ryan was in office.

"The broad picture is that from 1996 to 2001 it's an upward trend in most crime categories", Dr Weatherburn said.

That is proof from an independent source. Statistics show that crime rates have continued to rise under the Carr Labor Government. A number of crime prevention measures are alluded to in the Governor's Speech and they are welcome, but I wonder why it has taken more than seven years for this Government to get serious about the escalating crime problem in New South Wales.

The Government has said it will support legislation that lays down general sentencing principles, and I regard that as essential. Despite the Premier's rhetoric on maximum sentences, they are not being imposed. Average sentences are low, and I mention anecdotally that people in the streets claim the judiciary is out of touch with community expectations. That was confirmed by the successful appeal by the Director of Public Prosecutions against the sentences imposed by Judge Latham for gang-rape. The Government has chosen not to support the Coalition's policy of mandatory life sentences for people convicted of murdering police officers, but it must send a strong message to the community that those who oppose police officers in the legitimate exercise of their duties to enforce law and order in this State will be severely dealt with.

The Government has mentioned proposals to construct two new prisons, and I refer particularly to the 350-bed prison at Kempsey. That was just a re-announcement of the project—for the third time—and although the prison would be welcomed in Kempsey, the Government cannot hang its hat on re-announcements. There was no mention in the Governor's Speech of juvenile crime, which is a major problem throughout New South Wales. The Young Offenders Act has anomalies and loopholes, and to address these problems I have introduced a private member's bill that will make it harder for young offenders, especially repeat young offenders, to escape responsibility with little more than a stern talking-to. The proposal to provide additional rehabilitation beds is certainly welcome as an attempt to address the drug problem. The Government recently provided help for Hassela Australia, which has a facility at Kundabung near Kempsey, but the financial assistance was only temporary.

I call upon the Government to provide ongoing support for Hassela Australia to enable it to continue the excellent work it is doing. Mustard Seed Valley is a small rehabilitation facility near Hannan Vale which has been operating for several years without government assistance. I call on the Government to assist Mustard Seed Valley in the great work it is also doing in rehabilitating drug addicts. I believe the so-called safe injecting room at Kings Cross has been a serious mistake. I consider it to be an expensive use of taxpayers' funds and it sends the wrong message to the young people of this State, namely, that the Government will tolerate drug use and assist people to use drugs. The safe injecting room has created a honey-pot effect because drug addicts and drug dealers are attracted to its location in the knowledge that they are safe from apprehension and prosecution. I agree wholeheartedly with the Governor's statement that local community and cross-agency involvement in crime prevention strategies is important.

In January the Minister for Police, Mr Costa, announced delivery of a \$2.4 million program for Miller. The mid North Coast has its own Miller, that is, South Kempsey. Recently in the *Daily Telegraph* there was the sad story of Mr Darryl Perry, who is a prisoner in his own home. His baby daughter has been subjected to death threats and recently his wife was badly assaulted, requiring her to spend some time in hospital. I have asked the Minister to visit South Kempsey but have received no response to that request. I seek the urgent remediation of this area at South Kempsey, the problems of which have been caused, in part, by high-density public housing.

The Aboriginal Communities Development Program was outlined in the Governor's Speech. I have in my electorate large Aboriginal communities in Kempsey and Bowraville. The Government's policy to build or buy 67 houses is fraught with danger in that there is scope for nepotism in the allocation of the houses. Evidence has shown that rent is not being collected, bad tenants are not being evicted, the repairs and maintenance bill is escalating and there is insufficient money from the rent to cover repair bills. Indeed, it is a bottomless pit. I would encourage home ownership so that people will take some pride in their housing.

Simply giving housing to people, whether they are Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, does not work. Jobs are the key. Recently Noel Pearson referred to the welfare poison that has such an adverse effect on his people. I applaud the policy to train 240 Aboriginal apprentices. I repeat that jobs are essential. All too often I see Aboriginal people in hotels wasting welfare money on poker machines. I see also domestic violence, child neglect and abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and a low school retention rate. Education and jobs are the key. We need a cultural change to encourage Aboriginal people away from idleness, boredom and hopelessness towards an emphasis on working, which will give them hope and pride. In summary, the Governor's Speech consisted merely of reannouncements; it reflected a tired Government with no vision.

Ms ALLAN (Wentworthville) [12.31 p.m.]: I take great pleasure in commenting on the Speech of the Governor, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir. It is an honour to have an opportunity to speak in this Chamber on behalf of the electors of Wentworthville. The Governor reminded us early in her Speech that this year is the centenary of women's suffrage in both the Commonwealth and New South Wales parliaments. I note that the honourable member for Mulgoa is in the chair. It is important to remember suffrage and the fact that a large proportion of members of both parliaments are women.

I reiterate the comments of the honourable member for Epping. Marie Bashir is an excellent Governor. In this day and age the public tends to take constitutional heads for granted. Quite often it is only when there is debate such as that recently surrounding the Governor-General that people become aware of their existence. However, there is tremendous potential for people in those positions to attract considerable bad publicity. Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir has not attracted such publicity since her appointment as Governor. In fact, she has been an outstanding Governor and it is always a pleasure to work with her.

I should like to refer to the role of the greater Western Sydney region as a result of Government initiatives and the continuing role of that region in this State. A number of my parliamentary colleagues and I had the pleasure on Wednesday 6 March to hear the Western Sydney State of the Region address by the Premier at the Revesby Workers Club. It was an excellent speech. He signalled at the time that it was the first such address but, obviously, it will be an ongoing part of New South Wales politics. On that day the Premier put Western Sydney on the map. An interesting audience of people attended from the community and business sectors of Western Sydney, as well as local government.

In his introductory remarks the Premier outlined clearly the present position of Western Sydney. He said that the economy of Western Sydney had grown by almost 15 per cent since 1996, the year after his Government was elected. He said Western Sydney is the nation's fastest growing economic region and the third largest after the Sydney central business district [CBD] and Melbourne. The Premier said that the Western Sydney region represents 10 per cent of the Australian economy, with a gross domestic product of more than \$58 billion a year. His comments that the economy of Western Sydney is half the size of Singapore's national economy may be linked to his recent visit. He documented that the region employs more than 600,000 people and generates around 20 per cent of the State's jobs.

The Premier also outlined proposals for new investment projects for Western Sydney over the next six years, and I shall refer to those shortly. I thought it was interesting that the honourable member for Oxley attacked the Governor's Speech and the record of the Government as being city-centric. In fact, the Speech focused on the Government's achievements in rural and regional New South Wales as opposed to Sydney. Reading between the lines one gains an understanding of the performance of Western Sydney, and honourable members should be pleased rather than displeased about that.

The Government has identified 30 major private and public sector investment projects that will invest nearly \$10 billion into the greater Western Sydney economy over the next six years. They will generate 24,480 construction jobs and almost 34,000 operational jobs. The Premier referred to some of them in his address, including the Western Sydney Orbital, the Liverpool transitway and the Parramatta rail link. Most of the projects are not in my electorate but I shall refer to a couple that are important to my electorate.

The Premier also identified the relocation of more than 2,000 Police Service and Sydney Water staff from Sydney to Parramatta. That project alone is worth \$300 million. It is the biggest departmental decentralisation in 15 years. Construction has already commenced on the new police building. Even though the Parramatta CBD is not in my electorate, many people from the Wentworthville electorate commute to Parramatta to work. As result of the Government's initiatives there will be a great opportunity for my constituents to work in the Parramatta CBD. During the years of the Wran and Unsworth governments in the 1980s there was an active program of relocation, but that was basically ditched by Nick Greiner when he became Premier in 1988. I worked at one point in the Department of Community Services at Parramatta. It was a great tragedy when the Greiner Government and then the Fahey Government decided to abandon that program.

The Premier summed it all up on 6 March. It was significant that the Premier took the opportunity to deliver this address; it signalled that the Government acknowledges that greater Western Sydney deserves as much attention as possible from the Government. I note that the Minister for Western Sydney is at the table. The Office of Western Sydney has performed diligently in highlighting the concerns of Western Sydney. Although it is a small office, it has been very visible in Western Sydney promoting projects outlined by the Premier on 6 March. Major works, developments and initiatives are taking place within the Wentworthville electorate. One important project not referred to by the Premier on 6 March but on which he has put his stamp of approval in the past—and will continue to do so—is the redevelopment of the Boral quarry at Greystanes.

The quarry, which has operated as a quarry for nearly 100 years, is rapidly coming to the end of its life. Boral has decided that, rather than persist in natural resource exploitation in that area, it will redevelop the area for residential and commercial purposes, which is an ongoing project. I met with Boral representatives about week ago to get an update of progress on the project. Boral is about to launch new offices for the commercial

redevelopment of that site in the not too distant future. I am sure it would be happy for the Premier to launch those new offices. That is probably the only major residential redevelopment project to be undertaken between Parramatta and Blacktown for the past 20 or 30 years. We have not had new major residential redevelopment, other than as a result of urban consolidation initiatives, in that area of Western Sydney.

A lot of work has been done by Boral. An active committee comprising representatives from the community is based at Greystanes. A lot of work is being done by Holroyd City Council and the Parramatta office of Planning New South Wales to ensure that that is an excellent redevelopment. Although issues relating to traffic management and commercial redevelopments concern local residents, generally speaking, I think that whole process has been excellent. I look forward to resolving in the near future some of the small issues that still irk local residents.

One of the major issues—which I am delighted to state was mentioned by the Premier at Revesby Workers Club and which has been given the go ahead by the current Government—is the development of the new international drag strip at Eastern Creek. I was delighted when on 11 April the Government announced plans for the motor sports precinct at Eastern Creek, focusing particularly on an international drag strip complex in a motor industry business park. For many years I have been keen to see the Government support such a project. A major industry in my electorate is related to motor sports and to the motor industry generally. My electorate has a large population of mechanics—and the children of mechanics who aspire to be mechanics—who often work in fairly small but successful motor industry enterprises. I mention in particular Stan Sainty, the proprietor of the Sainty Speed Works in Hill Street, Wentworthville. Many years ago the Minister for Information Technology, who is in the Chamber, and I visited Mr Sainty to talk about the need for a major drag racing facility in New South Wales. At long last, after many years of discussion and agitation, that need has been addressed.

The Government is committed to delivering to Sydney, and to Western Sydney in particular, a dedicated track for that sport. Competitors and fans who have hitherto had to travel to Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia for major competitions now have an opportunity to come to Western Sydney, which is an excellent result. In the words of Stan Sainty, it will put Western Sydney on the map as far as motor racing is concerned. The industry will see enormous spin-offs as a result of the Government's announcement. People who produce and work on motor vehicles, oil producers and people responsible for the many by-products of the industry see this as a real opportunity to expand their industries in Western Sydney.

Stan Sainty reminded me that more racing cars are registered in Sydney than anywhere else in Australia. While we have been without this major facility in the past—people have had to use facilities in other States—we have still managed to retain the highest number of registered racing cars in Australia. The industry and supporters of the sport are obviously delighted. We will see growth not only in this industry but also in other areas. Foxtel and other pay television operators will get into the act as quickly as possible. That fantastic initiative is not something that people who do not live in Western Sydney fully appreciate. However, those of us who are aware of the issues concerning motor racing in Western Sydney and the motor mechanics industry know how tremendously important that project is.

I mention another major redevelopment of great importance to my electorate—the bus transitways that are being developed through the transport portfolio. The Liverpool to Parramatta transitway is already under construction, and planning for the Parramatta to Rouse Hill transitway is under way. The planning process for the Parramatta to Rouse Hill bus transitway has been diligent but a number of issues associated with that planning process would have major impacts in my electorate. I refer to the potential for major impacts on cross-electorate traffic flow once the transitway is up and running. There are a number of proposals which include, for example, the closure of Hammers Road access to old Windsor Road at Old Toongabbie. That proposal would be a major fault if it were to be pursued. A lot of lobbying is going on to ensure that that does not happen.

