

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 20 June 2002

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

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

CRIMES (SENTENCING PROCEDURE) AMENDMENT (VICTIMS' RIGHTS AND PLEA BARGAINING) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr HARTCHER (Gosford—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [10.00 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Victims' Rights and Plea Bargaining) Bill, which proposes amendments to the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999. The Act began operation in 1999 and seeks to regulate the procedures by which offenders are sentenced at law. Since the introduction of the Act it has become increasingly obvious that there are weaknesses in the legislation that need to be addressed. The bill aims to address those weaknesses. I propose to refer to some examples that occurred in the past year, which demonstrate that the expectations of the community in relation to sentencing have not been met.

First, however, I will outline the significant features of the bill. The bill ensures that the plea bargain is made public by the court. It creates a statutory right for a victim to make a statement, written or oral, to be presented to the judge, regardless of the plea bargain. It reduces the current sentencing guideline for discount sentences for guilty pleas to 10 per cent. It ensures that victims give fully informed advice to a plea bargain, and that victims and their representatives, for example, a lawyer or a parent, have the same representation as the accused when negotiating in the plea bargaining process.

Plea bargaining was introduced by the Coalition Government in 1991. It is a necessary part of the criminal justice system, as it helps avoid expensive and lengthy trials and often saves victims from the stress of lengthy criminal trials. Essentially, plea bargaining is a system whereby the accused agrees to plead guilty to a lesser charge or to fewer charges. In return, under the guidelines the court will impose a lesser sentence, normally of between 10 and 25 per cent of the expected sentence, and the prosecution will present to the court an agreed statement of facts.

I refer to the bill. Clause 1 sets out the name of the proposed Act. Clause 2 provides for the commencement date of the proposed Act on a day or days to be appointed by proclamation. Clause 3 is a formal provision giving effect to the amendments to the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999, set out in schedule 1. Section 22 of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 requires a court, when passing sentence for an offence, to take into account the fact that the offender has pleaded guilty, and when the offender pleaded guilty or indicated an intention to plead guilty. The court may accordingly impose a lesser penalty than it would otherwise have imposed.

Schedule 1 [1] limits the extent to which a sentence can be reduced to 10 per cent of the penalty that would otherwise have been imposed. Schedule 1 [2], which relates to plea bargaining, provides that a victim of crime must be informed of the decision to plea bargain and must be given an opportunity to inform the prosecutor whether he or she approves of the decision. It is not necessary that the victim consent, but he or she must be able to advise the prosecutor of his or her views. The provisions also require a judge, in sentencing an offender who has pleaded guilty, to publicly disclose the details of any plea bargaining. The bill also provides that victims have the right to ensure that their statements, whether oral or written, are brought to the attention of the judge and the judge is fully informed of their concerns before imposing any sentence.

This legislation has become necessary because of circumstances we have seen in recent times. In a number of prominent and well-publicised cases, victims have felt that their side of the story has not been told to

the court. There was the tragic case of the two girls who were subjected to a gang rape in the Hurstville area. A group of youths assaulted them with a knife, kidnapped them and took them to a house where over a period they were subjected to an ordeal of rape. When those assailants pleaded guilty to the crime, the defendant and the prosecutor tendered an agreed statement of facts to the court. The statement of facts omitted salient points, such as the significant issue that the girls were held at knife point. This led the judge to view the situation in a more lenient light than she would have regarded the situation had she known the girls were held at knife point. The girls were outraged. It was a feature in the public campaign that followed the trial that the full facts had not been presented to the court for consideration on sentence.

My amendment will ensure that in such cases not only the agreed statement of facts between the prosecutor and the defence is presented to the sentencing judge, but also the victim's full statement of facts, oral or written. The victim would then know that the judge had knowledge of the full statement of facts as the victim saw them, even if the prosecutor and the defence had not presented the facts in the same way. A further amendment relates to the whole process of plea bargaining where victims of crime—and "victims" includes the family of a person who has been killed—are not aware of the plea bargaining process or the plea bargaining process is presented to them as a fait accompli. I refer to the sad case of five-year-old Tayla Parker who was cruelly murdered in the Lismore area in 1999. Her convicted killer, Risiti Laupama—who pleaded guilty to the lesser charge of manslaughter although originally charged with murder—had woken the young girl in the middle of the night, sexually assaulted her and then hanged her from a balcony. He was charged with murder, but the prosecution accepted a plea to manslaughter. He received a sentence of only a minimum of eight years imprisonment for the cruel killing of this little girl.

The girl's mother, Kelly Parker, who publicly made her concerns known about the trial and the plea bargaining process, was given little opportunity to express her objection to the charge being reduced from murder to manslaughter. She was not given the benefit of any independent advice. She was simply told what was going to happen and then it was allowed to happen. As a result, the whole story of the suffering and trauma of the family was not disclosed to the court, and the court imposed what can only be regarded as a lenient sentence of a minimum of eight years imprisonment for the sexual assault and killing of a five-year-old girl. The maximum penalty for this offence is 25 years imprisonment. The penalty was reduced on the basis that a plea to a lesser charge was accepted and a discount was given for the offender pleading guilty.

If plea bargaining is going to continue—and it will because it is a fact of life—victims must be fully informed and their views must be taken into account. Victims—or, in the case of murder, their families—must be allowed to have independent advice so that they are fully aware of the court proceedings. Victims are merely taken outside the court and told what is going to happen. They are not given any opportunity to consider what has been put to them or to express an informed view. The purpose of this bill is to make sure that the victims are fully informed and fully consent at every stage of the process. The Coalition believes that this bill is important for victims and that it has community support. The community does not believe that victims should be discarded by the criminal justice system. The community believes that victims are at the very heart of the criminal justice system. The protection of victims and the community are two important roles serviced by the criminal justice system.

This bill provides that any discount, if allowed, will only reduce the expected sentence by 10 per cent. It provides that the victim has the right to make a full written or oral statement to the court as to how the victim saw the event and the facts that led to the charge. That statement will be before the judge when the judge imposes sentence. The bill requires that victims—or, in the case of death, a victim's family—are fully informed of the plea bargaining process and have the opportunity to express their views. Victims will not have the right to veto a plea bargain. The acceptance of a plea bargain is the decision of the prosecutor. But the prosecutor must have the victim's views before him or her when the final decision is made. Further, that bill provides that victims, or a victim's family, are entitled to representation and advice so that they understand the whole process. In that way, the process is not simply presented to them and their ignorance is not taken advantage of.

These are beneficial amendments, which are not inspired by any political spirit but by a spirit of reform of the criminal justice system. If the Government is serious about the reform of the criminal justice system it will accept these amendments to the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act. This Parliament and the Government have the opportunity now to stand up for the victims in our community. If the Government rejects this legislation, and it clearly has the power to do so, it sends a clear message to the community that it is not concerned about the victims. It sends a message that it is more concerned about the process and about supporting the Director of Public Prosecutions in the many decisions he has made that have an ill effect upon the criminal justice system.

If the Government rejects this bill, it is more prepared to stand up for the killer of young Tayla Parker than to stand up for young Tayla Parker herself. The facts in this case are a cry for reform. That her killer was allowed to plead guilty to a lesser charge, her family was not informed properly of his plea and he received a sentence of only eight years imprisonment for the sexual assault and brutal and sadistic killing of a young girl are a cry for reform. That cry has been heard by the Liberal and National parties and has resulted in the presentation of this bill to the House. I commend the bill to the House. I urge the Government to debate it seriously, to look to the interests of victims and, by accepting the bill, to enhance the criminal justice system in New South Wales.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Yeadon.

CRIMES AMENDMENT (MURDER OF POLICE OFFICERS) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr BROGDEN (Pittwater—Leader of the Opposition) [10.19 a.m.]:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The New South Wales Coalition has set a course for compulsory sentencing for violent crimes. We believe that the people of New South Wales are angry, frustrated and sick and tired of weak sentences from the courts. As part of the general policy approach, this bill will require that anybody who murders a police officer acting in the line of duty will go to gaol for life. We believe that, because of the nature of the job, police officers in New South Wales should be afforded extra protection under the law when they are on duty. When police officers are in uniform on duty or have recalled themselves to duty they put themselves forward when others step back. They put themselves in danger and do so to protect you, and me and the citizens of the State. The law should recognise that to murder a police officer is one of the most serious crimes in the State.

The Government has already acknowledged through legislation that there is a difference between assaulting an individual and assaulting a police officer. The maximum penalty for assaulting an individual is lower than that for assaulting a police officer. That policy came from this Government. The Government has already set in law the recognition that an offence against a police officer is of greater magnitude because of the nature of the role of a police officer than an offence against an ordinary citizen. Our bill goes one step further. It responds to the genuine community concern and anger and strong respect that the people of New South Wales have for the men and women who serve in the police force. Anybody who murders a police officer who is acting in the line of duty will go to gaol for life. It will be a compulsory sentence imposed by the court following a guilty verdict in a murder case.

It is in stark contrast to the weak approach to sentencing by the Government. This week the Government ran away from compulsory minimum sentencing and compulsory sentencing in general. The Premier does not want to talk about this. He argues that juries will not convict if there is a minimum compulsory sentence in place. He is wrong. It is my belief and that of the Coalition that jurors sitting in judgment, when given the opportunity, will not in any way balk at a guilty verdict if they know a compulsory sentence is in play. The Premier does not understand that the people of New South Wales want criminals to go to gaol; they want justice from our court system. The Premier does not understand and will not acknowledge that in the system he has allowed to flourish in his seven years in government, adequate justice is not coming out of our courts.

This is based on the tragic evidence that in the past seven years six police officers have been murdered in the course of their duty. They include Constable Peter Forsyth. The House and the people of New South Wales are familiar with the circumstances of that crime. That officer recalled himself to duty to stop a crime in progress. He was brutally murdered. The killer of Constable Peter Forsyth was sentenced to 27 years in gaol with a 20-year non-parole period. On appeal that sentence was reduced by nine years. Constable Forsyth's murderer will serve just 13 years in gaol for murdering a police officer. That is less than the average sentence for murder in New South Wales. If there is a single case that brings to attention the failure of the justice system to deal with the murder of police officers, it is the tragic death of Peter Forsyth. His family has to live with the understanding that the value the court has placed on his life was 13 years. That is not good enough.

Members on this side of the House say that murdering a police officer is one of the most serious crimes. We say it deserves a compulsory life sentence and it responds to community concerns about weak

sentences and the need to give extra protection to our police. It responds also to an increasingly violent attitude of many criminals that police are regarded as fair game. We need to send a message to the community and to the criminals in our society that if you murder a police officer you go to gaol for life. We have to say to our police officers that we will stand by them. We should not forget the families. The families of police officers see their husband or wife, their father or mother, go out the door every morning, and in the past seven years they could have been one of the six police officers murdered on duty. They need to understand that Parliament, and a Liberal Party-National Party Coalition government, will stand by them. We will afford those officers and their families that safety.

We cannot allow our police to be concerned about their physical safety because of weak laws and weak courts. This bill is simple and short. It will amend the Crimes Act to require compulsory life sentences. It responds to community anger and concerns. The challenge to the Government is to put up a cogent argument against it. We are yet to hear from the Premier or his left-wing Attorney General any arguments that hold water against this legislation. We are told it will not work. Prove to us that it will not work. The Premier sought to argue that our sentencing policy is the same as those of the Northern Territory. That is not so. I have indicated clearly that we will not go to the election with a policy of minimum sentencing for property crimes. Our policy relates to violent crime. There is no link between this bill and the Northern Territory policy, but the Premier has failed to outline that. He is running from this debate. If he were so confident about his position, if he were confident that this policy would not work, he would be arguing it in the public domain. But he has run a mile from arguing it in public. The Minister for Information Technology and his colleagues know that this bill responds to the community concerns about our justice system. The Premier's pathetic arguments in opposition to this bill simply do not hold water.

The ultimate judges will be the people of New South Wales. We look forward to the challenge at the next election to put forward different sentencing policies, to provide a contrast to the people between the Liberal-National Coalition and the Government. We represent the interests of city and country New South Wales. We respect our police officers. We believe the justice system should be tougher, and we believe that minimum sentences are an inadequate response to rising violent crime. The Government does not. It is tied down to a pathetic philosophical commitment in opposition to this bill and it does not hold water. We are yet to hear a cogent argument from the Premier. He does not want to talk about this issue.

We want to talk about it, because we want to send a message to our police officers that we stand by them and their families, and to the broader community that we respect police officers and the work they do. We know many of them are heroes; we know that terrible crimes happen to ordinary people. Those officers should not have to live in fear of violent crimes against them. Just yesterday we saw someone attempt to attack police officers in a stolen vehicle, swerving at a number of police cars. That could have resulted in the murder of a police officer. It is as simple as that. Some people in the State have a reckless disregard for the lives of police officers, for the jobs they do and the cover they provide to our community, yet there is no response from the Labor Government on this issue.

The Liberal and National parties are willing to go the extra step and tell the people of New South Wales that we will introduce compulsory sentencing: compulsory life sentences for people who murder police officers and compulsory minimum sentences for people who commit other violent crimes. We will do this in response to community concerns and because it sends a message to criminals that they will go to gaol if they commit violent crimes. In essence we hope it will be a deterrent and will stop people from committing violent crimes. For the seven years that Labor has been in government it has done nothing to stop violent crime. In fact, crime has increased dramatically under the Carr Labor Government and continues to rise.

There are two sides to this equation. One is the policing strategy and the other important one is the sentencing strategy. The Carr Government has fallen down time and again on its sentencing strategy. The only argument the Government has put up relates to guideline sentences. That is a weak argument because the courts take too long and judges can walk away from guideline sentences. Judges will not be able to walk away from our legislation, they will not be able to walk away from this Parliament, and they will not be able to walk away from the will of the people of New South Wales. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Yeadon.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.

COMMUNITY PROTECTION (ILLEGAL BROTHELS) BILL**Second Reading****Debate resumed from 6 September 2001.**

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.30 a.m.]: The Government opposes this bill. The Government recognises that it is important to have appropriate regulation of brothels to protect the community from the undesirable aspects of prostitution, to protect public health and to reduce the potential for corrupt conduct on the part of police. The Opposition's proposal is now completely redundant as a result of action taken by the Government. Last year the Government introduced legislation to amend the Disorderly Houses Act. This amendment confirmed that courts could consider circumstantial evidence—a move that will assist councils in dealing with illegal brothels.

Often, direct evidence that premises are operating as a brothel is not available to councils. The Government's changes list examples of relevant circumstantial evidence that is consistent with the use of premises for prostitution. Considered together, the circumstantial evidence may establish facts from which the court may conclude, as the only rational inference, that the premises are used for the purposes of prostitution. This will assist local councils in proceedings before the Land and Environment Court on an application under the Disorderly Houses Act for premises not to be used as a brothel, or under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act to restrain the use of premises as a brothel.

Furthermore, the Government has announced the establishment of a Brothels Planning Advisory Panel to provide advice and assistance to councils in developing their local environment plans. The panel will be able to help councils implement the objectives of the Government's 1995 reforms in the development of its planning instruments. The Local Government and Shires Associations are responsible for administering the Brothels Planning Advisory Panel. Mr Vic Smith, the former mayor of South Sydney, has been appointed as the independent chair of the panel. Membership of the panel includes representatives from the Local Government and Shires Associations, Planning NSW, NSW Health, the New South Wales Chamber of Commerce, two councillors—one from the metropolitan area and one from regional New South Wales—the Sex Workers Outreach Project, Private Workers Alliance and a person with expertise in legal issues relating to brothels.

I am advised that the Brothels Planning Advisory Panel held its first meeting on 3 May and met again on 14 June. Both meetings have been productive and members are very positive about the role of the panel. The panel will prepare guidelines to assist councils in managing development applications and preparing development control plans for brothels. The Government has acted to address this matter and I urge the Opposition to get behind the Government's initiatives rather than proceed with this now unnecessary legislation. The Government opposes the bill.

Mr BROGDEN (Pittwater—Leader of the Opposition) [10.35 a.m.], in reply: The Government's attempt to argue that this bill is now redundant is simply a joke. If there was evidence that the reforms attempted last year had worked, we would have heard chapter and verse from the honourable member for Newcastle about cases heard by the Land and Environment Court in which illegal brothels had been closed down. Indeed, the Minister has not debated this legislation. The great reform of the Government is that communities should feel comforted by the fact that the Government has established a unit to help councils provide consent for illegal brothels. The Government has done nothing to assist councils in any meaningful way to close down illegal brothels.

The explosion in the number of illegal brothels in New South Wales continues. The Government seeks to ignore the fact that this is a crisis in suburban New South Wales. This bill, as tough as it is, seeks to prevent illegal brothels from operating in areas where people live. The Coalition does not have a fundamental moral opposition to the concept of the establishment of legal and controlled brothels. However, the proliferation of illegal brothels in suburban Sydney and across parts of country New South Wales is not sustainable and is an attack on the lifestyle and amenity of people who are simply living quietly in a suburban area or country town. This is a problem across country New South Wales as well as the city.

The Opposition believes that the so-called reforms of the Government are unacceptable. Fundamentally there need to be changes to the legislation to protect the community from the operation of illegal brothels. The restriction and regulation of brothels under instruments and policies adopted by local councils and the facilitation of prompt closure of illegal brothels by local councils are important objects. Under this Government

it can take many months and cost tens of thousands of dollars of ratepayers' funds for a council to close down an illegal brothel. The process should be much more efficient. This bill seeks to reverse the onus of proof and require the operator of an alleged illegal brothel to prove that it is not operating as such. The onus should not be on the community, via ratepayer dollars to the council, to pay council inspectors and lawyers to fix this problem. In the past councils have been required to use private detectives, who have had to pay for sex in illegal brothels to prove that they were operating as illegal brothels. What a ridiculous waste of taxpayers funds! The reforms put forward by the Government are not a genuine attempt to deal with the problem. I call on the Government to support this bill.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 36

Mr Armstrong	Mr Humpherson	Mrs Skinner
Mr Barr	Dr Kernohan	Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Brogden	Mr Kerr	Mr Souris
Mrs Chikarovski	Mr Maguire	Mr Stoner
Mr Collins	Mr McGrane	Mr Torbay
Mr Cull	Mr Merton	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Debnam	Ms Moore	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr George	Mr O'Farrell	Mr Webb
Mr Glachan	Mr D. L. Page	
Mr Hartcher	Mr Piccoli	
Mr Hazzard	Mr Richardson	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Rozzoli	Mr Fraser
Mrs Hopwood	Ms Seaton	Mr R. H. L. Smith

Noes, 47

Mr Amery	Mr Greene	Mr Orkopoulos
Ms Andrews	Mrs Grusovin	Mr E. T. Page
Mr Aquilina	Ms Harrison	Mrs Perry
Mr Ashton	Mr Hickey	Mr Price
Mr Bartlett	Mr Hunter	Dr Refshauge
Ms Beamer	Mr Iemma	Ms Saliba
Mr Black	Mr Lynch	Mr W. D. Smith
Mr Brown	Mr Markham	Mr Stewart
Miss Burton	Mr Martin	Mr Tripodi
Mr Campbell	Mr McBride	Mr Watkins
Mr Collier	Mr McManus	Mr West
Mr Crittenden	Ms Meagher	Mr Whelan
Mr Debus	Ms Megarrity	Mr Yeadon
Mr Face	Mr Mills	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gaudry	Mr Moss	Mr Anderson
Mr Gibson	Mr Newell	Mr Thompson

Pair

Mr Tink

Ms Allan

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

**PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT OPERATIONS AMENDMENT (CONFISCATION AND
FORFEITURE OF VEHICLES) BILL**

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 18 October 2001.

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.49 a.m.]: The Government's strong record shows that it is prepared to support any move that will reduce illegal waste dumping and littering. Unfortunately, the bill introduced by the honourable member for Southern Highlands will not achieve those outcomes. The bill is badly drafted and, were it ever to become law, would have serious unintended consequences. Only a complete redraft of the bill could solve its problems. Illegal waste dumping blights our environment. The debate on this bill gives me an opportunity to take the House through the significant efforts made by the Carr Government in this area and allows me to point to the many successes that we have had in recent years. While there are undoubtedly dumping black spots in urban areas, we are now making real progress in tackling the waste dumping problem.

We have stemmed the tide of increasing garbage in our national parks and on public lands and streets resulting from years of inaction—not least by the former Coalition Government. This Government has consistently paid this issue the attention it deserves. First, we amended the waste legislation to make transporters and owners of waste responsible for the destination of their waste. These provisions are set out in section 143 of the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997. We then embarked upon an extensive education campaign that focused on the building and demolition industry and rural landowners to make them aware of the environmental and legal consequences of illegal dumping. We required the Environment Protection Authority [EPA] to establish a waste dumping task force in 1998 to investigate and prosecute waste dumpers, particularly those associated with illegal landfilling. In 2000 we introduced tough new littering laws that were the most comprehensive anti-littering reforms ever put before the New South Wales Parliament.

The State Government recently released the latest stages of our plan to crack down on illegal dumping—it will work well—building on our strong track record of reducing illegal waste. From July 2002 on-the-spot fines for illegal dumping will be doubled from \$750 to \$1,500 for individuals and more than tripled from \$1,500 to as much as \$5,000 for corporations. These new fines complement existing penalties that include fines of up to \$1 million dollars, and/or seven years in gaol, for offenders found guilty by a court. To complement these tougher fines, the Government also announced a new \$6 million package of anti-dumping initiatives. This includes \$4.5 million over three years for new regional illegal dumping [RID] squads, which will target hot spots across 20 local government areas in Sydney and the Illawarra.

This builds upon the successes of the RID program, which has been in operation for some time. RID squads are crack teams of specially trained officers whose sole task is to combat illegal dumpers using undercover surveillance, tracking and investigation. RID squads will find these dumpers and deal with them using the full force of the law. The teams work day or night, seven days a week, targeting black spots and fly-by-night dumping using mobile and static surveillance, covert operations, infra-red camera equipment, and helicopter and trail bike surveillance. Together with the surveillance and investigative measures we will establish a \$1 million Clean-up Fund to help councils and rural fire management committees clean up dump sites that pose a fire hazard, which will assist in preventing bushfires. In light of the recent bushfire tragedies, this is even more important. I know that local councils throughout New South Wales will support the measure.

Some \$600,000 will also be allocated to help councils maintain hot spots and deter dumpers by providing signage and lighting and cleaning up sites. The Environment Protection Authority and Resource New South Wales will work together to give advice to councils to assist with the prosecution of offenders. In addition, they will work with councils to increase awareness that dumping is illegal and publicise the penalties for dumping. I am sure that all honourable members recognise that these are impressive gains. They have already had a positive impact and they will continue to deter illegal waste dumpers and those who litter.

I turn now to the difficulties with this bill. While the Government recognises the bill's intention to help in the fight against illegal dumping, in practice its capacity to assist in delivering this outcome is very limited. Its detailed proposals are poorly developed. Unfortunately, the honourable member for Southern Highlands has not considered properly its legal and practical implications. Consequently, honourable members have before them a poorly drafted and unworkable bill that will not achieve its aims. Unfortunately, tinkering with the bill via amendments will not fix its problems. We cannot patch beat this bill; it needs a complete remake.

The object of the bill is to give authorised officers of councils and the Environment Protection Authority the power to seize vehicles used in the commission of certain littering or waste dumping offences that are prosecuted. An authorised officer will be able to seize a vehicle only when he or she has reason to believe the vehicle was used in the commission of the littering or waste dumping offence. The bill is limited to circumstances in which the officer is satisfied that the offence was committed in the course of carrying on a business or otherwise for fee or reward. The impact of the provisions of seizure are likely to be quite limited—they do not confer the power necessary to deal with this problem at source—as an authorised officer must have "reason to believe that the vehicle has been used in the commission of an offence."

As proposed in the bill, this would require the authorised officer to witness the offence or have a very clear video of the offence occurring. Most tip-offs about dumping incidents are unlikely to meet the necessary standard without an intensive investigation. Those opposite want to tie the hands of councils and those involved in the surveillance of illegal dumpers and prevent them from dealing with illegal dumping at source. The bill has severe jurisdictional limitations. Furthermore, an authorised officer must be confident that the evidence necessary to prove the offence beyond reasonable doubt can be obtained within 28 days from the date of seizure of the vehicle.

Another serious flaw in the bill is the failure on the part of the honourable member for Southern Highlands to nominate the most important waste dumping offence. That omission is quite strange. Section 143 of the Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 is the main waste dumping provision. It creates the offence of unlawful transporting of waste. If ever there were a trigger for motor vehicle forfeiture, this would be it. Yet the bill does not even mention it; it does not enter the picture. On the contrary, the bill focuses on sections 145 and 145A—the littering provisions—of the Act. Mr Speaker, I am sure that you would agree that the forfeiture of a motor vehicle for littering would be grossly unfair. I will illustrate just some of the absurd outcomes that this bill would deliver in the real world.

For example, the driver of a commercial courier van who throws a piece of paper out the van's window would be in breach of section 145 of the Protection of the Environment Operations Act. Of course, that person would be subject to the appropriate fines for littering that are already available and entrenched. However, if this bill were enacted, I am advised that the courier van—that person's livelihood—could be seized and impounded by the EPA because the littering offence was committed in the course of carrying on a business. I hope that the honourable member for Southern Highlands did not intend that such a penalty be imposed against small business. It would cripple small business, yet this is what her bill would allow in practice. The bill does not deal with a vehicle used by a waste dumper that has been stolen, hired, borrowed or used without authorisation. I am concerned that the bill fails to accommodate the rights of innocent third parties in such circumstances.

I refer to the many practical difficulties this bill would create. The bill provides that an authorised officer may seize a vehicle in the following circumstances: where the officer has reason to believe that it has been used by a person in connection with an offence and where the officer is satisfied that the offence was committed in the course of carrying on a business or otherwise for fee or reward. The bill does not make clear when an officer would be satisfied that an offence has been committed in the course of carrying on a business. Further, authorised officers may have difficulty confronting offenders and seizing vehicles in remote areas. Generally, they would require police assistance. How else could it be done effectively and safely?

Other practical and resource problems that the bill does not anticipate include moving and storing seized vehicles. In summary, this bill contains serious flaws. The Government has already tackled this most difficult environmental issue and it will continue to do more. The Government's record in this area is to be commended. The Government's initiatives are working. A bill should provide effective action. This bill should provide mechanisms to clean up our community, deal with waste dumpers at the source and provide adequate penalties. However, the bill is completely unworkable. It is tragic that this bill is hostile to small business. The Government is simply unable to support it.

Mr D. L. PAGE (Ballina) [11.02 a.m.]: What an apology for not supporting excellent legislation. The Premier has said that he wants this Government to be the greenest government ever seen in New South Wales. The Government has the opportunity to support a good piece of legislation introduced by the honourable member for Southern Highlands. The bill seeks to prohibit the illegal dumping of waste material for financial gain. However, the Government opposes it—that is a pathetic cop-out. The honourable member for Bankstown should support this legislation. If the bill contains a few minor problems he should suggest some amendments. However, while he claims to be green he will vote down this bill. The contribution of the honourable member for Bankstown was pathetic.

