

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 25 June 2002

Mr Speaker (The Hon. John Henry Murray) took the chair at 2.15 p.m.

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

ASSENT TO BILLS

Assent to the following bills reported:

Compensation Court Repeal Bill
 Crimes Amendment (Bushfires) Bill
 Legal Profession Amendment (National Competition Policy Review) Bill
 Financial Services Reform (Consequential Amendments) Bill
 Justices of the Peace Bill
 Licensing and Registration (Uniform Procedures) Bill
 Liquor Amendment (Special Events Hotel Trading) Bill
 Optometrists Bill
 Local Government Amendment (Enforcement of Parking and Related Offences) Bill
 Industrial Relations Amendment (Unfair Contracts) Bill
 Pastoral and Agricultural Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill
 Bail Amendment (Repeat Offenders) Bill

GUNDAGAI FLOOD SESQUICENTENARY

Ministerial Statement

Mr CARR (Maroubra—Premier, Minister for the Arts, and Minister for Citizenship) [2.18 p.m.]: Gundagai sits astride Mount Parnassus, high above the Murrumbidgee. It has all the colonial charm of a nineteenth-century inland town, but if you delve into the history you will quickly discover that the present town is not the original settlement. That town was swept away by a terrible whim of nature, a flood that killed one-third of the town's inhabitants and destroyed 71 buildings. I heard that fascinating story on Sunday morning on Malcolm T. Elliott's program. Malcolm interviewed Gundagai Tourism and Travel Centre manager and local historian, Mrs Marie Lindley. She claims the flood was Australia's worst natural disaster: 89 of the town's 250 people died, 27 more than were killed by Cyclone Tracy in 1974, which is claimed by many to be Australia's worst natural disaster. Mrs Lindley's husband is a direct descendant of a man who was away on business in Yass when the flood hit, but whose wife and children, sadly, perished.

The flood disaster happened 150 years ago today; it is an anniversary that we solemnly remember in this House. We remember, too, the humanity of the local Aborigines who spent that awful night rescuing survivors. We particularly honour the heroism of the local Aborigine Yarri of the Wiradjuri people and his mate Jackie, who saved more than 40 people using a simple bark canoe. Yarri, who died in 1880, was rightly honoured by the townsfolk as a hero. I am pleased to say that a marble headstone was recently erected in his memory by the local Aboriginal land council. But that was not the first part the local Wiradjuri people played in this tragic story. When the colonial authorities laid out the town plan in 1838 the indigenous people, with their ancient knowledge of the land, warned that the site would be risky. Yet the settlers planned a village on the low-lying river flats of the Murrumbidgee, and paid a woeful price for their gullibility.

This month the flood is being commemorated by the people of Gundagai. Commemorations started on the 7 to 10 June long weekend when about 2,000 people gathered in the town, including descendants of flood survivors and members of the local Aboriginal community. A book on the infamous flood was launched. A commemorative candlelight service will be held tomorrow night. All the threads of the Australian story are here in this tale: the original people of this country and their love and knowledge of the land; the courageous, sometimes foolhardy, white settlers; the possibility of reconciliation long before the term was invented; and the harshness of this land and the respect we must learn to have for it. Above all, today is an occasion to remember those souls lost to the darkness and confusion of the surging flood waters, to remember and commend them to a peaceful rest.

Ms HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [2.21 p.m.]: The past 150 years have been remarkable for the township of Gundagai. There have been many highs and many lows for the town. While I am talking about a

flood, I should say that we could certainly use another couple of inches of rain. The amount we had last week was just not enough. This week Gundagai celebrates 150 years since the great flood. On the June long weekend I had the great honour of joining with the former member for Burrinjuck, Terry Sheahan, to witness a terrific play, *Yarri of the Wiradjuri*, that was performed at Gundagai High School. The play highlighted the importance of the Aboriginal community to the Gundagai area. Reconciliation has been well on the way in Gundagai in the 150 years since Yarri rescued 40 white settlers with his bark canoe, as the Premier said. Only recently has it become known that Yarri of the Wiradjuri had an assistant named Jackie, who also took part in the rescue of many white people.

The original settlement of Gundagai was on the flats of the Murrumbidgee River between what the Aboriginal community described as a mother and a daughter, two arms that stretched around the area. In the early years of settlement the floods would come six inches to a foot into houses but the residents did not believe their lives would be at risk because even with a higher flood the women and children could resort to lofts or attics. The Aboriginal women warned the white women about the great flood that eventually resulted when the mother and the daughter river joined together and swept away the whole town. That was when Yarri of the Wiradjuri saved 40 individuals.

After the flood the site of Gundagai was moved to the mountains of Parnassus and Kimo. Since then Gundagai has enjoyed good and steady agricultural growth. It lies in the heart of my electorate of Burrinjuck. As the local member I am very proud to represent the township of Gundagai. I congratulate the local community on celebrating its sesquicentenary for the entire month of June. Bob Gilholme and other members of the Gundagai Advancement Corporation have put enormous work into the celebration. I wish them all the very best of luck.

BILLS UNPROCLAIMED

Mr SPEAKER: Pursuant to standing orders I table a list of legislation unproclaimed 90 days after assent as at 25 June 2002.

VARIATIONS OF PAYMENTS ESTIMATES AND APPROPRIATIONS 2001-02

Mr Aquilina tabled two variations of the receipts and payments estimates and appropriations for 2001-2002, under section 26 of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, arising from the provision by the Commonwealth of specific purpose payments in excess of the amounts included in the State's receipts and payments estimates.

PETITIONS

North Head Quarantine Station

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

Royal National Park Rusa Deer

Petition praying that the House ensure that culling of Rusa deer in the Royal National Park cease, received from **Mr O'Farrell**.

Lake Munmorah State Recreation Area

Petition praying that the northern entrance to the Lake Munmorah State Recreation Area remain open, received from **Mr Orkopoulos**.

Freedom of Religion

Petitions praying that the House retain the existing exemptions applying to religious bodies in the Anti-Discrimination Act, received from **Mr Piccoli** and **Mr Tink**.

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**.

Corrimal Traffic Arrangements

Petition praying that the pedestrian traffic signals on the Princes Highway at Corrimal be replaced by traffic and pedestrian signals at the intersection of the Princes Highway and Collins Street, Corrimal, received from **Mr Campbell**.

Lane Cove Tunnel Works

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

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**.

John Fisher Park

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

Lake Burrinjuck Water Level

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

Liverpool Electorate Natural Gas Infrastructure

Petition praying that residents of Cartwright have access to natural gas infrastructure, received from **Mr Lynch**.

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**.

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**.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**Report**

Mr Tripodi, as Chairman, tabled the report entitled "Inquiry into Court Waiting Times", dated June 2002.

Ordered to be printed.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

TAMWORTH PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENT MENINGOCOCCAL DISEASE

Mr BROGDEN: My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. Why was the occurrence of a case of meningococcal disease kept secret from parents at Tamworth Public School? Why did the Minister condone that cover-up by his department and the Department of Education and Training, given that standing departmental instructions require the Minister to be advised of all matters that are of major public concern or are likely to attract media attention?

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

Mr KNOWLES: As the head of the Communicable Diseases Unit, Dr Jeremy McAnulty, said this morning, "All of the protocols relating to the notification of meningococcal in all cases were adhered to."

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

Mr KNOWLES: Meningococcal is a rare disease that is difficult to transmit but can have fatal results. The most common strain cannot be vaccinated against. Each year about 200 cases lead to an average of between seven and 15 deaths. Meningococcal is a notifiable disease, and when a case occurs the Communicable Diseases Network of Australia, under the guidance of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, applies guidelines to the clinical and public health management of the disease. Now is the season—mid-winter to early spring—when the meningococcal illness peaks.

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

Mr KNOWLES: The cases identified today were notified and properly co-ordinated in accordance with the guidelines for early clinical and public health management of meningococcal disease in Australia, as confirmed by the head of the Communicable Diseases Unit. Given the extremely rare case that occurred at St Clair, public health officials have taken the opportunity of reminding the community of the need to be aware of the symptoms.

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

Mr KNOWLES: In addition, public health officials are in the process of contacting all schools, general practitioners, child care centres and other child care and health facilities, alerting them to the symptoms to watch for and providing general information about the disease. The head of the Communicable Diseases Unit has advised me that Tamworth Public School, the school attended by the child who contracted meningococcal disease, was notified and an information sheet was provided to the school to be given to anyone requesting further information. A media campaign was undertaken by the public health nurse from the area health service with information about recent cases of meningococcal.

These important public health issues are managed by public health officials in this State in accordance with guidelines. Given the seriousness and speed with which meningococcal can take effect, I urge mums and dads particularly to look out for the symptoms and to take precautionary steps should they occur. The symptoms are headache, fever, neck stiffness, drowsiness and confusion, vomiting and, in some cases, a rash of red or purple spots and bruises. I confirm again that the head of the Communicable Diseases Unit has advised that the protocols and guidelines were certainly adhered to in this case, as they have been in all cases. This morning the

Minister for Education and Training and I agreed that in the case of a single outbreak of meningococcal in any school, principals will receive a protocol in addition to the national guidelines, that is, the notification of all parents in the school.

Mr BROGDEN: I ask a supplementary question. When was the Minister first made aware of the incident in Tamworth? When did he first find out about it?

Mr KNOWLES: I have addressed the question.

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

Mr KNOWLES: In accordance with protocols and requirements, the young patient from Tamworth was hospitalised for treatment for meningococcal on Friday 17 May and we were notified at 4.00 p.m. on the same day.

CENTRAL WEST ECONOMY

Mr MARTIN: My question is directed to the Premier. What is the latest information on the economic situation in the Central West and related matters?

Mr CARR: What an astute question! One of the most encouraging things about the State economy is the band of prosperity that is emerging in the Central West.

Mr Tink: Except in your book.

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

Mr CARR: The challenge for you is to write a book. Do you have any thoughts to share? I am proud to say that the first print run was 5,000 and it is now 9,000, and every cent goes to a fellowship for a teacher of kids with disabilities. I am proud that. Why don't you do something like that? Why don't you share a few thoughts? There is not an idea between you, let alone a few ideas that could fill a book.

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

Mr CARR: After my comments in the House, the local paper in Orange, the *Central Western Daily*, declares, "Boom town—Orange an economic success: Carr". When we open up the paper, the editorial states, "Orange boom town of New South Wales". That is the sort of echo of statements in this House that are printed in the media in regional and rural New South Wales. There is not a peep out of the local member. He is nowhere to be seen. They do not know where he is.

Mr Slack-Smith: Point of order: The reason the honourable member for Orange was not mentioned in the newspaper is because he was too busy working for his constituents.

Mr CARR: They are all moving to protect him now. There I was at Electrolux, the new owner of the old Email factory—a company that has 1,100 jobs, supported by our package—and in a city that benefits from two great mines, which were facilitated by legislation we introduced in this Parliament.

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

Mr CARR: We introduced the legislation during our time, under our Government. What would the honourable member for Murrumbidgee know? The result is 4.6 per cent growth, making Orange one of the fastest growing cities in New South Wales.

Mr Slack-Smith: Thanks to the local member.

Mr CARR: The honourable member for Barwon is on our side. He should not pretend otherwise. A reporter from the local paper in Orange came to the literary lunch I was addressing, where I signed 45 copies of *Thoughtlines*, and said, "We have one question to ask of you, Mr Premier. Are you targeting the seat of Orange?" My reply was, "Yes, we are targeting the seat of Orange."

Mr Hazzard: We're targeting Maroubra.

Mr CARR: They say that the honourable member for Wakehurst will not even be in the shadow ministry after the next election.

Mr Hazzard: I will be in the ministry, not the shadow ministry.

Mr CARR: The member for Wakehurst is terrific; he is priceless; he is a serious liberal thinker. This band of prosperity in the Central West is something the House ought to acknowledge. The *Central Western Daily* said, "Orange has recorded one of the highest growth rates in New South Wales in the latest census"—that is the census that was published after my visit—"confirming the status baptised on the city by Premier Bob Carr as a boom city." I declare it a boom city, and the census comes out and confirms the status I have given it.

[*Interruption*]

Opposition members are saying that I was leaked the census results. They do not leak the census results to me, you fools! I enjoyed my trip to Orange so much that on my return to Sydney I cleared my diary and I am back in Orange next Saturday. While I was in Orange I visited Orange High School, which is a great advertisement for public education. The honourable member for Orange should go to some of these places in his electorate. I feel like I am the local member for Orange, with the work I am putting into the seat. Orange High School is doing such a great job for public education that I am going back there on Saturday to support it on its ninetieth anniversary. It is a great public school. The Mayor of Orange, Dick Niven, is rightly proud of his city's recent achievements. As to the figures for Orange, he said, "Those figures are excellent news and, of course, reinforce all the latest comments about Orange." Those "latest comments" were made by me and my parliamentary colleagues, not by the honourable member for Orange, who is never heard from on issues in Orange. The mayor also said, "All the hard work put into promoting Orange as a great place to live and work has finally started to pay off." The Mayor of Orange was talking about the partnership between State and local government to promote Orange. That partnership has delivered an unemployment rate of 4.6 per cent and an average income of \$10,000 above the average for regional New South Wales. The Chief Executive Officer of Electrolux, Mr Trevor Carroll, described the region as "globally competitive".

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is far too much audible conversation on the Opposition benches. I include the honourable member for Murrumbidgee in that warning.

Mr CARR: This band of prosperity also takes in the great city of Dubbo. The Leader of the National Party should look at Dubbo. It is a former National Party seat now held by an Independent who, according to the Liberal Party, is going to hold it at the next election. Dubbo is home to 35,000 people and has a solid growth rate of 2.6 per cent, with an unemployment rate of only 4.4 per cent. Our country centres' growth strategy in Dubbo specifically targeted the transformation of the region's economy. It is proving to be a winner and is creating an environment for growth. Since March 1999 we facilitated 11 projects, representing more than \$55 million worth of private investment and creating more than 250 jobs across the Dubbo electorate.

There was a time when the National Party was interested in jobs in country New South Wales. Do you remember those good old days? Not anymore. Wellington is another town that has benefited from our prosperity policies. It is home to the native vegetation unit. To staff that unit, more government jobs were shifted out of the city and sent to country New South Wales. The National Party would not send those jobs to Wellington. The *Wellington Times* of 1 June, referring to the State Government's budget, said "Budget brings boom funding". The boom funding to Wellington is a result of our budget. That shows a bit of optimism in rural New South Wales. At Bathurst I had the pleasure of opening the \$30 million upgrade of Ben Chifley Dam, to which the State Government contributed \$15 million. That is a fine example of the partnership between local and State governments that characterises rural New South Wales today.

Mr Stoner: What about the Lithgow smelter?

Mr CARR: In addition, two other projects alone injected \$50 million into the local economy, creating more than 210 full-time jobs. No wonder the *Western Advocate* on 22 May said "Bathurst doing well". I heard a plaintive cry from one of the little voices on the Opposition benches, "What about Lithgow?" Did honourable members hear a hint of that? I can answer that question. The unemployment rate in Lithgow is under the national and State average at 5.7 per cent. In October 1998 the Clarence colliery reopened, after an investment of \$7.5 million. We have another major project that the Opposition wants to scuttle—the \$140 million silicon smelter project. That project will create 370 jobs for Lithgow. Again, we see this band of prosperity benefiting this great region of New South Wales.