My electorate relies heavily on cross-electorate or regional transport. Many children who live in Toongabbie and who attend school at Northmead High School rely on cross-electorate or regional bus transport to be able to do that. Many people from Toongabbie and North Wentworthville who go to Parramatta do not necessarily travel along the Great Western Highway or travel on the train; they use their cars or buses and cross the electorate in a way that has not necessarily been considered by planners of the bus transitway. We must get this bus transitway up and running but we do not want any major impact on existing cross-regional traffic flows in my electorate.

Next week the Premier will visit Parramatta to launch the Parramatta regional plan. My electorate picks up on four local government areas—Holroyd, Parramatta, Baulkham Hills and Blacktown. Parramatta City

Council has been working for some time on its regional plan. Lord Mayor John Haines is delighted that the Premier will be launching the regional plan. I refer to a couple of other issues that were referred to by other members of Parliament. The Governor referred in her Speech to the wonderful announcement that the Government made some months ago—the \$70 million injection into school capital works for priority building and security upgrades in schools across the State between now and the end of June. This is a most welcome announcement. I have a list in front of me of public schools in my electorate that will benefit from that funding. It was a delight to read the schools on that list.

As I indicated earlier, not a lot of major new residential redevelopment has occurred in my electorate over the last 20 or 30 years. Many schools which were constructed in the 1960s are starting to look their age—an issue to which I have referred before in this House. We might all be starting to look our age, but certainly these schools are starting to look their age. We are seeing not just small injections of capital into these schools. For example, Beresford Road Public School is receiving smallish grants of nearly \$3,000 for various projects and it will also have its telephone system replaced at a cost of about \$5,000. Some major projects are also being funded within these schools. For example, Darcy Road Public School received two grants from the State Government's program—nearly \$20,000 for cabling and \$50,000 for external works. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Girraween High School received a small grant for works. It obviously needs more money, but I am sure it welcomes its allocation of \$2,705. Girraween Public School, which I attended as a small child, received almost \$100,000 for an electrical upgrade, and it is delighted with that grant. Another important school in my electorate, Greystanes High School—which I also attended—has lobbied hard in the past few years for funding to improve the condition of the school. School officials met representatives of the Minister for Public Works and Services and the Minister for Education and Training, and their campaign has resulted in an allocation of \$80,000 for various works—which is the second or third funding instalment that it has received in the past couple of years.

Northmead High School received more than \$100,000 for the construction of a perimeter security fence, which is an excellent initiative. Toongabbie East Public School received almost \$63,000 for a paint job. That is fantastic news as the work must be done as quickly as possible. Representatives of Wentworthville Public School also met the Minister for Public Works and Services to discuss conditions at the school and has received almost \$100,000 for important work. This program proved to be extremely effective in that most schools in my electorate received not just small pockets of money but big buckets of money in some cases, with a total expenditure of almost \$640,000.

Law and order is another major issue in my electorate—I note that almost every honourable member who has spoken in the debate so far has also referred to law and order. Just last week the Minister for Police announced some changes that will impact directly on local area commands in my electorate. Most of my electorate will now be overseen by Parramatta or the Greater Hume local area command. I look forward to meeting next week the area commander, John Carroll, to discuss the likely impact of the move. I have been very pleased with the local area commands that served my electorate in the past. My electorate falls between Blacktown, Merrylands and Parramatta. We have not only four local government areas but several local area commands, with which we have always maintained close working relationships. Although many of the police who served in those commands lacked experience, they always demonstrated a great deal of commitment and energy in ensuring that they did as well as they could with the resources available. I have always been pleased about my relationship with officers in my local area commands and I look forward to having a similar relationship with John Carroll.

Several other issues are pertinent to the future of my electorate. Last October-November and this January my electorate was hit by two violent storms—the worst natural disasters seen in that area for almost 50 years. I do not need to talk about bushfire management as there were no fires in my electorate—although many local volunteers travelled elsewhere to fight them. However, in the three months between last November and February this year my electorate suffered severe storm damage. Some constituents were left without power for 52 hours. That was extremely onerous and caused much anger. People do not like blackouts at the best of times and they certainly do not want to suffer severe storm damage.

There is an ongoing public brawl between many of my constituents, the local council and Integral Energy about why the storms did so much damage. They were certainly very violent and brought down trees that cut powerlines. I will let Holroyd City Council and Integral Energy fight it out man to man—which is what tends to happen. However, I was very pleased with the outcome of a meeting I had recently with Richard Powis,

the Chief Executive Officer [CEO] of Integral Energy, and some of the company's senior staff. Before the meeting I had been concerned that Integral Energy staff levels may have been responsible in some small way for the difficulties experienced in dealing with the widespread damage and organising reconnections. However, I was pleased to learn that Integral Energy's current employment rates are the highest for some years.

I am also pleased that Integral Energy seems willing to re-establish the relationship it had with local government when local government virtually ran Prospect County Council—it is a completely different ball game now. It is important that Integral Energy works closely with as many councils as possible. However, it is a two-way street, and I urge Holroyd City Council and Blacktown City Council to bury the hatchet, stop the public pronouncements and start talking to Integral Energy about issues that will produce mutual benefits.

The new rail timetable—which will now not come into force in the next week or two—will benefit my electorate tremendously. There are at least three railway stations in my area that will have a guaranteed, regular service under the new timetable. I believe the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads did exactly the right thing by postponing the introduction of the new timetable. It would be ludicrous to introduce a new timetable that could not work in the long term and would have to be abandoned within a few weeks of coming into force. I look forward to seeing the Minister and City Rail bring that timetable on line as quickly as possible.

Last Saturday, 6 April, I participated in the nineteenth graduation ceremony of the University of Western Sydney, at which Gough Whitlam received an honorary Doctorate of Letters. It was an excellent afternoon. I congratulate one of my neighbours, Amanda Lee, who graduated on that day. I am delighted that she has completed her course and been awarded a nursing degree. Gough Whitlam was certainly the star of the afternoon and made a wonderful speech about the history of the University of Western Sydney. The honourable member for Mulgoa, who is in the chair, represents this Parliament on the university's Board of Governors. Most university activities revolve around the Penrith area—although it now has a Rydalmere campus—and it continues to have a significant presence in my electorate. Many members of my local community attended the ceremony and were delighted to see Gough Whitlam receive his honorary doctorate.

It was the second time in a month that I had the opportunity to spend the evening with Gough Whitlam. Several weeks previously Gough attended the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the Wentworthville Leagues Club. I mention that club not just because it is the most significant club in my electorate but because I will shortly be lunching with its CEO. This year Wentworthville Leagues Club celebrates 40 years of service to the local community. Gough was present at the gala event because he turned the first sod on the project and opened the first bar. The club was started by a small band of committed local people and has grown to become one of the most significant clubs in the State. Many people from the club's old days were present to celebrate its fortieth anniversary. I was very disappointed that my predecessor in this place, the late Ernie Quinn, could not be there to enjoy the evening. He was an active member of the committee that established the club.

There are many matters that members of Parliament could speak about in debates such as this. However, I wish to raise an issue of concern to me that I believe the Government should address. I refer to last week's decision to significantly increase the salaries of the staff of public libraries. I certainly welcome that decision; I think it is appropriate that those people be paid at the appropriate rate. However, I believe the decision will have a major impact on the provision of library services.

After many years of involvement in local government and local community activities, I am well aware of how expensive library services are. In several of the local government areas I represent it has been suggested that people may have to pay for membership of local council libraries. I have always taken an in-principle position of opposition to such a proposal, even though it has been under consideration by certain local councils for some time. I believe enormous pressure will be placed on councils and libraries generally to reintroduce a user-pays system in public libraries.

As I said, I do not support such a proposal. However, I believe we need to make a strategic attempt to deal with the issue before it becomes a major catastrophe. The libraries in my electorate already need more resources, and I would not like to see an increase in library staff salaries translate into a reduction in those resources. I thank the House for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I congratulate Governor Bashir on delivering a fine Speech. I believe the Government has outlined a wonderful agenda for the greater western Sydney region.

[Debate interrupted.]

PRINTING OF PAPERS

Mr YEADON (Granville—Minister for Information Technology, Minister for Energy, Minister for Forestry, and Minister for Western Sydney) [1.02 p.m.], by leave: I move:

That the following papers be printed:

Report of the Office of the Legal Services Commissioner for the year ended 30 June 2001

Report of the Olympic Co-ordination Authority entitled "The Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games— A Report on the Financial Contribution by the New South Wales Government to the Sydney 2000 Games", dated 31 March 2002

Report entitled "Review of the Drug Court Act 1998", dated March 2002

Report of the Waterways Authority for the year ended 30 June 2001

Variations of the Payments Estimates and Appropriations for 2001-02 relating to the Attorney General's Department and Treasury (Office of State Revenue) under section 24 of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983.

The other reports tabled during the weeks since the last motion, but which are not being ordered to be printed, are as follows:

The Constitution of Landcom, and the Constitution of the Waste Recycling and Processing Corporation

The Final Report on Suitability of Liverpool-Parramatta Transitway for use by Light Rail

The Report on Progress in Cabramatta, and the Report of the New South Wales Police Service entitled "NSW Illicit Drug Law Enforcement—Performance Indicators"

The Annual Report of the New South Wales Law Reform Commission for the year ended June 2001

None of those reports and documents is statutorily required to be printed, and they are not of the type usually included in the parliamentary paper series. For the information of members, I can advise that the tabled papers register on the parliamentary Intranet now includes the web site address of any paper tabled in the House which is also accessible online.

Motion agreed to.

[Madam Acting-Speaker (Ms Beamer) left the chair at 1.05 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Seventh Day's Debate

[Debate resumed.]

Ms ANDREWS (Peats) [2.15 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to speak in reply to the Speech of the Governor, Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir, AC. In opening the third session of the Fifty-second Parliament the Governor pointed out that this year marked the centenary of women's suffrage in both the Commonwealth and New South Wales parliaments. It is with a great sense of pride I note that 26 February 2002 marked the occasion on which the thirty-seventh—and the first female—Governor of New South Wales opened this Parliament, the oldest Parliament in Australia. I take this opportunity to say what a wonderful ambassador our Governor is for this great State. I congratulate the Premier on the appointment of such a caring and dedicated person as Professor Marie Bashir to this high office. It was my great pleasure to be in attendance at two openings in my electorate of Peats which were attended by the Governor. Late last year the Governor officiated at the dedication of a number of plaques on the Great Northern Road, which is within the Dharug National Park, and more recently at the opening of an indoor arena for the Central Coast branch of the Riding for the Disabled Association, to which the Government contributed \$115,000.

In another first, the Governor's Speech was videostreamed live on the Internet. Although we are 100 years on from women's suffrage, we still have a long way to go before our nation's parliaments will reflect a proportionate representation of female members. It is my belief, however, that as more young women aspire to higher educational levels, we will see a greater percentage of them pursuing a career in public life. I certainly hope so. The recognition given at the opening of the third session of the fifty-second Parliament to the volunteers who played such a vital role in fighting the Christmas 2001 bushfires was most fitting and

appropriate. In the electorate of Peats, which I am honoured to represent in this place, many volunteers from all walks of life who are members of the New South Wales Rural Fire Service brigades did an excellent job in containing the bushfires. Many other volunteers from numerous organisations and employees of local government and State and Federal government departments also played a significant role in containing the crisis.

I add a special word of thanks to the families of the volunteers who had their Christmas celebrations rudely disrupted when the emergency broke out. These families, many with one, two or three or more members involved in fighting the bushfires, gave tremendous support to their loved ones over a very long crisis period. The worst affected area in the Peats electorate during the emergency was at Spencer. Approximately 13,000 hectares comprising both privately owned land and a large portion of Dharug National Park were affected. The property damage was minimal, with a small amount of fencing and a partly built shed being destroyed. To the great credit of all who played any role at all in the crisis on the Central Coast, not one life nor one home was lost. We are deeply indebted to them all.