The Opposition supports this simple, good, commonsense bill which provides for the confiscation of a vehicle or trailer used in the act of dumping material in an unlicensed disposal place for financial gain. The confiscation or forfeiture would occur if an authorised officer reasonably believed the vehicle had been used in connection with the offence, and the offence was carried out in connection with business, fee or reward. The honourable member for Bankstown indicated that councils raised problems with respect to the bill, but that is not the case. The shadow Minister has a fistful of letters from councils saying that they support the bill and want the opportunity to confiscate such vehicles. That provision is important—it would act as a significant deterrent for people who are involved in the illegal dumping of waste material for financial gain. In addition to being fined for this anti-social activity, they would run the risk of having their vehicle confiscated—an important deterrent. This Government claims to be green, but it will not support this quality bill. The shadow Minister was inclusive in her consultation process; she contacted all councils in New South Wales. The Ballina Shire Council responded in the following terms to the shadow Minister:

Whilst the problem is not currently one of overwhelming significance within Ballina shire, it is recognised as having the potential to become one, particularly as the cost of properly handling waste material rises.

That is an important point. As the cost of handling waste material increases people will have more incentive to become involved in illegal dumping for financial gain. They will not do what they are supposed to do under the existing legislation. This bill would make it more difficult for them to engage in illegal dumping for financial gain. The Government should be ashamed of itself for not supporting this intelligent bill.

Mrs SKINNER (North Shore) [11.05 a.m.]: I am pleased to support the bill introduced by the honourable member for Southern Highlands. It is extremely sensible, simple and easy to understand. The provisions of the bill are strongly supported by many councils in New South Wales, as was indicated by the honourable member for Ballina. The honourable member for Southern Highlands has received a fistful of letters from councils in support of this bill. It is designed to prevent the illegal dumping of commercial waste through a very simple mechanism. It entitles the seizure of a vehicle if it has been used to carry waste for a commercial fee. The bill sends a clear message to people who accept a fee to get rid of someone's waste and then illegally dump it in bushland or beside the road. Their vehicle will be confiscated. The vehicle can be sold if no remediation of the site is undertaken, or it can be returned if remediation of the site occurs.

This is a sensible bill and I am surprised that the Government does not support it. I believe the Government will not support it because it was introduced by the Coalition. It is political game playing. If the Government were serious about doing all it can to prevent pollution and the illegal dumping of waste it would welcome this bill. Instead, the Government will use its numbers to vote the bill down. The bill will be revisited when the Coalition is elected next March. The bill has received strong support from people across the board. I am surprised that so many councils responded to the honourable member for Southern Highlands; that it is not regularly the case. Of course, many of those councils areas are represented by Labor members of Parliament. Labor members must be squirming—they will be voting against this bill, but their councils strongly support it. The honourable member for Bankstown referred to problems with the bill. His comments were laughable and indicate the paucity of arguments put forward by the Government to not support the bill. The honourable member for Bankstown must have been embarrassed when he contributed to the second reading debate.

I strongly support any measures that protect our environment—as do all members of the Coalition, be they Liberal or National members, country or city members. This issue affects everyone, regardless of where they live. The community makes a tremendous effort to clean up our environment on clean-up days. It captures the attention of individuals. The community will support this bill. Mosman Municipal Council, which is in my electorate, has written to the honourable member for Southern Highlands saying that its waste contractors attend approximately 300 instances of dumped waste in a year. One would not expect 300 instances of dumped waste in a year in an inner city council area.

This dumped rubbish is a blight on the landscape of foreshore areas that are important for tourism and the good amenity of the people living in the area. My constituents will be very disappointed that this constructive and innovative proposal put forward by the honourable member for Southern Highlands will be opposed by the Labor Government for none other than political reasons. My council supports any increased powers to facilitate environmental protection enforcement. I commend the bill. I will condemn the Government if it fails to support the bill.

Mr RICHARDSON (The Hills) [11.10 a.m.]: This bill is straightforward and simple. The message it sends out is remarkably clear: If you dump rubbish for commercial gain you will suffer the consequences, which will be very serious for you. Those consequences will be much more serious than those mentioned by the

Parliamentary Secretary, the honourable member for Bankstown. The honourable member told us that on-the-spot fines for littering by individuals had been doubled, up to \$1,500, and more than trebled for corporations, up to \$5,000. That is the Government's plan to crack down on littering. However, the honourable member for Bankstown did not really talk about commercial illegal dumpers. He did not tell us one of the major reasons that this problem is so prevalent, particularly on Sydney's outskirts—that is, waste charges are extremely high. They have more than trebled over the past few years. Tips have closed, creating an incentive for illegal dumpers. What is the Government's response to a situation that it, to a considerable extent, is responsible for creating? It has increased fines—its response to just about everything environmental. Hit it with a big stick and hope it will die! In this case, the stick the Government is using is clearly not big enough.

I am mindful of the response of one of my local councils, the Baulkham Hills Shire Council. The honourable member for Southern Highlands, in her usual diligent and conscientious fashion, wrote to councils throughout New South Wales. The Baulkham Hills Shire Council recognised the problem of rubbish dumping and said it found that in the new housing development areas of Rouse Hill, Kellyville and Castle Hill there is an ongoing and increasing problem with builders and property owners. The council said that 10 per cent of those found to be responsible for rubbish dumping in the past 12 months had been prosecuted, but that illegal dumping occurred at night in many locations. As only 10 per cent of those responsible for rubbish dumping were prosecuted, that means that 90 per cent of rubbish dumpers have got away with their illegal activities. Of course, they will continue their illegal dumping because there really is no disincentive to their doing so.

The honourable member for Bankstown clutched at straws in presenting arguments against the very sensible proposals put forward by the honourable member for Southern Highlands. To suggest that a courier van could be seized is complete nonsense. I heard similar arguments advanced against the car hoons bill introduced by the honourable member for Vacluse some years ago. The Government voted that legislation down. But, almost immediately after, the Government introduced in this House almost identical legislation, recognising the worth of the proposal put forward by the honourable member for Vacluse.

As the honourable member for North Shore said, the Government will not support this bill because the Coalition has introduced it. The Government does not want to agree with anything that the Coalition would introduce. The Government does not want to concede that the Opposition has some very worthwhile ideas. Quite clearly, the Government is not acting on behalf of all the people of New South Wales. It is certainly not acting in the best interests of the people of this State. The bill introduced by the honourable member for Southern Highlands would make a huge disincentive to rubbish dumping in my electorate and across New South Wales, and particularly in the fringe areas on the outskirts of Sydney. That is why honourable members on this side of the Chamber support the bill.

Mr KERR (Cronulla) [11.14 a.m.]: I invite the honourable member for Bankstown, the Parliamentary Secretary, to come to my electorate next time the residents of Kurnell clean up Captain Cook Drive, which they do annually. If he does, he will know the consequences of the Government opposing this bill. Yesterday Labor members whose electorates fall within the Sutherland shire voted against increased funding for shire roads and increased funding for treatment of cancer patients. I hope the Parliamentary Secretary did not speak on their behalf on this bill. I invite Labor members to read the second reading speech of the honourable member for Southern Highlands, who detailed the problems facing the residents of Bardon Ridge.

Illegal rubbish dumping is a serious problem in the Sutherland shire. The birthplace of modern Australia is scarred by the dumping that occurs on Captain Cook Drive. I do not wish to take up the time of the House, but I will refer to a letter sent by the General Manager of Sutherland Shire Council to the honourable member for Southern Highlands. It said that dumping is a major concern to the council. Let us hope it is of major concern to Labor members. The letter refers to the commissioning of a study on illegal dumping in Bardon Ridge, Sandy Point, Lucas Heights and Menai. Feedback from residents highlighted concerns about the problem—86 per cent of Bardon Ridge residents and 93 per cent of Sandy Point residents stated that this is a very important issue, and one that should be addressed. The letter concludes by stating that the council is supportive of any measures that will assist in reducing illegal dumping. I appeal to all honourable members to support the bill, which will assist in reducing illegal dumping.

Mr FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [11.17 a.m.]: I support the bill and I commend the honourable member for Southern Highlands for introducing it. I point out the hypocrisy of the Government and the Parliamentary Secretary, the honourable member for Bankstown, who said in his contribution to the second reading debate:

We have stemmed the tide of increasing garbage in our national parks, public lands and streets resulting from years of inaction.

Labor has been in government for seven years. I saw Ian Kiernan in the foyer of Parliament House yesterday. Every year we see Mr Kiernan and his volunteers pulling all the commercial waste and rubbish under the sun from our national parks and forest areas. Approximately 75 per cent of the Coffs Harbour local government area and about 80 per cent of the Bellingen local government area are national parks, State forests and nature reserves. We would like those to be pristine areas that are an attraction for tourism. If people drive along the forest roads behind my home they will see builders' waste dumped all over the nature reserve. That is totally unacceptable.

This bill provides severe penalties for anyone caught dumping waste. The dumper's vehicle will be confiscated. Those who dump that sort of waste are easily identified, as the Parliamentary Secretary should know. The Parliamentary Secretary said that in July the Government would bring forward a bill doubling fines for illegal dumpers from \$750 to \$1,500. That is farcical. Then we are told that the Government will spend \$4.5 million over 20 local government areas. How much of that will be spent in my electorate? Absolutely none. To say that the van of a courier who throws a piece of paper out the window could be confiscated under this bill is farcical—and the Parliamentary Secretary knows that. It is lunacy that a Government that claims to be clean and green will not support this bill.

Our national parks, nature reserves and forest areas are being littered with commercial waste for commercial gain. It is absolutely unacceptable that commercial waste is not being taken to a regulated tip or recycling depot, where much of our builders waste goes. This bill will send a clear message to anyone minded to dump commercial waste. How can a builder dispose of rubbish if he has not got a truck to do that? The Parliamentary Secretary has been set up by the Government, which has asked him to give the House some fairly poor excuses as to why the Government will not support this bill.

It is incumbent on the Government to support this legislation in an effort to ensure our communities are kept clean by sending a clear message about dumping rubbish. Some commercial operators decide the easiest way to get rid of rubbish is to dump it in an area that members of our community use for peaceful enjoyment and recreation. The Government's attitude to this bill is laughable. I have no doubt the honourable member for Southern Highlands will notify all councils who wrote to her in support of this bill of the Parliamentary Secretary's contribution and his Government's attitude.

Ms SEATON (Southern Highlands) [11.20 a.m.], in reply: I was absolutely astounded to hear a member of the Labor Party, a member of the Government, essentially stick up for the continuation of activities by illegal commercial dumpers. This is a blind and lazy Government, a Government whose best days are behind it. At best the Government is simply not prepared to listen to councils and communities about what is an extraordinarily difficult problem in New South Wales. People are looking for more effective and practical tools to deal with this problem, yet today all we heard from the Government were excuses and more excuses as to why it is not prepared to get behind a good idea that is supported by many councils in the metropolitan and regional areas of New South Wales.

This bill gets tough with fly-by-nighters who go to commercial premises and offer to take away a load of old carpet, auto parts, chemicals and a whole range of materials for \$100 or \$200. The person from whom the rubbish is taken may well believe that it will be taken to a regulated tip and be disposed of legally. However, the rubbish is taken in a truck to places such as Barden Ridge, the Wollondilly shire, the Wingecarribee shire, et cetera, and is simply dumped. With the introduction of this bill I am trying to provide councils with another tool, if they so choose, to get tough on fly-by-night commercial dumpers. However, the Government is not prepared to support the bill. I have a folder full of letters from councils that support this bill and recognise the problem of illegal dumping. A letter from Bankstown City Council states:

Our records indicate that for the year 2000/2001 [Bankstown] Council disposed of 938.9 tonnes of dumped rubbish and that it cost the ratepayers of Bankstown over \$60,002 to dispose of it.

Yet the honourable member for Bankstown is not prepared to stand up for ratepayers by supporting a bill that will give the Bankstown City Council another tool in its armoury against illegal dumpers.

Mr Fraser: I am sure that you will send them a copy of his speech.

Ms SEATON: I will be sending a copy of all the speeches made during this debate, including the speech made by the honourable member for Bankstown, to Bankstown City Council. The Council of the Shire of Baulkham Hills has also recognised a major problem with illegal rubbish dumping in the Baulkham Hills area. The honourable member for Baulkham Hills spoke very strongly in support of this bill. A letter from Nambucca Shire Council states:

Of course illegal dumping is not confined to commercial illegal dumping. However, your proposals are a welcome starting point to addressing the problem.

Nambucca Shire Council is one of the smaller coastal councils. Its letter continues:

Council serves an area that is one of the most socio-economically deprived in Australia. Many of our towns and villages are located some distance from our central waste depot at Nambucca Heads. Unfortunately, we cannot afford to operate a series of transfer stations yet there is no doubt that this could assist to alleviate illegal dumping.

The council cannot afford to build transfers stations, which is why it regards the Coalition's proposals as a welcome starting point in addressing the problem. A letter from Mulwaree Shire Council states:

It is perceived that your Bill will effectively reduce the incidence of illegal dumping if the vehicle in question can be confiscated and Council lends support to such a proposal.

The Mulwaree Shire Council has given this legislation a big tick. A letter from Scone Shire Council states:

Whilst the problem does exist to a lesser extent in Scone Shire, Council would be supportive of any strengthening of measures designed to reduce illegal dumping.

That is another council putting up its hand in support of this bill. Mosman Municipal Council's letter states:

I have referred your letter to Councils Manager Ranger Services, who informs me that Council supports any increased powers to facilitate environmental protection enforcement.

That is another big tick for this bill from Mosman Municipal Council. Sometimes I think this bill ought to be called the Schreiber amendments because it emanates from a meeting I had with Councillor Kevin Schreiber from Sutherland Shire Council. He is so concerned about the level of illegal dumping in Barden Ridge and the Sutherland shire that he took me to see what is essentially a dumping ground in natural bushland in Barden Ridge. We saw piles of carpet, auto parts, commercial waste and building waste. Most of the waste looked as though it had been disposed of from commercial premises, and no doubt on a commercial basis. Councillor Kevin Schreiber, the honourable member for Vacluse and I looked in horror at this site of desolation. We then came up with the idea that we should not only have the ability to fine people who engage in illegal dumping, but that we should make them fearful of being caught in the act. That is the best deterrent. Under this bill, the vehicle could be confiscated—that would stop the problem. The Sutherland Shire Council wrote to me in the following terms:

Council is supportive of any measures that will assist in decreasing illegal dumping.

I congratulate Councillor Kevin Schreiber for proposing a motion to the council to support the bill. The letter continues:

Reference is made to your letter of 31 October 2001 regarding the introduction of the Protection of the Environment (Confiscation and Forfeiture of Vehicles) Amendment Bill 2001.

The honourable member for Bankstown attempted to assert that these letters do not refer to my bill. However, I have proof that the letter from Sutherland Shire Council refers to my bill and indicates its support for it. The letter from Hawkesbury River County Council states:

The matter, as you indicate, is quite significant and legislation to assist in this can only improve the situation.

The Tallaganda Shire Council wrote to me as follows:

Therefore Council congratulates you for introducing such a Bill in parliament that addresses this issue, that being unscrupulous operators. One can only hope that your fellow MP's understand the extent of the problem and its current and future costs to the relevant communities.

All members occupying the Liberal Party and National Party benches understand the problem. However, members of the Labor Party, those on the Government benches, do not care and are not interested. I have had conversations with representatives of Wollondilly Shire Council who are desperate about the problem of dumping in the Bargo River Crown land area and in many other areas alongside the Hume Highway. They want more practical tools to be made available to them to address the problem. The Yass Shire Council's letter states:

I acknowledge that illegal dumping is a major environmental problem, particularly on the urban fringe of larger communities, and so support your initiative.

The position cannot be made clearer than that. The letter from Shoalhaven City Council enclosed an extensive report that outlined its concerns associated with littering and rubbish dumping. The council informed me that the Department of Local Government has stated that change of ownership is a common problem with respect to all vehicle-related offences and that council should direct its concerns to the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA]. Shoalhaven City Council is experiencing the classic Carr Government buck-passing between departments. The council's letter states:

However, any initiatives to the impounding Act would have to be initiated by the Department of Local Government.

In that regard, it would seem that the department has been dismissive of the concerns raised. The shire has problems with illegal dumping and with the use of vehicles by commercial fly-by-nighters, and they are not getting any help from this Government. The letter from the Council of the Municipality of Hunters Hill states:

The initiative is welcomed and if implemented should be a useful means of curbing the problem.

I will write to Hunters Hill council and say that the Carr Labor Government would not let us implement this bill. Ballina Shire Council wrote to me in the following terms:

Whilst the problem is not currently one of overwhelming significance within Ballina shire, it is recognised as having the potential to become one, particularly as the costs of properly handling race material rise.

The council also stated:

This issue is indeed one of some significance across the State and your proposed bill has merit.

Parkes Shire Council supports the bill. The Blue Mountains Conservation Society stated:

This bill is an excellent idea. Best of luck.

Wingecarribee Shire Council is supportive of the bill and Blacktown City Council strongly identified with the problems that have given rise to the bill. Uralla Shire Council wished the bill a speedy passage through the Parliament. Snowy River Shire Council supports the introduction of the bill. Conargo Shire Council commends my action and hopes that the Government will implement the bill. Warringah, Greater Taree, Liverpool, Shellharbour, Rockdale, Maclean and Camden councils support the bill. A strong case has been made by councils and communities for the implementation of the legislation. I commend the bill to the House.

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

The House divided.

[In division]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I have been advised that members are experiencing difficulties with the lifts. I will order that the doors be unlocked. The division can then proceed.

Ayes, 36

Mr Barr
Mr Brogden
Mrs Chikarovski
Mr Collins
Mr Cull
Mr Debnam
Mr George
Mr Glachan
Mr Hartcher
Mr Hazzard
Ms Hodgkinson
Mrs Hopwood
Dr Kernohan

Mr Kerr
Mr Maguire
Mr McGrane
Mr Merton
Ms Moore
Mr O'Farrell
Mr Oakeshott
Mr D. L. Page
Mr Piccoli
Mr Richardson
Mr Rozzoli
Ms Seaton
Mrs Skinner

Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Souris
Mr Stoner
Mr Tink
Mr Torbay
Mr J. H. Turner
Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Webb

Tellers,
Mr Fraser
Mr R. H. L. Smith

Noes, 48

Mr Amery	Mrs Grusovin	Mrs Perry
Ms Andrews	Ms Harrison	Mr Price
Mr Aquilina	Mr Hickey	Dr Refshauge
Mr Ashton	Mr Hunter	Ms Saliba
Mr Bartlett	Mr Iemma	Mr W. D. Smith
Ms Beamer	Mr Knowles	Mr Stewart
Mr Black	Mr Lynch	Mr Tripodi
Mr Brown	Mr Markham	Mr Watkins
Miss Burton	Mr Martin	Mr West
Mr Campbell	Mr McBride	Mr Whelan
Mr Collier	Ms Meagher	Mr Woods
Mr Crittenden	Ms Megarrity	Mr Yeadon
Mr Debus	Mr Mills	
Mr Face	Mr Moss	
Mr Gaudry	Mr Newell	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gibson	Mr Orkopoulos	Mr Anderson
Mr Greene	Mr E. T. Page	Mr Thompson

Pair

Ms Allan

Mr Armstrong

Question resolved in the negative.**Motion negatived.****Mr SPEAKER:** Order! It being after 11.30 a.m., pursuant to sessional orders business is interrupted.**DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

Mr SPEAKER: I draw the attention of honourable members to the presence in the gallery of Professor Dacheng Wang, Director of Research Office, Commission on Budget Affairs of the Standing Committee, the National People's Congress, the People's Republic of China and his high-powered delegation. I welcome the delegation to the New South Wales Parliament.

HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT PATIENT ACCESS**Mrs SKINNER** (North Shore) [11.41 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that 26 per cent of emergency department patients waited longer than eight hours for a ward bed this financial year, compared to 17 per cent in 1998;
- (2) calls on the Minister for Health to indicate how many of the increased number of sicker emergency department patients are in fact waiting list patients who cannot wait any longer; and
- (3) notes that the Minister's only response to the crisis in our hospitals after seven years of government is inquiries, reports, reviews and excuses.

This motion is fundamental to the present crisis in our hospitals, a crisis that has gone from bad to worse and shows no signs of improvement. The figures in the motion have not been plucked out of the air; they have come from information provided by the Government, either through freedom of information or from the Government's web site. The first paragraph of the motion asks the House to note the extended waiting periods in emergency departments, in other words, access block. Every review the Government has commissioned of the problems in hospital emergency departments has confirmed that the major problem is what is referred to as access block. Patients are kept in emergency departments because no ward beds are available. Patients are supposed to be transferred to hospital ward beds within eight hours of admission. When that is not done, access block occurs.

Figures obtained from NSW Health show that in 1998 17 per cent of patients were not admitted to a ward within eight hours of admission. In 1999 the figure was 18 per cent, in 2000 it was 21 per cent, in 2001 it

was 24 per cent and this year it is 26 per cent. The Minister trots out the feeble excuse, "It is because there are more patients", but we need to keep in mind that the figures are percentages. The Minister claims that somehow the hospital crisis is not a problem: it is just that more patients are being treated in emergency departments. The Minister is correct: more patients are being treated in emergency departments, but that does not support his suggestion that those patients should be treated by general practitioners. Too often the Minister trots out the excuse, "The reason emergency departments are treating more patients is that patients are not consulting their general practitioners." The truth of the matter is that the patients seeking treatment in emergency departments are sicker patients. The statistics reveal that the great majority of those patients fall into the top triage categories. In triage category two, for example, which is for imminently life-threatening—

Mr Knowles: Come on Jillian, be fair. Start at triage one.

Mrs SKINNER: Triage one is for patients who have immediately life-threatening conditions, and such patients are to be treated within two minutes. I congratulate the hard-working nurses and doctors who treat those patients. Triage one patients are usually unconscious or have difficulty breathing. If they are not ventilated or treated within two minutes, they die. The figure for that category is 100 per cent, as it has been almost from time immemorial.

Mr Knowles: That's not true.

Mrs SKINNER: It has been at 100 per cent, or close to it, from time immemorial. The Minister does not like to hear that, but it is the fact. Triage two patients have imminently life-threatening conditions. These are people who have a critical illness, severe pain, serious chest pains, difficulty with breathing, severe fractures, and so on. According to the Government's statistics, in the month ended 24 May more than 1,500 people in triage category two were not seen within the required 10 minutes. The next category, triage three, is for potentially life-threatening patients. Patients in this category would probably be suffering from severe illnesses, major bleeding from cuts, major fractures or dehydration. A total of 13,750 triage three patients were not seen within the required 30 minutes. Need I say more? These are very sick patients, as the Minister has acknowledged, and they are not being seen within the appropriate benchmark periods. I might say that the benchmarks have been changed on four occasions since the Carr Government has been in office. They have been changed because the Government finds it difficult to meet them.

The question remains: If these sicker patients are coming into emergency departments, is it because they are not able to get into hospitals through normal booking procedures? In other words, do waiting list patients have to go to emergency departments to get the treatment they require? Doctors tell us that is what is happening. Hospital waiting lists have increased to such an extent that doctors are finding it extremely difficult to get their very sick patients into hospitals for booked treatment and are sending them to hospital emergency departments. The Minister will never be able to provide a solution to this problem unless he first acknowledges that there is a problem.

The Government, the Minister and the Premier seem to suggest that the only response to the crisis in our hospitals is inquiries, reports, reviews and excuses. They never propose a solution. The solution is quite simple: open more hospital beds. The Government has closed about 4,300 beds since coming to office. Currently there are 1,600 nurse vacancies in New South Wales. Only last week the Industrial Commission was told—I was there and I heard it—that nurses are being recruited at a slower rate than they are leaving the system. In other words, despite the fact that nurses are being recruited to our hospital system, the number of nurses has decreased.

Without nurses, beds cannot be opened and patients cannot be treated. The Government has the capacity to address the problem, but it chooses to ignore it and pretend that nothing is happening. If the Government continues to refuse to acknowledge that there are problems in the hospital system, it will never come up with solutions. The Minister knows full well that not only are my colleagues on this side of the House—National Party, Liberal Party, country-based and city-based members—bringing these issues to my attention, but Government members are also doing so. They are also bringing the issues to the attention of the media, because they are absolutely desperate to try to do the right thing by their constituents.

Patients are ringing radio stations, as well as my office and the offices of other members; we have had a spate of calls in recent times. In May a number of people called Steve Price's radio program. Mr Tree called about his mother, who had to wait 24 hours in the emergency department of Nepean Hospital for admission to a ward bed. That week the Leader of the Opposition and I spent three hours in the emergency department at

Nepean Hospital and spoke to the parents of a young woman who had to wait 24 hours to have her appendix removed because no ward bed was available. She was taken to the hospital at 12.45 p.m. one day, but she did not have her appendix removed until 2.00 p.m. the next day. I have spoken to her father several times since, and, fortunately, she is doing well. However, during the time she was kept waiting in the emergency department she was on morphine. She was also taking heavy doses of strong antibiotics. That is not the optimum way to treat patients.

As I have said on many occasions in this House, I have the utmost respect and admiration for the hard-working clinicians, doctors and nurses in our hospitals. I also have the utmost respect and admiration for ambulance officers, who are as frustrated about the hospital crisis as their hospital-based colleagues. They all work hard and do the best they can, but they are fed up. Ambulance officers are fed up. They are ringing me as well, asking me to keep this issue at the forefront and apply pressure on the Minister, who seems to refuse to concede what is happening. He mouths platitudes about clinicians but does nothing to improve conditions in hospitals. For example, he has done nothing in the budget to provide extra incentives for nurses to return to our hospitals. He has a report in his hands about 10,000 nurses who are no longer working in the hospital system. They have told him they want extra pay and improved hospital conditions. Nurses are telling me they have to do back-to-back shifts. I particularly recall the intensive care unit nurse who was working 16-hour shifts and had to try three different ventilators before finding one in working order to assist a seriously ill patient.

Mr Knowles: We checked that; be very careful.

Mrs SKINNER: I have that in writing. I am happy to bring it to the Minister's attention, as I have in the past. The third part of my motion asks the House to note that the Minister's only response to the crisis is to conduct inquiries and find excuses. He is now known as the Minister for excuses. He is a spin doctor: he spins the answers, but he never provides solutions to problems. There was another significant event in the Hunter overnight. The Minister knows it will be raised at a later date, and I know he will find an excuse rather than a solution. Shame on him!

Mr KNOWLES (Macquarie Fields—Minister for Health) [11.51 a.m.]: This debate is worthwhile, because it allows matters to be put on the record. It is largely about a shift in the way medicine is practised and how care is given. Everyone acknowledges that there are many reasons why our emergency departments and hospitals are busy. Like the honourable member North Shore, I place on record my great admiration for and thanks to the hard-working men and women of the Health work force. They do fantastic work. Indeed, I move:

That the motion be amended by leaving out all words after the word "House" with a view to inserting instead the following words "congratulates the doctors and nurses working in emergency departments".

The numbers the honourable member for North Shore has gone through tell a story. First, they demonstrate that emergency departments are busy places. They are there primarily to treat the most urgent cases. As has been indicated, in the triage one category—the most urgent, life-threatening cases—the benchmark of 100 per cent is reached all of the time. That is a terrific and creditable performance. When the Coalition was last in government in 1994 the best they got to was 89 per cent—100 per cent against 89 per cent. On the triage two category, at 78 per cent we are 2 per cent under the benchmark. The Coalition's performance was substantially poorer at 68 per cent.