That smelter will inject \$32 million into the regional economy. It is no doubt the case that it would not go ahead under a Coalition Government, but that will be \$32 million going into small businesses, restaurants, shops and local services. Construction of the smelter in Lithgow is expected to start by the end of the year and be completed within 22 months. Once fully operational the smelter will create exports of \$100 million a year. This is another interesting theme. Wherever one looks in this band of prosperity the success is based on exports, whether it is the Cadia or Ridgeway mines—

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

Mr CARR: This is not the old National Party world. This is the modern, competitive, globally engaged New South Wales economy. This is the modern New South Wales. It is not the old National Party whingeing about its McEwen past. It is a globally engaged, modern industry linked to world markets. There are a lot of Lithgow based businesses. The Coalition speaks about the Greiner years. The only thing he is good for is the tobacco industry—the chair of a tobacco conglomerate. The bloke who put the Leader of the Opposition in his job heads a globally engaged tobacco conglomerate based on hooking kids into smoking, based on hooking kids into tobacco addiction.

Mr Brogden: That is not right.

Mr CARR: That is absolutely right. Now the members opposite interject, "What about shooting galleries?" Your leader voted for our legislation.

Mrs Skinner: He voted for extending the trial.

Mr CARR: Yes, he voted to extend the trial of what you call the shooting gallery. Your leader voted for it.

Mrs Skinner: It is not the same as voting for smoking.

Mr CARR: She says it is not the same as voting for smoking. Dumber and dumber. I cannot believe that they would yell out about shooting galleries after the vote in this House, which saw their leader vote for the Government's legislation for a medically supervised injecting room.

Mrs Chikarovski: I didn't.

Mr CARR: I know you didn't. I am not saying you did. I know you didn't. You're a good girl.

Mrs Chikarovski: Point of order: Not only is the Premier sexist and patronising, he is out of order.

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

Mr CARR: Let me get back to Lithgow. Subcontractors in the city of Lithgow are looking forward to our plans to build a \$10 million State Government office block. It will create some 100 construction jobs—another success for our regional government jobs location plan. As with the police assistance line, which is already in Lithgow, we are relocating 132 State Debt Recovery Office jobs into the city. Towns and communities west of this band are not being left behind. My attention was drawn to the experience of Hay, proudly represented by that very active member, the honourable member for Broken Hill. The latest edition of the Broken Hill paper has a terrific photograph of him and the Minister. Hay, 728 kilometres west of Sydney, has a population of a little over 2,800 and an unemployment rate of just 3.5 per cent. They have had a great month, with confirmation that Hay council has given the go ahead for the new \$8 million Hay hospital, described in the local press as "New hospital gets the nod".

This is the very generous press treatment that our budgetary initiatives are getting throughout rural New South Wales. The Hay newspaper reports that the State budget delivered last week allowed for large sums of money for Hay. It reports some of the highlights of the budget—\$2.9 million towards a new hospital, more than \$7 million road funding for the shire, \$20,000 for the Sandy Point redevelopment, and funding of \$1.36 million this year to construct a new multipurpose building at Hay War Memorial High School. The generosity goes on, with an additional \$3 million boost in road funding for the shire, which takes the 2002-03 funding to \$7.6 million. There are other parts of rural New South Wales that I can talk about, but I have confined myself to some parts of it because the message is one of buoyancy and optimism. Nowhere in this happy picture is there a place for the relentless whingeing and negativity of a carping Coalition Opposition.

RAIL SERVICES

Mr BLACK: My question without notice is to the Minister for Transport. What is the latest information on the Government delivering rail services for New South Wales?

Mr SCULLY: It was a great day for Broken Hill yesterday when the honourable member for Murray-Darling was able to inform the people of Broken Hill that Country Labor had delivered again. Well done! I believe that a little bit of history is in order. In 1989, when the honourable member for Murray-Darling was the mayor of Broken Hill, these miserable members opposite cancelled the *Silver City Comet* to Broken Hill. Who was chief of staff to Bruce Baird at that time? It was none other than the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai, Barry O'Farrell. The people of Broken Hill were outraged.

The Labor Party made a commitment in 1994 leading up to 1995 that we would return the train service to Broken Hill. When we came to office we returned that service in 1996. However, the former Coalition Government had left the rail rolling stock in such shambles that the only rolling stock available were 50-year-old rail carriages, which were only able to run for about four years. As I informed the House a little while ago, those carriages got to the stage of being so old that we needed to withdraw them from active service. We made a commitment at the time that we would return the train to Broken Hill. This is where Country Labor works in an integrated, holistic fashion. The National Party should listen to how we operate.

South Coast Country Labor delivered not only for the Illawarra and the South Coast, but also for their communities by getting the electrification from Dapto to Kiama. That was a \$42 million project and a big win for the honourable member for Kiama, the honourable member for South Coast and the honourable member for Illawarra. This freed up three Endeavour rail cars and the Government spent \$4.2 million converting those Endeavour rail cars to three Explorers, which were delivered yesterday, and we had a terrific time. The honourable member for Dubbo should be pleased to hear that the train left this morning on time. I understand it is out in the vicinity of Parkes on its way back into Sydney. It will be a record service—Monday morning out, Tuesday morning back.

Yesterday the honourable member for Murray-Darling and I went on board the train at Menindee and the local townsfolk were there to receive the train. Menindee Central Public School was out in force. In fact, practically the whole school went on board the train for the trip up to Broken Hill. Honourable members may remember Darnick station. The honourable member for Ku-ring-gai does not like to hear about Darnick station because that is the station he had accidentally bulldozed. The train went through Darnick station and about 40 people were there to welcome it.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I place the honourable member for Coffs Harbour on two calls to order.

Mr SCULLY: The train pulled up and the people enthusiastically received that train returned to them by the Labor Government. When we pulled into Broken Hill station the reception was absolutely terrific. The band played *Waltzing Matilda* and there was a banner—

Mrs Chikarovski: Please don't sing!

Mr SCULLY: They hate this stuff. Every question time we should tell them about the achievements of Country Labor because they hate hearing about them. This is a great Country Labor achievement. The band played *Waltzing Matilda*, the train broke through a banner and 200 townsfolk crammed the station. There was a euphoric three cheers for Peter Black, who had delivered the train. I will not say "Hip hip hooray for Peter Black" in the Chamber, because that would be unparliamentary. However, in Broken Hill there was virtually a standing ovation for this great member for Murray-Darling.

The new train will not be called the *Silver City Comet*, because that is what those opposite called it. Yesterday the townsfolk expressed some interest about what it would be called. Some have suggested the "Silver City Xplorer" and the local member has suggested the "Broken Hill Bullet". I assure National Party members that, despite pressure from the Country Labor team, we will not call it the "Broken Hill Blackie", the "Blackie Bullet" or anything like that. There will be a competition to decide the name and we would like to hear from the townsfolk what they want their train to be called. The front page of this morning's edition of the *Barrier Daily Truth*—which yet again tells the truth—carries the headline "Glorious return of city's comet". The article reads:

The ghost of the Silver City Comet was laid to rest yesterday when the new Sydney train pulled into Crystal Street Station.

The pipe band struck up with "Waltzing Matilda" and the hundreds of people along the station platform applauded as the Silver City Explorer, whistle blowing, broke the banner set across the tracks.

Well done to the honourable member for Murray-Darling. This Government is doing still more for regional rail networks. I thank Country Labor and the honourable member for Maitland for securing 14 new rail cars in the Hunter. The tender process is well advanced. This is another win for Broken Hill because tied into that contract are three brand-new rail cars for the Broken Hill service. When the 14 new rail cars are delivered for the Hunter there will be another three for Broken Hill. The carriages that we sent to Broken Hill yesterday, which cost \$4.2 million as new, will be replaced in the next few years by brand-new rail carriages, and Country Labor and the honourable member for Murray-Darling will deliver for country people again. We will have a win on the South Coast, a win in the Broken Hill area and a win in the Maitland-outer Hunter region of this State. This Government is delivering for the people of New South Wales.

Despite what members opposite say, this Government continues to deliver for metropolitan Sydney and outer suburban areas of the Central Coast and the Illawarra. We have a contract well advanced for InterCity cars for the Illawarra and the Central Coast. As we indicated in the media this morning, the Millennium trains will be delivered on Sunday and Monday. However, the House should know about the Opposition's record in delivering trains. We have heard Opposition members criticising Labor governments and their delivery of trains, so I ask: What is the Coalition's record in government?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the National Party will cease interjecting.

Mr SCULLY: Their record is pretty ordinary. The Tangara train was commissioned, designed, built and introduced by Labor in government. The Millennium train was commissioned, designed, is being built and will be introduced by Labor. What did those opposite do? How many trains have Coalition governments introduced in the past 30 years? I would like to say none, but there is one that was introduced in February-March 1995. When I learned about it I said, "That can't be right; there's no train running around the system now." But I was told that it was correct.

I telephoned one of my deputy chief executive officers today to check that a Coalition government actually introduced a train—I am not used to Coalition governments delivering infrastructure; they have no idea how to do it. However, I was told that it was correct and that it was called the "Tilt Train". I asked how it had happened and I was told that the State director of the Liberal Party made a call to Bruce Baird and said, "Let's engage in the mother of all political stunts; let's get a tilt train out." Bruce then said to Barry, "Hold on, where can we get a tilt train to whiz out just before the State election?"

Mr O'Farrell: Not true.

Mr SCULLY: This is true; and you should be embarrassed about it. The Coalition sent a team to Sweden to lease a tilt train and to gain expertise on how to drive and run it. The train came to Australia on a special boat from Sweden. The boat docked at the wharf and the train was lowered onto the track.

Mr Tink: Point of order: My point of order relates to relevance. The question was about Broken Hill, not Sweden. I would have thought the Minister for Transport would understand the difference, as he is a city-based member who purports to know something about Country Labor.

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

Mr SCULLY: They took the train off the boat from Sweden and found that it could not power itself on our system. So the three tilt train carriages were pulled by two XPT power cars for what I call the "mother of all rail stunts". The train went on a magical mystery tour around the State. Where did it go? It visited the North Coast, Moree, Armidale, Tamworth, Dubbo, Parkes, Broken Hill, Albury, Wollongong, Penrith and Campbelltown. The train even went to the Easter show at Moore Park. How did they get it to Moore Park? They took it off the tracks, put it on a truck and drove to Moore Park to display it.

What concerns me is that this mother of all rail stunts cost \$10 million of taxpayers' money. Next time the chairman of the Opposition waste watch committee has the gall to comment about so-called government

waste—and if any of my frontbench colleagues hear such a comment from him again—each and every one of us should ask him, "When is the New South Wales branch of the Liberal Party going to pay back that \$10 million it took from the taxpayers before the 1995 election?"

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: The party will pay the bill when the Minister for Transport proves his case.

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

SEXUAL ASSAULT SENTENCING GUIDELINES

Mr SOURIS: My question is directed to the Premier. Why will the Premier not adopt the Coalition policy of a 10-year minimum sentence for aggravated sexual assault, given that in the past seven years, more than half of those found guilty of heinous crimes such as rape with violence, rape with physical harm, rape of young people and rape under threat with a weapon have received sentences of three years or less?

Mr CARR: That is precisely why we went to the Court of Criminal Appeal to put a case for guideline sentencing.

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

Mr CARR: That is precisely why we were in a position recently to welcome decisions in cases such as this that have sent people to rot in gaol for appropriate periods of time.

PLANNING NSW RESIDENTIAL FLAT DESIGN PATTERN BOOK

Mr COLLIER: My question is directed to the Minister for Planning. What is the latest information on Government measures to improve apartment design and related matters?

Dr REFSHAUGE: What a great night it was last night at the Sutherland Bowling and Recreation Club. The people there were cheering the honourable member. He is the patron of that club and a very popular member. Last year the Government launched a program to improve the design quality of residential flats across the State. That program was practical and innovative. In November the Premier and I officially launched the Residential Flat Design Pattern Book and its accompanying web site. The feedback we have had since then has been outstandingly positive. A total of 1,200 copies of the book have now been distributed to councils or sold to architects, developers and planners. Our pattern book web site has been visited by more than 22,000 users in the last seven months.

I am happy to inform the House that the success of the web site has now gone global. Over the weekend the Government's pattern book web site beat an international field at the prestigious Cannes Lions awards in France. These are the advertising equivalent of the famous Cannes film awards and they are considered to be one of the most highly regarded industry awards in the world. The Cannes Lions received more than 16,000 entries from organisations across the globe. PlanningNSW was the only government agency anywhere in the world to be recognised at this year's awards. The pattern book web site won in the "Content Orientated Sites" category. In that category we beat 1,300 entries from 41 countries. Let me share with the House what the judges said of our award:

It says to the world that your campaign is not only strategically based, and no doubt effective, but most importantly that your work is creatively outstanding. That it is the best in its class. It is recognition that you have pushed the boundaries further than your peers ... and that your creativity shines the brightest.

This is an extraordinary achievement. Many of the entrants in the Cannes Lions are major multinational companies as well as newspaper groups and magazines from all corners of the world. I would like to congratulate the private design company known as Massive Consulting and the staff of PlanningNSW who were responsible for the creation of this now award-winning web site. Since it was launched last November, the pattern book web site has had more than 22,000 users getting ideas, guidance and information about flat design. Our site has now been recognised by the Urban Land Institute in the United States, which is the biggest research and advocacy group on planning and urban design in the world. They have added the pattern book web site as a link to their own web page.

The success of the pattern book has been mirrored by scores of other agencies across New South Wales. Departments have embraced technology to provide an even better service to the people of New South

Wales. Indeed, the ratings agency ACNielsen consistently lists the New South Wales Government web sites as the most accessed of any government in the country. Last month there were 12.1 million page views on the New South Wales Government web sites, twice the number of the nearest contender, Victoria, which had just 5.6 million views in the same period.

My colleague the Minister for Information Technology informs me that the Government's web portal now has more than 3,000 links to other sites including the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, New South Wales Fisheries, CityRail, TAFE New South Wales, the Department of Health and the Department of Education. In fact they are some of the most popular sites providing easy access to information and services for the people of New South Wales. Today people can log on to register their boats, pay their bills, book tickets to the Opera House, explore New South Wales tourist destinations or even sponsor a zoo animal. Job seekers can now find employment opportunities in the New South Wales Government sector; and download their job information and apply for the job online.

By grasping hold of information technology the Government can provide essential information and services to people, no matter where they are in the world. These services are only getting better through the training program to help government agencies develop better online services. Once again I congratulate the creators of the pattern book web site for their award. It is a great achievement. It clearly demonstrates the good work that is being done in New South Wales through our web sites, making governments more accessible, delivering to the people of New South Wales and, as this award shows, leading the world.

NRMA MEMBER SERVICES MEETING

Mr HARTCHER: My question is to the Premier. In the light of the forecast by NRMA Services company secretary Jenny Kelly that an unnecessary cost of \$2 million will result from the forcing of an emergency general meeting because Australian Labor Party factional disputes continue to spillover into NRMA administration, will you intervene immediately to stop ALP factional warfare further impacting on NRMA services?

Mr CARR: If the status of the member for Gosford as a parliamentary clown were in any doubt, that question would confirm it. There he sits, someone who has not drafted a scrap of policy; someone who as Minister for the Environment once wanted to privatise the national park system; someone whose only publicity was that stuff about the doona. I do not want to read the stories about him. I am not responsible for the NRMA nor for the range of people in it. I might as well tell you, as you are a New South Wales Liberal, to get the number one Liberal in New South Wales, Nick Greiner, out of the tobacco business, out of producing an addictive substance that they market for kids. That would be about as relevant. I thank the House for its attention.