To those in other areas throughout the State who lost their personal belongings and homes, on behalf of my constituents in the Peats electorate I extend to them expressions of sympathy in their tragic loss. The fact that the Christmas 2001 bushfire appeal fund now totals more than \$9 million clearly demonstrates the generosity of communities all around the State. It is heartening to realise that in 2002 the wonderful Aussie spirit of helping others in need is still very much alive. I commend the Carr Government for today having the Attorney General, and Minister for Emergency Services, introduce into this House the Crimes Amendment (Bushfires) Bill.

As the Governor pointed out, 2002 marks the Year of the Outback. All honourable members in this House have heard the passionate speeches made by my colleague the honourable member for Murray-Darling about various aspects of his beloved electorate. This year will provide an excellent opportunity for persons who have not ventured into the far-flung outposts of this great State to do so. My fraternal grandparents, May Andrews [nee Walkden] and John Andrews, met each other in Bourke. John Andrews, I am proud to say, was a foundation member of both the Australian Workers Union [AWU] and the Australian Labor Party. The Walkden Plain near Bourke is named in honour of my grandmother's family. I admit that I have a sentimental attachment to our unique outback towns and the people who live in them. Without doubt any of these towns are worth a visit. In this session of Parliament the Governor mentioned that the Government would propose amendments to the Coastal Protection Act to improve emergency responses to beach erosion, to facilitate coastal planning and to enhance public access to beaches and headlands.

As a member representing a coastal electorate, I welcome these amendments. They will address the number of concerns about public access that people living in the Booker Bay area have raised with me. This matter became the subject of spirited public debate. Professor Bruce Thom, Chair of the Coastal Towns of New South Wales, visited Booker Bay and Umina Beach to see for himself what was causing so much discontent among local residents. Once again, the Carr Labor Government has not only taken on board difficult issues, but has worked hard to find a satisfactory solution to them. In the main, Australians believe in a fair and just society, and public access to our beaches is an aspect that is well worth upholding.

In the all-encompassing and complex area of health, the Carr Government has a very proud track record. The allocation of \$206 million in a massive capital works program will see the redevelopment of both Gosford and Wyong hospitals under the area's health access plans. The Gosford Hospital will be virtually rebuilt. The capital works include a new and expanded emergency department, new medical-surgical wards and outpatient clinics, 10 new operating theatres including a day surgery centre, an enhanced paediatric unit, a new cardiac catheterisation unit, a new production kitchen, and car parking located close to the emergency centre, the main entrance and outpatient clinics. The cardiac catheter laboratory will be constructed this year. It will provide cardiac diagnostic testing for people who experience chest pain, unstable angina and other heart disease conditions.

The upgrading of these two hospitals will mean the employment of 500 extra nurses alone. There will, of course, be employment for other health providers as well. These additional jobs will mean not only the delivery of better health services to residents of the Central Coast but also a huge boost to the local economy. It is interesting to note that more than 4,000 people are employed by Central Coast Health, making this State Government department the largest employer on the Central Coast. Although the Federal Coalition Government has shirked its responsibilities to those who depend on the public system for dental treatment following the abolition of the Commonwealth Dental Scheme, the Carr Labor Government has been doing its utmost to fill in the gaps in this important health area.

An extra \$9 million has been provided in this year's State budget for oral health, with an extra \$20 million becoming available next year and the year after, ultimately resulting in an overall budget of \$92 million a year for oral health. The new dental clinic, providing for the first time services for adults as well as children, will soon be constructed within the grounds of the Woy Woy Hospital. This facility will be convenient for a large number of my constituents, and I welcome it. The Mandala Clinic, which is located opposite Gosford Hospital—both facilities coming within the boundaries of the Peats electorate—was upgraded recently at a cost of \$500,000. The renovations address a number of security issues for patients and staff alike, while simultaneously improving comfort and patient privacy.

The state of the roads throughout the Central Coast continues to be a bone of contention. The rapid growth of the region has far outstripped the provision of infrastructure. As part of a recently announced statewide package of road and bridge works, \$3 million has been allocated for pavement reconstruction in Manns Road, West Gosford, and the Pacific Highway at Kariong. Both these localities are within the Peats electorate. The reconstruction works will see the roads widened to modern pavement widths and resurfaced to provide a stronger, smoother surface. This will make it safer for all motorists. This work will commence next financial year, and is in addition to the improvements currently being carried out at the intersection of Brisbane Water Drive and the Pacific Highway, West Gosford. This project will cost in the vicinity of \$2 million, and is nearing completion. It will go a long way towards alleviating traffic congestion at this intersection.

On 19 November 2001 the Minister for Roads opened the State Government's new Central Coast roads and transport headquarters at Woy Woy. The new office is located in the Clocktower Building opposite Woy Woy Station. The new office will provide employment opportunities for up to 30 people, and their first important job is to progress the widening of the F3 from the Hawkesbury River to the Calga interchange. The enabling works for the widening project is now well down the track. Prior to Christmas the Premier announced that septic tanks would be replaced at a number of localities within the Peats and Gosford electorates as part of a statewide \$133 million program. The infrastructure investment, which is the latest stage of the Carr Labor Government's \$3 billion waterways package, represents a big win for the environment. The State Government will work with Gosford City Council on that septic tank replacement project. Mooney Mooney, Cheero Point, Bar Point, Little Wobby Beach, Patonga Creek, Bensville, Empire Bay and South Kincumber have been highlighted as priority areas.

The Gosford City Council projects share in the \$30 million statewide allocation made under the special social program. The decision to make these areas priorities for the sewerage program was based on advice received from the Environment Protection Authority. Local families and the sensitive oyster industry will benefit from the provision of much improved and more reliable services. The connection of sewerage to the aforementioned waterfront localities will greatly improve water quality in the Hawkesbury River and Brisbane Water. Again, this extensive sewerage program will create many jobs for Central Coast residents.

The flood plain management program has had the continual financial backing of the Carr Labor Government, and is a key component in the New South Wales Government's flood-prone land policy, which is managed by the Department of Land and Water Conservation. This program aims to provide appropriate levels of flood protection to existing and future development through structural and non-structural flood mitigation strategies. Last month the Minister for Land and Water Conservation announced a grant of \$320,000 to assist Gosford City Council undertake its flood plain management program. This grant will assist in the purchase of a property identified as being located in a high hazard floodway, west of Hanlon Street, Narara, as part of Gosford City Council's voluntary purchase scheme.

The New South Wales Government, through its flood plain management program, the Federal Government, through its regional flood mitigation program, and Gosford City Council each contributed 33.3 per cent, or \$160,000, towards the \$480,000 cost of the project. The flood plain management program is very important for the Peats electorate as flooding has been a problem for many residents over the years. The funding provided under the program is a recognition by the Carr Government of the severe emotional and economic losses that people and communities suffer as a result of floods. Unfortunately, that has not always been the philosophy of the current Federal Coalition Government, which for a period opted out of the flood mitigation program. That Government was embarrassed into rejoining the program when it was clearly demonstrated that the Carr Government had every intention of continuing to meet its commitment under the flood plain management program.

After Central Coast Health, the New South Wales Department of Education and Training is the second largest employer on the Central Coast, with approximately 3,000 to 3,500 officers, including both full-time and

part-time staff. Providing the highest standards of education is a key priority of the Carr Government. A record level of \$7.6 billion has been allocated to the education sector in the 2001-02 financial year. Over the next four years \$1.7 billion will be invested in school capital works, upgrades and maintenance. Recently the New South Wales Minister for Education and Training announced that the Peats electorate had been allocated \$458,472 as part of a \$70 million boost to public schools in New South Wales. This spending is in addition to the funding allocations already made to school capital works in the Peats electorate.

The allocation of \$458,472 will enable the following new work to be carried out: Brisbane Water Secondary College, Umina campus, floor coverings replacement, \$11,098, telephone system replacement, \$5,000, and tractor replacement, \$18,000; Brisbane Water Secondary College, Woy Woy campus, telephone system replacement, \$5,000; Ettalong Public School, painting, \$52,709; Glenvale School, floor coverings replacement, \$3,355, and painting, \$18,000; Gosford High School, tractor replacement, \$18,000; Henry Kendall High School, floor coverings replacement, \$33,031, painting, \$100,000, and telephone system replacement, \$5,000; Kariong Public School, painting, \$48,870, and telephone replacement, \$5,000; Niagara Park Public School, telephone system replacement, \$5,000; Ourimbah Public School, painting, \$54,160; Point Clare Public School, cabling installation, \$27,400; Woy Woy Public School, painting, \$42,850; and Woy Woy South Public School, roofing replacement works, \$1,000, and telephone system replacement, \$5,000.

These projects will benefit teachers, students and parents and provide jobs for a large number of local tradespeople. Worthy of mention is the \$4.5 million approved for stage one of an upgrade of facilities at Henry Kendall High School under the 2001-02 major capital works program. This project is scheduled to go to tender in the first half of this year. With law enforcement, the Brisbane Water Local Area Commander, Superintendent Greg Ashurst, recently informed me of two successful major drug busts within the command, one on the Woy Woy Peninsula and the other in the northern part of the electorate. The decisive action taken by the police was made possible by the recently introduced drug houses legislation. Last year 12 new probationary constables were appointed to the local command, and this increase in police numbers is helping to combat crime on the Woy Woy Peninsula and in other locations.

Local programs under the Attorney General's Department aimed at making communities safer continue to be funded. The community drug action team established on the Woy Woy Peninsula was officially launched recently by the Special Minister of State, and Minister Assisting the Premier for the Central Coast. Programs aimed at youth at risk continue to be conducted at the Umina Police and Community Youth Club. The club has been a well utilised facility since its official opening a little over a year ago. The State Government has given the go-ahead to a \$8-million major new tourist attraction for the Central Coast. On 8 March 2002 the Deputy Premier, and Minister for Planning announced approval for a spectacular garden development as the centrepiece of the Mt Penang Parklands. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Mt Penang Parklands opened in September last year. It is the first stage of the State Government's \$25 million, five-year project to turn 156 hectares of public land into a hub for employment, tourism, recreation and major events. The gardens, designed by Sydney landscape architects Anton James Design, will be built over six hectares of the site and will be a key focus of the precinct. This \$8-million project will become a major tourist attraction for the Central Coast. More than 400 jobs will be involved in the construction phase of the gardens, and this is excellent news for the region's economy. To date, there have been more than 190,000 visitors to the site since its official opening last year.

I could speak forever about the many issues concerning the Peats electorate and what the Carr Labor Government is doing to address constituents' concerns. However, time prevents me from doing so. Therefore, I will conclude by acknowledging the Carr Government's response to those concerns, firstly, by listening to what the local residents are saying and, secondly, by doing something positive about them. I commend the adoption of the Governor's opening Speech to the House.

Mr MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [2.40 p.m.]: I am pleased to have this opportunity to contribute to the reply to the Governor's Speech to Parliament. Not all of my comments will be negative. I have some very positive comments to make and a couple of bouquets for the Government on some positive initiatives. My first compliment is to the Premier on his excellent selection of our Governor. I think his choice is outstanding. I had great pleasure in welcoming Professor Bashir, AC, and Sir Nicholas Shehadie to my electorate in March. They spent two days in the area and the impression they left with the people of the electorate of Wagga Wagga was first class.

Her Excellency the Governor officially opened the community and radiotherapy centre, visited the Riding for the Disabled organisation, attended various community functions and handed over the keys at an important charity fundraiser to raise money for children with cancer. That charity was Camp Quality, which

built a house with materials donated by businesses and others in the city of Wagga Wagga. The house was auctioned, raising more than \$200,000, and the Governor graciously honoured us with her presence and handed over the keys. The radiotherapy centre opened by the Governor was made possible by a community fundraising drive which raised \$3 million, and the Governor did us proud.

I repeat: the Premier made a great choice and he certainly should be congratulated on his vision. Various media reports have referred to the Governor's Speech as "visionless and dull". I should point out that that does not refer to the Governor but to her Speech, which was written for her by the Government. It was her role to deliver it. I am sure that if the Governor had been given the opportunity to write the speech herself it would have been very different. I want to touch briefly on some of the points that have been raised. Analysis of the speech revealed another Carr Government spending spree—and why not? In its report Access Economics stated:

Taxes are more than expected (again) ... with New South Wales to benefit from a nearly \$1.2 billion windfall in tax collections and Commonwealth grants. Stamp duties in particular are up yet again ... insurance tax collections are on the rise in the wake of premium increases ...