One could regard those figures as a performance failure, but if one considers the number of patients who go through emergency departments from category one to category five, those figures may be around the benchmarks. Perhaps the benchmarks are not right. In saying that, I acknowledge the comments made by the Hon. Dr Brian Pezzutti at this time last year when he chaired an upper House inquiry into the hospital system. He said that the benchmarks do not necessarily reflect the quality of care given. Indeed, in all of the cases that have come to light in recent days, the one thing people have been saying is that they do not dispute the quality of care.

There are many reasons why our system is busy. They range from work force shortages, which are global and are widely acknowledged. That is particularly so in nursing but it is not restricted to nursing. There are similar shortages in allied health care services and various medical specialties. We have all manner of programs in place to deal with that issue, as hard as it is. There are other fundamental reasons why the system is so busy, and this debate gives me the opportunity to place some of them on record. One is the shortage of nursing home beds. I am simply reflecting the fact that in some of our hospitals—traditionally those in country areas but now more frequently those in urban areas, particularly on the north side of Sydney—nursing home beds are closing and acute beds are more and more often occupied by people who are not necessarily sick but are just old and have nowhere to go.

The honourable member for North Shore knows that, and the flim-flam around the number of aged-care bed licences provided by the Commonwealth is nonsense. On the north side a number of nursing homes have closed, and the people who are occupying the beds then return to acute care areas of the hospitals. Equally, changes to general practice, lack of bulk billing and lack of after-hours services mean that in many of our towns and cities people have only one place to go: the local emergency department. It is a free service, it provides universal coverage, and someone who is poor has no other alternative: there is only one place to go. We have done analyses on the lower end triage categories, four and five. Those analyses clearly demonstrate that in towns where general practitioners do not bulk bill, attendances at emergency departments have increased by 60 per cent. That is a matter of fact, based on the Government's published information.

Areas with increases in triage category four and five presentations include the Central Coast, 5 per cent; the Children's Hospital at Westmead, 24 per cent; the Greater Murray, 14 per cent; the Hunter, 7 per cent; the Illawarra, 10 per cent; the mid North Coast, 14 per cent; Northern Rivers, 21 per cent, and so on. They are big increases. Recently I reported to Parliament that in the Illawarra an after-hours general practice clinic closed because it could not get medical indemnity insurance. That meant that between the hours of 9.00 p.m. and 9.00 a.m. the only place in town to seek treatment was the emergency department of Wollongong Hospital. Is it any wonder that they continue to be busy? Changes in insurance, changes in bulk billing practices, changes in work practices by general practitioners, changes in the provision of nursing home beds and extreme difficulties in the work force are some of the structural reasons emergency departments are under extreme pressure from blockages. There is no doubt about it: it is publicly acknowledged.

We are doing a lot about it. Only last week I reported to Parliament on the Auburn surgical pilot by Geoff Brooke-Cowden. It is halving the time taken for procedures that are usually at the end of waiting lists, procedures relating to hernias and gall bladders, for example. People requiring such procedures face extended waiting times for surgery. They are always bumped off the list by something more urgent—frequently procedures coming from the emergency department. The pilot is a classic example of a clinically led change sponsored by the Government involving a clinician. Let us not forget that the budget announced enormous measures for the improvement of procedures, particularly in our emergency departments. The emergency departments at Shoalhaven, Nepean, Liverpool and Hornsby hospitals are all mentioned, as well as a new emergency department under construction at Royal North Shore Hospital. Those hospitals will have facilities that the Coalition would not fund.

In relation to service, \$1 million has been allocated for elective surgery and procedures in orthopaedics and ophthalmology in northern Sydney. There will be more cataract operations in the Shoalhaven, and there have been big increases in funding for orthopaedic procedures in Wollongong and the Shoalhaven. In every area, in every hospital, there is extra funding to make sure the pressure is taken off some of the procedure areas. That is being done to try to get the balance right between emergency and elective procedures and to make sure that at every turn we work with the clinicians. This is a story about hard-working men and women who work under enormous pressure and stress. I do not resile from that, and nor do they. However, they do not like some of the claptrap that passes for policy on the other side of the House.

Given everything we have done, what would the Opposition do differently? What initiatives would it take that are different to the initiatives we have put in place? Would it wind back any of our capital programs? Would it make changes to the way we have involved clinicians in the process? They are questions the Opposition will not answer; it cannot answer them. Ultimately, it will have to trot out some policies. When a health system in this nation is under pressure—from work force shortages, shortages of nursing home beds, major changes in medical indemnity profiles and general practitioners closing their doors and refusing to take patients or to bulk bill—is it any wonder that, in a system that prides itself on universal health coverage and where the front door to free access to health coverage is the emergency department, which must take all comers, those emergency departments are busy? What else would they be?

Attendances in our emergency departments have increased at all triage levels. That means more people, and sicker people. Across the spectrum people are using our emergency departments because in many parts of the State, from small country towns through to the big cities, they have little alternative. We ensure that we treat them well. As the Hon. Brian Pezzutti said, they get good quality treatment; the quality is excellent at every turn. Some 1.8 million people go through our emergency departments every year, and about 500,000 of them are admitted. The overwhelming bulk of them are seen well within triage times and admitted within the benchmarks. That is a great credit to the men and women of the health service. That is why this House should unanimously support and congratulate the hardworking doctors, nurses and administrative staff, who keep that part of our nation's health system working as well as it does.

Mrs HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [12.01 p.m.]: This important motion states:

That this House:

- (1) notes that 26 per cent of emergency department patients waited longer than eight hours for a ward bed this financial year, compared to 17 per cent in 1998;
- (2) calls on the Minister for Health to indicate how many of the increased number of sicker emergency department patients are in fact waiting list patients who cannot wait any longer; and
- (3) notes that the Minister's only response to the crisis in our hospitals after seven years of government is inquiries, reports, reviews and excuses.

It is not a problem for me to support this motion, which states the obvious. Having a number of years of experience working in accident and emergency departments, I am appalled to know that people are now waiting such extraordinarily long periods to be admitted to a hospital bed. The fact that a 91-year-old woman was forced to wait 22 hours for a ward bed at Manly hospital is absolutely disgusting and lacking in consideration for the comfort and wellbeing of the elderly lady concerned. The current hospital system is overloaded and splitting at the seams. Where are all the wonderful solutions that have had hours of work devoted to them by many people in this State? At the moment it is too little, too late.

Over the past financial year 62,000 patients have been forced to wait longer than eight hours for admission to a ward. Yet the Carr Government has closed 4,320 hospital beds since 1995—2,748 of them in the past five years. Anyone who has had an experience in an accident and emergency unit—where they have first had to wait for attention in an often overcrowded waiting room and where final attention by the nursing and medical staff still might take considerable time once progress has been made onto a trolley bed in one of the cubicles—will have some empathy with the elderly lady and her tolerance of a deplorable situation in our hospital system today. Even for young people, the trolleys are uncomfortable and the environment is noisy. There is no privacy while lying on such a bed in a corridor waiting to go to a ward. Dignity goes out the door.

I have it on good authority that in some accident and emergency units the staff to patient ratio—that is, if one can actually get into the unit—is downright dangerous. Medical directors are phoning their chief executive officers and telling them that they cannot take one more patient. The answers these overworked doctors are getting probably should not be repeated. On many occasions the accident and emergency staff are told to cope. Stress levels are understandably high, and this is likely to lead to mistakes being made, to add to the mistakes that already occur. This year to date, 36 per cent of all patients entering a teaching hospital via an accident and emergency department waited more than eight hours after active treatment commenced to be properly admitted, whether to a ward, the intensive care unit or an operating suite.

In our major metropolitan hospitals 32 per cent of patients waited under similar circumstances. That is not acceptable. I remember well listening to the Premier make the promise—literally signed in blood—at the 1995 State election that he would resign if waiting lists were not halved. Incredibly, those waiting lists have now more than doubled! Longer waiting lists and fewer beds do not equate to good or better health. The Minister for Health thinks that accident and emergency departments are receiving sicker patients, and more of them, and that accounts for the current disastrous state of the waiting times, these patients are probably sicker because they had to wait.

Plans to downgrade a number of smaller district hospitals do not help. Instead of more care for the sicker and more numerous patients, there are fewer services. It simply does not make sense. We have had enough lip service, reports, and reviews. With all the effort and costs that have gone into evaluating every facet of health care in this State, surely something can be done to improve the parlous condition of the health care system. Providers of health care are doing their level best, often under huge pressure with too few staff members. The Carr Government is not providing solutions, and the Minister for Health is avoiding the answers to the hard questions. This cannot go on. New South Wales needs more beds and more solutions, and it needs them now.

Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [12.06 p.m.]: I oppose the motion moved by the honourable member for North Shore and support the amendment moved by the Minister. It is a long time since I have seen such an ill-timed and ill-directed motion as that which is currently before the House. The motion is an extraordinary litany about the Government simply conducting inquiries and producing reports, reviews and excuses; providing no solutions; and doing nothing. In regard to emergency departments, perhaps the mover of the motion should have looked at the budget papers and for once moved the Liberal Party focus away from northern Sydney and towards south-western Sydney. I am delighted to inform the House yet again, as I did last night, that \$1.4 million has been allocated to the emergency and trauma section of Liverpool Hospital.

A \$9.1 million program will be rolled out over a number of years. The first \$1.4 million was allocated in the State budget a couple of weeks ago. In that context, to come before the House today and rant and rave about no solutions and no capital expenditure, and say that all the Minister is doing is conducting inquiries and providing reports, reviews and excuses, is genuinely amazing. One is used to seeing extraordinary and amazing things in this place, but this is one of the more bizarre. Indeed, not only has that money been allocated, but the honourable member for Menai, the Minister for Health and I recently visited the emergency and trauma section at Liverpool Hospital. The staff were delighted at the extra money that has been allocated to reshape and redevelop that emergency section.

Mrs Skinner: How many ambulances were stuck outside?

Mr LYNCH: In response to the interjection from the honourable member for North Shore, no ambulances were stuck outside the hospital on that day. No doubt, not only the hospital staff but the people of Liverpool and the people of south-western Sydney generally are delighted at the capital investment in expanding the emergency section at Liverpool Hospital. In the context that the best the Opposition can do is to say that no solutions are being provided, I am delighted to say that many solutions are being provided—1.4 million of them this year, and 9.1 million over a lengthier period. It is simply bizarre that in that context the best the Opposition can do is say that the Minister is coming up with reviews and excuses.

What is even more significant is that this is the continuation of a trend that this Government has developed over a number of years to redirect resources to south-western Sydney to put health services and resources where the population is. Over recent years Liverpool Hospital has developed oncology services, cardiac surgery services and a range of other medical specialties which it did not previously have. People who need treatment for cancer no longer have to travel from Liverpool to Royal Prince Alfred Hospital; they can get the treatment at Liverpool Hospital. First-rate cardiac surgery is now being performed at Liverpool Hospital. Hugo Bonasso, the first heart patient dealt with at Liverpool Hospital, was delighted that he did not have to travel to the other side of Sydney for his health care.

That is the result of a clear policy to redirect resources to south-western Sydney, to put health services where the people are. The best the Opposition can do is say that the Government is doing nothing, that it is simply conducting reviews and making excuses. It would be a pleasant change if its arguments were occasionally informed by empirical data. I suspect that members opposite are wearing blinkers: once they get away from north-eastern Sydney they do not seem to know what is happening in the health sector. It is a great pity they do not represent the entire State, rather than get caught up in their own sectarian interests.

I have referred to the emergency and trauma unit of Liverpool Hospital. Generally the greater western area of Sydney received a 9.4 per cent increase in the Health budget this year. The allocation to the South Western Sydney Area Health Service was increased by \$42 million to \$552 million. I note that despite all her passion the honourable member for Hornsby could occupy only four of her five minutes in her contribution to this debate. Both she and the honourable member for North Shore should have directed their minds to the comments of the Minister for Health. They can rant and rave as much as they like, but how will they change their policy? What change will there be in the capital allocation? Will they take away the money that we have given to Liverpool Hospital? They have waffled, ranted and raved but they have not produced one precise concrete proposal. I assume from the antics of the honourable member for North Shore that the money will be taken away from Liverpool Hospital and redirected back to her bailiwick.

Mr MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [12.11 p.m.]: I clearly remember the Premier's promise when he came to office in 1995—it was written in blood—that he would halve hospital waiting lists. I move:

That the amendment be amended by the addition of the following words:

"and

- (1) notes that 26 per cent of emergency department patients waited longer than eight hours for a ward bed this financial year, compared with 17 per cent in 1998.
- (2) calls on the Minister for Health to indicate how many of the increased number of sicker Emergency Department patients are in fact waiting list patients who cannot wait any longer.
- (3) notes that the Minister's only response to the crisis in our hospitals after seven years of Government is inquiries, reports, reviews and excuses."

To back up my statement about waiting lists, I indicate to the House that the records show that waiting lists in my electorate of Wagga Wagga have escalated. In 1995, when the Premier came to power, there were 1,276 people on the waiting list, and in April 2002 there were 1,481. In the Albury electorate there were 371 people on

the waiting list in 1995 and there are now 1,155. People have been waiting 12 months or more for elective surgery in rural hospitals: In Albury there were four in 1995 and in April 2002 there are 375. That is an increase of 371 people waiting for elective surgery. In my electorate there were 77 in 1995 and in April 2002 there were 241—an increase of 164 people waiting for elective surgery. This is not appropriate; it is an absolute disgrace!

I have spoken in this House on many occasions about this issue. I have written to the Minister. Almost daily I send him complaints from constituents who are waiting to have operations in our hospitals within the Greater Murray Area Health Service. I have had discussions with ministerial staff and have pounded the issue. I have attempted to work very closely with the Minister to provide solutions. I suggested that nurses be trained at Wagga Wagga TAFE so that registered nurses, enrolled nurses and assistants in nursing can be trained in the city. It is more than 12 months since we first discussed that matter, and I have still not received a response.

If the Minister is serious about solving the problem he must allocate funds and work with our critical support unit and TAFE, and we can help solve the nursing crisis that is constantly referred to as the reason patients cannot get into hospital beds. Only four days I received a phone call from a woman who did not want to be named or cause trouble because she was so grateful that she was finally treated in the base hospital after spending two days on a trolley in a hallway. I certainly do not dispute that the medical personnel are angels. The treatment that they give patients is first class, and I support them 110 per cent. I supported nurses in my region when they protested for better wages and conditions, and I support them now. The Government needs to do more to encourage nurses back into the work force and to value their services.

I refer now to the crisis in regard to anaesthetists. I attended a meeting in Temora so that I could discuss with the Minister the problems with regard to anaesthetists. The anaesthetists agreed to take part in a study. When it was decided that initiatives would be presented to help rural anaesthetists, the deal was given to everyone across New South Wales. Still today separate deals are being done in Albury-Wodonga and Wagga Wagga. Once again our anaesthetists are at a disadvantage and are being treated unfairly. Doctors ring my office to complain about lack of access to surgery. They want to operate but cannot do so because the surgeries are closed. Recently the acute care ward of the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital was flooded with water. Money needs to be invested in that hospital to repair its rundown state. Holbrook District Multipurpose Centre is in need of more money to complete its acute care department. This third-world building is in need of attention. The Minister should try to help resolve this crisis.

Mr ASHTON (East Hills) [12.15 p.m.]: I speak against the motion moved by the honourable member for North Shore, and support the amendment moved by the Minister for Health. Honourable members must understand that if any crisis is occurring in our State hospitals it is not just the responsibility of the State Government. If the State Government received a better allocation of funds from the Federal Government we would be able to do an even better job. The Federal Government is more interested in making sure that Dr Wooldridge can access his emails than it is in the New South Wales hospital system.

The Federal Government has decided to increase the price of prescriptions from something like \$23.80 to \$27 or \$28, which will mean that many people will not be able to access the drugs they need, and as they get sicker they will end up in emergency wards for treatment. I am cynical about the motion moved by the honourable member for North Shore. If she was fair dinkum she would contact her colleague, the honourable member for Benelong, before she moved such a motion in this House. To show that the Government is determined and on the front foot in relation to health, this motion was only moved by the honourable member for North Shore yesterday, and instead of putting it at the end of the business paper the Government agreed to bring on this debate.

Mrs Skinner: Bring on all the other ones.

Mr ASHTON: We brought on this matter because it is much more important than the other 60 notices of motion on the business paper. We wanted to see if the honourable member for North Shore wanted to debate this matter or whether she just wanted to get cheap headlines. The Government has expended record amounts on Royal North Shore Hospital. As the honourable member for Liverpool said, some of that money could be spent in Liverpool, Bankstown or Camden, but it is going to Royal North Shore, and Hornsby Hospital will virtually be rebuilt. In relation to the increase in mental health funding, John Howard lives in the 1950s, when no-one had a mental health problem, except perhaps him. Nowadays so much more is being done in that area.

Mrs Skinner: Point of order: That is a very inappropriate comment to make about our Prime Minister. I ask that you ask the honourable member to withdraw it.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! I ask the honourable member for East Hills to withdraw the comment.

Mr ASHTON: I am happy to withdraw the comment. The Prime Minister would not understand that mental health is an issue because in the 1950s it was not recognised. If members of the Opposition are so worried about protecting the reputation of the Prime Minister in this place, they should get him to do something about health rather than take cheap points of order to protect his prime ministership. Of course emergency departments will at times suffer crises because people have to use them at different times. Recently, as a result of an accident at Bankstown, five young people were very badly injured and a couple were killed. Of course the emergency department was flooded that night with very serious cases. There may have been 10 other people waiting, but that is why we have triage nurses to grade them.

People cannot simply turn up at an emergency department and declare that they are emergency cases. Professional staff are employed to make that assessment. I do not know the background of the honourable member for North Shore—I think it was in journalism—that makes her an expert on health and emergency cases in our public health system. The shortage of nurses is a worldwide phenomenon. I place no credibility at all in the figures plucked from the air by the honourable member for North Shore. They relate what is happening in the middle of winter. If she were a good journalist, she would know that winter is always the worst time for health care.

As the Minister said, 500,000 people are being treated. The Government is on the front foot on this issue. It is not afraid to deal with it in the Parliament. The first thing the Howard Government did was dismantle the dental health scheme. It is not interested in older people. It wants their votes, but will not look after their teeth. It uses scare tactics to get their votes. Let us recognise the good work being done by our nurses and doctors. Let us keep on the front foot on this issue and get behind the people who are doing the very best they can under difficult conditions. The Federal Government should allocate more money to support the State budget, instead of attempting to serve its own political ends by blaming the New South Wales Government and attempting to punish it in the months leading up to the State election.

Mrs SKINNER (North Shore) [12.20 p.m.], in reply: The Coalition is very happy to support the amendment to the amendment and congratulates the hard-working nurses and doctors in our hospitals. That amendment is entirely appropriate, as I said when speaking to the motion. However the Minister's amendment insults patients, doctors, nurses and members of the community who continue to raise these issues as matters of primary concern. I will refer to just some of the comments made by Government members and the extraordinary points they raised.

The honourable member for East Hills made appalling comments that implied the Prime Minister was not interested in mental health. The Commonwealth Government, along with Victoria and other States, set up Beyond Blue, the Institute for Depression. Did New South Wales respond to the Commonwealth offer? No. The Premier of New South Wales said the initiative was not worthwhile. The Commonwealth has set the lead in this regard. New South Wales is the worst State in Australia when it comes to mental health funding, particularly funding of non-government organisations to enable them to continue their valuable contribution. But that is not the main purpose of this bill. An upper House inquiry is continuing into mental health. I look forward, as do many others, to the results of that inquiry.

The Minister made a comment about category one triage. The honourable member for East Hills spoke about spurious figures. My information comes from the NSW Health web site and what it refers to as an emergency department performance. It is dated 24 May. Obviously, it has not been updated. It reveals that 891 of 108,000 patients were in triage one—a minuscule proportion. In the next category are more than 7,000. The next category has nearly 32,000. The next category has 45,000. Those categories represent the bulk of patients, and those are the patients that the Government is failing miserably by not meeting benchmarks. These patients are not able to get access to hospitals through the book program.

Interestingly, annual reports of the Department of Health show that, for example, in 1998-99 the number of people admitted to public hospitals—the book patients, the elective surgery patients—was 1.348 million, and in 2000-01 it was 1.32 million. In other words, the number of patients admitted to hospital decreased. That means more and sicker patients are not getting treatment in hospital. Where do those patients go? Of course, they go to emergency departments. As the honourable member for Wagga Wagga said, the motion simply states the facts. There is nothing contentious about it. I moved the motion to highlight the concerns of the community, the Coalition and many members on the Government benches who tell me privately

of incidents regarding their hospitals. We heard one famous instance of a member trying to obtain speedier treatment for a patient. We are talking about patients who wait 30 hours in an emergency department. This particular warmhearted member intervened to get the person treated more quickly.

Those are the sorts of things that members of Parliament are being asked to do all the time. But some members opposite are blind to the reality. They mindlessly defend the Minister and the Government. They abuse, most inappropriately, the Commonwealth Government, which has absolutely nothing to do with the delivery of hospital services. This was pointed out by none other than the Premier. The honourable member for East Hills insulted the Premier, who said that everybody knows it is the State Government's responsibility to deliver decent hospital care. The motion shows that that is not happening. I urge all honourable members to support the motion and to support the patients, nurses and other clinicians in our hospitals.

Question—That the amendment of the amendment be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 35

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

Noes, 48

Ms Andrews	Ms Harrison	Mrs Perry
Mr Aquilina	Mr Hickey	Mr Price
Mr Ashton	Mr Hunter	Dr Refshauge
Mr Bartlett	Mr Iemma	Ms Saliba
Ms Beamer	Mr Knowles	Mr W. D. Smith
Mr Black	Mr Lynch	Mr Stewart
Mr Brown	Mr Markham	Mr Tripodi
Miss Burton	Mr Martin	Mr Watkins
Mr Campbell	Mr McBride	Mr West
Mr Collier	Ms Meagher	Mr Whelan
Mr Crittenden	Ms Megarrity	Mr Woods
Mr Debus	Mr Mills	Mr Yeadon
Mr Face	Ms Moore	
Mr Gaudry	Mr Moss	
Mr Gibson	Mr Newell	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Greene	Mr Orkopoulos	Mr Anderson
Mrs Grusovin	Mr E. T. Page	Mr Thompson

Pair

Mr Souris

Ms Allan

Question resolved in the negative.

Amendment of amendment negated.

Amendment agreed to.

Motion as amended agreed to.

QUEANBEYAN DISTRICT HOSPITAL UPGRADE

Mr WEBB (Monaro) [12.35 p.m.]: I move:

That this House calls on the Government to immediately place the Queanbeyan District Hospital as the State's number one priority for upgrading, as:

- (1) the hospital currently has underutilised facilities;
- (2) the ability to offer medium-risk procedures and other general surgery would reverse the outflow of New South Wales patients to Australian Capital Territory health services; and
- (3) the current run-down condition of the hospital does not attract patients and staff to use the facility.

My motion is similar to the motion moved by the honourable member for North Shore with respect to emergency department patients. My motion relates to the run-down state of New South Wales public hospitals, waiting lists, poor working conditions for staff, general practitioners and specialists, and poor conditions for patients. The provision of adequate medical services is the responsibility of this Government. Over a lengthy period the people of Queanbeyan have called on the Government and the Minister for Health to address the declining condition, the poorly maintained state and the poor working conditions of the Queanbeyan District Hospital. Recently more than 800 people attended a public meeting in support of the hospital. I congratulate the people of Queanbeyan on coming out in force—the meeting was a strong demonstration of Queanbeyan people power. I also thank the hundreds of local residents who contacted my electorate office in support of the hospital. The underlying message from the people of Queanbeyan to the State Government is that they demand improved localised health services and facilities, hand-in-hand with better conditions for health service workers.

Other major issues discussed at the meeting included a call for better transport services for patients, especially for the elderly. There was also strong opposition to accessing certain health services in Goulburn and Bega, which are considerable distances from Queanbeyan, and to accessing vital health services in the Australian Capital Territory at a premium cost. Transport costs are a significant burden, particularly for elderly people who in some cases have had to pay \$60 in taxi fares to visit a doctor or a hospital in the Australian Capital Territory. I welcome the Government's commitment to build a \$10.5 million joint facility to accommodate mental health, community health, drug and alcohol services, and physiotherapy and occupational therapy facilities within the hospital's grounds. However, I am disappointed that no commitment has been made to upgrade the hospital which, in its present run-down and ramshackle state, does a disservice to both patients and hospital staff. Surely that reflects no credit on the Department of Health. I suggest that it would be a better long-term investment in Queanbeyan and a better use of taxpayers' money by the State Government if it were to upgrade the whole facility.

Given that the region's population of 41,000 is expected to dramatically increase during the next 10 to 15 years, making the region one of the fastest-growing areas in New South Wales, Queanbeyan and district residents should be able to depend on the Queanbeyan District Hospital to provide them with the care they need, close to home and when they need it. I have written to the Minister for Health asking him to visit Queanbeyan hospital, to discuss these concerns with the Queanbeyan Tallaganda Yarrowlumla Health Council and to immediately address this problem. This problem has got worse over the years. Earlier today we debated a motion moved by the honourable member for North Shore to congratulate all the doctors and nurses working in our hospitals. I congratulate all the specialists, doctors and nurses who work in Queanbeyan hospital and in the Queanbeyan area. I thank them for their commitment to providing the best health services that they are able to provide, even though Queanbeyan District Hospital is in a run-down state.

Regardless of the comments that were made by a Government member in debate on the motion moved by the honourable member for North Shore, the provision of health services is a State government issue. If the New South Wales Government is not providing necessary services in the Queanbeyan area it should give the money that it gets from the Federal Government to local bodies, which can then liaise with the Department of Health and get the job done to the satisfaction of the people who work in Queanbeyan hospital and in local hospitals across New South Wales. The Queanbeyan Tallaganda Yarrowlumla Health Council called on the Government to provide increase in geriatric beds for ageing population, upgraded obstetrics wing, expanded emergency department, expanded orthopaedic services, enhanced pathology services, additional cardiac and anaesthetic equipment, improved radiology services, and expanded community health services and dental health services.

I believe that the Government is addressing some of those issues. As I said earlier, I welcome the Government's commitment to mental health and other services. Queanbeyan has a population of 41,000, but that

population is increased on a regular basis by the many tourists who pass through the Australian Capital Territory and the Queanbeyan area. As a large proportion of people in the Australian Capital Territory are currently on waiting lists for clinical procedures, the health system in that area is not able to cope with the demand for services. A fully integrated, maintained and enhanced hospital in Queanbeyan that provides medium-risk and low-risk surgery and clinical procedures could offer those services to people living in the Australian Capital Territory, significantly reversing the flow of patients and money from the Australian Capital Territory into New South Wales.

A hospital with adequate working conditions would enable the Department of Health to train and retain nurses, thus arresting the flow of nurses into the Australian Capital Territory. I believe that Queanbeyan hospital was a training hospital for doctors. A number of speakers addressed a community meeting that was held on 8 April in Queanbeyan. At that meeting speakers from all over the Queanbeyan district called on the Government to address a number of problems. Deb Stevens, a speaker from Peppertree Lodge—the confused and disoriented elderly dementia care unit—referred to the erosion in the capacity of the hospital and said that improved services and a new hospital were required. He referred also to inadequate staffing and said that, even though nurses from the Southern Area Health Service were giving more than the call of duty, patients' lives were being put at risk. We must look after staff at our hospitals, especially nurses.