Mr Brogden: Point of order: The Premier on several occasions today has stooped to personal attack rather than answer questions of substance from the Opposition. I ask you, to stop the Premier from stooping into the gutter on occasions with these personal attacks.

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

RURAL AND REGIONAL TEACHER RECRUITMENT

Mr BLACK: My question without notice is to the Minister for Education and Training. What is the latest information on Government efforts to encourage young teachers to work in rural and regional areas?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable for North Shore to order for the third time.

Mr WATKINS: Getting bright and enthusiastic teachers into rural schools is critical. That is why this week more than 40 teaching students from the University of Sydney will be visiting Deniliquin to get a taste of country life and to experience first-hand what it is like to work in the bush. All are participants in the Department of Education and Training's Beyond the Line program. That is an initiative about attracting new teachers to country schools. Through it, student teachers in teaching universities from throughout New South Wales spend up to five days visiting country towns and public schools that serve those towns. In total this year about 560 student teachers from eight universities will visit the key rural centres of Dubbo, Moree, Griffith, Broken Hill and Deniliquin. Dubbo has already played host to 60 University of Newcastle students, along with 25 from the Charles Sturt University. In the north-west, Moree, Narrabri, Wee Waa and Bellata have hosted 30

Southern Cross University teaching students and 54 students from the University of New England. Next week Broken Hill will host about 50 teaching students from Charles Sturt University and other groups will head out west later in the year.

Country centres are welcoming teaching students with open arms, with banners in the streets and a special type of bush hospitality that is unique to western New South Wales. They are receiving a warm country welcome, and it is working. The 180 student teachers who have participated in the Beyond the Line Program so far this year have been surveyed about their experience. At this stage 100 students have sent back the survey. They speak overwhelmingly of how positive their experience has been. One student said, "It was a very informative trip. Definitely want a place in the Moree district." Another student said, "The spirit of country people is a great incentive to go out west." In short, Beyond the Line is achieving results. More than 100 teaching students who took part in the program in the past two years are now teaching in country schools and that is what we want to achieve. The promotion of rural teaching positions is complemented by the Graduate Recruitment Program currently under way at universities that enables the department to select the best possible students after they complete their degrees. This year up to 1,000 graduates have been targeted to go into schools in 2003.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will remain silent.

Mr WATKINS: Of these 1,000 graduates, 592 went through the program last year and 302 went to country schools, 160 of which were country schools away from the coast. New teachers are also recruited through the \$ 3 billion preservice teachers scholarship program that has received quite a deal of media coverage in the bush. One would therefore expect the Leader of the National Party to have learnt about it. One would think that the National Party would be aware of the policy, but apparently it is not.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the honourable member for Epping are talking continually, and those in the gallery cannot hear the Minister. If they want to conduct a conversation I suggest they do so outside the Chamber.

Mr WATKINS: At the recent National Party conference the National Party released two education policies, which is two more than the Liberal Party. At last, we have two education policies for the people of New South Wales by which to judge this mob. Let us have a look at them. One policy was a commitment to provide 100 scholarship positions.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I place the Leader of the National Party on two calls to order.

Mr WATKINS: At the conference the Leader of the National Party promised that teacher scholarships—

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

Mr WATKINS: They do not like this because it shows that they do not have any effective policies. At the conference the Leader of the National Party promised teacher scholarships for students to become country schoolteachers, targeting an initial annual intake of 100 students.

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

Mr WATKINS: They are promising to target 100 students. We already have a policy in place in New South Wales that targets 140 students going to bush schools. The mob over there is promising a policy that will reduce the program from 140 to 100. They will cut the program by 30 per cent. This is the education policy that they are taking to the people of New South Wales. Thanks a lot, George! You are doing nothing for the schools in western New South Wales. At least the National Party has a policy. It is useless, but it has a policy. Where are the policies from the Liberal Party of New South Wales? It does not have any policies in education because it does not care.

WELLINGTON COMMON INDIGENOUS LAND USE AGREEMENT

Mr McGRANE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Will the Minister inform the House of the progress in signing over the Wellington town common to local Aboriginal groups?

Dr REFSHAUGE: I am aware of the honourable member's concern about resolving the issue of the Wellington common. After some serious consultation and negotiation, eventually agreement was reached at the end of last year by all of the parties concerned in regard to the transfer of the Wellington common to the local Aboriginal community. That agreement was then sent to the Native Title Tribunal in January this year. The Native Title Tribunal advertised the agreement, and people had until 9 April to respond and determine whether there were any objections to it. My information is that there has been one objection to the agreement to be ratified by the Native Title Tribunal. At the moment the tribunal is assessing that objection. Once it has made its assessment it will determine whether to register the agreement. If the agreement is registered then I will be in a position to use the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, for the first time, to acquire the common and transfer it, using that agreement, to the local Aboriginal community. At the moment I am awaiting the decision of the Native Title Tribunal.

TWEED HEADS FIRE STATION

Mr NEWELL: My question without notice is to the Minister for Emergency Services. How is the Government helping to protect the families of the Tweed?

Mr DEBUS: I thank the honourable member for his interest. In an impressive boost to the level of protection in Tweed Heads its fire station is now operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as a result of the doubling of the number of full-time firefighters. A total of nine new firefighters have commenced duties at Tweed Heads fire station, which is very good news for local families and businesses. As the Tweed Heads newspaper the *Daily News* reported last week, the fire station is now "better staffed, better equipped and open 24 hours a day". These people also pointed out that the beefed-up service is expected to ensure consistently speedier emergency response times, and allow firefighters to cope in a fast-growing shire. The arrival of these nine new firefighters built on the recent \$100,000 extension to the state-of-the-art fire station, which was opened just five years ago at a cost of \$1 million.

The fire station is well equipped for hazardous materials emergencies, with the placement of a dedicated HAZMAT response vehicle and boat, which can respond to dangerous chemical spills in the lakes, rivers and dams of the region. Protecting the beautiful waterways of the Tweed from hazardous material spills is an important priority for local firefighters. A high-quality reconditioned metropolitan fire engine is due to be delivered to the station in the near future. A new \$250,000 fire engine has already been delivered to the nearby Tweed River station. Together these two deliveries significantly boost the protection of the community. In the Tweed area the New South Wales Fire Brigades has a network of four stations in total—the other three are at Kingscliff, Murwillumbah and Tweed River—to ensure that the Tweed shire is well served by the New South Wales Fire Brigades. The addition of nine new firefighters is quite a dramatic boost in protection for the people of the Tweed, as well as of benefit to the local economy. All nine firefighters have moved into the area to take up positions, and they have brought their families with them.

Speaking more generally on the Government's strong track record of protecting our community from fire and other emergencies, the Government has continued its commitment to ensuring that our emergency services have the best possible equipment. In 2002-03 the budget provided another record \$564.6 million to be spent on the Rural Fire Service, New South Wales Fire Brigades and the State Emergency Services. In the Tweed area there is a continuing expansion of the spending program. In this year's budget the Richmond-Tweed division of the SES will receive a new radio system as part of the \$2.4 million improvement to its communications system. It will also benefit from a new sand-bagging machine provided to the Murwillumbah SES in 2000 to help in times of flood. In the past seven years the Rural Fire Service in the Tweed shire has been allocated \$1 million for the purchase of state-of-the-art firefighting equipment. This impressive expansion of the Tweed fire station is just one element in the Government's continuing commitment to deliver adequate protection to our rural communities.

Questions without notice concluded.

RAIL SERVICES

Personal Explanation

Mr O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai) [3.30 p.m.], by leave: During the circuitous answer of the Minister for Transport to a question from the honourable member for Murray-Darling about the restoration of the *Silver City Explorer* the Minister for Transport impugned my reputation by suggesting that when I was State Director of the

New South Wales Liberal Party I had either suggested to the Liberal Minister for Transport or colluded with the then Minister for Transport to bring the tilt train to New South Wales at a cost, according to the Minister, of \$10 million. The Minister rounded off his attack, which I view as grave, with the suggestion that the \$10 million had been wasted and should be paid back by the Liberal Party—presumably because of my alleged association with this deal. I say very clearly to the House that that was a false statement made with an intent to deceive. I call upon the Minister to search the files to try to find any skerrick that suggests that I had a conversation with the Minister for Transport or any officer of the Department of Transport and in any way had anything to do with the trial of tilt trains in this State. I ask the Minister to table all papers upon which his answer was based today. I ask him to put up or shut up. Alternatively I ask him to repeat the accusation outside this Chamber, in which case I will get satisfaction.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

Country Lifestyles Program

Mr MARTIN (Bathurst) [3.31 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because it is important that we continue to send the message to people in non-country areas about the Government's Country Lifestyles Program. This promotion and government schemes are creating economic development and jobs. The record amounts that the Government is putting into education and health in particular are making country lifestyles very attractive. The program is also helping our cousins in the city by relieving pressure on the overpopulated Sydney Basin. We need to continually reinforce this message. I ask that both sides of the House join in debating this urgent matter.

Millennium Trains

Mr DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [3.32 p.m.]: Today we have heard that the bulk of the Millennium trains has been put off for about 18 months. I am sure members from both sides of the House would agree that every day we receive phone calls and letters about dirty, delayed and overcrowded trains. The Government has been desperately hoping that the Millennium trains would be delivered to overcome the overcrowding; I do not think the Millennium trains would overcome the dirty and delayed trains. They are the three issues that come through to us continually. Today the Minister finally confessed that on Sunday there would be a photo opportunity, another stunt, the mother of all stunts for the Carr Government, when four Millennium carriages will start on the CityRail network. Those four carriages will be trailed around the entire network for the next 12 to 18 months. That will be the only sign that the Carr Government has delivered anything of benefit to commuters on the CityRail network. But commuters will quickly realise that those four carriages mean absolutely nothing in relation to overcoming the main problems of the day that are reported to members on both sides of the House—dirty, delayed and overcrowded carriages.

Mr Ashton: Point of order: I am loath to take a point of order but the honourable member is debating the substance of the motion. He must debate why his motion is more urgent than the motion of the honourable member for Bathurst.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! What is the point of order?

Mr Ashton: The point of order is that he spent the last minute and a half talking about the substance of the motion.

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

Mr DEBNAM: That interruption from the member opposite illustrates the entire point of this exercise. This Government has no understanding of project scheduling. It has no understanding of project management. It has no understanding why urgency in delivering these train carriages is critical for all the commuters across the network. The honourable member's taking a trivial point of order with no substance whatsoever just highlights again the absolute contempt that members of the Labor Government have for commuters generally in the rail system. Why is patronage on the rail system falling? I listened with some amusement yesterday as the Minister for Transport, who should really be renamed the Minister for tollways because they are the only things Carl Scully is interested in—

Mr Ashton: What about the M5 East?

Mr DEBNAM: That was one of the excuses that the Minister for Transport used yesterday to explain the falling patronage on the rail system. The other excuse was September 11. The Minister said that

unemployment in the central business district—he has not heard about the economic activity in New South Wales or in Australia under John Howard's Government—the M5 East and September 11 were the driving factors in pushing down patronage on the public transport system. This is the difficulty for Labor members: they do not use trains. What they need to do is get out there on the public transport system and actually talk to the commuters. I would be happy to take them out on the train system for a day and show them what is happening on some of the lines. If they come with me and travel on a couple of the lines and talk to people—

Mr Greene: Point of order: While we are prepared to sit and listen to the honourable member not debate the urgency of this motion but go off on some tangent, I object to the shadow Minister attempting to impugn the character of Government members who, like me, travel on public transport. Indeed, I caught a train on the Illawarra line today. I would catch the train on many more occasions than the honourable member has ever thought of.

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

Mr DEBNAM: I have to say that last year a constituent of the honourable member for Georges River complained to me about the graffiti on his railway station because the honourable member would not do anything about it. I pursued that issue and I will pursue—

Mr Greene: Point of order: Again I suggest that the honourable member should deal with the urgency of the motion and why it should be discussed. Most importantly, he is welcome to contact me about my constituents at any time.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member's speaking time has expired.

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

COUNTRY LIFESTYLES PROGRAM

Urgent Motion

Mr MARTIN (Bathurst) [3.38 p.m.]: I move:

That this House applauds the State Government's Country Lifestyles Program, which attracts families to relocate to regional areas and creates jobs and investment.

This Government has a strong belief in country New South Wales. Anybody with any doubt about that had only to listen to the Premier this afternoon when he answered a question from me in relation to what is happening in the central western region of New South Wales, where this Government, which has been accused by the Opposition of being city-centric, has a strong focus on and connection to country New South Wales. Country Labor has been working with the Government to promote the benefits of living in country New South Wales to families and businesses all over Australia. We know that country New South Wales is a great place to live and raise a family. Now what we want to do, from this Parliament, is tell the whole world about it. That is what Country Labor stands for—talking up country New South Wales.

We on this side of the House do not subscribe to some of the negativity that comes from the opposite side of the House. Opposition members want to blame all the ills of country New South Wales on sex, drugs and rock and roll. That is what we heard from the Federal Leader of the National Party recently. This Government has introduced a comprehensive package to promote living in country New South Wales. It is called the Country Lifestyles Program. It aims to dispel the myths about country New South Wales that those opposite from time to time like to bandy around. Since 1998 this program has aimed to attract families and businesses to country New South Wales. It also aims to attract investment and key skills to regional areas to ensure that business growth is tapped to its full potential.

One of the key initiatives of the Country Lifestyles Program has been regional business and investment tours. Those tours provide a forum for regional businesses to showcase their business to a group of investors from the city and overseas. Bringing investors face to face with the excellent opportunities in country areas is the key to helping country businesses access the necessary capital that is often lacking in the regions. And it is working! The tours have drawn an incredible response and have led to investors developing important relationships with regional businesses. Scores of investors have visited 20 regional centres as part of the six

regional tours that I mentioned. For example, regional business investment tours visited Goulburn, Bathurst in my electorate, Orange, the Tweed, Albury, the Narrandera-Leeton area and Grafton, to name a few. The National Bank of Australia, Quadrant Capital Fund, Deutsche Bank DB Capital Fund, Westpac and ANZ have been represented along with many small investment groups. One success story is the \$30 million timber plantation at Grafton.

It is important that city-based investors realise the abundance of opportunities in the country. The tours showcase the best of regional New South Wales and, at the same time, importantly, create jobs and/or investment. Prior to firms being involved in the showcases they take part in investment readiness workshops that are sponsored and conducted by the Government. Some 14 workshops have been held to educate businesses on the nature of the investment community and to help them structure their presentation to better attract investment. Following the disaster of September 11 last year the safety and lifestyle opportunities that country living presents are becoming more attractive to city dwellers. In every cloud there is a silver lining. I am sure that honourable members will recall that the Minister for Regional Development has noted the sea change phenomena taking place across the State. The Minister reported that since the September 11 tragedy there have been increased inquiries about towns such as Berry on the South Coast, as well as healthy property sales in the Central West, the New England and in my home town of Lithgow.