The report continued:

The pattern of revenue windfalls underpinning increases in government spending has been evident for several years now ...

It further stated:

... brickbats for its fiscal reporting. The State is overdue for fiscal transparency legislation such as the Commonwealth's Charter of Budget Honesty Act.

I believe that says it all about why this Government has had more money for its spending spree than any other government in the history of New South Wales—in fact, more money than any other State government in Australia. I want to point to some of the initiatives in my electorate that require funding, and some that have received funding. They are priorities and I want to put them on record. Communities want spending to be applied to priorities: health, police, law and order and education.

The people of Wagga Wagga need a new hospital. Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, which was completed in 1960 and has become a teaching hospital with the provision of the clinical school, is in desperate need of refurbishment. I understand that the amount required for capital works funding is \$40 million to \$50 million, but before that can happen there must be a budget for procurement and feasibility studies. I understand from comments made by the chief executive officer [CEO] and the chairman of the board of the Greater Murray Area Health Service that the work has been done; that the clinical services study, which is the important groundwork to deliver a refurbished or new Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, has been completed.

What is needed now is funding for the procurement study. I have been told that it will cost about \$500,000 to complete the plans for a new base hospital. Recently the chairman of the board of the Greater Murray Area Health Service said on ABC radio that she wanted the community to support her call to the Government to fund a new base hospital. I echoed her words in a motion in this House, calling on the Government to support the CEO and the board of the Greater Murray Area Health Service in the drive for a new hospital in Wagga Wagga. Once again I put that on the record. If the Minister for Health wants to leave a lasting legacy for his ministerial ship of health, a new hospital is one way that he can do that. I ask him to ensure that funds are allocated in the next State budget for the procurement study and commitment to a new hospital for the people in the region.

The Wagga Wagga Base Hospital is experiencing problems, as many hospitals in New South Wales are, in attracting anaesthetists to the area. We are in crisis at this moment. Wagga Wagga Base Hospital services my electorate, including the local government areas of Holbrook, Tumbarumba and Lockhart, as well as the electorates of Murrumbidgee, Burrinjuck and Lachlan. We need another five to seven anaesthetists in our hospital. At the moment we have five anaesthetists, and they are working overtime to try to cope with the enormous demands that are placed on that hospital. Wards have been closed and people needing operations have been turned away.

Such is the shortage of anaesthetists that people are being sent to other major cities for urgent attention and operations. Wagga Wagga also desperately needs nurses. By way of example, one lady who had two broken arms and a broken hip had to be sent off to another town approximately 100 kilometres away, such was the desperation for beds. I say to the Minister that this is a major concern. It is a priority for our region to get

resources into that hospital. Another initiative that I would like to see the Government consider funding for is the nursing crisis. We certainly have the capabilities to deliver, through TAFE nursing studies, the AIN and EN gradings of nurses. Instead of trainees having to travel to Cootamundra and other centres, those educational services could be delivered in Wagga Wagga. It simply needs a commitment to funding. That funding was not referred to in the Governor's Speech, but I want to put on record that it is needed.

Mental health is another area that requires attention and funding. The mental health unit in Wagga Wagga does not have a permanent psychologist, but we need one. I appreciate that the Black Dog facility has recently been opened and I hope it will become a world-class facility. In the meantime it requires funding. The honourable member for Albury and I attended a public meeting in Henty, where law and order was an issue. The meeting was attended by 120 people. The area needs police resources. It is no secret that in New South Wales we need an influx of police to deliver law and order. I understand that petitions will be presented to the New South Wales Parliament when we return after the break. I place my concerns on the record.

Education is an enormous issue that all members of Parliament should be concerned about. I read in the Governor's Speech that the Government has provided 90,000 computers to New South Wales schools, and that another 25,000 are to be provided by the end of June 2003. I visited Tumbarumba school, which has 25 computers in its information technology [IT] room. None of those computers are the same model. To link them together is a nightmare because the computer system keeps breaking down. There were 25 students in the IT class but Tumbarumba is having difficulty attracting students to take up the IT classes because the system keeps breaking down. It is impossible to encourage students to take up these classes when the equipment they have to work with is dysfunctional.

The system is antiquated, and the machines are not designed to work together. The school will probably get some of these new computers, but it needs the resources and technology to link it together. It is almost a Third World school. When I visited the school it needed painting; its carpets, which were threadbare and had gaping holes, were dangerous, and I was shocked to see the antiquated desks. To the Government's credit, following representations it allocated \$120,000 and the school has been painted, it has new carpets, and new furniture has been ordered, but it still needs funds for the technology room.

The Rock Central School and Forrest Hill Public School have had a series of transportable buildings and add-ons over the years. The schools need to have a permanent plan in place to deliver education in new buildings that are ergonomically effective, and to provide a good environment for the teachers and students. Mangoplah Public School in my electorate also needs funding. Recently it got a demountable building but it needs improved landscaping, with a sprinkler system and lawns to improve the amenity of that wonderful little school.

I also put on record my appreciation to the Minister for Transport, who should get a bouquet. I have referred in this place to two great tragedies that occurred in my electorate within one week of each other—the loss of one life at the Bowman crossing and six lives at the Gerogery crossing. In response to a petition to the Government for funding for level crossings, the community has received \$12 million—double the funding—over three years. The boom gates petitioned for at Bowman, at Fernleigh Road and Gerogery have now been installed. I appreciate the way in which the Minister approached this matter by commissioning a committee to inquire into level crossings and report to the Parliament. That important inquiry is being carried out at the moment, and I look forward to the recommendations that will be put forward to try to address the safety issues with regard to level crossings.

It is important that the Government provide ongoing funding for level crossings. A number of treacherous level crossings throughout the State need funds to keep motorists and train passengers safe. I appeal to the Government to address this issue and to keep up the funding. I appreciate the \$12 million but I want more funds directed to level crossings over the coming years so that motorists and travellers are kept safe and tragedies such as those to which I have referred can be avoided. I note the reference in the Governor's Speech to some enormous capital works programs for roads—an important issue in my electorate—but unfortunately most of those roadworks are in the city and refer, for example, to tunnels.

From a country perspective we do not want four-lane highways. We want sealed and safe roads in a good state of repair. The road from Jingellic to Holbrook needs to be resealed in two dangerous places before lives are lost. I have heard of many accidents on that road, and funds are urgently needed to reseat the road. Honourable members will know that in my electorate in Tumbarumba and Holbrook there is an enormous forestry industry, which is being increased because of the new Tumut mill. The logging trucks are smashing the roads to pieces. Such a project was not referred to in the Governor's Speech but I certainly want to place it on record as a priority for this Government.

Wild dogs are a huge problem, but I did not see extra funding being provided to control those sorts of problems. My understanding is that \$6.8 million has been allocated to weed control, but the figures show that \$8.8 million is needed to control them. Once again, there is no mention in the Governor's Speech about what the Government plans to do to resolve that problem. It was a long speech but I could not help but think that I have heard it before. I referred to my notes and I was right. I have heard the announcements again and again. If they are repeated enough, after a while people will believe them, but I want to see them delivered on the ground.

We hear a lot of promises but we need some commitment, such as that made by the Minister for Information Technology yesterday following representations from the community of Holbrook. The Holbrook community has been lobbying for funds for a community technology centre and, through my office and meetings with the Minister's staff, that has been pursued. It is important that people have access to technology and that rural communities have access to the world through technology. The good news for the community of Holbrook is an allocation of \$150,000, which was announced by the Minister yesterday.

I want more good news from this Government. Initiatives need to be put up front regularly and the concerns raised by honourable members in this place addressed. The Minister for Information Technology also deserves a bouquet for that announcement. I pay particular note to his staff because the door has always been open for me when I have raised these concerns. I am sure that members of the Opposition would agree that the Government tends to place more and more responsibility on local government. Local government is at the coalface of delivering services, yet it has extra responsibilities placed on it with no extra funding being provided. Councils are asked to make their dollars stretch further without getting extra resources. A raft of unfunded mandates add to the financial burden on councils.

Legislation and regulations that add to these increased costs include the Protection of the Environment Operations Act, the Local Government Amendment (Ecologically Sustainable Development) Regulation, stormwater management planning, the Local Government (Approvals) Amendment (Sewage Management) Regulation, the Waste Minimisation and Management Act, the Contaminated Land Management Act, environmental objectives for New South Wales waters, the Marine Parks Act, the Companion Animals Act and the Local Government (Community and Social Plans) Regulation. I am not saying we do not need those things but if councils have to adhere to legislation and regulations they need funding to help them deliver those services.

Costs are increasing in relation to planning and building regulations, street lighting charges, total catchment management, provision of public health infrastructure support, such as facilities to attract general practitioners to country towns to which I will refer later, and the provision of community law and safety measures. Those responsibilities are being placed on council because services are being withdrawn from rural areas and councils have to fill the breach. I put clearly on record that those concerns are relayed to me constantly, and are not addressed in the Governor's Speech. I welcome some of the initiatives but I note that the focus has mostly been on NSW—Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

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

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Private Members' Statements: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr Stewart agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit the consideration of private members' statements at 3.00 p.m. at this sitting.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

COBBITTY PUBLIC SCHOOL ANZAC MEMORIAL

Dr KERNOHAN (Camden) [3.00 p.m.]: On 15 November last year I spoke about the Child Anzacs project at Cobbitty Public School, a project in which students embraced research into their personal links with soldiers who served in World War I, as well as with boys from Cobbitty and Theresa Park schools who grew up to serve in the Australian Imperial Force. The students' enthusiasm did not stop with winning the New South

Wales Anzac Day award for this project and being runner-up in the national competition. They pledged their \$500 prize towards a permanent Anzac memorial and held a competition to design one. All classes from kindergarten through to year 6 were involved. Their workshop resulted in three concepts for the memorial. The first was an Anzac tree with the names of the Anzacs depicted on its leaves, the second was an Anzac entry and front fence for the school, and the third was an Anzac handball court.

All ideas were fully costed by local professionals assisting the project. The decision was to build a memorial handball court at a cost of \$32,700. This unique memorial will be a functional handball court with the names of the Anzacs engraved into pavers edging the court. Stage two will have the court covered by a sail printed with the Australian flag. The children have held raffles and donations have been received from the parents and citizens association and Cobbitty markets committee. There have also been individual donations. Larger memorial stones bearing the names of the old Anzacs or symbols to do with the war memorial can be sponsored for \$250. Pledges have already been received for 18 of the 29 stones planned. The Camden RSL sub-branch will sponsor one in the name of digger George Gray. I will sponsor one with the words "Lest we forget". Students or former students can buy pavers for \$50 with their own names on them and the years they attended the school. These will be placed around the edge of the memorial walkway through the court.

A black-tie function for 110 people held at the home of Vaughan and Sue McInnes on 27 March last raised \$4,800. The fund stands at just under \$17,000—more than half of the total required. The school is awaiting with hope a grant from the Department of Veterans' Affairs under the regional war memorials project to be announced on Anzac Day. Unfortunately, my request on the school's behalf to the Department of Sport and Recreation was too late for a grant this year. However, it is hoped that next year a small grant will be received from the department. Similarly, help is anticipated from Camden Council. Yesterday Cobbitty school held its Anzac Day service—a little early—to commemorate the death of Anzac Victor Frederick Hansen, a pupil in 1898, who died in France on 11 April. With a little more financial help, Cobbitty school will have its own special Anzac memorial before Anzac Day 2003. The Premier and other Ministers may wish to contribute to this unique and very special project.