Other speakers at the meeting queried the number of beds that were being provided at the hospital. A member of the Queanbeyan Heart Support Group—a group comprising 90 people—referred to problems that have been experienced by that group in accessing rehabilitation services at the hospital. That speaker also said that the Government should give back to the community old-style nursing services and care, and that the buck stops with the New South Wales Minister for Health. Services are stretched to the limit because of the population increase to which I referred earlier. Another speaker told the meeting that he was opposed to the closing down of Queanbeyan District Hospital. Dental services are not available at the hospital. People are waiting for five weeks before they are able to receive treatment. In an earlier debate reference was made to the length of time that people have to wait for services. This Government is doing nothing to address the waiting list problem. A 96-year-old woman, a resident of Kawaree Nursing Home, was taken at 4.00 a.m. by ambulance from Queanbeyan hospital to a hospital in the Australian Capital Territory. She was then returned to Queanbeyan hospital as no services were available.

Mr Knowles: Which services—an MRI or a CAT scan?

Mr WEBB: It was nothing as serious as that. There was just a lack of basic medical services. This Government is not able to provide our constituents with basic medical services. I have brought to the attention of the Minister for Health the crisis in Queanbeyan and the run-down state of Queanbeyan hospital. I have written to the Minister and invited him to come to Queanbeyan and inspect the services. However, I am yet to receive a reply from the Minister. I referred earlier to the fact that residents in Queanbeyan have to pay \$60 in taxi fares to obtain health services in the Australian Capital Territory. Queanbeyan hospital, which is located in south-east New South Wales, could be a good district recovery hospital. It could augment those services that are currently provided in Goulburn, Yass, Cooma, Bega, Bombala, Braidwood and the Australian Capital Territory. State and Territory governments could jointly provide health care services for the 400,000 people who live in those areas. There is some sort of confusion as to the number of beds that are available in Queanbeyan hospital. Wards have been closed down and theatres are operating at less than 25 per cent of their capacity. The people of Queanbeyan are concerned about the maintenance and the state of Queanbeyan hospital. I call on the Government to address those problems immediately.

Mr KNOWLES (Macquarie Fields—Minister for Health) [12.45 p.m.]: One of the great luxuries of being a backbench Opposition member is that one can make the most outlandish requests and demands and usually get a run in the local paper. This most outlandish motion that has been moved by the honourable member for Monaro places at risk the support of his own party. He is advocating, through his motion, that the Government should scrap every other capital works program, re-jig the State's entire health building program and make Queanbeyan District Hospital the State's number one priority. If this motion is carried I assure Opposition members that I will issue a press release stating that they voted against work that is scheduled for health facilities in their electorates because they decided to put everything else to one side and put Queanbeyan on the top of the list.

That is the luxury that is afforded to the mover of the motion. He can get away with that. He will issue a press release and he will feel good about the fact that he has had his day in Parliament. But the downside for all those who vote for his motion—and this is a guarantee—is that they will receive a press release in their

electorate stating that they have supported doing away with capital works programs. They will push their capital works programs further down the list and put them further back in time so that the health system can be re-jigged. That is not the way in which a government plans health services. It has to be done fairly and equitably. I will quote a statement made by someone who supports that principle:

There is no doubt about the fact that more money is being spent in providing health services in country New South Wales. Under the current formula, for example, the Northern Rivers and the Mid North Coast areas, two of the poorest areas in New South Wales, will receive within 2 per cent of their share of the health budget. Because of the certainty in budgeting this is an issue on which this Government should be congratulated.

None other than the Hon. Dr Brian Pezzutti in another place made that statement.

Mr Black: From a doctor.

Mr KNOWLES: The Hon. Dr Brian Pezzutti, an anaesthetist who is working in rural New South Wales, is underscoring our efforts to deliver a fair share of health resources on a proper, clinically constructed basis—as opposed to the honourable member for Monaro who wants the Government to play favourites just because he wants to get a headline in his local newspaper.

Mr Webb: It is my electorate.

Mr KNOWLES: That is the great luxury that the honourable member has as a backbench member of the Opposition—a place where he will remain for years.

Mr Black: No, he will be knocked off.

Mr KNOWLES: He might well be gone. The honourable member is seeking only a quick headline, but it will place at risk projects in the electorates of members who vote for this motion. For the first time in the history of this State, the Government has delivered equity to rural New South Wales. This is the first time that the health dollars match the rural population. Twenty-eight per cent of the recurrent budget is going to 28 per cent of the population, a plan that we announced three years ago and said would take three years to achieve. We have achieved just that with the 2002-03 budget. That is something the former Coalition Government could never do, and would never do, but it is what we will continue to do.

The great hope for Queanbeyan is illustrated in an article on the front page of today's *Canberra Times*. The article states that Mick Reid, the former Director-General of the Department of Health, has delivered the health plan for the Australian Capital Territory, which, from my discussions with him, incorporates a better service network and a clinical program linking the large hospital in the Australian Capital Territory with the outlying district hospitals, such as Queanbeyan hospital. That is the correct way to go about planning clinical services.

The news for Queanbeyan is very good. Contrary to the scaremongering and opportunistic politics of a backbench Opposition local member—and I concede that that is part of the honourable member for Monaro's job—the truth is very different. I will list some of the services that are being addressed. A clinical services plan has been developed, and it links in with a proper and mutually acceptable cross-border agreement. I congratulate Mick Reid on the work he has done. The plan has been endorsed by visiting medical officers, the local Division of General Practice and senior managers. That is why we have allocated in the 2002-03 budget \$820,000 to improve access and enhance the provision of orthopaedic services at Queanbeyan hospital, as well as at Bega and Cooma hospitals. But, to provide more specialised services, there needs to be a certain level of demand. If there is not a high enough demand, the quality of health care can suffer.

The services have to be linked to the large hospital in Canberra, which is 15 minutes away, and with a properly structured clinical services plan. That allows us to begin to reverse the flow and invest in the future of Queanbeyan hospital—something we are committed to doing. But we will do it properly, and we will not compromise other services at Goulburn, Cooma, Bega, Lismore, Broken Hill, or any of the smaller towns such as Henty, to satisfy the needs of the honourable member for Monaro, who, whilst doing his job, is trying to push one barrow ahead of the overall health needs of the State. The Government has provided funding to expand same-day gynaecology services and establish same-day urology services. It is planned to increase general medicine, routine and post-acute cardiology, and respiratory medicine services. It is planned to improve diagnostic endoscopy and gastroenterology services. As a first step in the flow reversals, five general beds were reopened in February this year, contrary to the claims of the honourable member for Monaro. In January last year a new manager was appointed to Queanbeyan hospital.

The professor of emergency medicine at Canberra hospital was brought in to examine clinical practices and services in the emergency department. Formal criteria for admission of paediatric patients have been developed, together with clinical pathways for their subsequent care. Queanbeyan hospital is the beneficiary of funds under the Rural Health Minor Works Program. In the current financial year it received \$450,000 for upgrades to the emergency department, including a two-bed, short-stay paediatric area, and improvements to patient accommodation. The honourable member for Monaro should not run down his hospital for his own political gain. He should recognise that many things are being done properly and structurally with the involvement of the clinical work force and the recognition that just down the road, in the Australian Capital Territory, is a substantial teaching hospital and the hospitals need to be linked. As is the case with Westmead and Auburn hospitals, Royal North Shore and Hornsby or Ryde hospitals, it is important that hospitals work together.

To demand that Queanbeyan hospital be given precedence above all other hospitals denies the fact that in medicine it does not work that way. It may have worked that way at one time, when every little hospital was its own little island, its own little silo, its own little castle, and it did what it liked, but these days doctors do not work that way. They have joint appointments, they use technology, and they make sure they link up together. The future of Queanbeyan hospital is very bright because it fits into a proper structure. Last year Queanbeyan hospital had a budget of \$8.8 million and a staff of 140. There have been no cuts to that budget. New high-tech equipment has been purchased, as well as a new mobile X-ray machine, a new cardiac monitor, a new diathermy machine, and new monitors for the high-dependency unit. Further purchases include laparoscopic and arthroscopic equipment, which will be used to improve surgical services. Last year there were false claims that an ultrasound machine worth \$100,000 was being used for only half an hour a day. The fact is that that was a service operated by a private operator; it was not a public facility.

The negative nark that we sometimes get needs to be balanced by the good things that are happening in health care. The honourable member for Monaro needs to make opportunistic points to maintain his position. But the people wake up to that. They understand what a whinger and whiner he is; they understand someone who does not have a plan and does not have a policy. Sadly, that is what they have got in the honourable member for Monaro. He can huff and puff, and fight a good fight, but in the end it is a Labor Government that is delivering services and equity—not the National Party in the bush. It is a Labor Government that has made sure that every part of this State receives its fair share of funds, and it is a Labor Government that will be doing that for years to come.

Mr Webb: What about the dental waiting lists?

Mr KNOWLES: The honourable member mentions dental waiting lists. One thing that John Howard can never be proud of is that he gutted dental services and blew out waiting lists for those services, for which this Government has provided additional funding this year. I thank the honourable member for raising dental waiting lists, because it is the one thing that can be fixed. A national dental program would address that superbly.

Ms HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [12.55 p.m.]: I am delighted to hear the Minister's contribution to the debate, and I look forward to receiving more details from him in relation to linking Queanbeyan hospital with Australian Capital Territory services. We have tried to debate the issue of cross-border anomalies on several occasions in this place. In fact, in 2000 the honourable member for Ballina raised the issue by way of a private member's bill. However, the bill was knocked out cold by the Labor Government. I speak to the motion moved by the honourable member for Monaro, who is an extremely hard-working, active and good community representative. In passing I mention that during the Minister's contribution he made a slur on the honourable member for Monaro when he said that the honourable member was politicising this issue. However, I draw to the Minister's attention that the Queanbeyan Tallaganda Yarrowlunla Health Council and many other community groups have been lobbying the honourable member for Monaro in relation to this matter, in much the same way that I am lobbied by the Southern Slopes Health Council and many other community groups about hospitals in my electorate, such as Goulburn, Yass, Boorowa, Crookwell, and Tumut hospitals.

It is important to remember that the honourable member for Monaro is representing his constituency, and he is doing that very well. He made representations to the Minister but, as we have heard in the debate, the Minister did not reply to those representations. I, too, have had my fair share of problems in getting answers from the Department of Health after I have made representations to the Minister. In fact, the problem is not isolated to the Department of Health; it applies to many portfolios, including education and planning. I understand that Ministers are extremely busy, but some matters have been outstanding for 12 months. When I complain to the relevant Minister's office I am either told that the documentation has been misplaced or given some other reason for the Minister not replying to my representations.

I understand that things like that happen, but it is unsatisfactory that members do not receive, in a timely fashion, correspondence in relation to issues that community groups raise with them. The honourable member for Monaro has experienced this problem, as I have in my capacity as the member for Burrinjuck. Indeed, I am sure all members of this place have experienced it. It is unsatisfactory that there is not a tight turnaround system in place in relation to responding to members' representations to Ministers. When a member takes the trouble to make personal representations to the Minister it is extremely frustrating when the Minister does not reply to those representations in a timely fashion. We all recognise that it takes some time to reply to such representations, but often it takes an enormous amount of time to get a decent response.

The honourable member for Monaro mentioned that the population of Queanbeyan is expected to increase greatly in the near future. It is one of the fastest growing areas in New South Wales, if not the fastest. I was unaware that the Minister intended to make an announcement today, but the fewer the services provided at the local hospital, the greater the pressures on surrounding hospitals. New South Wales taxpayers' money is used to pay for patients to be taken from Queanbeyan to the Australian Capital Territory [ACT] for treatment. There are cross-border anomalies in a number of portfolios. Health is but one.

There are a number of excellent hospitals in the ACT: the Canberra Hospital, which is the old Woden Valley Hospital, the Calvary Hospital, and several private hospitals, including John James Hospital. It is important that cross-border anomalies, which affect the people of this State, be addressed. Education is another portfolio in which there are cross-border anomalies: many students travel across the border every day. The honourable member for Ballina raised the issue of cross-border anomalies in a private member's bill. The problem has not been addressed and those anomalies will continue until the Government is prepared to address them properly.

Mr BLACK (Murray-Darling) [1.00 p.m.]: On behalf of Country Labor I take great pleasure in supporting city Labor on this matter. I will conclude this part of my contribution by saying that it is great to know that the only coalition that works in this place happens to be on this side of the House: the coalition between city Labor and Country Labor.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! It being shortly after 1.00 p.m., pursuant to sessional orders debate is interrupted.

[Mr Deputy-Speaker left the chair at 1.01 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

MINISTRY

Mr CARR: In the absence of the Minister for Community Services the Minister for Public Works and Services will take questions on her behalf.

INFLUENZA

Ministerial Statement

Mr KNOWLES (Macquarie Fields—Minister for Health) [2.17 p.m.]: In early June an outbreak of influenza was reported involving an estimated 150 students at a 900-student boarding school in North Sydney. Some students tested positive for influenza B. The latest outbreak confirms an increase in laboratory diagnoses of influenza since May and a continuing increase through June. Consequently, the Chief Health Officer has issued a reminder not to underestimate the danger of influenza. In extreme circumstances influenza can be fatal. The current Australian influenza vaccines contain A/Moscow and B/Sichuan components, which remain a good match for the circulating viruses of these types. However, the vaccines do not contain B/Hong Kong strains. They were not anticipated by the World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre for Influenza Reference and Research in Melbourne and the Australian influenza vaccine formulation recommendations that were made for the 2002 winter.

Hong Kong flu has been absent from most parts of the world for more than 10 years. However, in recent days it has been identified in some laboratory diagnoses. Health officials have advised that influenza B viruses generally have a lesser impact on the elderly and high-risk adult groups when compared with influenza A, which has been predominant in Australia to date. However, because children under the age of about 10 have never been exposed to Hong Kong B, they can be particularly susceptible, and commonsense precautions must be taken, including maintaining fluids, staying at home when ill and, in severe cases, consulting the family doctor. Public health officials will continue to monitor influenza throughout the coming winter.

Mrs SKINNER (North Shore) [2.19 p.m.]: Influenza B is serious. On behalf of my colleagues I ask the Minister for information about which school he is talking about. He said a school in the northern Sydney area had been affected. Given that the school may be in the electorate of one of my colleagues, I seek additional information from the Minister about it. I also ask the Minister to provide more timely information about communicable diseases. In every edition of the public health bulletin a table is produced. However, those tables are out of date and that makes it difficult to keep abreast of what diseases are prevalent and where improvements are being made. A number of improvements have been made in the fight against childhood diseases as a result of immunisation campaigns instigated by the Federal Department of Health. All States participated, but there are some unusual glitches in the statistics. Not having the table in front of me, Q fever is one that springs to mind. I was not given any warning that the Minister intended to raise this matter. The Coalition will support any initiatives or suggestions from the Chief Health Officer about vaccinations to prevent influenza. I seek from the Minister details of the outbreak and a response in relation to my request for more timely advice about communicable diseases.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Mr SPEAKER: I welcome Emmanuele De Libero, the Mayor of San Lorenzo in Campagna, Italy, to the gallery.

PETITIONS

North Head Quarantine Station

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

Bank Services

Petition asking the House to make banks provide a basic service for all and to make arrangements for the aged and the disabled, received from **Ms Andrews**.

Mandatory Minimum Penalties

Petition praying that mandatory minimum penalties be introduced into legislation, received from **Mr Merton**.

National Parks and Wildlife Service Prosecutions

Petition asking that the National Parks and Wildlife Service be directed to redress the injustice suffered by the Bacic family and to ensure that future prosecutions under the National Parks and Wildlife Act are properly and responsibly based, received from **Mr Rozzoli**.

Manly JetCat Services

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

Manly Traffic Arrangements

Petition requesting urgent improvements to the Seaforth roundabout at the top of Sydney Road, Manly, received from **Mr Barr**.

Northern Beaches Traffic Arrangements

Petition requesting an additional lane from Manly Road, Balgowlah, to Ourimbah Road, Mosman, including the widening of the Spit Bridge, received from **Mr Barr**.

Lane Cove Tunnel Works

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

Cammeray Traffic Arrangements

Petition praying that pedestrian traffic signals be installed at Raleigh Plaza on Miller Street, Cammeray, and that the 1997 traffic study be implemented, received from **Mr Collins**.

Bus Route 321

Petition asking for extension of bus route 321 from Vacluse to beyond Bondi Junction, received from **Mr Debnam**.

Main Road 241

Petition praying for an increase in funding to local government authorities to allow them to properly maintain Main Road 241, received from **Ms Hodgkinson**.

John Fisher Park

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

Old-growth Forests Protection

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

Ovine Johne's Disease Program

Petition praying for deregulation of the current ovine Johne's disease program and its replacement with a fair and workable alternative to facilitate trade and alleviate the social issues crippling the New South Wales sheep industry, received from **Ms Hodgkinson**.

Circus Animals

Petition praying for opposition to the suffering of wild animals and their use in circuses, received from **Ms Moore**.

White City Site Rezoning Proposal

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

Beat Policing

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

Casino Policing

Petition requesting increased police numbers at Casino and that the police station be manned 24 hours per day, received from **Mr George**.

Cronulla Police Station Upgrading

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

Surry Hills Policing

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

Malabar Policing

Petition praying that the House note the concern of Malabar residents at the closure of Malabar Police Station and praying that the station be reopened and staffed by locally based and led police, received from **Mr Tink**.

Wentworthville Police Station

Petition asking that any move to scale back or close Wentworthville Police Station be opposed, received from **Mr Tink**.

Monaro Policing

Petition asking that a police officer be appointed to frequently patrol rural areas of the Monaro and surrounding regions, received from **Mr Webb**.

COMMITTEE ON THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN AND THE POLICE INTEGRITY COMMISSION**Report**

Mr Lynch, as Chairman, tabled the report entitled "Sixth General Meeting with the Commissioner for the Police Integrity Commission", dated June 2002.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

POLICE KNIFE SEARCH STATISTICS

Mr BROGDEN: My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain why police whistleblower Mark Fenlon has not been formally interviewed six months after he met and raised concerns with the Minister for Police that statistics on knife searches were being falsified? Will the Premier refer this matter to the Police Integrity Commission for direct and immediate independent investigation?

Mr CARR: Anyone can make a reference to the Police Integrity Commission. The Leader of the Opposition can make a reference. The police constable himself can make a reference.

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

Mr CARR: First of all, credit ought to be given to this Government for introducing the toughest knife laws in Australia. Credit ought to be given to the police of this State for using those knife laws to good effect. In fact, I am not aware of a single criticism from the Ombudsman of the way the police have used this significant accretion in police power. It is our Government which gave the police the power.

Mr Brogden: Why hasn't the whistleblower been interviewed?

Mr CARR: Why don't you say something constructive for a change? Why don't you produce a single policy? How unedifying was it for the whole of the Parliament that last night—

Mr Brogden: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. I asked the Premier why whistleblower Mark Fenlon has not been interviewed six months after he met with the police Minister.

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

Mr CARR: Wouldn't you think you would get a constructive policy from them on something? No wonder there was a remonstrance in Parliament last night between the chief of staff of the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Coffs Harbour with unprecedented scenes of conflict spilling into the very corridors of this Parliament. Even hardened veterans of parliamentary conflict going back to the time of Jack

Lang were affrighted by what they saw in the corridors as the member for Coffs Harbour took it out on the chief of staff of the Leader of the Opposition. Enough of these distractions! Let's get back to the knife laws. Straighten it up, gentlemen, straighten it up! I am proud of the fact that we gave the police power to stop anyone on a street and remove a knife. In seven years in government the Coalition never contemplated giving police that power.

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

Mr CARR: We gave it to them, and without a single constructive thing to say about police powers the Leader of the Opposition is trying to discredit the law that we passed in this place. If anyone has got a complaint about the police they should go straight to the Police Integrity Commission. That is an independent body established—again, I might say, by this Government—to hear complaints about anyone who thinks that anyone in the Police Service is doing the wrong thing. That is where someone aggrieved with police action should go with the relevant information and details. It is remarkable that since this Government invested police with those powers, they have used those powers to good effect, with no criticism, to the best of my knowledge, from the Ombudsman about any infringement of civil liberties. Again the House will note that a negative, carping Opposition on the sidelines, without a single constructive policy on police management, is trying to discredit a very positive Government initiative that enjoys full public support.

COMPUTERS IN SCHOOLS PROGRAM

Mr CRITTENDEN: My question without notice is to the Minister for Education and Training. What is the latest information on the Government's Computers in Schools Program and related matters?

Mr WATKINS: The 2002-03 budget demonstrates the extent of this Government's commitment to improve technology in our schools, particularly in government schools. Over the next four years \$963 million will be spent on technology in our schools and TAFE colleges. Today I can inform the House about three key initiatives in the next part of our plan. This is the rollout of another 11,250 computers to government schools, starting this month—the implementation of a new policy that will see every new computer complete with a lock-down security device and a \$6 million increase in funding to allow the upgrade of cabling in government schools.

Nearly seven years have passed since the launch of this Government's Computers in Schools Program. We have achieved a great deal in that time. Ninety thousand new centrally-funded computers have been delivered into our schools. Two-thirds of those, 60,000, have already been replaced under a three-year lease deal to ensure the most up-to-date technology is available for our school students. We have led the world in connecting every school to the Internet, and work is well under way to increase Internet speed up to 30-fold, with requests for quotations for a system-wide upgrade issued on 4 June. Today I inform the House that the next phase of the computer rollout begins this week. Under this phase, 1,462 schools will receive a total of 11,250 computers. This is part of the extra 25,000 centrally-funded computers to be provided by June next year. From today, departmental officials will be visiting schools and advising them of their additional entitlements.

Schools to receive computers under this phase will be those that need them most. They will be schools whose computer-to-student ratio is currently below the State average. The new formula that has been worked out in consultation with districts and school principals uses current enrolment figures and the number of Computer in Schools Program machines that have been already delivered to the school. In short, we wanted a new formula designed to ensure that every school, wherever it is, gets its fair share. An example might help to make this clear. The February enrolment census showed a large western Sydney high school had an enrolment of 900 students. Under previous phases of the computer rollout, the school had received 81 computers. Under this phase, 18 extra computers will be provided, to dramatically improve the computer-to-student ratio.

I should stress that although the new formula is designed to ensure an equitable distribution, no school will lose computers under it—even schools that have more computers than the formula suggests. On the contrary, all schools will be able to keep all the computers they have, and at the end of the lease they will be able to hang onto excess computers, boosting the local ratio even further. This phase will be completed by October. The remaining 25,000 will be rolled out before the end of the 2002-03 financial year. For obvious security reasons, I am unwilling to provide a school-by-school or even a district-by-district breakdown of where those computers are going, I can inform the House only in broad terms. The Far North Coast will receive 655 new computers; the Central Coast, the Hunter and mid North Coast will receive 2,194 computers; the greater Sydney and Blue Mountains area will receive 5,898; the Illawarra and southern New South Wales 1,537, and the Central West and western New South Wales 968.

Under the plan, schools have the discretion to decide what sort of equipment they wish to buy—desktop computers, laptop computers, servers, or any combination of those. This means schools will be able to buy the equipment they need to supplement equipment they already have. When this Government came to office in 1995 the average computer-to-student ratio was one computer to 22 students. The ratio today is one to six, with more than 125,000 computers in schools, including those locally funded through parents and citizens organisations. This latest rollout of computer entitlements under the Computers in Schools Program will improve the ratio even further. When the latest round is distributed, the statewide average will be one computer to every 5.6 students.

While getting computers to our schools is a major initiative, one problem we face is keeping them there. Computer theft is a major security issue for many of our schools. Last financial year was the worst year we have had, with more than 2,300 computers stolen. Although stolen computers are replaced through insurance, their theft causes great disruption to our schools and imposes a heavy financial burden on taxpayers through rising insurance premiums. That is why, as part of the Government's comprehensive plan to improve school security—a plan that includes fences, security patrols and the establishment of the new Safety and Security Directorate under the command of former Assistant Commissioner Ike Ellis—I can announce a new initiative today.

From today, every new computer going into a government school will go with the new secure lock-down device to reduce the risk of theft. These lock-down devices are like a club lock that some people use to protect their major cards. They are a simple yet effective physical barrier to theft. They mean computer thieves will now have to take the desk if they want to take the computer, or they will need a chainsaw along on the mission. Obviously, this is just one part of the plan to improve physical security in our schools. I have asked Ike Ellis to look at a range of other anti computer theft initiatives in his new role, including liaison with local police about computer delivery. I have also directed the department that computers are not to be delivered to schools in the last two weeks of any term. Previously, this practice could mean that computers were left in their boxes over a school holiday period. My instruction should stop that practice from occurring.

The final initiative I announce today is an extremely important one for school communities. Honourable members will recall that the recent budget included \$24 million over the next four years to improve local networks and to provide better local technical support. The first part of this plan will see experts sent to all government schools to assess local computer networks. Today I announce that this \$24 million initiative will be supplemented with another \$6 million to help fix up school computer cabling and networks. Technical audits of local networks in schools will commence next month. The \$6 million that I announce today will help fix the problems that those experts find. Every school will receive funding, based on enrolments, to ensure that once the audit is done funds will be made available to each school. The smallest school will receive \$525 and the largest \$10,000. More computers, extra computer security, and better cabling and networks mean better information technology support for our schools and a better education for our children.

REGIONAL FOREST AGREEMENT

Mr SOURIS: My question is directed to the Premier. Given the statement to this House on 6 June by his Minister for Forestry that plans to create 10 new national parks were news to him, will the Premier give an ironclad guarantee that he will honour the existing regional forest agreements in the upper and lower north east?

Mr CARR: We created them; they are our agreements. We restructured forestry in this State.

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

Mr CARR: We created new forestry policies that ushered in a golden age of conservation while at the same time creating real prosperity and a secured supply for the timber industry.

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

Mr CARR: That is what we did.

Mr Souris: And what did we do?

Mr CARR: The Coalition left a shambles. I wish the Leader of the National Party would sort out what he can say with the Liberal Party. I noticed with interest that he was in Broken Hill at the weekend.

Mr Souris: Yes or no?

Mr CARR: Yes, the Leader of the National Party was in Broken Hill on the weekend but, no, he did not give himself much chance of winning the electorate. That is a yes/no answer. Our old friend the Leader of the National Party stated on the weekend that he would increase country roads funding by hypothecating the recent increase in the Sydney Harbour Bridge toll.

Mr Hartcher: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. The question was not about the highly successful conference of the National Party but about regional forest agreements, and the Premier is unable and unwilling to answer.

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

Mr CARR: My colleagues think that every aspect of my answer is highly relevant. Interrupted though I was by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I point out that the Leader of the National Party put out a policy on Tuesday—or, rather, I released it on his behalf on Tuesday. Within two hours, it was disowned in large measure by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Brogden: Let's talk about that.

Mr CARR: Let us get back to the answer, because that is what we all want. The demand is for a yes/no answer and it seems that the Leader of the National Party is saying yes, the increase in the harbour bridge toll will be hypothecated to country roads.

Mr Hartcher: No he didn't.

Mr CARR: That is exactly what he said.

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

Mr CARR: This is an extract from the Leader of the National Party's press release, and this is what he said, "... hypothecated revenue supplementation from the increase in the Sydney Harbour Bridge toll."