In order to further promote the value of living and working in country New South Wales, the Government joined with the Real Estate Institute to develop the "Guide to Investing and Living in New South Wales". The guide aims to provide valuable and up-to-date information on the competitive advantages and industry profiles of the regions. Local governments have the opportunity to be included in that publication and to promote the advantages of living in their area. Many councils in my area have taken advantage of that. Information on lifestyle and employment opportunities is included to help families and businesses looking to relocate in country New South Wales ensure that they find the right location. Following the success of the first edition the Government is sponsoring a second edition entitled "Moving Ahead", which is to be launched shortly.

Mr Armstrong: Point of order: I am sure that the honourable member would recognise that in order to get families to relocate to the country it is necessary that a four-lane to six-lane highway over the Blue Mountains be provided. I know he supports that, and I ask him to put in a commercial plug for it.

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

Mr MARTIN: I will respond to the point raised by the honourable member for Lachlan in my reply and I thank him for that free kick. Under the Country Lifestyles Program the Government sponsored the pilot regional investment breakfast, which was held in Sydney. At the breakfast regional companies presented their investment opportunities to a range of banks and venture capital providers. The Government has developed a Regional Investment Forum Program to assist businesses seeking investment dollars. That program also assists businesses that are looking to present their products to a large network of investors in Sydney and other capital cities through investment breakfasts and trade showcases. In addition, the Government has invested in more Industrial Supplies Offices [ISO] and consultants across the State. Consultants have begun work in Dubbo, Goulburn, Wagga Wagga, Tamworth and Grafton. ISO officers work closely with existing economic development bodies specifically to develop import replacement opportunities. It is important for country companies to be able to access the ISO, which does a lot of legwork, particularly through the networks that have been created over many years.

Simply put, this means more jobs and investment for country New South Wales. As a result of ISO activities, almost \$54 million imports were replaced in 1999-2000 and \$22 million last year. Analysis undertaken by independent consultants of the ISO has shown that each \$1 million of imports replaced creates 5.8 direct jobs and a total of 22 direct and indirect jobs. That is encouraging news for country families. The Government has developed a plethora of targeted programs to promote country New South Wales—the Country Lifestyles Program is just one, albeit a very important and successful one. The Regional Employment Transmissions Scheme is another initiative, which the Premier mentioned earlier today. Country Labor is committed to working with the Government to continue to promote country New South Wales as a great place in which to live and work. There is no magic wand involved, but we always do our best for country people.

During question time today the Minister for Education and Training spoke about scholarships for young teachers to work in country areas. Last year the Government introduced a scheme to encourage skilled teachers to work in remote areas—they were given a \$5,000 bonus to stay for a certain period. Under that

scheme the Government is ensuring that Brewarrina, Bourke, Boggabilla and similar towns have teachers. The Government's massive investment in schools will ensure that people who work and live in country areas will be able to access schools that are up to the standard of their city counterparts. The same sort of investment has been made in medical facilities in rural areas. The Minister for Health has done a marvellous job in working with the Federal Government to ensure that doctors are attracted to country areas. Recently we heard what the Government is doing to attract nurses back to the profession. We have heard about the myriad of new hospitals that the Government is building across the State, but they need to be staffed by competent medical people. That has been a challenge not only for New South Wales but for every State—indeed, every country has faced that phenomenon. Opportunities for nursing staff have been increased because they are required to have a tertiary education.

The Government is committed to making sure that the business part of the Country Lifestyles Program works. It is also committed to setting up investment tours and making sure that those opportunities are made known to people who want to invest. The Government is giving country industries the chance to grow and is ensuring that the infrastructure that is so important to country cities and small communities is in place. The recent budget highlighted a record 26 per cent growth in capital works over the next four years to provide water and sewerage schemes, roadworks, and medical and educational facilities for the people who are moving into country areas. That underscores the commitment of the Minister for Regional Development to attract business to the bush. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee) [3.48 p.m.]: I speak to the motion for urgent consideration concerning the State Government's Country Lifestyles Program. I come from a regional centre, Griffith, which is a rapidly growing city in western New South Wales. Other towns in my electorate, including Leeton, Deniliquin, Finley, and Berrigan, and Hay and Hillston to the west, are also growing rapidly. How we attract people to those country towns is significant. All members of Parliament support programs such as the Country Lifestyles Program in an attempt to encourage people and investment to country New South Wales. Griffith and other communities face the difficulty of attracting people to fill the available positions, an issue referred to by the Premier during question time today. We should not play too much on the success of the Country Lifestyles Program. The honourable member for Bathurst made great play of it and of the involvement of the Labor Party and Country Labor.

The issues that affect investment in country New South Wales, and perhaps deter people from moving to and staying in country New South Wales, are the big budget issues. The State Government has tried to deal with those issues in the past seven years. Dealing appropriately with those issues will keep people, particularly young people, in the country. Local government needs the support of State Government when a company investor seeks to establish an enterprise in country areas. All too often local government has had to place significant impositions on businesses and industries which seek to set up in country towns because of the costs involved, which local government has to bear. Local government does not receive the necessary support from the State Government to assess development applications in country areas. In terms of development approvals and support from the State Government, a number of great industries have set up in country New South Wales. However, some have been strangled, such as the Lake Cowal goldmine project. Without the support of the State Government, the project has been on again and off again.

Health is another important issue to be taken into account. I know of businesses in my electorate that wanted to expand and others that wanted to move out west, but they were concerned about staffing and access to health service. The Government built a brand new hospital in Hay, and I am sure that the people of Hay support the hospital. But if doctors are not allowed to practise in the hospital there is not much point in building it. A couple of years ago two doctors, a husband and wife team, practised in Hay. The wife, who is an obstetrician, was basically told by the area health service that she could not practise obstetrics. The service did not want babies delivered at Hay hospital. Those two doctors ended up leaving and Hay lost two valuable members of its community. The Coalition supports capital spending in country areas on health facilities, but it is important to ensure that services can be performed in the hospitals. Transport is crucial for industry and for people who live in country areas. Honourable members often talk about the lack of maintenance of country roads and the inadequate funding that local government receives from the State Minister for Transport to support its local roads infrastructure.

Mr Martin: What about the Roads to Recovery Program?

Mr PICCOLI: I am pleased that the honourable member for Bathurst has raised that matter. That \$1.2 billion would not otherwise have been received from the State Government. The Federal Government has

played its role, although it is not part of its responsibility. As to taxes in this State, workers compensation premiums, whilst not a tax, are a State Government impost. The premiums are ridiculously high and are turning businesses away from country New South Wales to set up in other States. As a member who represents an electorate on the Victorian border, I am well aware that there is a marked discrepancy between States in payroll tax. Companies looking to locate around the Riverina and in the Murray region are given every incentive to establish in Victoria. Businesses are choosing to set up in Victorian towns—such as Echuca, Swan Hill and Cobram—because the taxation rates for business in New South Wales are far too high. These issues affect employment and the establishment of businesses in country New South Wales and in New South Wales generally.

Education, particularly the establishments of TAFE and university facilities, is another issue that affects rural areas. Universities are a Federal responsibility. The Federal Government also needs to do more to encourage universities, particularly regional universities, to establish more facilities in various communities. Over the years the TAFE system has become more flexible. With the support of the State Government, I am sure that the expansion of TAFE facilities would provide a greater incentive to businesses to set up in country towns if their employees could be trained locally. All honourable members who represent country electorates know that the people who are most likely to stay in their communities are the ones who are born and bred there. The people who grow up and train locally will stay locally. We need to provide that opportunity. Accommodation in my electorate, in places such as Griffith and Hillston, is a major issue. A few years ago the Premier announced the five-point plan for the western Riverina, which is one of the fastest-growing areas in Australia. Not much has happened since then. A few reports have been written, but there has not been any definitive action. If the Government really wanted to promote this area, it would put some money and resources towards it. It should not get a few people to write a few reports.

Mr Martin: Talk specifics. Don't waffle.

Mr PICCOLI: The honourable member for Bathurst says he wants specifics. When the Premier announced the five-point plan he referred to the price of land in Griffith. Nothing has been done about that land since, which is owned by the New South Wales Government. As to other major issues that impact on investment, employment, the people and the prosperity of country New South Wales, I refer to the Government's water reform, the native vegetation reform and the threatened species legislation. I do not ask Labor Party members to believe me. They can believe what the New South Wales Labor Party delegates said at their State conference last year. Part of a motion moved by the Griffith branch of the Labor Party, which was supported, stated:

... calling on the ALP to return to policies of protecting the welfare of people.

If the Government members do not believe me, they can believe the Labor Party branch in Griffith.

Mr Martin: This is specifics?

Mr PICCOLI: The honourable member for Bathurst again says he wants specifics. The Griffith branch of the Labor Party calls on the ALP to return to policies of protecting the welfare of people. I am quoting from the true believers. They are not my words. My good friend the honourable member for Coffs Harbour will enjoy hearing a motion of the Coffs Harbour Labor Party branch, which states:

That this conference calls on the State and Federal Labor ... to consider and to act favourably upon all motions passed at the NSW Conference.

That is something we all support when we go to our conferences. It continues:

As Country Delegates are aware, these motions are duly passed at State Conference, and very few, if any are adopted into practice or policy by the various Ministries.

What a condemnation of the Labor Party! The Government invites all its Labor branches to a conference, lets them speak for a day or two, but does not listen to anything they say. I am quoting from the true believers. They are not my words. I would not say these things. The motion continues:

If the ALP is to win more Regional and Rural seats at both State and Federal elections, then the voice of the regions must be heard and acted upon.

What a condemnation of this State Government! It is not a condemnation by me—someone who the Government could say has a bias—it is a condemnation by the Labor Party's very own constituents, the Coffs

Harbour Labor Party branch. Government members can babble all they like. The Government rolls out the honourable member for Bathurst and the honourable member for Murray-Darling for these urgency motions and gives them a bit of time. I am sure that the Premier makes all sorts of promises to them. We need serious action in relation to health, transport, taxation, education and accommodation to address job creation in country New South Wales.

Mr PRICE (Maitland) [3.58 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the honourable member for Bathurst and I support the points he made. I target specifically one point that affects the Hunter Valley, specifically my electorate.

Mr Amery: The rail line we are opening that they closed?

Mr PRICE: The tour could have been conducted by rail, but I believe the participants used various methods of transport. I support that sector of the Country Lifestyles Program that involves the film industry. I was very pleased to have the tour participants visit my electorate when they inspected the old Tocal Homestead and Maitland gaol. Tocal Homestead has been the site for at least two films. The most recent film was a television series which ran for four weeks called *Kings in Grass Castles*. Tocal Homestead belongs to the State Government, and is administered by the Department of Agriculture. It is an excellently preserved residence that is making money from the film and television industries as and when it is required because of its age, its state of preservation and its location.

Tocal Homestead depicts a country lifestyle as it was 150 years ago. Indeed, when people visit the Dungog shire, Maitland and surrounding districts they appreciate just what they are missing out on by living in metropolitan areas. The film industry recognises the scope and extent of opportunities for film locations throughout New South Wales, particularly in the Hunter Valley. Of course, the old Maitland gaol is always a popular location for the film industry. It is the oldest high-security gaol in the State, apart from Parramatta gaol, and is used extensively under licence by Maitland City Council and a number of subcontractors. It is in an excellent state of preservation and would be extremely valuable in any film or television series depicting the history of the colony and the lifestyle that brought about the need for incarceration of people in institutions such as Maitland gaol.

When the party visited the gaol they were taken on a tour by a former inmate, who gave them a unique perspective on gaol life. He was able to enumerate a number of the more notorious criminals who were held in detention at the gaol for many years until it ceased to operate some four years ago. The tour was the first industry-focused tour the Government had conducted. It not only covered the Hunter area, it covered a number of specific areas in New South Wales—from the coast to the outback—including Broken Hill. It provided a mechanism for the industry to appreciate, through the Country Lifestyles Program, what New South Wales has to offer.

I have a daughter in the television industry and a son in the film industry. I have an appreciation of what Fox Studios has done for the movie industry in New South Wales. Therefore, it is easy for me to understand why people want a centre as a base and why the Country Lifestyles Program sends them outside metropolitan Sydney into the country areas, to take in the magnificent scenery, to look at the heritage of the areas, to appreciate the natural environment, to understand the impact of the Aboriginal community over 60,000 years, as well as more recently, and European settlement, and the trials and tribulations associated with that.

The Upper Allyn, another area in the Hunter, was used as a movie location several years ago, and that significantly increased the economic benefits to the area. The large sums of money that were outlaid stayed in the area. The movie provided locals with part-time work and assisted with the local economy. The tour has been extremely beneficial. The Police Traffic Infringement Bureau has been relocated to Maitland and will open in a few months time, resulting in 160 jobs. As part of the Government's decentralisation program, in 2004 the Department of Mines will relocate 180 jobs to Maitland. These initiatives are a tremendous boost to commercial operations in country towns and have significant economic benefits. The department is also arranging for at least two other significant industries to be located in the area. All I can say is: Hold the front page because those announcements will be coming shortly.

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [4.03 p.m.]: I speak to the motion for urgent consideration, which states:

That this House applauds the State Government's Country Lifestyles Program, which attracts families to relocate to regional areas and creates jobs and investment.

People in this State are paying record taxes, but country people are receiving very little in return. The recent budget again confirmed that New South Wales remains the highest taxed State in Australia. Despite country people paying record taxes, basic services in rural and regional New South Wales are virtually second-rate. Hospital waiting lists are longer than ever before and crime rates continue to rise. This Labor Government has a Sydney-centric obsession, a habit that eight years in office has failed to cure. When this Government came to office in 1995 it presided over a slash and burn operation of jobs from education, agriculture and other departments, yet those jobs have never been replaced. I am pleased that the Minister for Agriculture is at the table because agricultural jobs have been lost and have never been replaced. Country taxpayers are paying more than ever, yet they are receiving less in return.

One-third of the State's population lives outside the metropolitan area, yet the capital expenditure in the important areas of health, police, education and roads allocated in the recent budget to country New South Wales falls well short of the one-third benchmark that they should receive. Despite Labor's booming revenues, services in country New South Wales are getting worse. Country areas need appropriate services if they are to attract more people. The honourable member for Bathurst has moved the motion, yet he is the only Government member from a country constituency who will speak to it. Once again the Treasurer has balked at making good his promise to cut payroll tax, which is one of the biggest issues facing employers in this State. The Treasurer and the Carr Government have failed to address this problem.

The Government has continued its attack on the Department of Agriculture. This year the department's budget has been cut in real terms compared to actual expenditure last year. Labor has presided over a raft of anti-country legislation—for example, native vegetation and water legislation—that has cost jobs in the country. Government members need to visit rural and regional New South Wales to see what is happening in those areas. The budget for the Department of Land and Water Conservation has been cut from \$562 million to \$558 million and 175 staff will go at a time when the State needs their support. Country areas need more money. The motion refers to the Country Lifestyles Program, yet the Government is not providing the necessary funding to provide appropriate services. Funding for road maintenance in country areas was cut in real terms in the budget.

The budget failed to address extra pay and better hospital conditions for nurses. Funding for preschools has not been increased and class sizes have not been addressed. Funding for country town water and sewerage has been cut by almost \$12 million—essential services, particularly when the Government seeks to attract more people to country areas. Despite the spin and rhetoric of the Carr Government it has let down rural communities and insulted them by allocating only \$4 million to the program over four years. They deserve much more because of the wonderful contribution they make to this State. The Government is treating country people with contempt. Therefore, I call on the Carr Government to increase funding to the Country Lifestyles Program. The program is not working at its present level.