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.05 p.m.]: On behalf of the Government I commend Cobbitty Public School for providing a memorial handball court to commemorate Anzacs. It is important for young people to understand that our free and democratic community is founded on what Anzacs and others like them achieved. I also commend the honourable member for Camden, who has always been a diligent operator in her electorate. From my experience as Parliamentary Secretary for Education I know what she has achieved and the respect with which she is held by public schools in her area. Other schools would do well to emulate the unique initiative of Cobbitty Public School. Members of the community will be able to contribute their dollars to the construction of the Anzac memorial and the input of the school students will be remembered in this project. I commend the initiative to the House. I think that Victor Frederick Hansen would be very happy that the school in which he began his education has remembered him and others like him.

CAMPBELLTOWN MILITARY HISTORY

Mr WEST (Campbelltown) [3.07 p.m.]: Campbelltown is a great city with a proud history. One of the original Macquarie towns, we have a link with one of our most influential governors. While there has been significant change in Campbelltown since its days as a farming town, with foresight locals have protected parts of our heritage. Historic buildings still abound in our main street, a living link accommodating organisations from community groups to newspapers. Part of Campbelltown's growth lies in the soldier-settlements that were created in the older parts of Campbelltown, where ex-service men and women and their families came to build a home. This military history helped to make Campbelltown.

It is important that we remember the links with our past and the sacrifices made by these men and women—and the many who never made it home. In our main street is a park, Mawson Park, a patch of green in a busy city street, surrounded by large gum trees where cockatoos compete with the sounds of traffic and children playing. The park protects one of the most tangible links with the sacrifices of our service men and women, the cenotaph. Over the years the cenotaph has been reshaped but its symbolism and importance remain. The park is also home to an artillery piece representing the contribution of the army to our peace. The local naval association has secured an anchor and the State Government was only too happy to provide an anchor chain to what will be a visible link to our naval service men and women. There are plans to acquire a Royal Australian Air Force propeller, ensuring that future generations are reminded of Campbelltown's wartime contribution in all three armed services.

At a time when veterans and their descendants were horrified to learn of French Government plans to build an airport over the graves of our fallen war dead, there are elements of Campbelltown Council who want

to remove the war memorabilia from our park. For the last week veterans from the RSL and other associations, outraged at such suggestions, have contacted me. I was even stopped at the Campbelltown show, a celebration, by locals upset at the proposals. Those who have served in war know only too well the horrors that it brings, of the death and destruction that it causes. But, thanks to the efforts of these men and women, we can enjoy peaceful life. They gave up their jobs, their family and many their lives. They gave all this up knowing that they would be confronted by the horror of war. They gave up the comforts we take for granted to ensure our way of life.

There are those who believe that displaying this history is in some way glorifying war; that ensuring that our history sits side by side with our future displays the wrong image. I am not one of those. We owe it to these men and women to remember their sacrifices for Australia. In remembering them, in remembering our history, we are reminded that we must all work for peace. We must remember that there are times when Australia will be called on to defend the peace, and even times when we may be called on to defend our homes and families. It is appropriate that our history of war service is visible and accessible as we go about our daily lives, and is not hidden. If you take a walk through Martin Place you will see memorials to the fallen, alongside some of the largest organisations in Australia, in the busiest city in Australia—a gentle reminder.

So too it is appropriate that Campbelltown display its history along our main street, currently near the building that upholds the laws these men and women fought for. I understand that the suggestions to remove the war memorabilia are only just that and that council is yet to consider them. I am further heartened that the Mayor of Campbelltown, Russell Matheson, believes that the memorabilia should be displayed in a prominent area to remind all people of its significance. I welcome his support and leadership. The veterans and the community are willing to see Mawson Park enhanced, but we must maintain our links with our history. As we approach Anzac Day, lest we forget.

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.12 p.m.]: I commend the honourable member for Campbelltown for raising this matter in the House today and for emphasising for our benefit the supreme importance of Anzac Day. I am astonished that some elements within Campbelltown Council would put forward a point of view that is quite contrary to the Australian ethos and our established way of life of freedom and democracy. That legacy is largely the result of the contribution that our armed services personnel made. Some paid the ultimate sacrifice to keep our community free. I want to emphasise strongly to the House, in supporting the honourable member's comments, that war memorabilia in these locations—in this case at Mawson Park, which I know well having worked at Leumeah High School for some time in a previous life—reminds our community about the contributions and sacrifices made. They do not celebrate war or focus on war itself, but they let young people in particular know that war can have devastating consequences and that these sacrifices were made by our service personnel.

Many who left Campbelltown to fight in World War I, World War II, the Boer War and in Vietnam never came back. It must never be forgotten that those people allowed us to enjoy our freedom and stake our future. I commend the honourable member for his remarks. I urge all on Campbelltown Council to think about changing this commemorative statement now being made in Mawson Park. That memorabilia is in the park for a reason—not to celebrate war, but to remind people about the tragedy of war. We should never lose sight of the contributions made by our soldiers to protect our glorious country and our freedom.

MYALL LAKES ELECTORATE EMERGENCY SERVICES CO-ORDINATION

Mr J. H. TURNER (Myall Lakes—Deputy Leader of the National Party) [3.14 p.m.]: I raise a matter concerning constituents Angela Stackman and Mark Partridge. This matter was raised with me by James Paton, a solicitor practising with Paton Hooke, solicitors, in Taree. It arises from an accident that occurred on the Gloucester to Nowendoc road, known as Thunderbolts Way—a name I do not wish to use because it is associated with a thief, and I do not believe we should glorify bushrangers and thieves. But I will leave that argument to another time. This accident occurred on 23 November 2001. Unfortunately, Ms Stackman suffered very serious injuries, including a fractured skull, fractured vertebrae of the back, multiple fractures to the right foot and leg, and a fracture of the left heel. Her husband's quick action in dragging her from the car probably saved her life, as the car in which she was a passenger burst into flames and exploded.

The matters arising from the accident that I wish to relate concerns the services provided by the Ambulance Service. As I have said, the accident occurred on the Gloucester to Nowendoc road, which is also known as the Nowendoc to Walcha Road. This stretch of roadway, even though more traffic travels on it since it has been upgraded, is still very isolated. On the same night of this accident was another accident about 30

kilometres away. That accident occurred about one hour before the accident involving Ms Stackman and Mr Partridge. Two helicopters were dispatched to attend the first accident. One of those returned to Newcastle without a patient, and the other conveyed a patient with a broken wrist to Tamworth Base Hospital. Whilst Ms Stackman and Mr Partridge were lying on the roadside after their accident they saw the helicopter pass overhead. They were fortunate that an ambulance from Armidale proceeding to the scene of the first accident arrived at their accident and began to treat Ms Stackman. The first ambulance designated to attend their accident arrived approximately 1½ hours after the accident. Ultimately, two other ambulances that had been diverted from the first accident arrived at the scene.

Mark Partridge, the driver of the vehicle in which Ms Stackman was a passenger, was treated and picked up by the Gloucester ambulance, which broke down four kilometres from the accident site. He was then transported by the Walcha ambulance to the Walcha Hospital. He was not treated there. He stayed in the outpatients section while the ambulance drivers had a cup of coffee before transporting him to Tamworth. The accident occurred at 6.45 p.m. and he arrived there at 2.30 the following morning. Ms Stackman, whose injuries were quite substantial, arrived at Tamworth Base Hospital at 11.00 p.m., nearly five hours after the accident occurred. Her injuries—a fractured skull, fractured vertebrae, multiple fractures to the foot and so on—would have been causing considerable pain. Mr Hooke, writing on behalf of Ms Stackman and Mr Partridge, acknowledged the difficulty of co-ordinating ambulances in country areas, but this serious accident seemed to highlight the lack of co-ordination and priority for helicopter services. I have been asked to relay these matters to the Parliament with a view to improving priorities and assessing patients' needs and priorities following accidents.

This is not an isolated or unique incident. I have received many complaints about the co-ordination of emergency services. I have grave concerns about the level of manning of emergency services. I understand that 000 calls are now being bounced all round New South Wales. A call that emanates from such an accident site might be dealt with in Albury or some other western area before bouncing back into the local area. Obviously, that causes problems with co-ordination because the people in Albury will not be familiar with roads such as that colloquially called the Gloucester to Nowendoc or Gloucester to Walcha road, although they might be aware of Thunderbolts Way. There is an obvious need to better co-ordinate emergency services to maximise the treatment available to accident victims such as Ms Stackman and Mr Partridge.

PORT STEPHENS ROYAL BLIND SOCIETY VOLUNTEERS

Mr BARTLETT (Port Stephens) [3.19 p.m.]: For me, one of the highlights of the Sydney Paralympics was watching the athletics. One race for the visually impaired was over either 1,500 metres or 800 metres. The visually impaired are tied to a sighted person with a two-metre rope, and the two persons run side by side for the length of the event. At the end of the race I watched a young visually impaired athlete cross the line. She had her arm stretched back behind her, and she literally dragged the sighted volunteer at the end of the two-metre rope across the line. I pre-empt my speech today about the Royal Blind Society and the *Talking Port Stephens Examiner* and the work that they do for the blind in the Port Stephens community by referring to that incident. In the past five years we have got our act together and things are now a little bit better for visually impaired athletes than they were for that Paralympian.

Some three or four years ago I bumped into Joanna Buckland-Jones, who said to me, "Gee, John, I appreciate your articles in the *Examiner*, and I find them interesting." I asked her, "Do you read them, Jo?" and she replied, "Yes, I read every one of them." When I asked, "Do you read every one of them?" she replied, "Yes, I read them for the *Talking Port Stephens Examiner*. I read them onto cassette tapes. We go through the *Examiner* every week and read the newspaper articles, not the ads, onto tapes and they are distributed to the blind community in the Port Stephens electorate." That is how I became acquainted with this group in Port Stephens. Each week that group of 15 volunteers, narrators producers and distributors work on behalf of the Royal Blind Society. For the past five years anyone in the Port Stephens electorate who is visually impaired and wanted to know what is reported in the *Examiner* was able to have those tapes delivered to them.

At a recent presentation hosted by the Royal Blind Society those 15 volunteers were acknowledged for their community service. I congratulate all those from the Royal Blind Society and the group in Port Stephens for participating. I acknowledge the work of the seven narrators: June Bircher, Joanna Buckland-Jones, Anne Hoffman, Regina Sowdon, Sandra Cameron, Sheila Frances and Judy Stone. I thank the eight producers: Betty Williams, David Armstrong, who I know has done community work for more than 20 years, Lynn O'Sullivan, Meghan Young, Mervyn and Betty McIntyre, Murray Andrews and Pat Kranz. I thank all the distributors for their input. I also acknowledge the work that the Lions Club on the Tomaree peninsula has delivered over a long

time to people with vision impairment. As I said earlier, over the past five years we have got our act a little closer together than the volunteer who was dragged behind the Paralympian I mentioned. The group in Port Stephens is doing a wonderful job in looking after the visually impaired in our community.

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.24 p.m.]: I join the honourable member for Port Stephens in thanking those who put a lot of time and effort into helping those in need. In this case it is the volunteers who, through the Royal Blind Society, help the visually impaired. As the honourable member pointed out, the focus of helping people with disabilities has changed in a positive way over the years. During the Paralympics people with disabilities achieved some amazing results when compared with fully able-bodied athletes. The service carried out by the volunteers in Port Stephens is to be highly commended.

They spend a great deal of time in transcribing the *Port Stephens Examiner* onto tape so that the visually impaired can hear about what is going on in their community. I commend the people from the *Port Stephens Examiner*, who work co-operatively with the volunteers. I commend the local Lions Club for its work. Anyone who visits Port Stephens, a beautiful place, would see the many Lions Club plaques acknowledging the contributions of the club to the community. The contribution of the honourable member for Port Stephens today is an indication of his diligent work with the community. His close interaction with that community achieves fantastic results for Port Stephens.

STUDIO ARTES NORTHSIDE INC.

Mrs HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [3.26 p.m.]: It is with great pleasure that I speak about an amazing group in my electorate that could teach many people a lesson in achieving the highest level possible and never giving up. This group is found at Studio ARTES Northside Inc. at the back of an old residence on the Pacific Highway, Hornsby, in two rather small rooms. Stephen O'Doherty often spoke of the leaders and participants of Studio ARTES and he worked hard for them over the years he was the member for Hornsby. They are certainly not a chore to support. Rather, they are an inspiration to everyone. I am proud to know them all and honoured that they allow me to be part of the special activities that happen each day of the week at their rooms.