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

Mr CARR: It is very interesting that the press release states, "George Souris MP, Leader of the NSW National Party" and, I note, "Shadow Treasurer". In our workaday lives, we often overlook the fact that the Leader of the National Party is the shadow Treasurer. In this press release he states that the increase in the harbour bridge toll will be hypothecated to country roads funding. That is the yes part of the answer. But now we come to the no part of the answer. The Leader of the Opposition said on 4 June "We will abolish that toll." What a remarkable statement! Our other old friend, the honourable member for Lane Cove and previous Leader of the Opposition, said "The toll increase is discriminatory and it has to go." What a policy shambles! The Opposition is saying no to the increase in the harbour bridge toll, but its own shadow Treasurer, the Leader of the National Party is saying that they will have every cent of that, and hypothecate it for country roads. So in view of that, the Leader of the National Party should not insist on a yes or no answer from me. He should start giving yes/no answers to the questions that I put to him.

ABORIGINAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Mr MARKHAM: My question without notice is to the Premier. How is the Government working in partnership with the private sector to create jobs for young Aboriginal people?

Mr CARR: This is a terrific question and our colleague ought to be congratulated on the keen interest he takes in Aboriginal affairs. In particular, in relation to this aspect of the Aboriginal Affairs portfolio, the Government is working with the private sector to get jobs and traineeships for young Aboriginal people. Indeed this subject was discussed at the conference, Yarn Up 2, held in the honourable member's electorate of Wollongong. As best I can judge, the whole focus on the conference was on the hunger of young indigenous people for cultural knowledge, leadership skills and employment opportunities. My colleague the Deputy Premier, Minister for Planning, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and Minister for Housing stated when he opened the conference—

Mr Souris: That was not a yes.

Mr CARR: One could hardly say that the Leader of the National Party exhibits the dignity expected of a Treasurer of New South Wales. I know that every allowance should be made for inexperience, but the Opposition members are asking a lot as they roam around, disaffected, agitated and restless. In contrast, the Deputy Premier had good things to say when he opened Yarn Up 2.

Mrs Skinner: Arrogance plus!

Mr CARR: Now, now. Jillian, Jillian, and again, my dear Jillian! I detect a note of bitterness creeping into your every comment.

Mrs Skinner: Point of order—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before the honourable member for North Shore takes her point of order, I remind honourable members that when they address other members, they should do so by using the names of their electorates. Is that the point of order the member wishes to take?

Mrs Skinner: That is half of the point of order. The other half is that I noticed that the Premier, the Minister for Health and other Labor Ministers seem to lapse in this regard more frequently in relation to women, and that exposes the very sexist attitude of Ministers. I ask you to ask them to stop that.

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

Mr CARR: According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], the rate of Aboriginal unemployment is 23 per cent, which is nearly four times the State average of 6.1 per cent. The Leader of the National Party can work that out for himself. He can go ahead with whatever brings happiness to his soul. Many of the social problems in Aboriginal communities—domestic violence, alcohol and substance abuse—are linked to poverty and, yes, welfare dependence. Meaningful work offers a way forward. Economic independence is central to the Aboriginal Communities Development Program [ACDP], a seven-year program which involves building and fixing houses, and the provision of water, sewage, roads and recreational facilities. This financial year, 90 indigenous apprentices and trainees will be employed on this construction work at a cost of \$1.2 million.

So, 90 Aboriginal apprentices and trainees will be employed as a result of a commitment to this basic construction work. They will join a growing pool of indigenous people with trade certificates in building, carpentry, landscaping and horticulture, many of whom have gone on to full-time employment after getting their start with the ACDP. Anyone who looks at developments in indigenous affairs will see that this increase in the stock of indigenous Australians with certificates is one of the hopeful signs in policy.

[Interruption]

I join in giving Malcolm Fraser praise for being a better national Liberal leader than the people who came after him.

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

Mr CARR: I am trying to add value to the comments of Opposition members.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is far too much audible conversation. The honourable member for Ballina and the honourable member for Wakehurst will remain silent.

Mr CARR: We now have an Indigenous Business Advisory Service, a web site, a directory of over 300 indigenous businesses and a regular newsletter. Indigenous businesses include: Starlifter, an indigenous-owned toolmaker based in Warialda, employing six people full time; Winiam Investments, producers of a product for bicycle tyres sold throughout Australia and exported to the United Kingdom and Thailand.

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

Mr CARR: Other businesses include Terry Janke and Co., an indigenous law firm. I had the opportunity to meet Terry last year when we held a lunch in honour of Paul Okalik, an Inuit leader and lawyer

from Canada and Premier of Nunavut, a self-governing territory in the Arctic. We now have three Aboriginal business development managers who are working with businesses like South Moree Motors, a motor vehicle repair firm training Aboriginal people as mechanics, and Riverina-based Walkabout Tours, a tourism outfit employing 20 Aboriginal people full time and 100 part time.

It is important for honourable members to note that, throughout this program, we are linking mainstream business with indigenous communities. For example, the Australian Hotels Association has offered marketing and staffing advice to an Aboriginal-owned motel in Brewarrina. Edna's Table, a restaurant, is providing jobs and training to indigenous people. The Restaurant and Catering Association is planning an accredited training course that will link to 30 hospitality jobs for Aboriginal people. Other businesses, including the Australian Stock Exchange, the Boston Consulting Group and EnergyAustralia, are providing indigenous cadetships. This follows our active program of bringing small Aboriginal businesses together with people who can assist from the private sector. It is an active program to produce those linkages, and it is working.

Mrs Skinner: We did it.

Mr CARR: The honourable member for North Shore said the former Coalition Government did that. I congratulate the honourable member on that initiative, but surely we can discuss policy in this area without saying, "I did it first", or, "We did it better than you." It is an area of government policy. If it was kicked around under the Fahey Government and we picked it up and built on it, all the better. If there is continuity in this area of policy-making, all the better.

[Interruption]

I give credit all round. That is the approach that I have always taken. Today I announce the formation of an Aboriginal business roundtable. Ten senior business people—five indigenous and five non-indigenous—will provide high level advice and contacts to advance indigenous economic development. It will be chaired by indigenous business person Leah Armstrong, General Manager, Economic Division of the Yarnteem Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation, a Hunter-based company providing bulk warehousing and rural commodity handling, conference and catering services, tourism and accommodation and property investment. It employs 40 Aboriginal people full time and it has 266 participants from the community development employment program.

One of the four indigenous members of the roundtable is John Moriarty, Chairman and Head of Design, Balarinji Australia, which is famous for the painted jumbo. Later today I will release the names of all indigenous and non-indigenous members of this committee. The roundtable will link the business community with the Aboriginal community. I am looking forward soon to addressing their first meeting. The theme is economic independence as an alternative to welfare dependency in the Aboriginal community. That means people having real and substantial jobs with an emphasis on training. It will build pride, skills and self-esteem. It will reduce social problems such as domestic violence. It will allow indigenous people to take their rightful places as citizens contributing to and sharing in the wealth of our society.

WILLOUGHBY CHINESE RESTAURANT FIREBOMBING

Mr TINK: My question without notice is directed to the Premier. Was the Police Media Unit's new spin-doctoring role of maximising positive media coverage and minimising negative media coverage responsible for an astonishing 14-hour delay in the release of a public appeal for witnesses to a firebombing of a Chinese restaurant in Willoughby, a delay ended only by the appearance of a Channel 10 film crew?

Mr CARR: I do not know the details of the case.

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

Mr CARR: Yesterday, when I was trying to be helpful and informative to Opposition members, I said that I do not read the statements that are issued by the Police Media Unit.

Mr Fraser: You should.

Mr CARR: The honourable member for Coffs Harbour said that I should. That is ridiculous. They are not directed to me.

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

Mr CARR: What silly interjections!

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai to order.

Mr CARR: If I got these sorts of interjections at Rockdale council I would consider that something was wrong. This is pathetic! This party is supposed to be the party of Greiner and of Bob Askin. We are used to infantile questions, but the Opposition's interjections are strikingly stupid. Opposition members are stating, "You did not read the report from the Police Media Unit." The Police Media Unit does not report to the Premier. I do not ask for its reports. If the honourable member believes that there is a substantial example of malpractice or maligned behaviour, let alone corruption, I urge him to take the matter to the Police Integrity Commission. I remember the days when, under Coalition governments, there were police media units. They made statements from time to time, presumably based on the best information available to them. I do not think that members of my team or I, in our seven years in opposition, ever condescended to hold the Premier of the day responsible for an alleged mistake by people in the Police Media Unit.

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

Mr CARR: Am I supposed to sit at the Premier's desk correcting releases that go out from the Police Media Unit? If that is the most substantial thing wrong with public administration in the \$30 billion a year business that is the New South Wales Government, we are going pretty well.

NURSE EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Mr McBRIDE: My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Health. What is the latest information on the training and educational opportunities for nurses and related matters?

Mr KNOWLES: Earlier this week I was reading an assertion in a newspaper that nursing numbers have declined in our public hospital system. That is simply not true. I thought I would use the Parliament to put the record straight. Far from declining, nursing numbers have increased and continue to do so. As at May this year there were 34,866 permanent nurses working in health services throughout New South Wales. That is an increase of 1,775 nurses, or 5 per cent, since 1998. Let us compare those figures with figures under the former Coalition Government. In the seven years of the Greiner-Fahey Government there was an increase of 161 nurses. In one month there has been a far greater increase in nursing numbers than in the entire seven years of the Greiner-Fahey Government. The honourable member for North Shore does not like to hear this. She tells people that nurses are leaving hospitals in droves. There has been a substantial increase in the number of permanent nurses working in the public hospital system—in fact, an increase of 762 between January and May this year.

No-one is denying that there is a shortage of nurses in the work force. In fact, it is a worldwide phenomenon. It occurs in this State and every other jurisdiction around Australia, and in every other country. But it is simply not true that there has been a decrease in the number of permanent nursing staff in the public hospital system. There has in fact been a substantial increase. However, it may interest members to learn that there have been substantial decreases in enrolments of undergraduate nurses in our universities. When the Commonwealth Government assumed responsibility for nurses education in the university sector in 1993, it did so with the objectives of enhancing the status of nursing and addressing growing nurse shortages around the country.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Opposition backbench will remain silent. I cannot hear the Minister. I remind the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that he is on three calls to order.

Mr KNOWLES: Members opposite are obviously not interested in a major issue associated with the administration of health services in this country. Members will recall that with the shift away from State-based, usually hospital-located, nursing programs—

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

Mr KNOWLES: He's really not having a good day, is he? Members opposite are getting a little embarrassed. As honourable members would recall, when the Commonwealth Government, with the agreement

of the States, moved nursing training out of hospitals and into universities, it also transferred many millions of dollars away from the States by way of Commonwealth financial assistance grants adjustments. In today's dollars, about \$50 million that was clawed back by the Commonwealth was centralised and then redirected into universities to fund nursing training. At the same time, targets were established for the intake of nurses. For New South Wales that target was set at 2,490 nurses each year.

Despite the Commonwealth Government's aspirations, and the aspirations of all of us, those targets have never been met. Since 1993, despite the constant demands of all the States at every ministerial council meeting I have attended, very little has been done about that at the Commonwealth level, as I am sure the former Minister for Health would agree. Given the Opposition's cat-calling, I might say in passing that one of the things the Commonwealth could have done to meet those targets—as it has done for doctors in rural areas—was remove the Higher Education Contribution Scheme burden for undergraduate and postgraduate nursing courses, to make nursing more attractive as a career choice.

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

Mr KNOWLES: The highest number of enrolments was back in 1994, and since then there has been a progressive decline of about 10 per cent, culminating in a shortfall of about 1,700 nurses.

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

Mr KNOWLES: The obvious result of an increasing number of nurses and a decreasing number of undergraduates supplying future work force needs is that our nursing work force is getting older and not enough nurses are coming in to replace nurses who are retiring. To that end, earlier this year I met with or wrote to all the vice-chancellors and deans of nursing to encourage them to review their undergraduate programs to make them more attractive to young nursing students making their career choices. For the purpose of those discussions I asked each of the universities to consider establishing an undergraduate degree that would compress the current three-year, 30-week per annum course into a two-year, 45-week per annum program. My objective was to establish a faster and more focused course of study, with the further intent of ensuring that half of the two-year degree course would be spent attached to one or more pre-nominated hospitals for practical training.

This model recognises the critical importance of a science-based degree in contemporary nursing practice, but also incorporates greater opportunities for aspiring nurses to have a much greater involvement in hospital-based training activities. It is a real attempt to achieve the best of both worlds—the high-tech skills that only a science-based degree in nursing can provide, coupled with the practical on-the-ground experience that only hospital-based training can provide. Frankly, one without the other is not sufficient. At the recent National Party conference held in Broken Hill the Leader of the National Party advocated going back to hospital-based training. I would be fascinated to find out whether the shadow Minister for Health would endorse a totally hospital-based training package as advocated by the Leader of the National Party.

Mrs Skinner: That's not what the National Party says.

Mr KNOWLES: That is what the Leader of the National Party said in his press release. It is like the Sydney Harbour Bridge toll. National Party members say it, they put it in their press release, and then they deny it. The honourable member for North Shore can sort it out with the Leader of the National Party, between his giggle fits. Then she can work out what she is going to say to nurses when they say to her, "Why won't you continue to endorse science-based tertiary training?" A model that incorporates both opportunities is essential. I say to the Leader of the National Party: It is very difficult to get a standing ovation when you have your meetings, unless you are standing in a telephone box. The responses from the universities varied, as one might expect. They ranged from a willingness to consider new and innovative models to a view that, "increased clinical experience cannot necessarily replace theoretical, conceptual and analytical development for students that is currently facilitated by on-campus study".

Mr Hartcher: That's very Marxist.

Mr KNOWLES: The honourable member for Gosford says it is very Marxist. He would not understand what that word means. The response shows that some institutions have a fairly blinkered view of what constitutes contemporary needs in nursing. To lurch one way or the other is, in this day and age, not

appropriate. I would like to work with the universities, the Commonwealth Government, the unions and the other academic and professional associations, to look at the model of training that has resulted in an underachievement of nurse enrolments over the last seven or eight years and a continuing decline in the number of school students considering nursing as a profession. I support our model, which blends academic rigour, scientific excellence and quality with good, old-fashioned, on-the-ground hospital-based training. But you cannot do one without the other.

Mrs Skinner: It's our policy.

Mr KNOWLES: The honourable member for North Shore says it is their policy, but it is not the policy of the Leader of the National Party. The honourable member for North Shore has not outlined her policy. She does not have a policy on this. These things cannot happen unless the Commonwealth, the State and the learning institutions work together. I have signed up for it. The challenge is: Will other institutions do the same?

STATE FORESTS LAND TRANSFER

Mr D. L. PAGE: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Forestry. Why has State Forests agreed to transfer almost 51,000 hectares of Crown and perpetual lease in the State's north-east to the National Parks and Wildlife Service under the Resource and Conservation Assessment Council [RACAC] process when these leases can only be relinquished voluntarily and cannot be arbitrarily transferred by the Minister or any committee's decree?

Mr YEADON: The honourable member for Ballina is telling little fibs, as usual. He has a real bee in his bonnet at the moment over forestry. He is desperately trying to get traction on forestry issues in the lead-up to the election. He has no policies, so he has to stir the pot. The irony is that the more he stirs the pot the more he throws light on the success of this Government in regard to forestry and conservation. As the Premier indicated earlier in response to a question from the Leader of the National Party, the past six years for New South Wales has been a golden era of conservation, but more importantly, a golden era in the timber industry.

The honourable member for Ballina has a cynical grin on his face. I thank him for the question he asked me recently which gave a free advertisement to the cypress industry accreditation function that was held downstairs shortly after question time. A whole range of members attended that function, and it was great to see the white cypress industry so uplifted, so delighted, with its progress in Japan and with its strategic plan. It was fascinating to hear representatives from the Forest Products Association tell how the whole industry was a total mess in 1995 but has since developed into a successful industry. Of course, 1995 was a key year—that was the year the Carr Government was elected, and the timber industry in this State has been in a golden era ever since.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I place the honourable member for Ballina on two calls to order. The Chair has extended a degree of latitude to members today. However, I now ask members to behave with their usual decorum. Several members, including the honourable member for Murrumbidgee, are inviting me to have them removed from the House.

Mr YEADON: The question by the honourable member for Ballina relates to the question he asked recently about discussions on the North Coast, the upper and lower north-east management areas and the possible further development of conservation—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is far too much audible conversation in the Chamber. I call the honourable member for Wollongong to order.

Mr YEADON: The policy position of this Government has been out for some time. Some instances of grazing in those areas are under discussion. As I have indicated previously, we are aware of that and we are speaking about those issues with representatives of the New South Wales Farmers Association. That organisation is represented on the RACAC committee. We will work through that process with them. If it eventuates that some of those leases cannot be continued, we will make every endeavour to find alternative areas of grazing for those who are displaced.

REGIONAL TOURISM FUNDING

Mr PRICE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Tourism. How is the Government supporting regional tourism?

Ms NORI: I am pleased to inform the House that honourable members from regional New South Wales can go back to their electorates and make sure that the regional tourism industry knows that we are now calling for applications for the latest round of funding for regional tourism flagship events. This program is specifically designed to support events that can act as flagships or drawcards for their regions and attract visitors from outside the region, especially from Sydney. The program is unique. This Government started it, and the other States do not have it. So far, 145 events have been funded under the regional flagship program that has so far provided \$2.9 million worth of support to events across the State. Obviously, we monitor the events that we fund and try to integrate them, where possible, into our normal Tourism New South Wales marketing strategies. The grants are between \$10,000 and \$20,000 for one-year tourism events that best meet the selection criteria.

For example, last year three successful Year of the Outback events were held: the Big Wide Outback River Regatta, the Silver City Outback Band Festival and the Shear Outback event in Hay. Of course, there were many others. The big dollars come from the triennial funding part of the program—that is \$30,000 a year for three years, or a total of \$90,000. Each year we choose two events for this program, so at any one time we have six events in the system. I have attended a number of these events, as have other honourable members. The honourable member for Maitland has participated in the Maitland Steam Fest. Anyone who attends these events—and I am sure the honourable member for Murrumbidgee will agree with me, because he has one in his electorate—would be impressed with the consistency and creativity of regional communities in getting these events up and running with great success.

Many triennial events have been held, but the one I want to talk about in particular and use as a case study is the Deni—Play on the Plains Festival, or the Deni World Record Ute Muster, which is held in Deniliquin. It began in 1999 when some people in the town got together and literally brainstormed to try to find an event that would put Deniliquin on the map and bring tourism to their region. Deniliquin did not have a history of such events; there was nothing to base it on. When they came up with the idea the Government provided one-off funding of \$17,000, and 10,000 people turned up. In the two subsequent years they received the \$30,000 funding. In the year 2000, there were 20,000 people at the event, and last year there were 40,000.

This event has generated about \$3.5 million in economic benefit for Deniliquin and the Murray region, and it is growing at 100 per cent a year. Last year it attracted people like Peter Brock and Allan Nixon as the judges for the ute competition. Utility enthusiasts can enter competitions for the dirtiest ute, the vintage ute, the ute that has travelled the furthest and, of course, the best girls' ute. For the benefit of the honourable member for Coffs Harbour, the girls did not do the washing up.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Ms NORI: In some ways, I liken the festival in Deniliquin to what the Tamworth Music Festival perhaps was about 15 years ago. The festival in Deniliquin is exactly how we want to spend our triennial funding. It is not exactly seed funding, but it helps to kick-start an event that eventually can be so self-sustaining and successful that it is fantastic. This year we will try something a bit different. We are thinking of using some of the money on advertising a full calendar of events for all of regional New South Wales—not necessarily only the events that we fund—and placing a quarterly calendar in the Sydney press so that we can attract the Sydney market to the regions. It is all very well for the people of Cessnock to go to Maitland for the day—that is terrific—but it does not help the economy. We want Sydneysiders out in the regions.

LITTLE MANLY POINT POLLUTION

Mr BARR: My question without notice is addressed to the Minister for Planning. Will the Minister update the House about the cyanide pollution at Little Manly Point?

Dr REFSHAUGE: I thank the honourable member for Manly for taking a responsible approach to this important issue, unlike the honourable member for Davidson, who grabs any newspaper story, purveys lies throughout the media and makes major mistakes, as he did the other day with the Botany industrial complex.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Wakehurst will resume his seat. I call the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai to order for the second time. I call the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai to order for the third time.

Dr REFSHAUGE: In relation to Little Manly Point and the alleged contamination that was reported on the front page of the *Manly Daily*, I advise the House that the Environment Protection Authority [EPA] has

advised me that the Total Environment Centre [TEC] used the wrong tests. The EPA advises that the levels detected are so low that they are not of any concern; they are entirely suitable for aquatic life and swimming. The TEC tests used a drinking water quality standard. This would be appropriate if people drank the water coming off the site, but they do not. I have a high opinion of the Total Environment Centre, but unfortunately it got it wrong. Let me assure the constituents of the Manly electorate that the run-off levels are safe and there is no risk to humans, animals or aquatic life. While there is no safety issue with regard to the run-off, on 12 June the EPA recommended that my department look at the containment system on the site. It is likely that some minor grouting of the seawall may be required. I repeat: There are no health or safety issues, and there should be no further scaremongering on this issue.

BATHURST FIREFIGHTING STRATEGIES

Mr MARTIN: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Forestry. How is the Government improving firefighting response times in the Bathurst area?

Mr YEADON: It is good to be asked a decent question on rural New South Wales by a member representing a country electorate. Today I can inform the House that State Forests is moving to further improve firefighting efforts in the Bathurst area. That is on top of the fantastic work being done by volunteers and officers in the State's peak fire agency, the Rural Fire Service, which is under the portfolio of my colleague the Minister for Emergency Services. As honourable members know, land management agencies such as State Forests work hand-in-hand with the Rural Fire Service to combat wildfires and reduce hazards. That is certainly the case in Bathurst. State Forests is in the process of installing a helipad in the town near the Bathurst office of State Forests to improve response capability during bushfire emergencies. The helipad will enable a helicopter to be on standby at the Bathurst headquarters of State Forests on severe fire weather days—conditions similar to those we saw over the Christmas-New Year period.

In the next fire season the new helipad will make a big difference when it comes to fire response time. It is anticipated that the helicopter will be on standby on this new helipad for about 20 days a year when conditions are extreme, as I said. It will significantly reduce the amount of time taken to get firefighters into the helicopter, which has previously been on standby at the airport. It is important to note that this is no ordinary helicopter. The State Forests' Squirrel helicopter can be fitted with a 600-litre bucket for water bombing. It has forward looking infra-red sensors to see through cloud, smoke and tree tops to locate hot spots on the fire front. It is also equipped with an aerial incendiary machine used for accurately dropping incendiary capsules for backburning during fire emergencies. These capsules ignite and start strategic fires. The helicopter was instrumental in stopping some potentially serious fires from spreading during the recent fire season. It is also used for hazard reduction burning.

A new sprinkler system will soon be installed to keep the area around the helipad green, dust free and ready for immediate use throughout the year. I can also inform the House that State Forests recently added a new fire tanker to its fire arsenal in the area. This new ergonomically designed fire tanker is based at Black Springs camp near Oberon. It is one of a new fleet of tankers specifically developed by State Forests based on the agency's operational experience in the forest during wildfires. Importantly, that means that the firefighters themselves have had major input into the design of the tanker. Both the helipad and the fire tanker are part of an ongoing upgrading program for State Forests' Macquarie region, which covers Bathurst, Oberon, Cabonne, Blayney, Lithgow and Orange.

Questions without notice concluded.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

North Coast Government Initiatives

Mr BARTLETT (Port Stephens) [3.36 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because the people of Port Stephens, the mid North Coast and the North Coast are fed up with the National Party talking them down. It is important to discuss this matter today because this Government has done a great deal to improve schools, hospitals, roads and the environment in the Port Stephens electorate and, indeed, up and down the coast. I am proud to live in Port Stephens on the North Coast, and I am proud of what the Country Labor Party has done to improve the quality of life for our communities. The National Party comes across as negative, negative, negative. Our communities deserve better than the whingeing of the National Party, and it is time we set the record straight. My motion is designed to look at what is going on along the North Coast of New South Wales. I suggest that my motion needs to be dealt with urgently today.

Child Death Review Team Report

Mr HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [3.37 p.m.]: In terms of which motion should have priority, I say at the outset that the Coalition supports the funding initiatives for Port Stephens. Indeed, we want to see more money going to Port Stephens. However, that matter should be discussed during the budget debate rather than as an urgent motion today. My motion relates to a report of the Child Death Review Team. In the circumstances, although the people of Port Stephens would like to hear more about the various moneys that are coming to their area, I am sure they would prefer to hear what the Government will do about the report about the fatal assault of children and young people, which was released only last week by the Commission for Children and Young People and the Child Death Review Team. Clearly, these issues need to be discussed urgently.

Unfortunately, on four separate occasions the Government has failed to discuss these issues. On 15 August 2000 the Government was asked to debate a Child Death Review Team report into the deaths of children. The State Labor Government preferred to debate the "deaths of cattle in feedlots". On 6 November 2001 the Coalition sought to discuss child deaths and another Child Death Review Team report. On that day the Government chose to pass a vote of thanks to prison chaplains, rather than discuss the death of 21 children. On 9 April this year the Government spoke against another Opposition motion seeking to debate the issue of child deaths. On that occasion the Government chose to debate the closure of branches of the National Australia Bank.

Today the Government wants the motion of the honourable member for Port Stephens to take priority so that it can talk about the money going into Port Stephens—the Opposition supports such funding, but now is not the appropriate time to debate the issue. It is time that this Government got serious and undertook a debate about children who are dying. The Child Death Review Team report refers to 60 children who died of abuse in just two years. The report found that prior to the death of those children the Department of Community Services [DOCS] was involved with one-third of them. Other government agencies—health, police, mental health, education—were involved with the remaining two-thirds of the children at risk. That tells us that there has been an overwhelming whole of government failure to protect children at risk. I do not refer just to DOCS, I refer to all the other government agencies that should have told DOCS and that failed to intervene and do their job appropriately.

At the same time, we have seen the appalling spectre of this Labor Government—it should be doing better than this—bargaining with children's lives when deciding how many staff will go to the front-line of DOCS. The Premier likes leaked documents, so he should look at a leaked Public Service Association [PSA] newsletter of 14 June that announced that the association will not agree to, and has not agreed to, any trade-offs in return for more staff. The PSA has said quite properly that they just need more staff at the front-line of DOCS jobs to protect children. This matter is urgent because it is unbelievable that in another leaked email a DOCS PSA official announced to his members:

The department has said that if we agree to their demands they would advertise 170 caseworker positions on Monday.

The union has been told that this Government acknowledges that it needs 170 extra positions. I remind honourable members that the Opposition said it would put an extra 200 staff on the front-line, so it is close to the mark. The union said in the email to its colleagues that the Government wants to bargain, it will not give them the 170 and it wants a number of changes. But those changes should not be what they are arguing about. This Minister does not run the department. The director-general does not run the department. The director-general has effectively been sidelined by Col Gellatly. A three-page email that was signed by Col Gellatly, the Director-General of the Premier's Department, was sent to all DOCS staff a couple of weeks ago. That is the first time that all front-line DOCS staff have received an email from the Premier's Department. The Premier's fingerprints are on this disaster, and Col Gellatly is basically telling the staff that he is running the show. The Minister for Community Services has been sidelined by Gabrielle Kibble of the Kibble inquiry. This matter is urgent because we need to find out what is going wrong in this department—so many children are dying. I ask the honourable member for Port Stephens to withdraw his motion and allow us to debate this matter today.