Mr NEWELL (Tweed) [4.08 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to join my colleague the honourable member for Bathurst in addressing the House on this motion for urgent consideration. The motion applauds the State Government's Country Lifestyles Program, which attracts families to relocate to regional areas and creates jobs and investment. The Carr Labor Government and the Country Labor team want to deliver real outcomes for rural and regional New South Wales. In the 2002-03 budget the Government is spending some 36 per cent of the State's revenue on 28 per cent of the population. Such a return has never been exceeded by any other government, particularly a Coalition government.

Since the launch of Country Labor in 1999, the Carr Government has introduced a raft of business development programs to help regional enterprises grow, access new markets, diversify or better promote themselves. Those initiatives include new market expansion plans, the Agribusiness Alternatives Program, the country centres growth strategy, the Regional Economic Transition Scheme for struggling towns, the Townlife Development Program and T-Corp, which encourages regional businesses to form co-operatives. We know that regional New South Wales is a good place to do business and we will do our best to promote our regional areas. But in true Labor style, Country Labor has gone one step further than the Coalition ever did.

The Country Lifestyles Program introduced by this Labor Government is a perfect example. It is all well and good for country business people to make the journey to Sydney and pitch their services to investors, but it is quite another to fly a group of investors directly to regional New South Wales and allow businesses to showcase themselves on their own turf. This is what Country Labor has been doing since 1998 through the regional business investment tours. We are not only providing country businesses with better access to capital but showcasing the country way of life to investors. One of those tours visited the Tweed, and the likes of Quadrant, Venture Capital Partners, Smith Madden, the Overseas Union Bank, the Commonwealth Bank of

Australia and Australian Business Angels listened to presentations by the Chinderah Marina Project, Eco Furniture and Timber, the Skyrider Teleport Project and Permo Drive Research and Development Pty Ltd. Those tours are backed by investment readiness workshops for tour participants and by business relocation seminars and regional investment breakfasts for investors. I have heard many stories from companies that have taken on board advice offered to them at the department's workshops and have later been able to secure contracts.

The Country Lifestyles Program funded the soon-to-be-released second edition of the "Guide to Living and Investing in Regional NSW". Tweed Shire Council has sponsored a page in the guide, and it is a fantastic advertisement for our local area. The guide gives an overview of where we are, our transport infrastructure capabilities, access to tertiary institutions and health services in the region, an outline of industry in the Tweed and a list of major companies that have located in the Tweed. The guide also lists major community events such as the Banana Festival, All That Jazz and the Wintersun Festival, which was held recently in the Tweed and on the Gold Coast, and describes how to access government agencies and services. It is a perfect snapshot for potential investors who may be unfamiliar with regional New South Wales.

Country Labor understands the needs of regional businesses and communities. Lack of recognition of local industry capabilities has always been an issue, so we established through the Country Lifestyles Program regional branches of the Industrial Supplies Office [ISO]. In 2001 the ISO secured some \$22 million worth of import replacement work for regional firms in New South Wales. That obviously creates spin-offs such as jobs and economic growth in regional New South Wales. Access to capital is an ongoing problem, so Country Labor established the regional business investment tours. We are promoting regional New South Wales as a place to live and we will soon have released two editions of "Guide to Living and Investing in Regional NSW".

We are delivering real outcomes for regional New South Wales. From our business development programs to the promotion of our country lifestyle, Country Labor certainly has country interests at heart. I remind Opposition members that in the Carr Labor Government's 2002-03 budget country New South Wales, which has 28 per cent of the population, received 36 per cent of the expenditure. Coalition members do not like to hear that. They also cannot bear the fact that under the last Coalition Government—and I hope it will be the last for a long time—payroll tax rose to about 8 per cent. Under the Carr Labor Government payroll tax has fallen consistently over the years to a level of 6 per cent and, as the Treasurer said, we will continue to reduce it.

Mr MARTIN (Bathurst) [4.13 p.m.], in reply: I thank the honourable member for Murrumbidgee and the honourable member for Lismore and my colleagues the honourable member for Maitland and the honourable member for Tweed for participating in this debate. There was great disparity in the standard of contributions as, once again, Opposition members failed to grasp the arguments. Unfortunately, the honourable member for Murrumbidgee has obviously not done his homework. He is one of those lazy Coalition members who, as Tim Fischer said, is still out to lunch. He raved on and then mentioned payroll tax.

[Interruption]

The honourable member for Camden should realise that under the previous Coalition Government payroll tax reached 8 per cent and the threshold caught many more businesses. The Government has reduced payroll tax by 25 per cent, and that reduction continues. The budget introduced an exemption from payroll tax for those employers who employ apprentices. That is a very popular policy in the bush because it will help regional companies to employ more apprentices. If there is any credibility in the taxation area it is not on the side of Opposition members. Perhaps we can excuse the honourable member for Murrumbidgee because he has been here for only five minutes, but one would think he would have some sense of history.

The honourable member for Lachlan, who was sitting behind the honourable member for Murrumbidgee, must be a little concerned about the future of the National Party if that is the calibre of members it has to look forward to. I remind honourable members that payroll tax was introduced by the Fraser Government. It told the States, "If you want any other source of revenue, we are chopping you off; the only opportunity you have is payroll tax." Before Opposition members argue about payroll tax they should take a history lesson and see where it came from. The honourable member for Lachlan is a great colleague: We worked together on the tri-government group to secure a second crossing of the Blue Mountains. However, today he took a point of order—he usually does that—in an attempt to delay us. Once again Government members have taken the lead. Some weeks ago the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads put his \$1 million on the table and John Anderson reluctantly followed suit. National Party members say they will do this and that, but once again it was the Government that broke the deadlock.

Opposition members talk about road funding. Remember the much-trumpeted largesse of the Roads to Recovery Program in last year's Federal budget that offered \$1.6 billion to country councils? It was much appreciated and people said, "Here is a Coalition government in Canberra that is listening to the bush." However, that program disappeared from the next budget. So much for John Anderson's contribution to country councils! Coalition members should talk to officers of Evans Shire Council and Rylstone Shire Council in my electorate and they will tell them how they have been duded by the Federal Government on the Roads to Recovery Program. They set themselves up for a four-year program that was promised by the National Party but that has been cancelled after just one year. Those councils must consider sacking staff, and road funding will grind to a halt. Once again Opposition members have opened their mouth to put their foot in it.

Mr Fraser: Point of order: The honourable member for Bathurst is misleading the House. He knows full well that the Roads to Recovery Program has not been withdrawn. He should tell the House the truth and not mislead it as he is doing this afternoon.

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

Mr MARTIN: If the honourable member for Coffs Harbour is capable of doing so he should look at the budget papers. He should talk to councils around the bush. The current Federal budget contains no money for the Roads to Recovery Program—a four-year program that finished after one year. The very forgettable member for Murrumbidgee mentioned the Lake Cowal project. The company has told the Government, "We've looked at the environmental issues and realised that there were problems; it's now back on the agenda." As the Premier has reminded people time after time, major mining activities throughout country New South Wales—including some in close proximity to my electorate in the Blayney-Orange area, such as the Ridgeway mine—have received investment of hundreds of millions of dollars on the back of the Government's good economic management. Unfortunately, Opposition members have again shown their disrespect for country people. They advanced not one credible argument in their negative contributions. They simply blame the ills of the country on sex, drugs and rock and roll. They are an absolute disgrace. I commend the motion to the House and expect that Coalition members will be too embarrassed not to support it.

Motion agreed to.

OVINE JOHNE'S DISEASE VACCINE

Matter of Public Importance

Mr AMERY (Mount Druitt—Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Corrective Services) [4.19 p.m.]: I ask the House to note as a matter of public importance the vaccination and trading options for sheep producers with sheep afflicted with ovine Johne's disease [OJD]. For years OJD has been a contentious issue in rural New South Wales. The issue has been whipped up from time to time by National Party spokesmen, who have called for the program to be disbanded and so on. However, I am pleased to report to the House, as I have done on many occasions in the past, that the OJD control program and the evolution of the various facets of it, which have been developed in close co-operation with national authorities and the sheep industry—both meat and wool—has the great support of the New South Wales industry. Today I will announce a new program the Government has put in place regarding the use of the Gudair ovine Johne's disease vaccine.

Following the recent registration of the Gudair OJD vaccine, NSW Agriculture has released its new vaccine policy and procedures. The department acknowledges that the program will not be completely deregulated; controls will still be in place for the use of the vaccine, as I indicated to the House some months ago. The new procedures represent a major change in the way vaccine can be used in New South Wales, particularly in the way vaccinated animals can be traded. That has been an important aspect throughout the whole program. It is a matter of major concern, particularly for stud breeders who have been most affected by the detection of OJD on their properties.

Such a policy change was not possible until all other States agreed to proposed amendments by New South Wales to the national standard definition and rules for the management of OJD in Australia. That agreement was reached in late May, clearing the way for a major overhaul of OJD control measures in all States. The move has been warmly welcomed by all sectors of the New South Wales sheep industry. Sheep producers in the proposed OJD residual and control zones will soon receive an easy-to-read guide detailing their greatly enhanced trading options. Within the next few weeks the guide will be sent to about 11,800 sheep producers to help them select the most appropriate trading strategy to suit individual situations. NSW Agriculture has

compiled the guide based on zone, flock status, testing and use of the Gudair vaccine. Under the new policy, producers whose flocks are at risk of OJD infection, but where infection has not been confirmed, will now be able to access vaccine as a preventive measure.

For example whether they see me at the Royal Easter Show or at country shows—raise the issue of their ability to trade. Measures have been included in the policy to encourage the trade of animals vaccinated as lambs, and to discourage trade of high-risk non-vaccinates from infected properties. Those trade advantages increase as demonstrable prevalence of infection on a property decreases. For example, hypothetical producer C with an infected property has evidence of very low infection levels. Previously he could sell vaccinated stock only to other properties that were under, or would take on, quarantine measures. Under the new policy he can now sell his vaccines anywhere in the high prevalence or the medium prevalence parts of the State—the residual or control zones respectively—with no requirement for quarantine measures on the destination property. That is an important freeing up of the arrangements.

The policy development most warmly welcomed by stud producers, however, is the access to vaccine for assured properties, which are those properties that have a market assurance program. Previously, the only assurance system available to studs was the Market Assurance Program [SheepMAP], which relies on testing and management to minimise disease risk and provide assurance to clients, but does not permit the use of a vaccine. A new assurance status is now available to studs, the market assurance vaccinating status, which will no doubt be known as MAV. That status relies on management, testing and vaccination to minimise risk, and is a major development for studs in the residual and control zones. Studs that are eligible for this status can sell vaccinated stock into all parts of eastern Australia, something that was unheard of prior to the implementation of the amended national rules and the new New South Wales policy. All of those changes herald a new era of OJD control which will allow producers to put disease control measures in place and get on with their business of producing quality wool and meat for Australian and international consumers.

I also point out that an international OJD conference held in Spain and attended by 300 scientists and administrators confirmed the need to limit spread of the disease on farm—the approach being taken in New South Wales and nationally. NSW Agriculture sent two staff to the conference to ensure that the ovine Johne's disease program being developed in New South Wales is based on the latest information and knowledge overseas. The key theme that emerged from this meeting was the worldwide effort to reduce the incidence of Johne's disease on farm. That is contrary to some views being put forward in rural New South Wales that New South Wales or Australia is somehow going it alone in the management of OJD. The message that has been given to me by our delegates who attended the conference is that there is now a worldwide concern about OJD and a worldwide strategy is either being considered or put in place to control it.

The farm is regarded as a critical control point, and significant attention needs to be addressed to identifying infection and reducing the shedding of bacteria onto pastures. Early results from Australian vaccine research are encouraging. That research has shown that vaccination has stopped bacterial shedding for nine to 12 months in animals that graze in pastures that have a high level of the ovine Johne's disease bacteria. That level of protection should be sufficient to dampen down the contamination over time, as successive age groups are vaccinated as lambs until the whole flock is vaccinated. Research is continuing to evaluate the long-term efficacy of this vaccine under Australian conditions. NSW Agriculture will continue to work with the State's sheep industry to design strategies for the long-term control and management of this disease. There has been tremendous progress with the ovine Johne's disease program in the past 12 months. The conference in Spain supported the approach undertaken in New South Wales and I firmly believe the national OJD plan is heading in the right direction.

The program to control OJD has never been set in concrete from day one. It is a program that has evolved after a ministerial council meeting some years ago that gave consideration to a study over a number of years of the options available to control OJD. Through research and continual management, discussions, forums and workshops, we are now working our way through the program to put the best possible policies in place to help the farmers who have been affected in many parts of New South Wales by this disease. The policy change I have announced today will allay, at least to an extent, some of the concerns that farmers have brought to my attention over a number of years. I ask the House to note this important matter of public importance.

Ms HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [4.29 p.m.]: The ministerial statement by the Minister for Agriculture in the form of a matter of public importance is extraordinary. However, I welcome his announcement; it is terrific news. It is good to hear that after three years of being dragged kicking and screaming by producers and me—

Mr Martin: Oh, come on!

Ms HODGKINSON: I will continue to go on about this. I have 10 minutes in which to speak, but it is difficult to have a discussion about ovine Johne's disease [OJD] in less than three hours. It was extraordinary to hear the Minister make these comments in the House today. This matter of public importance might be more aptly named "Vaccination and Trading Options for Sheep Producers Afflicted with Mr Amery". For past three years producers in my electorate have travelled down a hard road. On many occasions I have raised ovine Johne's disease in this House. I have placed many questions on notice and I have referred to it many times in private members' statements. I have written numerous letters and made many representations to the Minister. Since 1999 I have called on the Government to relax its draconian OJD control measures. I have consistently called for the freeing-up of trading options for affected producers, financial support for OJD-affected producers, the wider use of the Gudair vaccine and more research into the disease—in other words, vaccinate and trade.

In the early days I felt like the lone voice crying in the wilderness, but as the impact of the Government's policies was increasingly felt and discontent swelled, even this city-centric, anti-farmer Minister could no longer ignore me. Every time I made representations to the Minister I received patronising or dismissive responses. When I referred to the plight of Graham Privet, the Yass farmer who was hauled before the court and fined \$10,000 because he wanted to protect his customers, the Minister, who will remember this well, informed me of his regret but said he had no option but to haul him before the courts. When I asked whether NSW Agriculture had a limited sum of money to dedicate to the case I was told that funding was unlimited and that the department would fight the case to the end. When I actively sought to obtain trading options for Brett Picker from the Rocton Stud, in Bigga, the Minister wrote to me and accused me of trying to spread OJD throughout Australia. For the record, Brett Picker approached me in frustration about the unhelpful attitude of NSW Agriculture when he sought at least some trading options.

Mr Amery: Yes.

Ms HODGKINSON: The Minister agrees that he accused me of that. Yet today he is doing exactly the opposite. As a direct result of my conversations with Don Saville from NSW Agriculture, the Pickers were at least able to hold a limited spring sale. It was after I raised these concerns in this House on 5 December that the Minister made his outrageous statement. Let there be no misunderstanding by the Minister: I am passionate about this issue because it affects a large proportion of my electorate. He has misrepresented the farmers of this State again and again in this place.

Mr Amery: You are not even supported by the industry.

Ms HODGKINSON: The Minister did not need to send two people from his department to Spain to tell him what farmers in this State have been telling him for the past three years. He has wasted his money. He could have listened to local producers and the local member of Parliament.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lynch): Order! Members will cease objecting and the honourable member for Burrinjuck will direct her comments through the Chair.