I have known Sue Byatt and Wendy Escott and the cohort at Studio ARTES for a relatively short time but have come to value highly our time together. Sue and Wendy are two talented and dedicated educators who have set up a pilot program for young adults with disabilities that enables people to develop artistically, producing some of the finest artwork I have seen, as well as learn skills for the workplace. Some have jobs at places such as Upper Crust Food and Catering at Normanhurst. Local Rotary Clubs have provided three positions but others are having difficulty in finding work that enables them to make a contribution to their communities.

The young people are willing and eager to get out into the community and make their mark, and that encapsulates two burning issues for the group. They need a bigger, more permanent venue to carry out their aims and they would very much appreciate local businesses to give them jobs reflecting their individual abilities and talents. Wendy and Sue and the group, as well as numerous helpers, university students and other observers, have trouble fitting into the two rooms made available to them at the moment. A decision must soon be taken to either enable a property to be purchased for Studio ARTES or find other more suitable premises locally to rent.

Wendy and Sue would like to expand the program to include younger children but are prohibited from doing so because of the limited current available space. Recently I visited the group and was able to take part in a session on improving workplace skills. Young people such as David and Jackie stood up and spoke about themselves in an activity to instil self-confidence in their ability to make themselves heard in the wider community. I, like Stephen O'Doherty, have indicated that should they wish to send me emails I will respond to assist with that part of the program. Lars, one of the volunteer trainees, wrote a letter to me a few weeks ago which stated:

We are looking forward to seeing you on Friday morning to see what we're doing at Studio ARTES and everyone will meet you this Friday to have a talk about our program and how it is run by our trainees and staff. And we hope that some of our trainees get jobs for the future.

The last three words, "for the future", are most important. The parents and friends of Studio ARTES members are firmly committed to the program and everyone who comes into contact with the group is totally impressed and convinced about the opportunities it creates for the young people in attendance. Their future is so much more positive as a result of their participation. Wendy and Sue have had a great deal of foresight and have moved the program along strategically each step of the way. The group has joined the Hornsby and District

Chamber of Commerce and Industry, a decision that is designed to expose the young participants to more opportunities to acquire work. Brooke, another trainee, has been delegated as the representative to attend the monthly chamber meetings, a challenge she is more than capable of achieving.

I am working with both the Chamber of Commerce and Studio ARTES and am 100 per cent supportive of the need to access the chamber to improve the job opportunities of those young people. I invite anyone who wishes to visit a positive and inspirational pilot project to come to Hornsby to visit Studio ARTES. I feel sure that together the group and I, with other interested friends, will cement the success of the program and that it will be replicated around the State. A number of people are on the waiting list to join the group. People younger than 18 years would love to be part of a program that enables them to increase their abilities in artistic pursuits and for their future working lives.

AUBURN SPORTS EXPO

Mrs PERRY (Auburn) [3.31 p.m.]: On Saturday 6 April I attended the nineteenth annual presentation dinner of the Auburn Sports Expo. I wish to draw the attention of the House to the continuing high standards of achievement and dynamic community spirit evident in the local sporting community in my electorate of Auburn. I acknowledge the hard work of the committee of the Auburn Sports Expo, particularly Councillor Bob Murray and his wife Judy; Wilma Klein; directors of the Auburn Soccer Club, Ray Grimes and Allan Hynds; as well as Francis Stockton, Chris Nicholas, Wayne Sampson and Barbara McClennan. I also congratulate Wilma Klein on her nomination this year for the Sportsperson of the Year Award. Ms Klein is an outstanding bowler for the Lidcombe Women's Bowling Club, having won many championships and having been chosen for a number of representative teams.

It is apparent that the Auburn local government area is endowed with a wealth of sporting talent, both across the generations and across various sporting disciplines. As the awards progressed and the various winners were acknowledged it also became apparent that in addition to highly developed sporting skills and talents, the people have a strong sense of community and responsibility. It is evident that while these young sportspeople are receiving support and encouragement from their families, clubs and communities, they are passing on that support and encouragement to others. It is also evident that involvement in sports initiatives is building bridges in the culturally diverse Auburn community. Many of our talented young sportspeople are now joining in sports that have not been significant previously in their family's background. Their participation and contribution is welcomed and valued by their clubs on the playing fields, in the clubrooms and at social functions.

One such young man recognised on that evening was Peter Abboud of the Auburn District Cricket Club. Peter is not from a cricketing background. However, Peter's contributions on the field have been acknowledged as contributing to his team's success in the minor premiership in the Metropolitan Plate competition for the 2001-02 season. Peter is not merely a competent athlete on the field, however; he is widely recognised for his dedication and service to his club. He is involved regularly in setting up and closing the down the grounds for the weekly competition, extra one-day games, training sessions, assisting with the provision of food and beverage supplies and taking responsibility for the club float. His contribution to the smooth running of the Auburn District Cricket Club, particularly over the two most recent seasons, is acknowledged by other club members to have been outstanding.

That contribution was recognised last season when Peter was awarded the Dave Tribolet trophy for Clubman of the Year. Peter is the youngest person in the history of the club to have been awarded this trophy. Another of Auburn's young sporting achievers is Rodger Morris of the Auburn Orioles baseball team. Rodger has been a representative player since 1997, competing in interdistrict, exhibition and international events. He is known to be one of the district's most successful and reliable young pitchers. Rodger has also earned the respect of his fellow athletes for his enthusiastic team spirit and willingness to share his skills and knowledge with younger players. He has participated in umpiring and coaching duties, and has taken part in support roles such as ground maintenance and canteen duties. He is recognised for his support of his team-mates, his respect for the game and for the officials who are involved in administering it.

Other outstanding young sports people in Auburn include Matthew Hatton and Dilek Uygunteur of the Auburn Lifesaving Club, and Garry Burns and Jason Robert Decker, who also achieve at high levels on the baseball field. It is evident that not only is sporting talent and enthusiasm alive and well in the Auburn district, but that those community values which it fosters are in good hands in the younger generation of sportspeople, and that some of the strongest bridges in our culturally diverse community are being constructed on the sporting fields.

[Private members' statements interrupted.]

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lynch): I welcome to the Parliament of New South Wales the agricultural delegation from Shanxi Province of the People's Republic of China. I hope they enjoy their visit to the Parliament.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

[Private members' statements resumed.]

KENNEDY BROTHERS ADAMINABY PLANT AND EQUIPMENT AUCTION

Mr WEBB (Monaro) [3.37 p.m.]: I report to the New South Wales Parliament a momentous occasion: the Kennedy Brothers auction on 6 April. "Sale-O, Sale-O, all lots offered on account of the late Cliff Kennedy, and Max Kennedy, earthmoving contractors of Adaminaby"—these were the opening words of John Mooney, auctioneer, who was ably assisted by Stewart Lee. Some 600 lots were on offer, and the auction was the start of a sad, interesting, nostalgic but exciting day. Machinery, tools, parts, fittings, spares, and other bits and pieces—including a large steel dome that had been used for testing the pressure in the gigantic water pipes at the Murray and Tumut power stations during construction of the Snowy Mountains project—were offered for auction. Other items for auction included land and a shed.

Locals and friends from all over New South Wales helped to prepare the articles for sale and to assist Max Kennedy on the day. Interest was shown from every State by well over a thousand people who assembled in hundreds of cars and trucks to attend one of the biggest clearing sales ever held anywhere in New South Wales. I take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank particularly the Adaminaby Progress Association, Jim Madew, Ian Sharman and townsfolk of Adaminaby for their co-operation and assistance to Max Kennedy and for their loyal support for the town of Adaminaby. The auction was also an important event for the Snowy River Shire Council, the Mayor, Bill Smits, and Dallas Burnes. Employers such as the Snowy Mountains Authority were also represented. Associate Commissioner Vin Good appeared for the authority. I thank the Deputy Premier, the New South Wales Government and members of the New South Wales Heritage Office for their assistance in preparation for this significant occasion.

Sufficient money was raised to fund the purchase at the auction of a representative sample of machinery so that it can be preserved in a museum in the district in which it was used, the Snowy Mountains area at Adaminaby. It will be dedicated to the efforts of the Kennedy Brothers and the significance in Australian history of the construction phase of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-electric Scheme. Recently the scheme's fiftieth anniversary was celebrated. The Adaminaby branch of the Country Women's Association [CWA] was still selling at 4.30 in the afternoon and its members had a wonderful day. The auction created a snapshot of local history and it was wonderful to walk among the machinery and parts, much of it still in running order. The atmosphere was a step back in time and many people who exchanged stories wished that the day would never end. The auction featured the Snowy Mountains scheme and achievements of the Kennedy brothers, and was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to purchase memorabilia.

Among the items for auction were eight international TD24 bulldozers, said to be the biggest collection of them in the world. Last Saturday they were all running, including one which later sold for \$12,000 and had completed a dam on the previous day. There were also many parts, spares, tracks and accessories. I am sure Max's ability to keep the equipment going and to repair it will keep him busy for a long time. It was generally acknowledged that if something broke down—if a bearing blew apart or a crown wheel or gear shattered, if there was an oil leak or a hidden failure—the brothers, Cliff and Max, would simply laugh, locate the appropriate spare in the shed or yard, pull the machine to bits and effect the necessary repairs on the spot. There were also four 6 x 6 Studebakers: they were all in working order, and some had very low mileage. There were four Federal prime movers, renowned through Monaro, that had played a major part in the building of the Snowy Mountains project. At one stage the Kennedy brothers had fitted a helicopter's turbocharger to one of the Cummins motors on one of the Federals. You could hear it whistling from a great distance and see a cloud of black smoke belching well before the Federal came flying over the hill.

A Goodwin Adams grader, low-loaders, and bulldozers large and small—the TD24s, which are probably equivalent to a Caterpillar D8, which is large by any standard—were the drawcard and fascinated

many. People spoke of operating them, and I can recall seeing them working during the construction work at Guthega and Eucumbene in the late 1950s and 1960s. They built the project—the roads, dams and tunnels. The five Le Tourneau scrapers, cranes, a snowplough, a bus trailer that had been used by Utah to ferry the men in and out of the tunnels, and a rare Athey track trailer were some of the great vehicles, 50 years old or more, that were for sale. The equipment and parts were all in very good condition.

The ABC covered the event and will produce and telecast a documentary for the benefit of those who were unable to attend. More than 800 people registered to buy and I am sure many were disappointed on the day. At the commencement of the auction, there was one minute's silence as people paused to remember the late Cliff Kennedy, and to acknowledge his wife as well as other members of the Kennedy family. It was also acknowledged that Cliff and Max had made an extremely significant contribution to Adaminaby and to the historic Snowy Mountains that will never be repeated.

WYONG SHIRE COUNCIL DEVELOPMENT APPROVALS

Mr CRITTENDEN (Wyong—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.42 p.m.]: Last Monday Wyong Shire Council convened a meeting in Toukley to discuss the need for community consultation with respect to zoning developments. This issue is not peculiar to the Wyong shire; it is relevant throughout New South Wales. It is essential that the area in which my office and home are located is not overdeveloped, which would destroy the natural beauty that attracts visitors to the Central Coast. About 120 people attended this productive meeting. It is obvious that council must give serious consideration to height restrictions for development around the central business district of Toukley. The view of certain sections of the community is that the area should have a greater population density with residents living in buildings that are four or five storeys high to ensure the prosperity of Toukley shopping centre.

My office has been located in Toukley since I was first elected as a member of Parliament in 1991, and since that time the shopping centre has gone into decline. It consists mainly of second-hand clothing stores and a number of vacant shops—a consequence, principally, of the development of new shopping centres such as the Westfield shopping centre and the complex at nearby Lake Haven, which is operated by Gandel Trust. The reasons for the decline of Toukley shopping centre and measures to improve its situation must be determined. I have suggested that the local chamber of commerce work with council to market Toukley using a theme consistent with the attractions of the area, such as the fishing village type atmosphere that Toukley developed following the Second World War.