Question—That the motion for urgent consideration of the honourable member for Port Stephens be proceeded with—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 49

Mr Amery	Mrs Grusovin	Mrs Perry
Ms Andrews	Ms Harrison	Mr Price
Mr Aquilina	Mr Hickey	Dr Refshauge
Mr Ashton	Mr Hunter	Ms Saliba
Mr Bartlett	Mr Iemma	Mr Scully
Ms Beamer	Mr Lynch	Mr W. D. Smith
Mr Black	Mr Markham	Mr Stewart
Mr Brown	Mr Martin	Mr Tripodi
Miss Burton	Mr McBride	Mr Watkins
Mr Campbell	Ms Meagher	Mr West
Mr Collier	Ms Megarrity	Mr Whelan
Mr Crittenden	Mr Mills	Mr Woods
Mr Debus	Mr Moss	Mr Yeadon
Mr Face	Mr Newell	
Mr Gaudry	Ms Nori	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gibson	Mr Orkopoulos	Mr Anderson
Mr Greene	Mr E. T. Page	Mr Thompson

Noes, 37

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

Pair

Ms Allan

Mr Brogden

Question resolved in the affirmative.**NORTH COAST GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES****Urgent Motion****Mr BARTLETT** (Port Stephens) [3.51 p.m.]: I move:

That this House notes the State Government's support and funding initiatives for the coast from Port Stephens to the Tweed.

The funding initiatives that I will speak about concern Port Stephens. Other honourable members will no doubt talk about their own electorates. This is part of a package of funding initiatives that local members have put together over the years. Prior to that, reliance was placed on applications for grant funding, lobbying Ministers and chasing up through Treasury the funding required. I will commence my contribution by speaking on the environment, because it encapsulates so much of what happens in Port Stephens. According to a recent survey of the *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 35 per cent of Port Stephens residents noted as their number one issue the preservation and improvement of the environment. I will highlight some of those achievements in the Port Stephens electorate. Raymond Terrace, Boat Harbour, Nelson Bay and Shoal Bay have received pollution traps, at an average cost of \$300,000 each.

The State Government usually picks up about half of the cost of the pollution trap. Each year those traps are removing thousands of kilograms of litter, oil and rubbish from stormwater that goes into the river at

Raymond Terrace, the ocean at Boat Harbour and the ports of Port Stephens, Nelson Bay and Shoal Bay. These improvements were part of Government policy under which funding was offered for initiatives up and down the east coast of New South Wales. I was pleased to support those applications for stormwater pollution traps. In my time in Port Stephens we have installed five boat sewage pump-out systems. They are free. Prior to that, boats went to the middle of the harbour and pumped out whatever they wished. The five free sewage pump-outs on the foreshores of Port Stephens were funded by Federal, State and local government. They are expensive items, costing about \$200,000 each. They can be found at Lemon Tree Passage, Karuah, Soldiers Point, Nelson Bay and Tea Gardens.

Sewage treatment is an extremely important issue in Port Stephens, given its world-renowned oyster industry. In my time in the area the Raymond Terrace and Medowie treatment plants have come on stream. The improvements at Raymond Terrace cost \$11 million, and at Medowie the pumping station, closure and pipeline cost another \$11 million. Karuah had been the site of some very nasty oyster scares. The \$15 million Karuah treatment plant is a state-of-the-art facility and does not return waste water to waterways. That new facility should open any day. The incompatibility of oyster growing on the foreshore of Karuah with septic tank discharges in high-rainfall events has been an issue for Karuah for more than 20 years.

I refer to the capacity of the Grahamstown dam, which supplies Newcastle, Raymond Terrace, Medowie and similar areas. Some \$90 million in funding went into the Raymond Terrace to Karuah upgrade, including a new spillway. That spillway, including roadworks, will cost some \$10 million. That will increase the water supply for the Port Stephens area by 50 per cent. The ability to raise the dam wall means not only, strangely enough, that water can be discharged quicker but that water capacity can be increased by 50 per cent. This is happening just in time because the Tomaree water supply comes from the Tomaree National Park, which is reaching its capacity for withdrawal of water from sand beds during times of drought.

This budget increases the strategic water supply from Tomago to the Tomaree peninsula—something like 39 kilometres—at a cost of \$10.5 million. So, not only has this funding increased the capacity of the Grahamstown dam to allow for this, but the water will be piped through a \$10 million pipeline supplying water to the Tomaree peninsula. The Tomaree peninsula will run out of power supply in about 2005. Peak load demands in summer, with all computer terminals and airconditioning plants working, will demonstrate a deficiency in the power supply from the existing grid. The upgrade from Tomago to the Tomaree peninsula, at a cost of about \$40 million, will enable maintenance of current levels of power supply along that upgraded line to the Tomaree peninsula.

I turn now to some minor budget expenditure. I was very pleased with the allocation of \$65,000 for the jetty at Kooragang Island. That will allow tourists and visitors to Kooragang Island via the Hunter River to see what goes on in the Kooragang wetlands, a project with which I am very well acquainted and wholeheartedly support. An allocation of \$300,000 has been made to the Taylors Beach Fisheries Research Station—part of the \$600,000 infrastructure there. Also, \$130,000 will go to the Corrie Island navigation lights, facilitating better navigation through the ports. Construction is being undertaken on an 11-kilometre cycleway from Raymond Terrace to Medowie. I have been working on that project for more than four years. We will put down the last bit of track in the next couple of months, completing the 11 kilometres of the cycleway.

Twenty years ago I was chairman of the Port Stephens Cycleway Committee. Once this cycleway is finished, our attention will be turned to the Anna Bay to Boat Harbour cycleway, another project that adds to the amenity of not only local residents but also the tourists who flock to Port Stephens. Tourism has now become a major generator of income in the Port Stephens area. More than a million people come to Port Stephens each year. I continue to face the problem of getting valid statistics on tourism. That is a flaw in the present system. More than 200,000 people are dolphin watching in Port Stephens, and they usually stay overnight. There has been a huge boom in whale watching. During the past five years the number of whale watchers has increased, with some 40,000 people now going whale watching and enjoying the clean water that these funding initiatives help to provide. This urgent motion is an opportunity for members to speak about the entire east coast of New South Wales north of Port Stephens. I will deal with a number of other issues in reply.

I shall briefly comment on the budgetary allocations to schools in the Port Stephens electorate. Between 1980 and 2000 the population of the Port Stephens electorate doubled. Because of the pleasant environment and the consequential demand created by people who have moved into the area, infrastructure services, particularly schools, have had to try to keep pace. This year's budget has allocated \$100,000 for improvements to the Raymond Terrace Public School, and that amount will provide a multipurpose centre, a new canteen and new toilets. In addition, the library will be relocated to the existing 1880 heritage hall. Anna

Bay Public School has received \$250,000 for the planning phase of a multipurpose centre, an administration area and other facilities. At Soldiers Point Public School, which is another area under high pressure because of the increase in population and increased infrastructure needs, \$250,000 has been allocated for additional classrooms and undercover areas.

In strategic terms, the Port Stephens electorate is a microcosm of the living conditions in areas along the coast north of Port Stephens. The Port Stephens Council, the Federal Government and the State Government are working together to provide necessary services and infrastructure to the area. This combined approach recognises needs and addresses them before they become critical. The unemployment rate in Port Stephens, which is just north of Newcastle, is 6.6 per cent, which compares favourably to the Hunter region's unemployment rate of 12 per cent. The tourism industry has made a huge difference to the availability of jobs for young people. I am sure that all coastal areas will look forward to the future expansion of the tourism industry.

Mr D. L. PAGE (Ballina) [4.01 p.m.]: This motion is yet another self-congratulatory motion moved by a Government member to make it look a lot better than it is. Therefore, it is incumbent upon Opposition members to expose the fallacy of Government claims of support and funding initiatives for coastal areas from Port Stephens to the Tweed. Therefore, on behalf of the Opposition, I move the following amendment:

That the motion be amended by the addition of the words "and notes elective surgery waiting lists at Grafton hospital have increased from 186 in March 1995 to 421 in April 2002, and calls on the State Government to increase health funding to the Northern Rivers Area Health Service".

While it is enlightening to examine health funding for coastal areas of New South Wales, it is equally pertinent to point out that only one capital works project is being undertaken, in what could hardly be described as a coastal area—namely, the Kyogle Memorial Hospital. Beyond an allocation of the funding in the recent State budget for two works in progress on the North Coast—the Tweed Heads District Hospital and Kempsey District Hospital—no substantial capital works projects are being undertaken for coastal areas. In the categories of new and ongoing capital works projects, only three projects are being undertaken.

It is interesting to compare hospital waiting list statistics for coastal areas from 1995, when the Coalition was in government, with current statistics. In the region north of Port Stephens to the Tweed, the area referred to in the motion, the waiting list for elective surgery at Ballina District Hospital had 98 names on it in 1995 but now has 142. The waiting list at Coffs Harbour and District Hospital was 828 in March 1995 but is now 1,180. At the Grafton Base Hospital—in the centre of the Clarence electorate, which is represented by a Labor Minister—the number of names on the elective surgery waiting list was 186 in March 1995, whereas it is currently 421. That is a threefold increase.

In Kempsey the waiting list was 298 in 1995, but it is now 413. In Lismore it was 463 in 1995, but it has increased to a mammoth 1,476. Murwillumbah had 267 names on the waiting list in 1995, but it had 684 names in April 2002. Port Macquarie had 802 names on the elective surgery waiting list in 1995, but it currently has 1,866. The statistics show quite clearly that coastal areas in New South Wales are grossly underfunded—but the same could be said of the health care system across the State. Far from supporting coastal communities, the State Government is denying those areas vital funding for people to book into hospital and get the treatment they need. Lists containing names of people who have been waiting for surgery for more than 12 months in coastal areas from Tweed Heads to Port Stephens show that in 1995 the number of people waiting for surgery in Coffs Harbour was four, whereas it is now 292.

Mr Fraser: An absolute disgrace!

Mr D. L. PAGE: It is a disgrace, but these figures—which have been provided by NSW Health—show the reality. The figures have not been made up by the Opposition; rather, the shadow Minister for Health, Jillian Skinner, obtained these figures by invoking freedom of information [FOI] legislation. The Opposition had to resort to FOI because the Government did not want us to know about these figures. In 1995 nobody was waiting more than 12 months for surgery at Grafton hospital, but 28 people have now waited more than 12 months. In Lismore one person waited longer than 12 months in 1995, whereas there are now 176 names on the waiting list. In Manning-Great Lakes Health Service 52 people waited 12 months in 1995, but there are now 223 names on the waiting list.

In Murwillumbah one person waited 12 months in 1995, but 128 people are now on the list. In Port Macquarie no-one waited more than 12 months in 1995, but there are now a mammoth 599 names on the

waiting list. At Tweed Heads 18 people waited more than 12 months in 1995, but now there are 61 names on the list. Those figures show that this Government has performed miserably with respect to capital and recurrent expenditure. Not only has the number of people on the waiting list blown out, but the number of people who have been on the waiting list for more than 12 months has significantly increased.

I refer to country towns water and sewerage facilities, which are of enormous importance to coastal areas. The provision of those facilities impacts directly on water quality. Under the previous Coalition Government, funding was provided to the tune of \$85 million a year, but under this Labor Government funding has been reduced to \$50 million. Numerous projects that were intended for areas along the coast have not been undertaken because of that funding shortfall. Many councils in coastal areas have not been able to embark on projects because the State Government has not been prepared to contribute its 50 per cent share of the cost. The Government has an appalling record on funding for the country towns water and sewerage facilities program. As a matter of interest, the Leader of the National Party announced at Broken Hill that a Coalition government would increase the annual funding for country towns water and sewerage facilities projects to an average of \$100 million a year. That represents a substantial increase in the current Labor Government funding for the program.

Mr Fraser: How is road funding in the Tweed?

Mr D. L. PAGE: Quite legitimately, the honourable member for Coffs Harbour asks about road funding for coastal areas. I will turn my attention to road funding in the Tweed. What I am about to say may be of interest to the honourable member for Tweed, who will follow me in this debate. An article in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* carries the headline, "Road funds steer clear of Tweed". The article states:

The NSW Government has promised to spend more than \$197 million on roads in northern NSW—but none of it in Tweed heads.

An editorial in the *Daily News* is worth mentioning because it really tells the story. It states:

However, there is nothing in the State Budget for the Tugun bypass. Tweed MP Neville Newell was conspicuous by his absence at last weekend's Tugun bypass public meeting.

Mr Newell: Tell them where the Tugun bypass is.

Mr D. L. PAGE: The honourable member for Tweed will have his chance to speak. The article continues:

Of course, like any politician, he is restricted by Government spending priorities in what he can promise, but Mr Newell needs to start fighting for the bypass.

It seems the NSW Government power brokers have not been willing to acknowledge in the Budget the potential electoral damage for Mr Newell if there is no NSW money for the Tugun bypass.

Similar electoral fallout is a distinct possibility if the Roads and Traffic Authority continues to ignore sensible local requests for a Kirkwood Road exit from the Pacific Highway, to relieve congestion at one of the region's biggest shopping centres and to improve access to the Tweed's growing retail park off the Greenway Drive.

I am quoting from an editorial; this is not my statement. The editorial, which refers to the electorate of the honourable member for Tweed, states that there is no allocation in the budget for projects in the his electorate. The motion moved by the honourable member for Port Stephens asked the House to note that the State Labor Government is doing wonderful things in coastal areas. What has it done in the electorate of Clarence—the electorate of the Minister for Local Government, no less? It has been estimated that it will cost about \$900,000 to upgrade the road from Grafton airport to the Pacific Highway.

The Federal Government has contributed its share of \$300,000, councils in the area have contributed their share of \$300,000 and they are asking the State Government for a contribution of \$300,000. That is not a lot of money in the context of the roads budget. The Government is not prepared to contribute \$300,000 to the electorate of the Minister for Local Government for the upgrade of that important link between Grafton airport and the Pacific Highway. Qantas has direct flights from Grafton to Sydney using Dash 8 aircraft. That means that there is a great deal of traffic at Grafton airport, yet the Government will not contribute \$300,000 for such a simple project. The Alstonville bypass in my electorate has been on the drawing board for many years now.

Mr Markham: How many?

Mr D. L. PAGE: It has been on the drawing board for about eight or nine years. Planning was going well until about three years ago when the Government decided to stop funding for the Alstonville bypass, even though the planning process had concluded. The Bruxner Highway project, which it is estimated will cost \$36 million, is not the responsibility of the Federal Government; it is the responsibility of the State Government. However, to its credit the Federal Government contributed \$12 million towards the cost of that project. The State Government has allocated nothing. In the last year the former Coalition Government was in office I opened four brand new schools in my electorate. The present Government has opened only one school, which is at Evans Head. [*Time expired.*]

Mr NEWELL (Tweed) [4.11 p.m.]: I join my colleague the honourable member for Port Stephens in acknowledging the tremendous amount of funding that has been provided by the Government for projects on the North Coast and in the Northern Rivers area—and not only in the electorates of Country Labor members. Since 1999 there has been a tremendous surge in funding for projects in the Northern Rivers area. I thank my colleagues in Country Labor for facilitating that increase in funding. The honourable member for Ballina, who referred to a number of other issues, was somewhat reticent about acknowledging that some of that funding will go to projects in his electorate. I want to point out what the Labor Government and Country Labor are doing in the Ballina electorate.

The honourable member for Ballina might be somewhat embarrassed about the fact that there was lobbying from other areas, including branches of the Australian Labor Party on the North Coast, to secure that funding. The honourable member for Ballina might have been too shy to approach Ministers to obtain that funding. An amount of \$2 million was allocated in the budget for stage two of the Mullumbimby High School upgrade. An amount of \$5.3 million has been allocated for the provision of hospitality and trade courses at Wollongbar TAFE, which is located in the electorate of the honourable member for Ballina. Under the Greiner and Fahey governments rail services were downgraded. The Government has allocated \$2 million for rail infrastructure to maintain the branch line from Casino to Murwillumbah.

Earlier by way of interjection I referred to the Ballina bypass, a project that has been on the backburner and which never got a guernsey under the Greiner and Fahey governments. Under the Government an amount of \$2.4 million has been allocated to complete that bypass. Much has been said in debate about health funding. Opposition speakers referred to the funding that has been allocated by the Government for the Northern Rivers Area Health Service. This year that health service will receive a record budget of \$244 million, an increase of \$25.8 million or 11.8 per cent on last year's budget.

Before changes were made by the Government to the resource distribution formula all areas in New South Wales were underfunded. In the seven years that the Greiner and Fahey governments were in office regional and rural New South Wales missed out; they did not get their fair share. When this Government was re-elected in 1999 the resource distribution formula was fixed up, which meant that, on a per capita basis, rural and regional New South Wales received equitable funding. So 28 per cent of the population received 28 per cent of the health budget. Earlier in the debate the honourable member for Ballina referred to Tweed hospital and other hospitals. I will not refer to the budgetary allocations for those hospitals.

Mr Anderson: Why not?

Mr NEWELL: Those figures have been mentioned before and I will refer to them again when I make my contribution to debate on the budget bills. I referred earlier to funding for road projects in Ballina. Some \$30 million has been allocated for the final stages of construction of the Chinderah to Yelgun motorway. In 1995 the honourable member for Clarence and the honourable member for Tweed secured funding for that project from State and Federal governments. Recently I was pleased to announce that the Government allocated \$1 million for the Kynumboon Bridge and \$700,000 for the pedestrian overpass at Sexton Hill, a matter that the former Coalition Government did not address in its seven years in office.

Mr OAKESHOTT: I seek leave to table documents to show how well the electorate of Port Macquarie is doing.

Leave not granted.

Pursuant to sessional orders debate interrupted.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

CANBERRA FESTIVAL OF AMATEUR ONE ACT PLAYS

Mr ANDERSON (Londonderry) [4.15 p.m.]: I refer tonight to an event that I attended over the weekend of 7, 8 and 9 June this year, the Queen's birthday holiday long weekend. I travelled to Canberra with the Henry Lawson Players, an amateur dramatic group from my electorate, to watch them perform in the 2002 Canberra Festival of Amateur One Act Plays. I state at the outset that one of the players who performed at that festival was my wife, but that was not the only reason I attended the festival. Obviously, I was there to support a group from my electorate and to see how well they performed. It was an outstanding event. There were 22 acts from New South Wales and other States. The festival, which commenced on Friday evening, consisted of four plays. A number of adjudicators, some highly qualified people, sat through all the plays and gave their critiques.

Corille Fraser, who migrated to Australia from Scotland via England, worked for many years in many reputable theatrical groups. Corille, who brought with her a wealth of information, has been helpful not only to younger players but also to older players who participated in the performances. Mr John Spicer, a gentleman with outstanding credentials and a former member of the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford-on-Avon, had all the credentials that were necessary to enable him to give advice to all these amateur performers. However, in my opinion, these actors were not amateur performers. All the people who participated in the festival put on a tremendous show. I was particularly proud of the Henry Lawson Players, the group that I travelled with to Canberra.

That group of amateur actors is supported by an outstanding club in my electorate, the Henry Lawson Club. The club provides a theatre for the players, and it also provides financial support for payment of nomination and application fees for the festivals. The club has done that since the early 1960s, and it continues to provide an opportunity for these wonderful actors and actresses to perform at many levels of the performing arts. At the conclusion of the weekend the adjudicators awarded prizes for the various categories of performances. I was thrilled when the Henry Lawson Players received an award for the most outstanding performance.

My wife and her colleagues were presented with a trophy for their performance. In their comments the judges said it was an outstanding performance by all the players and they had been brilliantly directed. It was a great weekend for all of us. A celebration was held on the Sunday evening following the presentation of awards. I offer my congratulations to my wife, Kathleen, and Neridah James for their brilliant performances; Mike Raymond, the director; Sari Erasmus and Mike Rochfort. I congratulate all the players who participated, as well as the Henry Lawson Club, which does great work in my electorate.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.20 p.m.]: The honourable member for Londonderry shows understandable bias in relation to the matter he has referred to, and I compliment him on bringing it to the attention of the House. Amateur theatre forms an important part of the cultural fabric of the city of Newcastle; it obviously does the same in the electorate of the honourable member. The energy and interest shown by the participants in the 2002 Canberra Festival of One Act Plays were remarkable. The honourable member spoke about the quality of the adjudicators, the enthusiasm of the players and his pride in the Henry Lawson Players being judged the most outstanding players. Cultural activities, amateur theatre and music play an important role in developing the skills of young people in particular, and that often results in full-time occupation in the theatre.

WARRAGAMBA PUBLIC SCHOOL SAFETY AWARENESS DAY

WARRAGAMBA-SILVERDALE POLICING

Dr KERNOHAN (Camden) [4.22 p.m.]: Last Friday 14 June I attended Safety Awareness Day at Warragamba Public School. On a lovely winter's morning safety talks were delivered to individual classes in the school grounds by four emergency services officers. The centrepiece of each class was a vehicle from the Police Service, the Ambulance Service or the town and volunteer rural fire brigades. I attended three of these classes, and I congratulate the emergency services officers on the way they tailored their talks to the age of the kiddies. The officers include Constable Sharon Maddox, off-duty ambulance officers Darryl Smith, Greg Bell and Neville King, Warragamba Town Brigade Captain Jeff Kenny, Steve Woods, plus "Bernie Cinders"—unfortunately, I do not know who was playing Bernie that day—and Silverdale Rural Fire Service officers Harry McLachlin and Ray Irving.

The day was originally named Blue Day to highlight the lack of a permanent police presence in the Warragamba police station and residence, but the principal, Ray Farnham, extended the coverage to other emergency services and all aspects of safety. A community morning tea was organised at the school by Pam Ezzy to show support for the project and emphasise community concerns about their safety as a whole. Those in attendance included Phil Costa, the Deputy Mayor of Wollondilly; Superintendent Alan Harding, the local area commander; Lauren Haden, the Secretary-Manager of Warragamba Workers Club; Michael Beshara, the President of the Chamber of Commerce; Sean McMullen, the President of Rotary; Sandra O'Regan, the Director of the Neighbourhood Centre; John Lyons, the Treasurer of the senior citizens group; Elizabeth Searle, the director of the preschool; Margaret Stepniewski of the "Mulgoa Warradale Gazette" and girl guide leader; and Father John Evans, a retired local priest.

Members must be tired of hearing me complain about the lack of a permanent police presence in Warragamba. I understand that an officer is willing to live in the police residence if the rent was not so-called market value. This is a very cheap price to pay, as all the miscreants and those who misbehave in the Warragamba-Silverdale area know it takes a long time for police based at Regentville to attend the scene of an incident when called. Warragamba-Silverdale residents are still recovering from the Christmas bushfires, and now they are in mourning for the tragic loss of four of their teenagers on 25 May last. Ben Turunen, aged 17, Joel Pearson, aged 13, Dale Beale, aged 16, and Matthew Eldridge, aged 16, died as a result of Ben's Holden Gemini hitting a four-wheel drive head on. Whether that could have been prevented by a local police presence is not known. However, it is rumoured that it was reported to Regentville police at 10.30 that Saturday morning that a Holden Gemini was doing burnouts and spins on Silverdale Road but no-one responded. My heart goes out to the families and friends of those boys, and to the local ambulance officer and Rural Fire Brigade members who were first on the scene and knew the boys who were killed.

That tragedy also highlights the fact that Warragamba has the only one-man ambulance station in New South Wales and other ambulances have to come from Penrith for any patient who needs treatment en route to hospital. The Warragamba-Silverdale area had a population of 4,600 as at 30 June last year. Without a full-time general practitioner and a 24-hour police presence, and with only a one-man ambulance station, the area has probably the most vulnerable population of its size in New South Wales with respect to health and safety. On many occasions over the past three years I have spoken in this place about the lack of health and safety facilities in the Warragamba-Silverdale area, but there has been no positive action from the Carr Government.

PENNANT HILLS ROAD TRAFFIC SIGNALS

Mr TINK (Epping) [4.27 p.m.]: On behalf of the Beecroft-Cheltenham Civic Trust I bring to the attention of the House the need for warning signals near the intersection of Copeland Road West and Pennant Hills Road in my electorate. A number of serious accidents and near misses have been caused by the lack of warning signals in this area. As the civic trust pointed out to me, trucks require a greater amount of warning to stop than regular vehicles, especially given the speed at which they travel along Pennant Hills Road. In a letter dated 6 June the trust asked me to seek the placement of warning lights further along Pennant Hills Road to warn trucks of the traffic lights. It is proposed that these lights would be similar to the lights on Beecroft Road that warn motorists of the concealed traffic lights leading to the M2 tollway. The head of the Hornsby Shire Council traffic committee, Garry Kennedy, has provided me with statistics for Pennant Hills Road between Hannah Street and Copland Road for the period 1 January 1996 to 31 December 2001.

I was surprised by those disturbing figures. The stretch of road in question is only about 100 yards long, but Mr Kennedy advises that there were 65 major accidents on it, involving five fatalities and 40 injuries. Of those 65 accidents, 38 or 58 per cent involved trucks. The matter has been raised before. In the past Senior Constable Craig Thorp advised that recommendations for warning devices had been made and it was his opinion "that these recommendations have merit". He requested that the recommendations be passed on to the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA]. I understand that happened, and I am now renewing the request. I have a letter from Mr Lloyd of West Pennant Hills. He describes the physical situation quite well. In part his letter stated:

The danger comes from the fact that from a point slightly before the intersection of Aiken Rd, the Copland Rd intersection and traffic signals can't be seen due to a curve to the left. By the time the signals come into view there is a very limited distance in which to bring a vehicle to a stand if needed, especially under conditions when no traffic is "banked up" so making the status of the traffic signals more obvious. As a result a number of vehicles can be stationary at the signals while other vehicles can approach around a "blind" bend at fairly high-speed only to be forced to brake fairly quickly. The potential for severe rear end collisions is great and in fact I have witnessed 3 such accidents. One of these involved a large semi-trailer which came fast down the centre lane, around the curve and was confronted by stationary traffic. Unable to brake in time the driver managed to successfully mount the footpath and bring the vehicle to rest exactly at the intersection, sideswiping at least one vehicle, effectively making a "4th lane" and thus averting a very serious situation. However, on 24-4-98 a fatal accident occurred with a car crushed between the front and rear of two heavy vehicles ...

That accident prompted him to write the letter. More recently, in February last year, an accident between a tanker and a utility caused a major oil spill of 4,000 litres of sump oil at the junction of the same roads. It is plain to me that this is a major problem, and I respectfully suggest that that junction should be a major priority for some sort of warning signal.

As all members know, Pennant Hills Road is part of the national highway network; it links the M2 with the F3. It is the major route for all the heavy vehicles, including B-doubles, travelling at high speed. It is one of the few parts of the major road network that has on it a series of traffic lights. Many heavy vehicles travelling from Brisbane will have been in free-flowing traffic for a couple of hours before they get to the Thornleigh-Pennant Hills area. By the time they reach this intersection the drivers are becoming fairly frustrated and, because it is a blind bend with no warning, it is a dangerous area. I have written to the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads in the past few days. I put on record that I hope my concerns will be followed up and that something can be done.