Ms HODGKINSON: The Minister could have listened to local producers such as those who pulled him up at the Royal Easter Show. They could have saved him a lot of money. But, no, he does not listen to Australian producers. He has to be told by somebody overseas. His rhetoric has moved from control to on-farm management. I am amazed at the change in his attitude. It almost makes me think that the Minister has decided to join the National Party, which is so unlike the Sussex Street, union-dominated Labor Party. The honourable member for Murrumbidgee referred to the Labor Party conference and the number of disappointed Labor members representing regional and rural Australia whose motions are passed at the conference but not represented in this place. Then there is the council officer in Broken Hill who has decided to leave the Labor Party and join the National Party. But I digress. I welcome the Minister's change of heart. Unfortunately, it has come at a terrible cost. How many properties like Robert Peden's Bullamalita Stud and Ken Clancy's Mount View have been brought to breaking point and beyond by the policies of Minister Amery?

According to an answer on the notice paper, those policies are kept in a loose-leaf folder because they change so often and, despite claims of wide industry acceptance, the policies were opposed by many in the wool industry. Among the organisations that opposed those now-failed and discredited policies were the Australian Society of Breeders of British Sheep, the Australian Poll Dorset Association, the Australian White Suffolk Association, the New South Wales Stud Marino Breeders Association, the Southern Tablelands Stock Care

Group, the New South Wales OJD Action Group, the New South Wales Farmers Wool Committee, the New South Wales Farmers OJD Task Force, the Mudgee OJD Committee, the Yass and District OJD Action Group, the Wool Council of Australia, Gunning Shire Council and the rural lands protection boards of Forbes, Goulburn, Yass and Young. As the Minister will be aware, public meetings about his disastrous policies and their effects on producers have been held in many country towns. Earlier this year a meeting was held in Yass at which John Carter, the Director of the Australian Johne's Alliance, said:

NSW Agriculture has been both irresponsible and incompetent in dealings with producers caught up in the bureaucratic entanglement of their making.

I have received many letters of protest about levies placed on producers and I have made representations to the Minister about them. I note that he has left the Chamber because he is so disinterested in this subject.

Mr Martin: Because you are boring, that's why.

Ms HODGKINSON: The honourable member for Bathurst should take note of what I am saying about OJD, because it certainly affects the electorate of Bathurst. He has had such disregard for this subject that the producers in his electorate are disappointed in him.

[Interruption]

Mr Acting-Speaker, I ask that you call for a little decorum in this House. The Eden Brae Pastoral Company is run by Andrew and Michelle Southwell of Glenflesk, Rye Park, and Kelvin and Maureen Southwell of Eden Brae, Pudman. On behalf of the company Andrew Southwell wrote:

I am writing this protest letter to accompany the Contribution Fund check. I want it to be made quite clear that this is in no way a voluntary payment and it is quite an insult and a lie to refer to it as such. We are only paying this money as we are being threatened with legal action and an increased charge if we do not pay it.

We do not agree with many of the actions that are taking place as part of the OJD control programs.

The use of Zones is discriminatory, being placed in a zone based on geographical location whether your flock has OJD or not, is illogical and I believe contrary to freedom of trade laws in this country. To overcome these zone restrictions requires sheep being tested using tests that are unproved, often wrong, and guilt is presumed even if a retest shows no OJD. Who in their right mind would take such a risk with their business?

His statements are quite strong. Darrell and Robyn Armour of Carrawatha, Rye Park, wrote:

To Katrina,

We have written to add our voice to the increasing opposition to the OJD collection levy and in fact to the discriminatory way in which the whole OJD program has been implemented.

They wrote a long and strongly worded letter about the way in which the Government and this Minister have implemented the OJD policy to date. I welcome the Minister's ministerial announcement today that access to the vaccine will be broadened. We have lobbied for that for a long time. But where are the incentives for producers to test? I have often raised this question with the Minister by letter. To date many tough penalties have been imposed when tests have proven positive, but the tests have been inaccurate. Earlier I outlined the case of Graham Privet, but there have been many others. Graham Privet is probably the best example of someone who has been sued successfully by NSW Agriculture. The Minister's incompetence on this matter in the past few years has been breathtaking. The announcement today about the freeing-up of the vaccine is a great win for producers. We have lobbied for it for a long time. But I want to know whether the Minister will apologise for all the heartache he has caused producers who have been caught up in this disastrous, loose-leaf, OJD policy net.

Mr MARTIN (Bathurst) [4.39 p.m.]: I welcome the Minister's announcement today. Unlike the honourable member for Burrinjuck, I congratulate him on his leadership on this issue. To put the record straight, the honourable member for Burrinjuck is certainly not the only member representing a country electorate who has raised this matter continually; I have been on this case since I was first elected to this House. What she did not say was what the National Party policy is on this issue, because that party has never had a policy on ovine Johne's disease [OJD]. She cannot produce one written policy. As I said, I welcome the Minister's announcement that a new brochure will be sent to about 11,800 sheep producers to assist them with their enhanced trading and vaccination options. The guide highlights their trading options relative to their zone, flock status, testing and use of vaccine.

The brochure also covers the importance of management to achieve the best results when using the Gudair vaccine. This includes using proper drenches and effective grazing strategies. I also congratulate the

Department of Agriculture on the work it has done in conjunction with the industry to develop the policies and procedures that deliver many more options for sheep producers. The changes will help this State's sheep producers with infected flocks to get on with the job and to conduct business in a profitable way. The seventh International Colloquium on Paratuberculosis—the organism that causes OJD—was held in Bilbao, Spain between 11 and 14 June 2002. The colloquium was a gathering of leading scientists and administrators who discussed the latest research on OJD.

Mr Bruce Christie, who will soon be Chief Veterinary Officer of New South Wales and Program Manager, Quality Assurance, and Mr Pat Abraham, Program Manager, Wool and Sheepmeat Services, NSW Agriculture, attended this important conference to ensure that the ovine Johne's disease program being developed in New South Wales is based on the latest information. The conference attracted 300 people from the agricultural, food safety and medical disciplines. They came from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Holland, Iceland, the United States of America, Australia, Spain, Switzerland, Italy, Canada, Poland, Brazil, France, Croatia and Belgium—a wide spectrum. I am pleased to inform the House that a number of the papers at this international conference were by people employed by NSW Agriculture or having a close working relationship with NSW Agriculture. This highlights the world-class research being undertaken by NSW Agriculture on this insidious sheep wasting disease.

The key theme to come out of this meeting was that there is a worldwide effort to reduce the incidence of Johne's disease on farm. The farm is seen as a critical control point and significant attention needs to be addressed to identifying infection and reducing the shedding of bacteria onto the pastures. Experience from Iceland highlights that while the vaccine will not eradicate Johne's disease, it goes a very long way to reducing the impact that the disease is having on the productivity and profitability of infected flocks. Iceland's first case of Johne's disease was detected in 1933. The source was imported sheep from Germany. The disease spread rapidly throughout the main sheep breeding areas. A vaccination experiment saw mortalities reduced by 94 per cent. In 1966 vaccination of sheep was compulsory in endemic areas and losses from Johne's disease have been reduced considerably. The country was divided into zones, with strict controls on the movement of stock between each zone. Today there are areas where no Johne's disease has been detected, areas where compulsory vaccination is still undertaken and areas where vaccination has been stopped.

As the Minister indicated earlier, the Gudair vaccine has been recently registered in Australia. Early results from Australian vaccine research are encouraging. This research has shown that vaccination has stopped bacterial shedding from nine to 12 months in animals that are grazing pastures that have a very high level of the ovine Johne's disease bacteria. This level of protection should be sufficient to dampen down the contamination over time, as successive age groups are vaccinated as lambs until the whole flock is vaccinated. NSW Agriculture and the Minister will continue to work with industry to promote catchment groups designed to minimise the local spread of the disease.

John Seaman, who runs a property near Perthville, and Col Fergusson from the Bathurst Marino Breeders Association were right at the forefront in promoting the Gudair vaccine. They received a lot of criticism from breeders in the Yass area when they started to push this issue. They got on to it long before the honourable member for Burrinjuck and her cohorts cottoned on. People such as John Seaman deserve congratulations on their foresight in sticking with their views. What they were saying years ago has proved to be correct. There is still a long way to go. The program needs effective management and control. I welcome the statement by the Minister and I support his raising this important matter of public interest in the House today.

Mr AMERY (Mount Druitt—Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Corrective Services) [4.44 p.m.], in reply: I thank the honourable member for Burrinjuck and the honourable member for Bathurst for their contributions. The honourable member for Burrinjuck has probably been the most irresponsible member of the House on ovine Johne's disease [OJD]. She claimed that I had to be dragged kicking and screaming on this issue. That is absurd. The whole control program has been nationally co-ordinated—led by New South Wales and adopted nationally. As the policy has evolved over the years it has been ticked off by a National Party national Government, Labor governments and Coalition governments all around Australia, and all the peak bodies that govern the sheep industry in the wool and meat sectors. Dragged kicking and screaming? I consider it walking in tune with the industry and all the governments around Australia.

The five minutes I have to respond does not allow me to read out all the examples down through the years but I will pick out just a couple. In 1999 the Rural Lands Protection Board from the Yass area, in the honourable member's electorate, put out a resolution calling for the abolition of the program. In response, the Broken Hill Rural Lands Protection Board wrote to me with reference to recent moves by affected producers in relation to OJD to abolish zoning for OJD. It stated, "This Board believes that Zoning is still necessary." Over the years I have attended meetings of the Agricultural Resource Management Council of Australia and New

Zealand [ARMCANZ] and have received letters such as the one from the Sheepmeat Council of Australia dated 24 February 2000 signed by the President, Bill Whitehead. The letter concludes:

I request that you and the ARMCANZ Ministers—

ARMCANZ Ministers are Ministers from the Federal Government and all the State and Territory governments—

resolve to similarly continue to support this program.

He gave me a page and a half of reasons why a control program is needed. In his letter he stated that this was supported by an independent rural press—hardly the bastion of Labor Party policy—survey conducted in late 1999. The Narrabri Rural Lands Protection Board district veterinarian sent me a letter headed "Support for OJD zoning in light of 6 August meeting at Yass". The meeting at Yass that the honourable member for Burrinjuck talked about was jumped on by the industry all over New South Wales. Among the many letters, the Armidale Rural Lands Protection Board wrote:

To advise Ministers Truss—

that is National Party Minister Warren Truss—

and Amery of conferences support for zoning and regulation of OJD.

The honourable member for Burrinjuck, quite rightly, has listened to the concerns of farmers within her electorate whose sheep are affected by OJD. But, rather than make representations and try to explain the program adopted by National and State governments and the industry, she has carried on a populist campaign in her electorate. Her views on the regulation of the OJD program have not been supported by ministerial council meetings ever, irrespective of whether Labor or Coalition governments have chaired the meetings. She has never produced a policy—

Ms Hodgkinson: Point of order: The wording put forward by the Minister refers to vaccination and trading options for sheep producers with sheep afflicted with ovine Johne's disease. The groups that he is referring to are not sheep producers with sheep afflicted by this disease. I ask that you direct the Minister back to the wording in the motion.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lynch): Order! The Minister for Agriculture has the call.

Mr AMERY: I recognise that the honourable member is a bit sensitive on the issue. She has been caught out again with her misrepresentation on this issue. I put this one question to the House: Have her views on the deregulation of the OJD program ever been supported by the publication of a National Party policy? The answer is no. We have checked the records. We have checked the web site. There is nothing in National Party policy that says that the whole program should be thrown out. The honourable member's views are her views only—of a populist MP who has been irresponsible on this very important issue.

Discussion concluded.

APPROPRIATION BILL

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION (SPECIAL OFFICES) BILL

GENERAL GOVERNMENT LIABILITY MANAGEMENT FUND BILL

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT OPERATIONS AMENDMENT (TRADEABLE EMISSION SCHEMES FUND) BILL

PUBLIC FINANCE AND AUDIT AMENDMENT (BUDGETING AND FINANCIAL REPORTING) BILL

STATE REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BUDGET) BILL

Second Reading

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Take-note Debate

Debate resumed from 21 June.

Mr IEMMA (Lakemba—Minister for Public Works and Services, Minister for Sport and Recreation, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship) [4.50 p.m.]: The media does not always get it right, but the

front pages of newspapers after the recent budget were spot-on. "Bob the Builder" was a pretty fair summation of the success of the budget. Since Bob Carr became Premier this State has enjoyed a record run in construction. The \$24.6 billion of construction activity during the Olympics was certainly the highlight. But the greatest challenge was always going to be ensuring that the investment, building and jobs continued after the Games. The Government has done just that, and the budget has done just that.

It is no surprise that the construction industry is one of the Government's priorities. It forms an important part of our stated aim of jobs and growth. New South Wales accounts for more than one-third of Australia's construction industry. The industry employs 8 per cent of the State's workforce, about 240,000 people. The recently announced budget has built on that success and will help to ensure that those jobs survive and that new ones are created. The budget revealed the biggest capital works program in the history of the State: \$26 billion over the next four years. To put that in perspective, between 1949 and 1974 Australia built the Snowy Mountains Scheme at a cost of \$820 million over 25 years, or \$8.5 billion in today's terms. The Government will be investing three times more in four years on capital works than Australia spent in 25 years on the Snowy Mountains Scheme. In the next financial year alone the Government will spend a record \$6.35 billion, \$800 million more than last year, and that is a 12 per cent increase. That increase is focused on many areas.

In Education the Government has committed a budget record of \$3 billion to the schools program. That is an increase of \$44.2 million, or a 16.5 per cent increase on last year. That is on top of a \$70 million schoolyard blitz announced in February. The \$300 million schools program will go towards 41 major new projects and work will continue on 59 other major projects. The schools program will also fund 27 major TAFE projects worth \$72 million. In the Justice and Corrective Services sector the Government has committed hundreds of millions of dollars to new gaols including a young women's Juvenile Justice Centre at Lidcombe, and a Children's Court complex at Parramatta. A multiclassification 350-bed Correctional Centre on the mid-North Coast is well under way and will provide a significant boost to jobs in Kempsey. A correctional centre is slated for the mid-west of New South Wales.

In Health the Government has committed a record \$504 million to capital works. That includes the first stage of the \$452 million total rebuild of the Royal North Shore Hospital. The budget includes \$16.4 million to redevelop the Hornsby Hospital, \$14.5 million to rebuild the Bourke District Hospital, \$10.9 million to rebuild the Hay Hospital, \$10.4 million to rebuild the Kyogle Memorial Hospital, \$5 million to rebuild the Henty District Hospital, \$9.1 million to expand the emergency department of the Liverpool Hospital, \$8.6 million to expand the Nepean Hospital, \$6 million to redevelop the Blue Mountains hospital, \$5 million for the Shellharbour Hospital and \$4.4 million to redevelop the Milton-Ulladulla Hospital. Those amounts are on top of the commitment to redevelop health facilities in Wyong and Gosford hospitals valued at \$160 million. Those amounts are also on top of a major investment in rebuilding the health infrastructure in the Hunter with the Hunter health strategy of some \$235 million, including major redevelopment of the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, the John Hunter Hospital, the Belmont District Hospital and the polyclinic for the Newcastle central business district.