The Central Coast comprises a number of disparate communities. It has wonderful natural features such as mountain ranges, lakes and the ocean—all of which must be preserved for future generations. Not long ago there was a Jewels Food Store at Toukley. It was taken over by the Independent Grocers Association, but, unfortunately, it is now closed. The only remaining supermarket in Toukley is Coles. I do not need to remind honourable members such as the honourable member for Coffs Harbour that a single pensioner receives only \$421 per fortnight while a married pensioner receives only \$352 per fortnight. That money will not go very far if these people have to shop for groceries at Coles. The problem has been exacerbated because the Franklins store at the Lake Haven shopping centre is now owned by Woolworths and has become an up-market supermarket with high prices, and pensioners are struggling to afford the high prices.

I am a proactive member so I made approaches to Aldi, which wants to establish a store in the northern part of Wyong shire. I call on Wyong Shire Council to develop a retail strategy to allow Aldi to set up a store in the Wyong shire at a locality of its choosing so that my constituents can purchase essential items at competitive prices and still preserve their standard of living. At present my constituents no longer have the opportunity to obtain necessities at a reasonable price. I ask that Wyong Shire Council gives serious consideration to allowing Aldi to operate in the northern part of Wyong shire because the Warnervale town centre development will not be completed for two years and the pensioners and low-income earners of my electorate cannot afford to wait two years.

TAFE FUNDING

Mr FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [3.47 p.m.]: I wish to refer to TAFE funding in regional New South Wales. Many members of Parliament and members of the community would dearly love their children to attend university. Two of my children have been to university and I hope my son will eventually attend. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the importance of retaining trade courses. Indeed, tradesmen are often on high incomes and have the best hourly rates. I have had the experience today of having to replace my hot water service—and it was not

cheap! In New South Wales TAFE funding has been cut severely and will be further cut next year. Lest members on the Government side of the House attempt to deny that as a fact, I shall read onto the record the following paragraph from an internal memorandum from the North Coast Institute of TAFE:

Unfortunately there is still no capacity to run entry level training programs at all sites, though I have no doubt it is warranted and supported by an unmet demand.

These training programs will be cut because of a reduction in funding for TAFE. The memorandum continues:

The other significant issue is that within our allocation and ASCH target, we need to absorb the July 2002 and Jan 2003 teacher salary increases of 4 and 5% respectively.

This meant that if teachers are to be paid this increase, the money will be taken away from teaching programs. It continues:

These will result in a 9% salary increase with only $2 + 2 = 4$ contribution by the State to support the increase.

The proposal is that of this 9 per cent salary increase, with allocation of 2 per cent plus another 2 per cent by the State, 5 per cent must come from teaching programs. Those students undertaking TAFE courses and who are being given wonderful education by teachers, who do a terrific job in trying conditions, will have their allocations cut by 5 per cent. The memorandum then states:

That, together with the 2.57 per cent reduction I spoke of at the last FC meeting results in an effective 7.57 per cent reduction to the teaching component of our delivery budget. I believe that with diligence, this is to be achievable, but will not be easy.

I do not intend to disclose the name of the author of the memorandum but that person obviously holds a management position. Teachers at the coalface are being told that student contact hours must be reduced by 7.5 per cent in the next 12 months.

Mr Crittenden: Point of order: The honourable member is quoting from a memorandum. I invite him to table the document for the edification of all honourable members.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lynch): Order! No point of order is involved.

Mr FRASER: The honourable member for Wyong has a reputation for standing up for the people in his electorate but because he is a Government member he has decided that a sensitive issue to his electorate and mine should be hidden. It is a fact that the State Government is cutting back on funding to TAFE teachers by 7.57 per cent.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER: Order! I have ruled that there is no point of order. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour should return to his private member's statement.

Mr FRASER: This is my private member's statement. A member of the left-wing of the Labor Party has sought to stop me raising in Parliament the fact that the TAFE budget has been cut by 7.57 per cent, resulting in a reduction in student contact hours and vocational training programs to make the budget balance. That is a disgrace. I call on the Government, you, Mr Acting-Speaker, and the honourable member for Wyong, to approach the Minister to ensure that this budget is maintained, that there is no decrease in funding and that students receive the education that they deserve. [*Time expired.*]

Mr CRITTENDEN (Wyong—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.52 p.m.]: What a rambling diatribe from the honourable member for Coffs Harbour, but that is the sort of thing we have come to expect from the Neanderthal member. He referred in his contribution to trade qualifications. We certainly need to ensure that people are able to obtain trade qualifications. However, if the honourable member were fair dinkum, he would be willing to make available the anonymous information that he proffered in the Chamber today. I am aware that the honourable member comes from a rural constituency. During the course of the twentieth century there were three distinct elements of economic growth: agriculture, manufacturing and knowledge. However, the most important aspect is the emerging knowledge industries.

Mr Fraser: Point of order: The Minister is not addressing the content of my private member's statement.

Mr CRITTENDEN: I am.

Mr Fraser: You are not.

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

Mr CRITTENDEN: The honourable member for Coffs Harbour should take a wider view of the world. The honourable member referred to trade qualifications. Had he talked about the need to develop knowledge industries in regional and rural Australia—and if worked with the Government to achieve that end—it would have been a much more worthwhile approach. I am sorry that the honourable member could not see his way clear to being constructive and positive. He did not suggest a way forward and he had no vision for the future of TAFE that would provide his constituents with high-value, high-paying jobs in his electorate. Rather, he prattled on in a crazy way about trade qualifications, the industrial age and all that sort of stuff. He, as an aspiring leader of the National Party, should look to the future of regional and rural Australia.

COMO OPTUS MOBILE TELEPHONE BASE STATIONS

Mr COLLIER (Miranda) [3.54 p.m.]: Ortona Parade is a quiet residential street in Como, a suburb in my electorate. It is a street in which seniors and married couples live and a street in which families with young children attend the nearby preschool and primary school. It is a street where people have lived in harmony for years. They have gone about their business, raised their families and enjoyed the good things that the shire has to offer. However, Ortona Parade has become a street of fear—a street where residents, young and old, are gravely concerned about their health and the health of their families. Why? The signs erected in the front yards of houses say it all. "No, Optus. Take your mobile phone towers away."

On Saturday 9 February in the afternoon Optus officials marched into the Telstra building at the top end of Ortona Parade without warning and began installing a mobile telephone base station. Nearby residents, including Mr and Mrs Reeves, who live next door to the Telstra building, were not advised, council was not informed and the community was not consulted. That mobile base station is within 100 metres of Como public school and within 50 metres of Como preschool where a "No, Optus" sign now hangs. Honourable members will recall that I made a statement in the House on 12 March regarding the Optus proposal. That statement followed a public meeting called by me which was attended by more than 100 residents concerned about the Optus proposal. The meeting called on Optus to scrap its plans to build the base station.

Optus has stopped work but it has not abandoned its plans. Instead, it is reviewing the design and it has released additional reports of electromagnetic radiation which, sadly, are cold comfort for residents like Mr and Mrs Saddler who will be subjected to that radiation 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is cold comfort for the parents of children who attend the preschool to know that the levels of radiation at Como preschool are amongst the highest. I refer to the lack of consultation by Optus in relation to these towers. In a letter to me dated 18 February Optus' National Acquisition Manager, Mr Howard Game, wrote:

In keeping with company policy Optus notifies council of its intent to install a low impact facility as a matter of courtesy. Unfortunately, in the case of the Como facility, council has no record of any formal notification and it cannot be confirmed whether such advice was issued.

Mr Game confirmed at the public meeting in Como on 11 March that Optus did not notify anybody—residents or council—before going ahead. This is the hypocrisy of it all. This week the Australian Communications Industry Forum approved a code of conduct for telecommunication carriers called the Code for the Deployment of Radio Communications Infrastructure. That code, which will soon attain legislative force at a Federal level, will apply to facilities like the Optus proposal at Como. The code, which requires carriers such as Optus to invite public submissions before going ahead, states:

Before commencing the work, the Carrier must have regard to any submissions received from the public or council.

In this case Optus has been told by the community that it does not want the mobile base station. The outcome of the consultation which has been effectively forced on Optus after it began installation without notification can be summarised in two words: "No, Optus." I am sure that people will say, "The code is not yet in force, so Optus does not have to abide by it." But the code was devised by a committee comprising carriers which included Optus. What is more, Optus agreed to abide by the principles of that code, including community consultation, even though the code has not yet been introduced. The person who chaired the committee that developed this code is none other than Mr Brent Gerstle, an Optus executive. Optus, knowing that a code that required community consultation was about to be introduced, undertook to follow with that code and was even a major party in its development, but it did not comply with it.

Optus did not consult with my community as it knew it should have. If Optus continues with this approach in the face of community opposition, what does that say about the code? It will make a mockery of the

code. It will mean that the code is a toothless tiger, powerless to compel community consultation and powerless to prevent the very behaviour that it is intended to change. This is a very real test. Now is the time to see whether Optus has any integrity and whether it is a good corporate citizen. Now is the time to see whether Optus will comply with the code of conduct that it was instrumental in designing. Now is the time to see whether Optus will do that and look elsewhere. If Optus is fair dinkum it will comply with its own code. It will listen to my community which is saying to it loudly and clearly, "No, Optus."

Mr WHELAN (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.59 p.m.]: I listened intently to the contribution of the honourable member for Miranda, who raised an important issue on behalf of his constituents—an issue that will have a great impact on the people who live in his electorate. I advise the honourable member that I will forward to the appropriate Minister the details of his constituents' complaints. I thank him for raising the issue. I am sure it is a matter that he will pursue with his usual deliberate style and with gusto. I hope he will achieve some commonsense and that this large corporation will take appropriate action and look after his constituents.

KU-RING-GAI ELECTORATE CRIME STATISTICS

Mr O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai) [4.01 p.m.]: Tonight I provide proof positive that community safety in the Ku-ring-gai municipality has deteriorated under the Carr Government but, more importantly, proof positive that, since the downgrading of Gordon police station and the transfer of policing responsibilities out of Ku-ring-gai municipality to local area commands based at Hornsby and Chatswood, community safety has again deteriorated. A week or so ago the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research released crime figures for the 2001 calendar year. When comparing the figures for 2001 with the figures for 1995 we see a pattern emerging. I want to go through 10 of the categories of crime figures collected by the bureau and refer to the 1995 to 2001 increase.

Assaults have increased by 60 per cent over the period 1995-2001. Robberies without a weapon have risen by 176 per cent; break and enters of dwellings have risen by 21 per cent; break and enters of non-dwellings have increased by 24 per cent; motor vehicle theft has decreased by 8 per cent—I shall return to that issue— theft from motor vehicles has increased by 30 per cent; stealing from dwellings has increased by 53 per cent; other theft has increased by 71 per cent; malicious damage to property has increased by 42 per cent; and weapons offences have increased by 187 per cent. These are not my statistics but independent figures from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research—although that is a government agency. They show that between 1995 and 2001 in each and every category except theft of vehicles crime increased significantly in the Ku-ring-gai municipality.

In 1996 the Government, in its wisdom, decided to reorganise the New South Wales Police Service. That reorganisation included downgrading Gordon police station, which had \$3.4 million spent on it a few years earlier and has cells that no offenders have ever occupied. At this moment, on the weekend or in the middle of the night one general duties officer mans Gordon police station. That station was effectively closed in 1996. The 1996 to 2001 crime comparatives produced by the bureau show that crime in Ku-ring-gai has increased and that the sense of community safety has decreased. Since the downgrading of Gordon police station the number of assaults has increased by 44 per cent, incidents of robbery without a weapon have increased by 140 per cent and break and enters of dwellings has increased by 15 per cent. Every day of the year three homes in the Ku-ring-gai electorate are broken into—or 80 homes a month.