WYONG INVESTMENT

Mr CRITTENDEN (Wyang—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.32 p.m.]: Tonight it is my pleasant duty to draw the attention of the House to an excellent meeting that occurred on Tuesday 11 June at Wyong Council Chambers under the auspices of the Department State and Regional Development's Main Streets Program and the Wyong Chamber of Commerce. The purpose of the meeting that night was to look at ways in which the Wyong township can be reinvigorated and enhanced. As with many towns in regional and country New South Wales, Wyong has lost a number of banks and other facilities such as TAB outlets. As a consequence a large number of the shops in the central business district of Wyong are vacant. The Wyong Chamber of Commerce has been proactive in encouraging shop owners to look at innovative ways in which the shops may be utilised. There have been discussions with Wyong Shire Council about ways and means of bringing more people into the Wyong township, creating a hub of activity for the shops and providing a different style of living for those who wish to live close to the railway line.

The Wyong township is close to the railway station. It is important that the House recognises that although the TAB and the banks have gone and shops have closed, the State Government has provided a great deal of investment funding. In September this year a \$3.5 million community health centre will open in the Wyong township. It will employ 50 equivalent full-time staff. Those people will need to buy their lunches and gifts for their friends and family and so forth, and we hope that they will do much of their shopping in the Wyong township. We also hope that the bus-rail interchange, which has now been completed at a reasonable cost of around \$1.6 million, will be a boon to the Wyong township. We hope it will reflect the heritage of Wyong township, which was once a timber town. In addition, it is important to recognise that the State Government, with the investment of \$2 million in Wyong High School, has now ensured that the young people in Wyong will get a good education in the emerging industries. That was the thrust of my comments at the important meeting on 11 June.

The Telstra telephone exchange is located in Alison Road Wyong. It is important to locate information and communications technology [ICT] companies close to a telephone exchange. For that reason we are looking at ways in which the vacant shops can be utilised to become a harbour for the important and wealth-generating ICT industry. Some people at the workshop were talking about the need for restaurants in Wyong. We need to work out what comes first. We need to make sure that there is, in fact, a demand for restaurants and, more importantly, that people have the funds to pay for restaurant meals. It is no use wishing it will happen; we have to provide the necessary facilities so that it will happen. One way of facilitating that is to use the emerging ICT industry. It is my fervent hope that many of the young people at Wyong High School will either attend university and become PhDs or start businesses in Wyong. I hope that Wyong shire in particular and the Central Coast in general will become known as the ICT hub of Australia, as Mumbai is in India. The Ourimbah campus is nearby but we should not be limited to one tertiary institution offering ICT. In the words of a great person, we need to allow a thousand flowers to bloom. In that way we will make sure we utilise all the advantages offered by our district.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.37 p.m.]: The honourable member's statement this afternoon has great resonance with me. He is advocating on behalf of his constituents, as he always does, that the Government should work with the community to bring more investment funds to the area, which has already seen the development of a health centre and a bus-rail interchange. It is important that the young people in that area have access not only to education but to the communications technology industries that the honourable member mentioned. I commend him for his statement on behalf of the Wyong township. The Government needs to work with the community to make the town centre viable and vital for the whole community.

NAMBUCCA VALLEY ABORIGINAL HEALTH

Mr STONER (Oxley) [4.38 p.m.]: I raise the important issue of Aboriginal health in the Nambucca Valley. The Nambucca district has a significant Aboriginal population, particularly at Bowraville and Nambucca Heads. As honourable members will be aware, sadly, Aboriginal people are well and truly overrepresented in terms of statistics relating to health problems. For several years an outpost of the Durri Aboriginal Medical Service, based in Kempsey, has operated from near the Gumbayngirr community area on the outskirts of Bowraville. The Durri Aboriginal Medical Service, managed by Steve Blunden, has been very successful in delivering health services to Aboriginal people on the mid North Coast, and deserves congratulations for the invaluable role it has performed.

However, in the Nambucca Valley, which is home to a different tribe—the Gumbayngirr people, as opposed to Kempsey's Dhungutti people—a number of people in the community do not fully utilise the Durri Aboriginal Medical Service outpost. Those people would prefer to have their health needs met by a locally sponsored organisation. This preference has been sufficiently strong that these people have established their own Aboriginal medical service, known as Bawrunga, in Bowraville. Local Aboriginal people—Russell Walker, the chairman of the Bawrunga Aboriginal Medical Service, and Leavina Reid, the senior health worker at the service—have done a magnificent job establishing and running the Bawrunga Aboriginal Medical Service in the main street of Bowraville.

Nambucca Shire Council has recognised the legitimate desire of the local people to provide medical services to their own community, and has provided accommodation, in which the Bawrunga Aboriginal Medical Service operates. This enterprise has also been supported by the medical fraternity, and some fine doctors working with Bawrunga to meet the manifold needs of the Nambucca district's Aboriginal people. The issue is one of funding. Bawrunga's achievements in providing an excellent health service to local people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, have been accomplished without any State Government support. I understand that the Bawrunga Aboriginal Medical Service has sought funding assistance from the State Government, and although it has received some encouraging words, it has not yet had any concrete action.

I understand that the Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the honourable member for Wollongong, has agreed to arrange a meeting of the executives of the Bawrunga Aboriginal Medical Service with the Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Minister for Health, the honourable member for Heathcote. I raise this issue today and ask that the suggested meeting go ahead, that senior Government members, particularly in the Aboriginal Affairs and Health portfolios, consider the needs of the Bawrunga Aboriginal Medical Service, without necessarily impinging on the services provided by the Durri Aboriginal Medical Service, which does an excellent job.

The Nambucca shire was recently identified in the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data for 2001 as having the third lowest income level in the State. It also has a very high Aboriginal population as a proportion of the general population. Sadly, there is a great need for health services amongst the Aboriginal community. Certainly, that is the case in the Nambucca. I therefore ask that serious consideration be given to assisting the successful Bawrunga Aboriginal Medical Service—an established service that is running well and is a credit to the local community in that it is providing a service without State Government funding.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.43 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Oxley for raising this matter in the House. As he said, he has had discussions with the parliamentary secretary for Aboriginal affairs and the Parliamentary Secretary for health. If the parliamentary secretary for Aboriginal affairs has said he will arrange a meeting, I am sure that meeting will take place. The matter of Aboriginal health is very close to the heart of the Government and of both parliamentary secretaries. I am sure this matter will be given due consideration.

CABRAMATTA HOMELESSNESS

Ms MEAGHER (Cabramatta—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.43 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of honourable members the emerging issue of homelessness in Cabramatta, the need for crisis accommodation to alleviate the problem, and the need for strategies to address the social issues surrounding homeless people. This matter was raised recently at a community forum I held, at which Mark Hankin, a youth worker from the Cabramatta Community Centre, addressed participants and highlighted the plight of the homeless within our local community. However, the true extent of the problem is not immediately apparent due to highly visible policing efforts that disperse and move on people congregating within our local town who would otherwise be

recognised as being homeless. A recent report by University of New South Wales researchers Dr Lisa Maher, Heidi Coupland and Myly Thack entitled "Every Day's the Same—youth homelessness in Cabramatta", which was commissioned by the Premier's Department in partnership with Fairfield City Council, identifies the nature and extent of homelessness on the streets of Cabramatta and prescribes recommendations for service providers and government agencies to work together to address this problem. The research found that:

... the last five years have witnessed a proliferation of youth homelessness in the area concomitant with a dramatic expansion of the local heroin market. While recent police activities have had a strong influence on the visibility of the problem, this does not diminish the need for action to address youth homelessness in the long term.

I am sure all honourable members are familiar with the nature of homelessness. Findings indicate that many homeless young people left home voluntarily or involuntarily following unacceptable levels of conflict, physical and/or sexual abuse. Many young people do not choose to live on the streets; it is their last resort. After leaving home they usually stay with friends or family for a short time. However, this arrangement lacks the stability required for them to secure financial means and find permanent long-term accommodation and they often end up on the streets. Recent findings estimate that between 50 and 100 young homeless people are living on the streets of Cabramatta, although these figures do not account for those squatting and residing in temporary accommodation with friends and family, and who will return to the streets. The report to which I referred also found that:

... after leaving home, young homeless people living on the streets in Cabramatta rapidly became immersed in a lifestyle characterised by transience, poverty, crime and poor health. While the majority of participants did not use drugs prior to becoming homeless, all of the street-recruited sample were injecting drug users.

The lack of financial support and assistance—specifically the absence of Centrelink benefits for those without a fixed address—compels them into criminal activities and prostitution to support their drug use. Due to the lack of basic necessities such as food, clean clothing and accommodation, many have difficulty in gaining employment opportunities simply because they cannot present for interviews. To address these basic needs, the Cabramatta Community Centre created a special homeless survival pack which consisted of a towel, toothbrush and toothpaste, shaving cream, sanitary items for women and information on assistance services. The packs were given out free to homeless people who came to the centre seeking help. I congratulate the centre on its front-line intervention. The State Government has been attempting to assist young people at risk who are on the streets, and established the Department of Community Services [DOCS] Street Team as part of the Cabramatta anti-drugs strategy.

The DOCS Street Team has been successful in reconnecting many young people with their families and linking homeless people to services that will assist them. The Supported Leases Program initiated by the New South Wales Government has been of enormous benefit to those people who have come into contact with the DOCS Street Team and have been provided with interim accommodation. Obviously, the private rental market continues to offer little hope to young homeless people due to the high cost of rental properties. While government agencies have been implementing programs to address homelessness, the findings in the University of New South Wales report and first-hand experience by the Cabramatta Community Centre indicate that more needs to be done to address the nature and extent of homelessness, and provide adequate crisis accommodation or shelters where young people can get off the streets and meet their immediate needs for shelter, food and personal hygiene. I advise the House that over the coming week I will be meeting with the community centre workers and non-government organisations to work through the recommendations in the Maher report and to look at strategies that will help to combat this problem effectively and find a real long-term solution to this issue confronting many young people on our streets.

BULAHDELAH CENTRAL SCHOOL

Mr J. H. TURNER (Myall Lakes—Deputy Leader of the National Party) [4.48 p.m.]: I refer to representations I have received from the Bulahdelah Central School council concerning the building program for that school. Bulahdelah is situated at the centre of an extensive drawing area—from Tea Gardens, which has a growth rate of 45.6 per cent, and the Booral branch area, which had a growth rate of about 42.9 per cent from 1991 to 1996 but which I expect will be varied in the recently published figures. In 1991 the population of Bulahdelah Central School secondary department was 187. In 2002 it will exceed 400, and the K-12 population will exceed 60. The school has grown significantly, but unfortunately its infrastructure is old and has not kept pace with the growth, so we have the double problem of old infrastructure and a lack of new infrastructure.

Bulahdelah Central School has no adequate indoor sporting facilities. The school's canteen is no longer big enough to cope with the demands. The school residence was once the principal's residence and is now used

as a makeshift staff room. The front classrooms on Meade Street, the remaining original wooden buildings, are less than satisfactory. The art rooms are in a poor state of repair, flooding occurs on the playing fields, and there is a lack of storage and work space. The main problem is that there is an inordinate number of demountables and portable buildings on the land. There are 18 demountables, two portable classrooms, and only 13 permanent classrooms, all of which have been looked at by a trainee occupational health and safety officer and found to be wanting. None of the demountable rooms are attached to any drainage system. As a result, the school grounds are dangerous and almost unusable in wet weather.

The placement of the demountables has been ad hoc, resulting in a science laboratory being placed 100 metres from the other laboratories and dangerous chemicals being carried between the sites on a regular basis. The permanent classrooms are in a poor state of repair, and also have inadequate roof drainage, which causes flooding to those rooms. A detailed letter was sent to the department, and I wrote to the Minister in the middle of last year. Regrettably the only reply I received was that there is a certain amount in the State budget to renovate and renew New South Wales schools during the next four years, and as part of the review the needs of Bulahdelah Central School will be taken into consideration. Unfortunately, nothing has happened since that time and nothing was allocated in the budget. Those larger issues are the core issues and are bad enough, but recently I received a further letter from the school.

The situation is getting worse and is affecting the morale of teachers and students because of the department's failure to do anything about their concerns. As a result of the letter sent in the middle of last year, promises were made to carry out some interim work at the school, such as drainage and repairs to the demountables. The main problems that were raised recently—and I do not want to detract from serious problems that I mentioned earlier—were: drainage repairs are well overdue and desperately needed because of the coming wet, cold, damp winter; necessary demountables for the secondary department have not been made available; and termite damage at the school has not been attended to. The buildings are still being flooded, causing damage to the carpet and equipment. When the carpet is renewed the building gets flooded again and the carpet has to be replaced once more because of water damage.

The damage caused by white ants is apparent to every visitor to the school because the door lintels at both the front and back doors of the administration building have been eaten out. The school is very concerned about these matters and has asked me to raise them again in Parliament with a desperate plea that something be done. I have outlined the growth of the area. I have demonstrated the patience of the school community, which has waited for this work to be carried out. I stress the need for long-term work to solve the problem, and short-term work to help them out as quickly as possible.

PACIFIC HIGHWAY UPGRADE

Mr NEWELL (Tweed) [4.53 p.m.]: I anticipate the opening on 4 August of the Chinderah to Yelgun motorway, which runs through my electorate to the Queensland border and has been delivered by this Government. That section of the motorway will have cost some \$348 million, which is a substantial amount of funding for the redevelopment of the Pacific Highway from both State and Federal governments. It will be the biggest infrastructure section of that reconstruction and will have a major impact on my electorate and other areas of the far North Coast. Other sections of the redevelopment project include the Chinderah bypass and the Tweed Heads bypass, which will have dual carriageways constructed right to the Queensland border.

The Tweed Heads bypass, the initial part of the highway reconstruction, was built in the mid to late 1980s, before the funding agreement of \$2.2 billion was put in place in 1995-96 with the State and Federal governments. The New South Wales Government was responsible for building the bypass for Tweed Heads, which alleviated the traffic congestion in Tweed Heads and Coolangatta-Kirra and had a big impact on the local economy and environment around Coolangatta. Once it was constructed, the Gold Coast City Council—and undoubtedly the Queensland Government—put in some money and upgraded Griffith Street, along which traffic still travels, to make it pleasant for pedestrians. This Government's construction of the bypass took traffic out of Wharf Street and Griffith Street onto the bypass.

As part of the package for constructing the first stage of the bypass, other local work was carried out and paid for by the New South Wales Government. It upgraded Minjunbal Drive, which passes through south Tweed; Kennedy Drive, which carries traffic to west Tweed Heads; and Wharf Street; and constructed a new bridge at Boyds Bay. The agreement between this Government and the Federal Government expires in 2006. I ask the Federal Government to extend that contract to ensure that funds for the Pacific Highway upgrade continue after 2006—\$2.2 billion is a lot of money.

We have made a commitment to upgrade a fair proportion of that highway to a dual carriageway, but because of increased costs we will not be able to meet the targets we put in place in 1996 unless the Federal Government is fair dinkum about funding the Pacific Highway and puts in some extra funds. The recent budget funding for local roads included \$1.2 billion for the Kynumboon bridge, \$700,000 for the Sexton Hill overpass, with the Tweed Shire Council getting a block grant of \$1.6 million for spending on local roads and other projects. So the Tweed electorate—contrary to what other honourable members might have us believe—has received considerable funding from the budget. I commend the budget and the Minister for his co-operation to ensure these projects get off the ground.

SAILORS BAY BOATSHED

Mr COLLINS (Willoughby) [4.58 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House a matter affecting the Northbridge area of the electorate of Willoughby. A proposed marina threatens the tranquil waterways of the upper reaches of Middle Harbour. In bringing this matter to the attention of the House I acknowledge the useful information printed in the current edition of "The 202", the newsletter of the Northbridge Progress Association. The Northbridge residents group Friends of Sailors Bay has been formed to oppose an application for a major new commercial marina development at the Sailors Bay boatshed in Clive Park. If approved, the marina would project almost 100 metres into Sailors Bay towards Castlecrag. Jutting out from it would be 35-metre fixed pontoon structures at which large boats would be moored. In other words, the marina would cover roughly the area of a football field.

The Sailors Bay boatshed is located within Clive Park on land owned by the Department of Land and Water Conservation, immediately west of the Northbridge Sailing Club and Northbridge Sea Scouts, which have been there for many years. The only access to the three facilities is by a steep, narrow, single-lane road through the park, which I have used on many occasions. The local residents—which include, incidentally, former Prime Minister Bob Hawke, who I am pleased to say is one of my constituents, and distinguished former mayor of Willoughby Noel Reidy—are concerned about the safety of the Sea Scouts and children learning to sail at Northbridge Sailing Club, as the 23 proposed new moorings are all on the eastern side of the proposed marina, on water that the Sea Scouts and sailing club constantly use.

The second concern is that the narrow, single vehicle-wide access road simply cannot handle the traffic required to service these expanded marine facilities and new residential facilities in the boatshed. Third, ease of public access to the water will make this a popular rendezvous, pick-up and drop-off point for countless boats wishing to collect boating guests, for which the narrow access road and extremely restricted parking are totally inadequate and incapable of suitable development. Fourth, the huge investment, residential management and operational facilities applied for clearly cannot be economically supported by the number of berths proposed in the development. In other words, this is the elephant's trunk coming through the door; there is a lot more to come after this. To start with, they want a few pontoons, but after that they would fill up the whole bay. For this proposal to be commercially viable, much greater development by stealth could be contemplated.

Fifth, additional development is not warranted or justified in view of the fact that existing facilities are not even fully utilised at the western end of Sailors Bay, near Northbridge baths. As a warning, many Cammeray residents regret that facilities were approved in their neighbourhood without wider community input. The time for discussion has now passed because, once approved, of course a development cannot be dismantled. I totally support the Northbridge residents, who are concerned to protect their environment. I draw this matter to the attention of the Minister for Planning, because the Minister is now the consenting authority. This was an issue for this part of the electorate 10 years ago. Ten years ago it was defeated. It was defeated then because Willoughby City Council had the say over the use of the land. This time, the consenting authority is Planning NSW.

I call on the Minister to nip this proposal in the bud. This is one of the tranquil upper reaches of Middle Harbour. Some waterways lend themselves to and are suitable for this sort of development. Those areas may be areas that have an existing commercial use, or areas that have an industrial use that could be converted. Tranquil, secluded, quiet waterways should not be turned into boat parks, any more than urban bushland should be turned into car parks. This is a matter that the Minister needs to nip in the bud right now on behalf of Northbridge residents. I would support him fully if he did.

ULLADULLA AND DISTRICTS WAR WIDOWS GUILD

Mr W. D. SMITH (South Coast) [5.03 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House the tireless, excellent and largely unrecognised work being carried out by the War Widows Guild of Australia, with a focus on the

Ulladulla and District Guild. Their motto—"We all belong to each other. We all need each other. It is in serving each other and in sacrificing for our common good that we are finding our true life."—exemplifies the spirit of the guild. The guild was first established in New South Wales in June 1946 in Sydney, founded by Jessie Vasey, widow of Major-General George Alan Vasey, who identified the need for specialist care and support of war widows. The guild is a self-help, charitable organisation with a membership base of more than 14,350 guild members in New South Wales, with the average age of members being 79 years. A network of 45 clubs meet throughout New South Wales monthly and represent all war widows—around 40,000—statewide. All have been widowed as a result of war in the service of Australia. Most have been widowed as a result of World War II. Some of their husbands died during the war and others returned with wounds and illnesses to be nursed, with death following in later years.

In my electorate of South Coast, the Ulladulla and Districts Guild was formed on 23 July 1999 to cater to the needs of members from Sussex Inlet to Batemans Bay. The President, Mrs Margaret Watts, and Secretary, Mrs Fran Powell, endeavour to hold meetings once a month. They have a membership of approximately 30, with meetings being socially based and barbeques held before meetings. Various guest speakers to inform and entertain the ladies are invited each month. The purpose of the Ulladulla, and all guilds, is to enable war widows to live their lives with dignity and to meet their ongoing and emerging needs, physically as well as mentally and socially. The guild members are compassionate enablers, influencers and advocates, working with others to help ensure that all services that war widows require and all their needs are met. Their vision is for members' interests to be promoted and protected as their wellbeing improves.

At the end of 2001 15 staff were employed by the guild, which has since employed an additional welfare worker to assist members when they need help or information, particularly at times of change. Often this is at a time of illness or hospitalisation, when major financial decisions are required, or when members are considering a change in housing arrangements. A guild worker visits the South Coast at least once a year to sit and discuss any issues or matters of concern with the members, and to sort out any problems members may be experiencing. The guild relies on the generosity of its friends and the members for its financial support, with no continuing government funding. The Ulladulla and District Guild was thanked for its continuing support and donations. It is considered an excellent example to all other guilds, especially for such a newly formed group.

The guild currently provides 202 properties, nearly all in Sydney, to house members, subsidising the rent, and making it affordable for those in need. The housing owned is built specifically to meet war widows' needs, and as residents in housing get older and increasingly frail, self-care housing may no longer be safe for them. The guild recognises that with the age decline in its members, alternative solutions will have to be sought. As nearly half of its members live outside Sydney, the guild continually endeavours to increase services to those members and strives to reduce social isolation. This can be seen in the Ulladulla and Districts Guild in my electorate. There are around 6,500 members in country and rural areas, who are more inclined to suffer the effects of social isolation as age increases, friends move away and transport becomes difficult as members give up driving, as is the case on the South Coast, with villages being quite a distance apart and the guild district being as large as it is.

The Australia Bureau of Statistics reports that the average woman of 65 years spends around 12 of her waking hours alone. A keep-in-touch scheme, which is a phone contact system, has been developed and implemented with great success. Members of the guild can ask to receive and make calls to chat with other members, to help alleviate loneliness and to keep in touch with other ladies of similar age and interests. This scheme has been embraced wholeheartedly on the South Coast. The secretary, Mrs Powell, also assists members by arranging transport to attend social gatherings to facilitate interaction with a variety of people. The members of the Ulladulla and Districts Guild are kept well informed about other guild activities and general information by an informative and entertaining quarterly production of the "Guild Digest" in audio and written form for all members to enjoy. The guild's advocacy role is incredibly important to politicians and other service providers in promoting and understanding issues faced by war widows.

NORTHERN RIVERS WESTPAC LIFE SAVER RESCUE HELICOPTER SERVICE

Mr D. L. PAGE (Ballina) [5.08 p.m.]: Last Sunday I attended the twentieth anniversary celebrations of the Northern Rivers Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter Service, which was held in the Byron Bay Surf Club. It was a very well attended function. People from the rescue service, related emergency service personnel—including those from the Ambulance Service, the State Emergency Service, the Volunteer Rescue Association and the surf-lifesaving movement—and the community generally attended the function. As I said in my address at the function, it was appropriate that the function was held in the surf-lifesaving club. If it had not

been for the support of Surf Life Saving Australia in the early days of the helicopter rescue service it would have failed. The occasion was a celebration of a wonderful helicopter rescue service that is widely supported throughout the Northern Rivers region. The service area stretches from Tweed Heads in the north, to Macksville in the south and to Glen Innes in the west. There are also regular flights to Brisbane.

The helicopter rescue service enjoys a fantastic level of community support in the region, so much so that donations from the community account for around 40 per cent of the service's operating costs, which amount to a total of approximately \$2.6 million a year. Initially there was just one helicopter, but these days there are two. The service is able to provide an immediate response to the many accidents and emergencies that arise across the region. I was interested to learn from the chairman of the service, Warren Tozer, that in its 20-year period of operation 3,800 rescue missions have been successfully performed, resulting in the saving of many lives. I cannot speak too highly of the community support provided to the Northern Rivers Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter Service. The support is broad based and enthusiastic. It has resulted in the community having a strong sense of ownership of this valuable service. It is something that the community feels it must have, and people are constantly prepared to put their hands in their pockets to support it.

In addition to strong community support, there are a number of very important sponsors. The major sponsor since 1991 has been Westpac. Prior to that the major sponsor was the Northern Rivers Co-Operative Meat Company. I pay a particular tribute to both of those organisations for their wonderful support over the years. When the rescue service first started the community would have viewed it as a bonus, something that was desirable. However, these days the community sees the service as a necessity because people understand that a quick response to serious accidents and emergencies, and the ability to obtain appropriate medical attention quickly, make the difference between life and death. I am aware of numerous examples where people definitely would have died had it not been for the ability of the rescue helicopter service to quickly deliver them to appropriate medical attention.

I acknowledge that the Department of Health, through an agreement with the rescue service, provides approximately a third of the operating costs. But I wonder, given the integral nature of the service in saving lives and the beneficial health outcomes, whether government support for the service should not be increased from approximately one-third to approximately 50 per cent—in other words, a dollar-for-dollar arrangement. Having said that, I must emphasise that it is important to retain a strong community contribution to the service because it provides that critical sense of community ownership that I referred to earlier. Operating costs increase all the time and amount to approximately \$2.6 million a year. Therefore, a 40 per cent contribution from the community represents \$1.04 million each year, which is a substantial amount of money given the widespread demand for donations from the community for a variety of good causes.

Perhaps it is time that the State Government considered increasing its contribution to around 50 per cent of the operating costs. In the general scheme of things, that would not be a great deal of money from the State Government's perspective, but it would ease greatly some of the day-to-day fundraising that is required to keep the helicopter rescue service operating. I mention the chairman, Warren Tozer, the board of directors and the management of the service, particularly Mr Perry Wells, who has been the face of the helicopter rescue service for many years. I have lost count of the number of fundraising functions I have attended with Perry over the years. I also mention the crew and the many volunteers and fundraisers who keep the service operational.

Today it is hard to believe, given the level of community support and the amount of missions flown by the service, that the service was put in jeopardy in 1994 when a senior Department of Health bureaucrat—who later, would honourable members believe, became the Director-General of Health—wrote a report recommending that it be terminated. The community outcry was loud and strong as the disbelief over such a recommendation grew. The subsequent campaign to save the helicopter was vigorous and, obviously, successful. This week is Helicopter Awareness Week. I note that the Northern Rivers Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter Service's mission statement is:

To provide the best possible emergency medical and rescue helicopter services 24 hours a day every day of the year, free of charge, whenever life or property are in danger.

This rescue service is on call 24 hours a day and is ready to go whenever it is called. My community appreciates the wonderful work performed by the service. I congratulate everyone involved.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.13 p.m.]: As the Parliamentary Secretary for Emergency Services, I congratulate the honourable member for Ballina on drawing to the attention of the House the wonderful service delivered by the Northern Rivers Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter Service. As the

honourable member for Newcastle, I express my pride in the Hunter Westpac rescue helicopter service. In common with the honourable member for Ballina, I pay a tribute to Surf Life Saving Australia for its initiation of the rescue services and continued support, and I compliment members of the community on their support of the helicopter rescue services. During Helicopter Awareness Week it is appropriate to recognise the service's enormous output—the honourable member for Ballina mentioned that it undertook 3,800 rescue missions in a 20-year period.

When one considers the number of lives saved by the medical retrieval service and the number of rescues one cannot but praise the boards, the pilots, the medical staff, the ambulance staff and the highly trained paramedics for going out in all conditions to perform rescues. The people involved in providing that service receive enormous support from the community. Sponsors of the Northern Rivers service—Westpac and the Northern Rivers Co-operative Meat Company—have been assisted by thousands of people who participate in fundraising. As the honourable member said, community involvement is an important anchorage for such a wonderful service. I commend the honourable member for bringing this matter to the attention of the House.

OPERATIONS VIKINGS I AND VIKINGS II

Ms HARRISON (Parramatta) [5.15 p.m.]: It is with great pleasure and pride that I congratulate the New South Wales Police Service on the excellent results of the recent operations Vikings I and Vikings II. This Government has brought the numbers of police in New South Wales to the highest levels ever. Only last month Police Minister Costa welcomed a record attesting class of 400 officers. These officers, class 11, from the Police College at Goulburn brought the number of police in New South Wales to more than 13,800. These police officers will be part of a more visible and proactive New South Wales Police Service.