In my electorate the Government has delivered a significant boost. In Lakemba the Government has already committed \$25 million for transport, roads and housing, with \$9.5 million to improve rail and bus services. An allocation of nearly \$6 million will pay for track reconstruction, re-railing, underbridge renewal, signal and electrical renewal and other maintenance work on the East Hills railway line. Other projects include \$600,000 to install easy access facilities at Riverwood railway station where construction started with last year's budget, and \$130,000 for renovations and maintenance work at Wiley Park railway station.

Punchbowl will also benefit after a commitment of \$50,000 for the maintenance of station and passenger facilities. This follows last year's \$1.5 million for easy access to Riverwood station, \$1 million for the upgrade of Lakemba station and \$1 million for Beverly Hills station. People in the Lakemba electorate will be eligible for \$2.8 million in bus concessions. Following the successful opening of the \$750 million M5 East, this year \$8.7 million will be used for improvements to local roads. A budget allocation of \$3.5 million will be used to improve and maintain the road network around Lakemba.

The budget provides for four Main Street programs that will revitalise business and shopping districts of four small strip shopping centres. Riverwood is the biggest beneficiary with an additional \$200,000 allocation, and that follows the \$350,000 allocation over the past two years. Narwee will get an additional \$75,000 for its main street program, bringing its total to \$125,000 in the past two years. Wiley Park will receive \$100,000 and The Boulevard at Punchbowl will be given an additional \$50,000. Other initiatives include

\$609,000 for traffic management improvements and \$16,000 for Canterbury council's road safety program. Hurstville, Bankstown and Canterbury councils will receive a total of \$1.9 million for maintenance of roads. The State Government has also recognised the need for more public housing in the Lakemba area and allocated \$3 million for 18 general housing units. Nine units will be built in Gunyah Crescent, Roselands, seven units in Ferrier Parade, Campsie, and two new units in Kiewarra Street, Lakemba. Another \$472,000 has been allocated for 17 units already being built in Narwee and Riverwood.

People in Lakemba will also benefit from significant initiatives in Education including \$475,000 allocated towards the \$3.5 million upgrade of Beverly Hills Public School. That follows the \$3.5 million the Carr Government has allocated for the redevelopment of McCallums Hill Public School, the rebuilding of Hampden Park Public School in Lakemba, and the redevelopment of Beverly Hills North Public School. In the past few months \$1 million has been allocated to renovate 14 schools in the electorate as a result of the \$70 million bonanza in clearing the backlog of maintenance in our schools. The budget has certainly delivered for the people of Lakemba and the Lakemba electorate. It is very much a case of building on the achievements of the past.

I mentioned the extensive program for the reconstruction of hospitals and the health system. By the time that \$504 million program is complete, there will hardly be a major hospital in this State that has not been redeveloped. That stands in stark contrast to the record of the Coalition, when it was in government, especially in the area of Health. The Coalition's record on health care and hospitals was marked by cuts, closures and privatisations. No greater example of that approach can be seen than in my electorate of Lakemba. Canterbury hospital was closed and slated for demolition. The Carr Government stopped Canterbury hospital from being demolished and we rebuilt it at a cost of \$79.9 million. We provided 200 new beds in the emergency, critical care, maternity, paediatrics and surgery wards in that brand new hospital. That is an example of the distinction between our approach, which involves investment in public hospitals and health facilities, and that of the Coalition, which was one of cuts, closures and sell-offs.

When we look at investment in education and schools, we also find a significant example of the contrasting approach taken by the Government in investing in public education to that taken by the Coalition Government—and their Canberra colleagues, with whom they have worked hand-in-hand—that is, a record of cuts, closures and sell-offs. As an example, I cite Georges River College, formerly known as the Oatley campus of the University of New South Wales. As a result of Federal funding cuts some years ago, the future of the campus was placed in jeopardy. This Government saved the site for public education and also invested a significant amount of money to give the facility, now called Georges River College, a new life as a multipurpose campus for the people of the inner south-western areas of Sydney. We introduced specific legislation to save the Oatley campus site, keep it in public hands and protect it for public education. The result is a \$14 million investment in Georges River College, a jewel in the crown of public education facilities in southern Sydney. The families of Beverly Hills, Peakhurst and Narwee very much welcome this facility. As I said, our approach stands in stark contrast to the cuts, closures and sell-off approach taken by the Coalition.

Another major area of investment that has taken place since the Carr Government came to office in my area has been in transport. The transport infrastructure in my electorate has been almost totally rebuilt. The completion of the M5 and the M5 East has revolutionised the lifestyles of people in my electorate. Travelling times have been dramatically reduced. Those who live in Beverly Hills, Narwee and Riverwood have started to see the beginning of the end of rat runs, which blighted the amenity of residents in those suburbs. A trip to the city, which once would have taken between three-quarters of an hour to one hour during peak hour now takes between 20 to 30 minutes. It is not surprising that as a result property prices in those suburbs have increased significantly. That is not only anecdotal evidence. Local real estate agencies have said that houses on King Georges Road, Stoney Creek Road, Edgbaston Road and Broad Arrow Road, which once would have taken a significant amount of time to sell because of the heavy traffic volumes, now take a matter of weeks to sell. This \$794 million project has delivered enormous benefits to the people of Lakemba.

In addition, the East Hills duplication rail project, costing \$106 million, increases the capacity of the East Hills railway line and will provide faster and more efficient rail travel for commuters in my electorate. The Government has also made a significant investment in upgrading the facilities at major railway stations in my electorate on the East Hills line at Beverly Hills at a cost of \$1 million and at Riverwood at a cost of \$2.5 million. Further, there have been significant improvements and the installation of covered walkways at Kingsgrove. The railway station improvements are very much appreciated by the constituents in those suburbs. The most pleasing investment for me that the Government has made, and one that stands in stark contrast to the approach taken by the former Coalition Government, is the redevelopment of Lakemba railway station.

Lakemba railway station was destroyed by fire in about 1988. During the entire time that the Coalition was in Government, it simply refused to allocate funds to rebuild Lakemba railway station following the fire. A temporary facility, similar to a demountable building, was placed at Lakemba railway station and turned into a concession and ticket office. It was put on the top of the platform and there it stood for the whole of the period that the Coalition was in Government. This Government finally gave the people of Lakemba proper railway station facilities. That is the most pleasing small investment for me, and one that vividly paints the contrast of this Government delivering services and improving facilities as opposed to the Coalition Government's approach of neglect and cuts, closures and sell-offs of hospitals and schools. The people of Lakemba very much appreciate the new facilities at Lakemba railway station, which were long overdue. It took the Carr Labor Government to finally end the injustice for rail commuters who use Lakemba railway station by rebuilding the fire-damaged station facilities.

In the area of Environment, the Government has given significant support to the Salt Pan Creek recreation area. Much of the 32-hectare site was old industrial land and some of it had been used as a tip. In the mid-1990s a proposal to construct a concrete crusher caused outrage amongst the residents of Riverwood and Punchbowl. After a significant resident campaign, the concrete crusher proposal was defeated. A master plan was made for the whole site and a decision was taken by the local community and Canterbury City Council to develop a recreation area on the site. I am pleased that the Government has seen fit over a number of years to support the development with cold hard cash to the tune of \$275,000. We have also provided \$500,000 to treat Salt Pan Creek with pollution traps and stormwater protection, so as to improve the water quality of the creek. That significant investment by the Government has improved those recreational facilities for the people of Riverwood, Punchbowl and Narwee and will benefit them even more when the project is finally completed in a couple of years' time.

In the time I have remaining I want to refer to a number of other local projects that have received support from the Carr Government since it came to office. I again contrast the approach of this Government with the neglect of and the refusal by the previous Coalition Government to support important local projects and initiatives for the people of Lakemba. I refer specifically to the King Georges Road pedestrian safety bridge at Beverly Hills north. This Government allocated \$500,000 for the urgently needed project, which was a Government initiative. Planning approval has been given for a similar safety pedestrian bridge on King Georges Road at Wiley Park where Wiley Park Public School and Wiley Park Girls High School are located. That very important project will protect the students of those two schools.

The widening to four lanes of Kingsgrove Road bridge at Kingsgrove railway station at a cost of \$1.2 million has removed one of the worst bottlenecks in my electorate. The area blinded vehicle traffic and motorists from the Canterbury end of my electorate moving through to Hurstville and Rockdale. With the allocation of the money for that project and a partnership with the three local councils—Canterbury, Hurstville and Rockdale—that bottleneck has been removed. The traffic now flows freely on Kingsgrove Road across that bridge. Residents living in the Canterbury, Hurstville and Rockdale council areas, who have been severely disadvantaged over many years, no longer have that bottleneck in their area.

I have mentioned the Main Street improvement programs, which are small but important projects for any local community. They are particularly important in places such as Narwee, Beverly Hills and Riverwood, which have small strip shopping centres that have been in long-term decline as a result of the development of super shopping centres such as Westfield at Hurstville, Bankstown and Roselands. Small strip shopping centres are struggling to survive. Main Street improvement programs are important in lifting the amenity of those centres. I hope that they will encourage new investment in the shopping centres so that residents can enjoy their local shops. [*Time expired.*]

Mr THOMPSON (Rockdale) [5.10 p.m.]: I speak to the take-note debate of the Address-in-Reply to the Governor's Speech. In Professor Marie Bashir, New South Wales has an outstanding Governor. She brings to her role not only a strong intellect and excellent reputation but also a good measure of grace, diligence and compassion. I applaud the Premier's decision to appoint such a remarkable woman to be the thirty-seventh Governor of New South Wales. The Governor's Speech highlighted the Government's education, policing, health, transport, regional and rural affairs, economic management and environment programs. I shall refer to a few of the programs that have particular relevance to my electorate. In her reference to education Her Excellency said:

The Government's key priorities in education are to maintain the highest standards of achievement in our schools, and to value and support our teachers.

She went on to speak about record levels of spending on education that the Government has embarked upon. She made reference to the additional \$70 million that has been recently provided to fund priority building and security upgrades of schools across the State in the earlier part of this year, up to the end of June. At that time I was delighted to learn that some \$722,000 of that additional \$70 million in funding had been allocated to schools in my electorate. That funding has been a tremendous boost to local schools and will be spent on capital and maintenance projects, including repainting of classrooms, replacing worn-out floor coverings, upgrading toilet facilities, building security fencing, upgrading playgrounds and so on. In addition to the obvious benefits for the schools, this expenditure will create work, most of which will go to local tradespersons, workers and small businesses.

Other major capital works are under way at Arncliffe Public School, Brighton-Le-Sands Public School and St George School, which is being entirely rebuilt on the campus of Moorefield Girls High School. Public schools in the Rockdale electorate are being well served by the Carr Labor Government. As well as addressing the crucially important areas of literacy and numeracy, and assisting students by providing programs to deal with behavioural problems, the Government will be implementing a range of strategies to enhance the standing of the teaching profession. These programs are about uplifting and upgrading all aspects of public education in the State.

Another major theme of the Governor's Speech was healthier communities. The Menadue and Sinclair reports addressed the historical inequities of funding between regions. They mapped out a fairer funding system to allow health services to plan on a three-year basis. That system has greatly assisted area health organisations, particularly those in rural New South Wales, to plan over three-year cycles rather than annually, as occurred in the past. The scarcity of qualified nurses in the health system was also referred to by the Governor. The nurses shortage is not a problem only in New South Wales, it is a problem throughout Australia and, indeed, the world. Her Excellency referred to the Government's \$20 million-a-year plan to recruit and retrain nursing staff, including offering scholarships for rural students and retraining to attract former nurses back to the profession. In the *Sunday Telegraph* of 23 June an article appeared under the headline "Carr lures back nurses". I shall quote selectively from the article by Nathan Vass, who wrote:

Up to 500 experienced nurses have returned to the State's health system this year in the biggest recruitment drive undertaken here.

A "nursing reconnect" plan was devised to provide ex-nurses with the chance to refresh their skills so they could quickly re-enter the system.

"This new recruitment plan is bringing nurses back to their chosen field," Premier Bob Carr told *The Sunday Telegraph*.

"Nurses who have been out of the workforce are now being paid to re-skill on the job."

I applaud the initiative of the Government. It was particularly delightful and appropriate that the 500-odd nurses who have come back into the system were entertained and honoured at a special function at Government House to mark the occasion. Only a few years ago the Government decided to return Government House to daily public use. That was a wonderful initiative. The decision was strongly supported by the former Governor, and it has received the ongoing support and patronage of our current Governor. The Governor made reference to a three-year \$107 million program to increase mental health services, including 700 additional staff and 150 new acute care beds, 90 of which will be in rural areas. My electorate is already benefiting from the program, with improved mental health facilities at St George Hospital.

The Governor's Speech also referred to safer communities. We all want our communities to be safer. I applaud the measures the Government has taken in this regard to date and will take in the future. Statistics show that recidivist offenders commit the majority of crime in our society. The removal of the presumption in favour of bail for repeat offenders will undoubtedly lead to greater levels of incarceration, but will also reduce the level of crime because the offenders will be locked up. Never before have police received such strong support from a government, whether it be in the form of new equipment, such as the Glock pistols, capsicum spray, new batons and so on, or new technology, such as DNA testing, Livescan digital fingerprinting or mobile data terminals. The Carr Labor Government is supporting police in a very practical fashion. In her Speech the Governor also outlined the Government's recommitment and program to address illicit drug use in society. This includes a number of initiatives, such as the Magistrates Early Referral into Treatment Program, the adult Drug Court trial, the medically supervised injecting room trial—which was recently extended—and the development of a treatment and prevention strategy for drugs such as cocaine, ecstasy and amphetamines.

Transport and roads are obviously important to our State. The M5 East motorway was completed last December. It is greatly benefiting my electorate. Convoys of heavy vehicles, particularly container trucks, are

no longer travelling through our local streets. Residential streets suffered as people tried to find a short cut or a way around the congestion caused by the trucks. It was dangerous and annoying. The M5 East has taken most of the trucks and commuter traffic off local roads. Peace and sanity have largely been restored to local streets and road safety generally has improved. Public transport for Rockdale commuters has been given a large boost, with the \$14 million redevelopment of Rockdale railway station. I have spoken about that project previously in the House so I will not reiterate it now. Work is already well under way and the project is scheduled for completion towards the end of the year or soon thereafter. In her Address to the Parliament the Governor said:

2002 marks a highly significant anniversary in the political history of our nation and our State.

This year is the centenary of women's suffrage in both the Commonwealth and New South Wales Parliaments.

I am sure that all Members will join with me in honouring this milestone of equality and democracy.

I certainly join Her Excellency in those sentiments and note the significance of her appointment as this State's first female Governor. I applaud her for the work she is doing for the people of New South Wales and I commend her Speech to the House.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Lynch): Order! It being after 5.15 p.m. business is interrupted for the taking of private members' statements.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDERS DAY OF OBSERVANCE COMMITTEE WEEK

Mr MARKHAM (Wollongong—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.19 p.m.]: National Aboriginal and Islanders Day of Observance Committee [NAIDOC] Week will take place from 7 to 14 July and this year's theme is "Recognition, Rights and Reform". Aboriginal people in the electorate of Wollongong and the Illawarra region will actively celebrate NAIDOC Week and I will participate in several events. On Wednesday 10 July a march will leave the Kenny Street Community Centre—a new Aboriginal cultural centre that was completed recently and is the pride of local Aboriginal people—and end at the amphitheatre in the mall, where a number of guest speakers will address the crowd. At 3.00 p.m. that afternoon at Wollongong City Gallery an exhibition of Aboriginal art entitled "Unity and Diversity, Aboriginality" will be opened by Iria White, Chairperson of the Queanbeyan Regional Council, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission [ATSIC]. That is an important exhibition celebrating NAIDOC Week.