Since Gordon police station was downgraded, motor vehicle theft has leapt. It increased by 22 per cent in the period from 1996 to 2001, despite the fact that the figures from 1995 to 2001 showed a reduction. Incidents of stealing from motor vehicles increased by 22 per cent, stealing from dwellings increased by 28 per cent, other theft increased by 23 per cent, malicious damage to property increased by 33 per cent and weapons offences increased by 120 per cent after the station was downgraded. These figures are proof positive of the downgrading of community safety in Ku-ring-gai and of the impact of the downgrading of local police stations such as Gordon. I place on record my disappointment with the Minister for Police, who came to office promising local solutions to local policing problems. He may be doing good things across the rest of the State—although the crime figures do not suggest that—but in the municipality of Ku-ring-gai in my electorate he is not meeting his early goals. I welcomed his appointment and am now disappointed that nothing has materialised. I am bitterly disappointed that he has not accepted my invitation to come to Ku-ring-gai to visit the police station and see the problems there first hand.

MERMAID POOL RESTORATION

Mr BARR (Manly) [4.06 p.m.]: An exciting local environment project has just begun in my electorate. A group of dedicated local community volunteers has begun the restoration of Mermaid Pool, a small natural pool that forms part of the Manly Dam headwaters. The pool is a hidden gem tucked away in the suburb of Manly Vale. It has a range of interesting local and national historic connections, including the fact that Captain Arthur Phillip walked along this route to the headwaters of Manly Dam. The pool was once a popular swimming hole and picnic spot, as old photographs showing families picnicking and swimming in the pool attest. Unfortunately, the pool has become severely degraded in recent years. It has a high faecal coliform count, is unsuitable for primary contact and is in urgent need of rehabilitation. The surrounding bush is choked by weeds. The pool lies in the Manly Lagoon catchment at the base of Manly Dam. Manly Lagoon is also under serious stress and was not assisted by a major chemical spill last year. Degradation of this waterway is an important issue as it flows into the sea near one of Sydney's most famous beaches.

Members of the Save Manly Dam Committee, the group formed to fight the Ardel development at the headwaters of Manly Dam, have stepped in—particularly Mal Fisher and his partner, Leonie—and taken up the challenge to remediate Mermaid Pool. Several community meetings have been held and there is a great deal of local interest in the project. Mermaid Pool was given a makeover on Clean Up Australia Day this year. More than 75 volunteers registered on the day and more than 3,000 kilograms of rubbish was collected, including car bits and pieces and all sorts of metal rubbish that was found in the pool and the surrounding area. I spent several hours wrestling with a large metal container that was embedded in the sand and which could not be removed completely. One young volunteer was quite badly scratched in the process and had to receive a tetanus injection because of the state of the water because the metal was rusted.

A job of this scale will obviously require co-operation between various authorities. Negotiations have begun with Warringah Council to secure its involvement in the remediation work and I have spoken to Brian Dooley, Regional Director of the Department of Land and Water Conservation, who has indicated that he is willing to do all he can regarding the restoration work. I have also contacted the Premier's Office and obtained information about various grants that might assist efforts to rehabilitate this area, including the Environment Protection Authority's environmental trust grants. The issue was also raised with the Minister for Land and Water Conservation on his recent visit to Manly Lagoon, and I look forward to continued involvement in and support from the Minister and his department regarding this initiative. I have also written to Sydney Water to try to attract funding for the project.

The next proposed restoration event—it is on hold pending various bureaucratic approvals—is "Dive with the Mermaid", which will involve divers bringing up bits and pieces from the bottom of the pool. It is not something that I would want to do because of the polluted state of the pool, but there are people willing to do it. The Department of Land and Water Conservation has been approached to provide assistance in this regard, and I hope that the event will go ahead. The rehabilitation of Mermaid Pool will be an ongoing project for many years. I have no doubt that, with the support of many volunteers and local authorities, the Save Manly Dam Committee will eventually be successful in restoring a beautiful natural asset for the benefit of the whole community.

If that happens it will be a triumph of local community involvement in a very difficult environmental issue. It is not easy to clean up an area such as this not only because of the contamination of the water and identifying the source of those contaminants but because of the bushland degradation and the need to deal with weeds. We discussed waterways and coastal development in this place yesterday. It is an ongoing issue. We must address catchment management and ensure that there are sensitive developments along these sorts of waterways if we are to have any success in returning them to a pristine condition. I congratulate all those involved in the project and look forward to working with them in future.

HOLBROOK MULTIPURPOSE SERVICE CENTRE

Mr MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [4.11 p.m.]: The community of Holbrook, in conjunction with the Greater Murray Area Health Service and the Department of Health, has embarked upon a project to redevelop Holbrook hospital to a multipurpose service [MPS]. Problems have been identified with the old hospital, which urgently needed refurbishment. The community formed an MPS committee that worked closely with the Greater Murray Area Health Service and the department to identify the problems that needed to be rectified. It has worked to deliver a draft services plan for a Holbrook multipurpose centre and has certainly done its best to co-operate with the Department of Health to secure this improvement.

The project cost \$2.479 million, although it was envisaged that it would cost \$1.5 million. It will include integration for ambulances, at a cost of \$127,000. It will provide nursing care, with eight ensuites and rehabilitative improvements in the nursing home. It will have new air-conditioning and a community health centre. Some of those improvements have already been made—in fact, stages one and two are almost complete. It is pleasing to see the new community health centre attached to the hospital—although I have some reservations about the materials that were used. The older part of the multipurpose centre is made of brick and tile but the new centre is made from corrugated iron. But beggars cannot be choosers. We are delighted that funding has been provided for stages one and two to be completed and that the ambulance service is to be relocated to the hospital as part of stage three.

I wish to raise the community's concern with regard to funding for the acute care wing, which is stage three. We have held meetings with the staff of the Department of Health and expressed our extreme concern that no funding has been allocated to complete the project. Although funding for stage three was included in the original \$2.479 million, we now find that stages one and two, nursing home and community health, have been completed, and there is funding for the ambulance service, but there is no funding for acute care. The problems with the acute care wing at the Holbrook multipurpose centre are enormous. For example, paint is flaking from the roof, there is no provision for palliative care, and the kitchens are of Third World standard. The repairs and renovations that have been made to the wing are simply not functional.

At the last meeting we gained additional funding of \$100,000 to ensure the smooth integration of acute care and stages one and two. However, we have never received any written confirmation of the \$100,000 funding. I therefore ask that the Minister provide written confirmation of that funding, so that the multipurpose centre committee knows where it stands. More importantly, I ask that funding be provided so that stage three, the acute care wing, can be completed. The hospital is simply dysfunctional without it. Members have to see the hospital to understand its condition. It is antiquated, and it is in desperate need of the allocation of almost \$1 million to complete necessary improvements.

One has to ask the question: If all the planning work was done properly, everyone agreed and signed off on the project, and we were to get a completely refurbished multipurpose centre for \$2.479 million, what has gone wrong? Why are we only getting three-quarters of a project, when it was originally agreed that we would get the acute care centre as well as the community health centre and the nursing home facilities? I am aware that things go wrong with projects and that unforeseen matters sometimes arise. However, we need a commitment from the Government that it will provide the funding to complete the acute care wing. I know that a large number of projects in the State need funding, but I appeal to the Minister to provide Holbrook Hospital the funds it needs so it can have its multipurpose centre completed.

Mr WHELAN (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.16 p.m.]: The honourable member for Wagga Wagga has made a strong case, and I assure him that I will draw the matters he has raised to the Minister's attention.

HOXTON PARK AIRPORT

Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [4.16 p.m.]: At approximately 11.45 a.m. on Wednesday 10 April yet another plane crash occurred at Hoxton Park airport. The airport is located within my electorate, as are many of the houses that are threatened by aircraft from the airport. I have called for the closure of the airport on other occasions, and this latest incident simply confirms the view that it should be closed. Not only do aircraft fall out of the sky near or on residential areas, but we also have the added problem that, as reported in the media, the Australian Transport Safety Bureau is not interested in investigating such incidents. So not only do we have a very serious safety issue in my electorate, but safety bodies are not even interested in carrying out investigations. As I understand it, the latest incident involved an aircraft in which the engine cut out; it has been described as a mechanical fault. As a result, the plane crashed between half and one kilometre from the runway. Thankfully, the plane did not land on houses. Thankfully also, no-one on the ground was injured, nor was the pilot injured.

I am advised that the plane came down about 800 metres from the nearest houses. That probably had as much to do with good luck as it had to do with good management. Of course, it may well have been that the prevailing wind was going in a direction that prevented the plane from landing on houses. Without an engine, the plane, the pilot and neighbouring residents were at the mercy of fortune. Thankfully, as I have said, it seems that no-one was injured. The crash landing in a paddock was not completely without incident. A fuel leak in one wing of the plane necessitated attention by the fire brigade, which covered the plane with the appropriate

material. I understand there was the usual plethora of fire engines, police vehicles and ambulances present. This is another in a long and sorry list of safety incidents at an airport that is now far too close to residential development. Assurances made by the aviation industry that it is safe for the airport to remain near houses have proved to be without substance. The airport should be closed.

The Federal Government wants to make a massive capital gain by selling the airport as a going concern. The Federal Government's greed means that it will not close the airport. Its greed is more important to it than the safety of my constituents. The commercial enterprises that operate at the airport also put their financial interests ahead of the safety of residents of the suburbs I represent, such as Green Valley, Hinchinbrook, Cecil Hills, West Hoxton and Hoxton Park. People who are training to be pilots at the airport want to continue to train there, they do not want to have to travel any further, so they are putting their convenience ahead of the safety of the residents I represent.

In addition to the concerns about safety, over the years many complaints have been made by residents about noise and height nuisances. The potential development of Bankstown Airport has raised an even greater level of concern. There is a very real concern that the development of Bankstown Airport will force many training schools out of that airport into Hoxton Park airport. Indeed, estimates suggest that the level of traffic at Hoxton Park airport will increase by 55 per cent if pilot training schools are pushed out of Bankstown.

That highlights one of the key problems about Hoxton Park airport. Many of the pilots who use the airport are trainees. In other words, they get to fly over my electorate and make all their mistakes. It is no surprise that we have safety incidents at Hoxton Park, when so many trainee pilots are flying around—they get to make their mistakes in south-western Sydney. What makes the situation even worse is the substantial volume of air traffic. Hoxton Park airport is the busiest uncontrolled airport in Australia—yet, it does not have a control tower, notwithstanding that the airport is right in the middle of residential areas, and it has a massive number of trainee pilots flying around. The aviation authorities thought it important enough to establish a control tower at the airport for the Olympic Games, but not afterwards. That says something about the priorities of the Federal aviation authorities.

As I have said, there has been a sad and sorry, indeed tragic, history of safety incidents at Hoxton Park airport. In March and June 1999 there were two separate incidents involving three fatalities. One of those incidents reveals quite graphically and tragically the impact of human error in such situations. The fatality in March 1999 seems to have occurred because the radiofrequency used by various pilots at Hoxton Park airport was changed for the first time in 40 years. It seems that no matter what safety mechanisms we seek to adopt, inevitably accidents will occur. The risk of such incidents occurring at Hoxton Park airport—which is located in the middle of what has been the most rapidly developing residential area in the State for a number of years—is simply too great. The airport should be closed.

Mr WHELAN (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.21 p.m.]: The honourable member for Liverpool has clearly outlined a very serious issue. The safety of the honourable member's constituents should be the only matter for consideration by the relevant authorities. It is frightening that in this densely populated area there is an uncontrolled air space that is being used by trainee pilots. Clearly, the honourable member's fight on behalf of his constituents, particularly the divesting of responsibility, should receive serious consideration by the relevant Federal authority.

The relevant Federal Minister should be acquainted with this matter. Perhaps a country town in New South Wales would welcome the employment opportunities that come with generating an aircraft facility of this type. Why is there an aircraft training centre over one of the most densely populated areas in Australia? Approximately 10 per cent of Australia's population reside in Western Sydney. Why are trainee pilots flying over that area? The honourable member's statement is worthy of consideration, and I thank him for raising the matter in the House today.

Private members' statements noted.

**The House adjourned at 4.23 p.m. until
Tuesday 7 May 2002 at 2.15 p.m.**