This visibility was demonstrated over 15 hours on 24 May with the launch of Operation Vikings I and was followed up last week, on 14 June, with Operation Vikings II. More than 550 police officers were involved in the Vikings I blitz. Crime hot spots throughout Sydney, along with community and business centres, were targeted. The blitz resulted in 92 arrests and 100 charges. The majority of charges were for antisocial behaviour, offensive conduct, knife possession, drink driving, drug offences and goods in custody. These are precisely the sorts of antisocial offences that were intended to be caught up by the blitz. Local communities want that type of high-impact, highly visible policing.

Policing by its very nature is a complex and increasingly expensive procedure. Speaking of "expensive", I was extremely pleased that the Forensic Services Satellite Office at Westmead, in my electorate, benefited from this Government's most recent budget. An \$800,000 SEM/EDX microscope has been allocated to that forensic crime-fighting facility and is much appreciated by those hardworking men and women at that office. While essential items such as these are vital to effective policing, it is through operations such as Vikings I and Vikings II that street crime is deterred. It is the perceived danger inherent in antisocial behaviour that concerns law-abiding citizens. These police campaigns will send a message to the whole community that the New South Wales police can—and, more importantly, will—continue to mount high-profile operations.

Police Commissioner Moroney—I sincerely congratulate him on his recent appointment to that position—said that he wants all police to perform operational duties. Commissioner Moroney, his team leaders and all front-line police who took part in Vikings I and II are to be praised. The high visibility of uniformed officers out from behind desks and patrolling the street is what the community is entitled to, and wants to, see. During Vikings I in my electorate of Parramatta more than 30 police, including transit police and a police dog, went to places in Church Street Mall and Parramatta station. I know that many local business operators were heartened to see uniformed officers on the beat. The police were under the command of Parramatta Local Area Commander Superintendent John Carroll. Superintendent Carroll, who was recently awarded the prestigious Australian Police Award, was recognised for his commitment to internal witnesses and employee management.

After Vikings I swept through Parramatta, which lasted for several hours, the team moved to the Blacktown area. Superintendent Carroll reported that the places that it concentrated on were in response to community concerns. Because community concerns are exactly what the Government should be and is addressing, I applaud Operation Vikings I. But that was only punch number one of the Vikings I and II combination on crime in Parramatta. Operation Vikings II, which began at about 2 o'clock or 3 o'clock last Thursday 13 June, focused on major shopping centres such as Parramatta. That operation resulted in nine arrests, with four charges being laid. Police carried out numerous knife searches, random breath tests, cautions, et cetera. I witnessed some of the operations in the mall that afternoon, including one arrest. I was delighted to see the community's reaction to the blitz and happy customers at Westfield chatting to many officers. I spoke to Superintendent Carroll about the conduct of police officers that afternoon. It was a fantastic public relations exercise, with many of the police going out of their way to stop and chat to and reassure shoppers.

The next day, 14 June—when potential troublemakers thought that the storm had passed—another group of police carried out yet another part of the sweep. That resulted in even more arrests, searches and police action. The warning has gone out to street criminals. The Vikings operations are part of an ongoing commitment to high-profile policing, not one-off operations, as the street criminals might have thought. Business owners in Parramatta are pleased to see the police out in force. The operations were well received by the community, which was receptive to seeing these officers. Licensees publicly stated that they welcomed police walking through their premises—a sentiment that was echoed by their patrons. I commend Minister Costa, Commissioner Moroney and the Parramatta police command not only for a job well done but also for a job that I know they will continue to do in the future.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.20 p.m.]: It was a pleasure to hear the honourable member for Parramatta commending the Minister for Police, Commissioner Moroney and the Police Service for the success of Vikings I and II—a strong and visible police presence and a targeted operation against hot spots. Vikings I targeted antisocial behaviour and street offences in Sydney's central business district. The honourable member for Parramatta referred also to the successful 14 June operation in Parramatta and Blacktown which, once again, targeted offences that are causing stress and fear in the community. It was good to hear the honourable member recounting the feeling in her community about these successful operations. That is what the community wants. From 1 July, after the rollout of new policing policies, more police will be visible on the streets. Commissioner Moroney and special police groups will target antisocial behaviour and street offences through this Vikings program—behaviour which, as I said earlier, is creating many problems and causing fear in our communities. I commend the honourable member for bringing this matter to the attention of the House.

HOME WARRANTY INSURANCE

Mr MERTON (Baulkham Hills) [5.22 p.m.]: The home warranty insurance crisis is an issue that is continuing to have serious repercussions for local builders in the Baulkham Hills electorate. One local building business involved in the club and commercial market, including commercial residential construction, wrote to me last week about the difficulties that it is experiencing in obtaining insurance. The builder, Vic Paratore of Merlot Constructions Pty Ltd, raised an issue that has become widely known in recent months as builders struggle to stay afloat. He said that onerous conditions were being placed on builders and their spouses requiring home warranty insurance. The conditions include the signing of an indemnity, which requests all personal financial assets—inclusive of bank accounts, houses and vehicles—to be listed as assets. Those assets can be seized by the insurance company to cover any insurance claim that might arise.

A further requirement is the signing over of the right of power of attorney to insurance companies over all personal assets of the builder and his spouse. Clearly, it is outrageous to ask that of any individual running any type of business. I am sure that no other industry has had to cope with such demands. Another local builder, Michael Gremmo of Gremmo Constructions wrote to me earlier this year raising similar problems relating to home warranty insurance. From 17 July last year building businesses were charged \$357 for projects up to \$500,000, regardless of the cost. That meant that insurance for a pergola of \$15,000 was the same price as a house of \$500,000. In February this year, when a sliding scale for premiums was introduced, the amount levied for home warranty insurance sky-rocketed. Builders are now being slugged \$3,090 for insurance for dwellings above \$200,001 and below \$250,000, and \$4,030 on dwellings above \$250,000 and below \$500,000. That represents price increases of 850 per cent and 1,130 per cent respectively. As Mr Gremmo rightly said, he has never seen goods or services raised in price by that much in 6½ years—a very short period.

Subsequent inquiries that he made to HIA Insurance revealed the reasons behind such an astonishing increase. They included the continuing high level of warranty claims, the collapse of HIH and the flow-on from the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States. But as Mr Gremmo stated in his correspondence, no claim has ever been made for home warranty insurance or any other insurance in respect of his company. The company has never been referred to the Department of Fair Trading for any improper practices or for any other reason. While Mr Gremmo said he expected that the collapse of HIH and the terrorist attacks would have a flow-on effect on the insurance industry, he was not expecting one of such magnitude. Mr Gremmo has also called for a review of the method by which HIA Insurance assesses the categorisation of builders.

Gremmo Constructions has always been a category one builder based on HIA Insurance's net tangible worth method. But two years ago it was reclassified as a category three builder due to speculative building projects. That company remains a category three builder today, which is an injustice, given that it has never had a claim or complaint made against it. The Gremmo family believes that it has been discriminated against. The

improvements that HIA has made are of little use to the company. Gremmo Constructions argues that no company can sustain or, for that matter, pass on an 850 per cent or 1,130 per cent increase in insurance. In comparison to the premium hike for home warranty insurance, if it were to pass on a similar increase to its clients the cost of a \$240,000 house would rise to \$2.04 million. A price hike of that nature would be sure to attract the attention of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission!

Over the last six months, Gremmo Constructions, like many other building businesses, has lost contracts and faced undue financial strain due to the onerous conditions imposed in respect of home warranty insurance. The building industry as a whole has been suffering this plight for the last 12 months, with many small building businesses being forced to close down. The builder is at the end of the line with the unenviable task of passing on these prices or absorbing them—a no-win situation which places the client-builder relationship under stress before the project begins. Labor's Home Warranty Bill, which was passed in Parliament recently, failed to provide a sustainable solution. The Coalition put the Carr Government on notice that it has until 30 June—and that obviously will not happen—to resolve the crisis. The Coalition wants at least two new insurers introduced to the market, a reduction in premiums and an increase in access to insurance for builders without them having to hock their family homes.

When the Government privatised home warranty insurance it promised to deliver a tough regulatory and licensing regime to replace what the Building Services Corporation [BSC] used to do. That has not happened. The Home Warranty Bill has done nothing to address regulation or licensing, nor does it protect consumers and good builders from shonks and rorters. The Carr Government's latest legislation will do nothing to solve the crisis. Builders will still be required to put their homes on the line to get insurance. The Leader of the Opposition said last month that, if this crisis continues, the Coalition will consider bringing back a modified version of the old BSC model if it is elected in March 2003. [*Time expired.*]

ILLAWARRA ELECTORATE POLICING

Ms SALIBA (Illawarra) [5.27 p.m.]: I listened with interest to the comments of the honourable member for Parramatta about police in her local area. I also wish to bring to the attention of the House the activities of police in the Illawarra electorate. Superintendent Gary Hodsdon, the Lake Illawarra Area Commander, was extremely swift in implementing the Police Accountability Community Team [PACT] for the Lake Illawarra Area Command, and I commend him for that. I am a member of the PACT, which comprises people from Kiama, Shellharbour and Wollongong. It includes people in three State seats—Kiama, Wollongong and the Illawarra—as well as the business community and the police. The team provides positive support for police in my electorate. Superintendent Hodsdon wasted no time in contacting the local members of the three areas to ask them to send a representative along to the group. The team has looked at some of the statistics for my electorate and ways in which the police are combating crime.

In Dapto, in my electorate, I have set up a feeder group for the PACT. The group comprises local community members who have volunteered to be part of the team, and a number of representatives from organisations such as the Dapto Pensioners Association and the Dapto Chamber of Commerce. Kanahooka High School and Dapto High School send along student council members to take part in meetings of the team. Luke Vella, one of the student representatives from Dapto High School, who is in the gallery, has enthusiastically participated in team meetings and has had input into what is going on in our local area. I was pleased that the young people became involved, because very often when petty crime is carried out by young people some community members take the view that all young people are responsible for it. It is important that young people who are not involved in criminal or illegal behaviour are given the opportunity to have positive input into policing issues. It is good for them to be able to demonstrate to other members of the community that they are responsible young people and that they have a commitment to their local community.

Acting Inspector Danny Sharkey, the crime manager at the Lake Illawarra Area Command, attended a recent PACT meeting in Dapto, where he provided information about the way in which police are handling crime in the area and programs that the team has been running to address the issue. It was good opportunity for the community to have positive input and to make suggestions about ways in which police might handle specific problems. For example, in Dapto Mall there is a problem with people drinking alcohol in an alcohol-free zone, and we have discussed ways of addressing that issue. It is good to know that the police are open to suggestions about ways to deal with these problems. None of us has the answers to all the problems. It is therefore important to be able to communicate with people and find out other ways to deal with problems. I commend police in my local area for the work they are doing in targeting crime to ensure the safety of the Illawarra community. In particular, I thank Superintendent Gary Hodsdon for his swift action in forming the PACT, encouraging input from people who have participated in team meetings, and being honest with us about the issues and the ways in which police are addressing them.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.32 p.m.]: I commend the honourable member for Illawarra for reporting to the House the success of the Police Accountability Community Team [PACT]. The acronym gives a clear indication of the drawing together of the police and the community in seeking to find local solutions to local issues, focusing on crime hot spots, understanding policing issues, drawing together intelligence and putting it into effect, and drawing on the community's knowledge of local areas. I commend Luke Vella from Dapto High School, who I understand is in the gallery. It is extremely important that youth have a voice in policing issues. Far too often young people receive negative publicity. However, the majority of young people are committed and positive; they also want to have fun, but in a responsible fashion. Indeed, young people can provide a good lead to dealing with the small percentage of youth who engage in antisocial behaviour, by working with the police to develop positive programs to deal with those issues. I commend Superintendent Gary Hodsdon and Acting Inspector Sharkey, the crime manager, for working with the community to develop a proactive and visible police presence in the area.

MOSS VALE HIGH SCHOOL

Ms SEATON (Southern Highlands) [5.34 p.m.]: A new and exciting era has begun at Moss Vale High School. I bring to the attention of the House the marvellous things that are happening at that school. Not long ago we sadly farewelled Mr Philip Crampton, who retired after being a longstanding principal of the school. He is now involved in all sorts of community activities. The school now has a new leadership team—a new principal and a new deputy principal—and there is a great sense of commitment to carving a new era for Moss Vale High School in this new millennium. The Moss Vale campus of the University of Wollongong is also providing a lot of opportunities for Moss Vale students, particularly Moss Vale High School students. Some extremely fine young people have come out of Moss Vale High School. They are involved in community activities, youth advocacy, drug education and self-esteem programs, and community activities such as the Moss Vale Show.

However, Moss Vale High School is being let down by bricks and mortar. Despite the wonderful things that are happening inside classrooms, and the intellectual, cultural and academic output of the school, its buildings are old and tired. On Tuesday this week—a day on which it rained—I received a phone call from strong supporters and advocates for the school expressing concern that the hall was leaking and was a safety risk. Normally sports activities and other activities are conducted in the hall on rainy days, but because the hall has been leaking it has been unsafe to use. That is just one of the issues that supporters are concerned about. Despite the fact that the Premier crowed a lot in the budget about having a \$6.3 billion spending program, not one red cent of that funding has found its way to Moss Vale High School.

Stage three of the school's redevelopment has never been completed. A library and new administration building were built in the old F block, but refurbishments to the old administration area of A block have not taken place. On other occasions in this place I have spoken about the unsafe art demountables, the fact that the kilns are still not separated from the classroom area, and that the demountables are leaking and dangerous and have inadequate office space for staff. The school's hall is too small for a full assembly. The old D block has had no refurbishment for 39 years. The welding bay in that building is not safe; it is simply blocked off by temporary screening and is not considered to be safe.

On Tuesday this week water was leaking through the ceiling of the art department and the hall. On cold days heaters are used and the combination of heaters and leaking water is dangerous. On one building the external louvres are falling off. They have been subject to condition assessment for two years. The school cannot even get them removed for safety reasons—for example, to stop them falling on someone's head—let alone get them fixed. There are concerns that the louvres could fall off the building and hurt someone. The school image task force is doing a great job with the grounds and some of the smaller works, but bigger capital items are not being funded. Not a single cent of last year's \$70 million maintenance upgrade came to Moss Vale High School. As I understand it, no-one at the school was contacted to nominate projects for the \$70 million program.

On a number of occasions the school has been told that many projects should have been completed some time ago and they should have priority. However, in this budget absolutely nothing has happened. Under a recent program 4,000 heaters were allocated to schools in southern New South Wales. I understand about four of them went to the South Coast but not a single one went to the Southern Highlands. The heaters in Moss Vale High School are old. They need upgrading, which will cost the school a great deal of money. Putting in proper modern heaters would be a much better idea. Asbestos was removed from the roof several years ago and the insulation has not been replaced. That needs to be done. If the Carr Government is serious about supporting public education it should get serious about supporting schools that need fundamental bricks and mortar upgrades. Moss Vale High School deserves priority.

LAKECOAL PTY LTD COAL HAULAGE OPERATIONS

Mr MILLS (Wallsend) [5.39 p.m.]: The proposal by LakeCoal Ltd to transport coal to the Newcastle coal loader by truck through the residential streets of the cities of Lake Macquarie and Newcastle remains a serious threat to the amenity of many suburbs in the Hunter region, including suburbs in the Wallsend electorate. Those suburbs are Wallsend, Jesmond, Lambton, Shortland, possibly Sandgate, Black Hill, Beresfield and Tarro. Over the past two months a variety of proposals has emerged, all of which involve trucking coal through residential areas of our cities instead of taking coal to the export port by the current methods, that is, by using the ship *MV Wallarah*, which travels from Catherine Hill Bay to Newcastle Harbour, or by rail, which is how the bulk of coal is transported to the export port.

Honourable members representing the electorates of Swansea, Newcastle and Charlestown have made strong statements in this House insisting that such large volumes of coal—and we are talking of almost one million tonnes a year—should be transported to the port by ship or by rail, as is virtually the whole of the other 85 million tonnes that is exported from Newcastle each year. When this issue arose in mid-April I issued a media release which was headed "Mills rejects new coal truck routes through Wallsend". In that press release I said:

I join my colleagues in Swansea, Charlestown and Newcastle electorates in rejecting new coal trucking routes through residential areas.

Rail and ship have long been the preferred ways of moving coal through the Hunter from mine to port.

In that way the mining companies have shown respect for the peace and quality of life of their workers and their families in their homes.

What kind of mining company would propose to disrupt their workers and local communities in their homes, by use of inappropriate transport of product coal to the port?

Wallsend residents expect Lake Coal to organise transport which will ensure residents' current lifestyles are preserved.

The people of the Hunter Valley have great respect for the coal industry. It is our source of wealth and employment, but we expect that respect to be mutual. For the past 50 years coal-owning companies have shown that respect because they have met community expectations that rail and ship are, in effect, the only ways of transporting coal to the port. Transporting coal in that way does not disrupt too many lives. Road has been used only in exceptional circumstances, generally when things have gone wrong. The new company, the new boy on the block, has links to a property developer. It has decided to take on the community. That is regrettable. I am advised that Mr Kerry Heywood, the General Manager of LakeCoal, addressed a progress association meeting on 16 May. I am told he said:

... local MPs ... have refused to meet with Lake Coal; Newcastle City Council has organised meetings but the MPs don't come.

That is simply not true. I attended a meeting on 26 April. I give the lie to that claim. It is simply wrong. At that meeting on 26 April the Lord Mayor of Newcastle summed up by saying that the elected representatives present would request BHP to keep the ship *Wallarrah* going until the end of the Catherine Hill Bay mining operations, which will be soon, the elected representatives would move forward in a co-ordinated way, and that there would be another meeting after a technical committee had reported. BHP said it was willing to extend use of the *Wallarrah* for a few more weeks. It has been extended until at least the end of July. However, at that meeting it was indicated that the priorities of the councils and the community were, first, to keep the ship going; second that Chain Valley Bay coal should be sold to Vales Point power station and an effort should be made by the company to sell it there rather than to export it and, third, that rail should be used to take it to the port. Anything else was basically a no-no as far as the community was concerned.

At that meeting Tony Haggarty, director of LakeCoal, indicated that once the company got its road system going one-third would use the Pacific Highway through many suburbs, one-third would use the freeway and the link road through Wallsend and one-third would use John Renshaw Drive. All three are unacceptable. The community's priorities are still the same: to keep the ship transport going—if not, rail should be used; and to keep those hundreds of trucks laden with coal out of the residential streets. I do not want to see the streets of Wallsend awash in coal dust as they were 50 years ago.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.44 p.m.]: As the honourable member for Wallsend said, the community does not want to return to the 1960s and 1970s. Having coal trucks on the roads is an attack on residential amenity, an attack on the environment and an attack on the safety of our roads. The

coal companies take the benefit and the community bears the social and environmental costs. It has been made clear to LakeCoal that its proposal is unacceptable. The coal should be kept on the MV *Wallarah* or a way should be found of transporting it by rail. As the honourable member said, Chain Valley Bay unwashed coal, should be directed to the Vales Point power station or another power station in the area.

The company may have to find contracts but it should not use road transport to take coal up the Pacific Highway or the F3, or through suburban roads in Newcastle, thus impacting on residential amenity. This company is 80 per cent owned by a property developer who is obviously eyeing the potential development of residential blocks in the Catherine Hill Bay to Lake Munmorah area that is now owned by LakeCoal. That sensitive coastal land is subject to the Government's coastal policy. It will be subject to a comprehensive coastal assessment. In my view and in the view of the majority of people, the land should become part of the Munmorah State Recreation Area. It is not suitable for intense residential development.

HOSPITAL WAITING TIMES

Mr BARR (Manly) [5.46 p.m.]: I wish to speak about the unacceptable case of 91-year-old Edna Barrett, who had to wait in a corridor for 22 hours to get an emergency bed at Manly hospital. That case has highlighted yet again the severe pressure on our hospitals and the poor state of hospitals, particularly on the northern beaches. The case also highlighted the chronic shortage of nurses at our hospitals. A little over a year ago 23 beds were closed in the main ward at Manly hospital because of the nursing shortage. Those beds have gradually been phased back in. Four beds were reopened in the past week, partly in response to the unfortunate incident I referred to.

I understand the hospital is still having great difficulty staffing the four extra beds, and nine beds have still not been opened. Manly hospital and other hospitals still have a large number of nurse vacancies. I am informed that during the recent long weekend the emergency departments at the hospitals at Mona Vale, Ryde, Hornsby and Manly were closed for part of the weekend and ambulances were diverted to Royal North Shore Hospital. I am informed also that it took four to six hours to unload the ambulance trolleys at Royal North Shore Hospital. So the chronic nursing shortage is a serious issue. No matter how good the buildings and beds in hospitals, without specialist staff such as nurses and other specialists they are like empty stage sets. I am not saying that the Manly and Mona Vale hospitals are good buildings at present. The issue of hospital services on the northern beaches needs to be resolved.

I shall make a couple of points. The first is that the Federal and State governments need to work together to do something about the chronic nursing shortage. Included in the suggestions I have heard, which I think are sensible, is the notion of doing away with the higher education contribution scheme [HECS] fees for students undertaking nursing training. It seems absurd that we have a chronic shortage of nurses yet we are forcing students to pay HECS fees for something that is so vital. The second point that is linked with this shortage is the fact that nurses and other hospital staff need to work in good, sound clinical conditions. Major capital works on the northern beaches have been underfunded for a long time.

I have brought it to the attention of honourable members that over the past 12 years—a period encompassing governments of both parties—the Northern Sydney Area Health Service has been underfunded to the tune of about \$690 million compared with funding that other area health services have received. That is based on metropolitan area health services. The area covered by the Northern Sydney Area Health Service comprises about 16.5 per cent of the population but has received only 2.6 per cent of the capital works funding in those 12 years. In the recent budget I was pleased to see an announcement of funding of \$452 million for significant major works at Royal North Shore Hospital over the next eight years. That will go a considerable way towards rectifying the situation. However, work still needs to be done on hospital facilities on the northern beaches.

A planning process, which I support, is being undertaken now. In the budget funding has been provided for the procurement feasibility process. A report on that planning process is due in November this year. This planning must result in a long-term solution. I believe that the best long-term solution is a single hospital in a central location with an ongoing community health role for existing facilities. However, whatever specific recommendations emerge in November, somewhere along the line the planning and consultation that have taken place must translate into a commitment to major capital works on the northern beaches. If major capital works are not undertaken and new facilities are not provided on the northern beaches we will not be able to attract clinical staff and nurses to those facilities, because they will want to go elsewhere.

The problem is a combination of matters, including a shortage of nurses. We must do what we can to upgrade the nursing profession, upgrade the pay and physical conditions for nurses, and upgrade the facilities in

which they work to attract people into this worthy profession. If we do not do that sort of thing we will be facing this situation yet again, and there is no excuse for it. It should not happen. It must not happen. We must do everything we can to ensure that 91-year-old women or anyone else do not have to wait 22 hours to get into an emergency bed. It is unacceptable. As the member for Manly I will do everything I can to ensure that Manly hospital gets the facilities the hospital staff and the people of Manly deserve.

P. J. AND H. M. JENSEN STRATA MANAGEMENT LEVIES

Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [5.51 p.m.], by leave: I draw to the attention of honourable members the difficulties encountered by a constituent of mine, Martin Kelton, and the apparent inability of our government structures to assist him. Sometimes in the tabloid media we read horror stories about nightmare tenants. Mr Kelton's problems stem from a nightmare landlord and property owner. In December 2001 Mr Kelton purchased a home; he bought a unit in Liverpool. The unit was in a multistorey block near Liverpool central business district. There are nearly 30 units in the block. As is not unusual, the flats consist of a mixture of tenants and owner-occupiers. Mr Kelton is an owner-occupier. The vast bulk of the tenants and owner-occupiers are perfectly reasonable people who behave in a perfectly reasonable manner. However, the owners of two units are thoroughly unreasonable. These are P. J. and H. M. Jensen.

The real purpose of raising this issue in this forum is to request the Minister for Fair Trading to review whether the law and regulation in this area are in need of reform to assist in solving the dilemma faced by my constituent Mr Kelton and his co-owners in relation to the misbehaviour of these recalcitrant property owners. The essence of the problem is that the Jensens have refused to pay strata levies for a number of years. I am advised that the outstanding amount is now in excess of \$20,000, being more than \$10,000 for each of their two units. At one level, this is a question of basic fairness. All the other owners have paid their share, but these owners have not. However, it is more than just abstract principle. There are real purposes for which strata levies have to be used. If some owners do not pay then extra levies have to be paid by the remaining owners. This obviously includes all the usual and ordinary expenses. In the case of this block, some repairs to a wall need to be undertaken, requiring significant expenditure.

The defaulting owners have owned their units for some time. Mr Kelton has been advised that they purchased their first unit in 1976 and their second unit in 1982. Mr Kelton says that he has never seen them and has no idea where they live. He has seen reference to them living in Mudgee. Of course, Mr Kelton became an owner only in December 2001. Mr Kelton's inquiries reveal a quite disturbing picture. Strata levies seem to have first been owed by these owners in June 1991, about 11 years ago. Whenever they first stopped being paid, they have certainly not been paid for some time now, leading to an outstanding sum of more than \$20,000. Various attempts have been made to recover these levies. However, the Jensens appear to be past masters at using every conceivable strategy to delay and frustrate these proceedings.

Mr Kelton regards the Jensens as professional litigants, as do the strata's managing agents. Mr Kelton's research has revealed 11 separate court cases over the levies. Part of the problem is that each time a new levy is not paid further proceedings have to be instituted. This complicates matters and adds to the expenses. These practical difficulties are exploited by the Jensens. Even having judgements entered against them does not seem to have changed their attitude. The Jensens also seem content to make all sorts of allegations in an effort to avoid having to meet their financial obligations. Part of the sense of frustration in dealing with these owners is caught in a letter from the strata management to the Department of Fair Trading in March 2000. The strata manager advised the department:

We have been involved in a long, frustrating and protracted legal battle to recover the levies. They have managed for many years to avoid payment and in turn this has resulted in the other owners paying special levies to cover their non-payment.

The strata manager later said:

Frankly, when does the system and authorities look at them and force them to meet their obligations as an owner. Perhaps if they devoted as much time to paying their levies and not harassing our firm and other persons living at the complex, the strata plan would benefit and also the resources that they use by involving government departments would be a cost saving to the taxpayers.

These comments reflect the degree of intense frustration felt about the dealings the other owners have with the Jensens. The frustration is exacerbated by the complete failure of the present system to provide any consolation to the other owners. Accordingly, I ask the Minister to see whether anything in the present system can be changed to assist my constituent.

Private members' statements noted.

PRINTING OF PAPERS**Motion, by leave, by Mr Whelan agreed to:**

That the following papers be printed:

The Annual Report and Determination of Additional Entitlements for Members of the Parliament of New South Wales by the Parliamentary Remuneration Tribunal pursuant to the Parliamentary Remuneration Act 1989, dated 31 May 2002
Report of an Investigation under section 430 of the Local Government Act 1993 entitled "Re: Tweed Shire Council: Second instalment on Seaside City and Related Matters", dated 19 June 2002

The House adjourned at 5.58 p.m.