Later that afternoon I will be present for the sealing of a time capsule that will contain indigenous art, the work of musicians and several community members. I am looking forward to that event, which will take place at the restaurant Faces on Crown. Friday 12 July is National Aboriginal Day and I have been invited to open the new Aboriginal Winnanaggay preschool at the Noogaleek Children's Centre at Winnima Way, Berkeley. That project has been in development for some time and organisers have timed the preschool's opening to coincide with NAIDOC Week. On Saturday 13 July from 10.30 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. I will attend the Aboriginal Reconciliation Festival at Nowra. This year's NAIDOC theme is about putting into practice some of the ideals of real reconciliation. It challenges all Australians to acknowledge a very important aspect of our shared contemporary culture. Each year a city is chosen to host the national focus for NAIDOC and this year the national focus with the theme "Recognition, Rights and Reform" will be in Sydney. As the host city, Sydney will stage this year's NAIDOC Awards Ball on Friday 12 July. These national awards recognise the significant contributions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to their communities in many diverse fields.

Today many indigenous communities and individuals have little or no stake in the economic life of the nation other than what governments may provide. The achievement of social justice for indigenous Australians requires that the human tragedy and national shame be redressed. This is clearly a task of such magnitude and high importance that it lies well beyond the scope of any particular set of public policy measures. Indeed, it requires no less than fundamental reform to the basis of the relationship between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and must be built on recognition of the right to equality of treatment with all other Australians; the particular status of the nation's indigenous peoples; the right to cultural, social and economic diversity; the right to self-determination of priorities and paths in life; the importance of addressing both immediate need and the achievement of lasting solutions, and the need to commit adequate resources. I totally support those ideals.

Several other important events will be held during NAIDOC Week. On 8 July I will attend Spellbound Television awards to be held by ATSIC and the Department of Education and Training. The awards presentation will take place at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission State office. On Thursday 11 July at 6.30 p.m. I will attend the TAFE New South Wales Aboriginal Students and Staff Awards, which will be held at the Millennium Hotel, Kings Cross. I have been to that presentation for the past seven or eight years, and it is a very important part of NAIDOC Week. All honourable members should discover what is happening in their areas during NAIDOC Week and participate wherever they can. This is a great opportunity to recognise indigenous Australians.

Ms NORI (Port Jackson—Minister for Small Business, and Minister for Tourism) [5.24 p.m.]: I acknowledge the contribution by the honourable member for Wollongong in his role as Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Deputy Premier on Aboriginal Affairs to National Aboriginal and Islanders Day of Observance Committee [NAIDOC] Week and policy development. I recognise his constant and total commitment to the indigenous people of this State. I am pleased that NAIDOC Week celebrations have become quite mainstream. That is not a criticism, but a great compliment: We now recognise the importance of celebrating reconciliation. This year's theme "Recognition, Rights and Reform" is most important, and I congratulate the honourable member for Wollongong on his invaluable contribution to these issues and for the way in which he pricks our conscience in this area—and rightly so. We thank him for that.

WOOLCOTT COURT AND Mrs EDNA STEWARD

Mrs HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [5.26 p.m.]: I inform the House today of a very serious situation in my electorate that involves one of my elderly constituents, Mrs Edna Steward. Mrs Steward is 80 years old and lives alone at Woolcott Court, an aged care hostel in Wahroonga. Her family are country based and not on hand to assist her with the day-to-day concerns that have arisen in relation to her place of residence. Mrs Steward is physically disabled to the extent that she is prevented from living independently, hence her need to reside in an environment that offers both a place to live and ongoing domestic services. Two years ago Mrs Steward was living in a Castle Hill retirement village and was "encouraged" to move to Woolcott Court in Wahroonga. At the time she expended \$130,000 for, as her niece describes it, "her right to reside under a leasing arrangement". This meant that she had a residence in which to live as well as support services that would enable her to live independently. This lifestyle would make it possible for her to maintain her dignity and independence and receive support so that she could enjoy the latter years of her life.

Mrs Steward is now an aged pensioner and she used her savings to fund her retirement, thinking she had a secure lease that would provide her with complete domestic care and a residence for the remainder of her life. Sadly, this does not appear to be the case. I am alarmed to hear that she has been manipulated to part with money to pay for a leasing arrangement and that she now has no lease, no \$130,000 and soon no home or services. Mrs Steward faces the loss of her \$130,000 as well as being evicted from her home and an uncertain future in terms of financial security and a place to live. She trusted a solicitor to make the arrangements that would formalise the leasing arrangement, but this did not happen. Mrs Steward paid her money but never received documentation proving that she had a legal lease. The registration of the lease has not taken place. Her family have been advised that "the company Woolcott Court had certain difficulties that had to be overcome prior to settlement" of the lease.

Mrs Steward was not made aware of this fact until very recently. She estimates that quite a few others may be in the same situation. In the past six months Mrs Steward was told that Woolcott Court was in financial difficulties and that all residents would have to vacate at some stage. Approximately one month ago Mrs Steward's niece telephoned the Department of Fair Trading and explained the problem. She was informed that the department would look into it but she did not hear back from anyone. I was fully briefed on the situation only last Monday and have endeavoured to speak to the Department of Fair Trading, with no success; to acquire documentation from the solicitor, which has not arrived; and to identify and speak to the administrator appointed by the Department of Fair Trading, to no avail, although the department apparently appointed the administrator. On 20 June I wrote to the Minister for Fair Trading explain the parlous nature of the situation.

Yesterday following a number of distressing calls from Mrs Steward's niece, I spoke to the Minister's office about the fact that Mrs Steward was about to be evicted and that her locks were likely to be changed. I explained that the premises, Woolcott Court, are to be auctioned on 4 July—a mere eight days away. Mrs Steward has no security, no documentation and has been left significantly out of pocket by an as yet unknown person. This old woman is living in fear and needs assistance from the Department of Fair Trading and the Minister. She needs an immediate and effective result.

Mrs Steward's niece assures me that her aunt would find it impossible to vacate the premises as she has no available funds and no means to find alternative accommodation. The security of Mrs Steward's finances has

not been mentioned, nor has compensation been mentioned. The elderly lady was firmly of the opinion that her lease was secure and would attract compensation should any unforeseen circumstances be encountered. Now she is in a completely reversed situation. Mrs Steward is in dire circumstances and has not received help from the Department of Fair Trading or the Minister. A helpless 80-year-old woman is about to be evicted to an unknown future. In the time that I have been aware of the issue, I have tried again and again to draw it to the attention of the Minister for Fair Trading, his office and the Department of Fair Trading. Urgency to deal with and solve the problem has not been evident. This matter is urgent and needs immediate action. Tomorrow Mrs Steward may be out on the streets. She is alone, vulnerable and in need of help.

HEATHCOTE EAST RAILWAY BRIDGE

Mr McMANUS (Heathcote—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.30 p.m.]: I refer to the Heathcote East railway bridge. I thank the Minister for Transport for the allocation of \$500,000 towards making this structure safe, not only for my constituents but for the commuters on the Illawarra railway line. This structure currently has a 27-tonne load limit. This bridge provides passage for residents of Heathcote East to and from their homes, access for students who attend Heathcote High School, and access and egress for emergency service vehicles in Wilson Parade during fires and other emergencies. Such vehicles are often laden with water and equipment when traversing the bridge. In addition, when any development takes place large trucks carrying concrete traverse the bridge. If any of these vehicles exceed the 27-tonne limit it may result in a serious and dangerous situation.

Sadly, Sutherland Shire Council, which previously promised to share the cost of the bridge restoration, has changed its mind. Instead of providing its share over two council budgets it has completely voted against its previous decision, resulting in a dramatic shortage of funds to complete the project. Given this reversal of funding, particularly by the Liberals on Sutherland Shire Council, I ask the Minister whether there are any further opportunities to contribute to this important project. Only then can we provide adequate access and egress for my constituents, and only then can we provide safety to commuters using the Illawarra rail line. I commend the Minister for the following budget allocations: \$373,000 to improve the station signs at Como and Jannali; Wombarra, Otford and Coledale, in my electorate, have been well treated; \$200,000 to raise and lengthen the platform at Jannali station; \$40,000 for maintenance of station and passenger facilities at Otford; \$95,000 for maintenance of station and passenger facilities at Waterfall; and \$500,000 for the proposed widening of the Heathcote East railway bridge.

I reiterate my concerns and frustration with respect to Sutherland Shire Council. Some years ago the then Labor council made a commitment to funding because it realised the importance of the bridge. I am disgusted that when the Liberals gained power of the council it refused to honour the funding commitment. The situation is pretty horrendous because the bridge is the only access in and out of the Heathcote region. It is important—in fact, it is crucial—for us to have a road system that provides for and protects the constituents of Heathcote East, Heathcote West and Engadine, whose children attend Heathcote High School. This is a busy area, especially in the afternoons, as traffic tries to get in and out via Wilson Parade.

The council's consideration of this matter has been derelict. The councillors who voted against this funding should be condemned. I congratulate and thank the councillors, in particular the Labor councillors, who voted to continue the funding allocation to the bridge. It is horrendous that the council can make promises to protect my constituents—also its constituents—and then, when it suits it, turn its back for blatant political reasons. I thank the Minister for the Government's funding allocation for the bridge. I also thank the Minister for making money available for the continuity of the noise barriers on Heathcote Road. I would appreciate the Minister giving serious consideration to anything that can be done about the bridge at the State level.

EPPING TO CHATSWOOD RAIL LINK

Mr O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai) [5.35 p.m.]: I refer to the proposed Epping to Chatswood rail link and, in particular, to the removal of spoil—that is, rock, earth and other debris resulting from its construction. By any measure, this project has had a chequered history. Originally, it was to be built from Parramatta to Chatswood via Epping at a cost of \$1.4 billion. However, now only the Epping to Chatswood section is to be funded and the cost will top \$1.6 billion. I have always argued that a second-rate route was chosen for the link. It was pointed out early in the piece that a station at the University of Technology, Sydney [UTS] Ku-ring-gai, needed to be included in the project. That station has now been dumped. Given this change, one can readily understand the anger of residents in parts of Lindfield and Roseville who will still suffer from the late changes in the route, changes that were made on the basis of a UTS station and to accommodate an underground route through the Lane Cove National Park.

Now that the Government has abandoned the UTS station it remains unclear why the changed route is still required and why families are being threatened by a tunnel which, in some places, will be just 13 metres below their homes. Equally, if the Government were serious about solving these residents' problems it would replicate the compensation provisions available to similarly affected residents of other major transport projects. It would also be helpful if the Government committed to an underground station at Chatswood, which would increase the depth of the tunnel as it passed through the newly affected Roseville-Lindfield corridor, and would avoid concerns and problems. My principal reason for raising this issue relates to spoil removal. It is a curious issue. In the original environmental impact statement [EIS] the only reference to spoil removal was a table—table 12.7 on pages 12 to 21—entitled "Summary of Cumulative Spoil Truck Increases [Assuming 100% Spoil Removal by Road]".

The table documented the significant number of trucks that would use roads if 100 per cent of the spoil was removed that way. It predicted 250 additional daily truck movements on the Pacific Highway north of Lindfield, rising to 880 daily movements on the highway north of Pymble; and 630 additional daily truck movements on Ryde Road, north of De Burgh's Bridge. Details of projected truck movements on streets around major construction points were also provided. By any measure, these are large numbers of truck movements. The original EIS estimated that at least 230,000 cubic metres of spoil would be generated by this project in my electorate alone. In total, it was estimated that this project would produce one million cubic metres of spoil. This number of truck movements will eventuate only if all spoil is removed by road. While I accept that that is unlikely, the reality is that despite almost four years of inquiries and study the public and, most importantly, people living in the communities around the project route simply have not been told anything about how spoil will be removed.

Incredibly, despite the obvious significant impact the matter has for people living in surrounding suburbs, spoil removal was not subject to scrutiny, assessment or recommendation in the EIS. Indeed, in correspondence to me the Minister for Transport stated that the matter would be considered and determined after the EIS process was completed. I remind the Minister for Transport that we are now well beyond that point in time. When I met with departmental officers for a briefing on the project in 2000 I raised spoil removal. At that time, in addition to being told the matter would be determined after the EIS process, it was suggested that removal by rail could be an option. However, one of the issues to be assessed was how to schedule any rail spoil removal around existing passenger services on the North Shore line. When Parliament debated enabling legislation for the rail link, barging some of the spoil down the Lane Cove River was raised. However, that option has not been raised since.

Recently it was suggested to me that a conveyor belt system was being considered. It was suggested to me that the conveyor belt would grow in length as the tunnel was dug—similar to the long conveyor belt systems seen in Australia's mining areas. It was put to me that the conveyor belt would end at a point near the M2 so that trucks could use that motorway and avoid other streets and roads. I have written to the Minister asking whether this suggestion has been made and asking what stage spoil removal planning is up to. I am yet to receive a reply. I call on the Minister for Transport and the Government to state where planning is up to for this important aspect of the Epping to Chatswood rail link. If a final determination has not yet been made the Minister should say so. He should come clean with interested and affected residents; he should let the public know what options are being considered and their potential impact on communities.

Most importantly, I request that the public be allowed to have input during the planning and assessment phase of considering spoil removal options. By informing and consulting with the community at this stage the Minister is more likely to avoid any confusion or problems later. Let me be clear about my position on the rail link: I have supported, and will continue to support, the expansion and upgrade of Sydney's rail system. Although I have criticisms about aspects of this project, I will continue to work with residents and local communities to iron them out, minimise their impact or ensure appropriate redress is available. I will continue to lend my support to the Epping-Chatswood rail link. My community, like so many others across Sydney, is being strangled by traffic.

Improvements to the rail system offer the only hope to stem the growth in vehicular traffic. I will do what I can to support such improvements. The public needs to be consulted about spoil removal. The Minister, the department and the Parramatta Rail Link Company have been at fault in not consulting, advising and informing the public to this point. They should not attempt to push this issue under the carpet. At the end of the day one million cubic metres for the entire project, 230,000 cubic metres out of my electorate, have to leave the route somehow—whether by road, rail, barge, conveyor belt or whatever. The public deserves to know how that will occur, what its impact on them and their surrounding suburbs will be, and for how long it will occur.

GEORGES RIVER ELECTORATE SPORTING EVENTS

Mr GREENE (Georges River) [5.40 p.m.]: As this House well knows, I certainly enjoy participating in a number of sporting activities. On Saturday the under-sevens St Joseph's Riverwood team that I have the pleasure of coaching had a bye, and I was pleased to be able attend the launch at Hurstville Oval of a magnificent book on the history of the oval. The book, co-authored by Elizabeth Butel and published by Tom Thompson, was put together by Hurstville City Council. I congratulate Hurstville City Council and its Mayor, Vince Badalati, on hosting the function. Funding was provided through the auspices of Leo McLeay and Robert McClelland, two local Federal members. The book details the fine history of Hurstville Oval and the many great sportspeople who have contributed to the development of sport in the St George district. Howard Wallace, a former General Manager of Hurstville City Council, had the vision for this fine production. He was supported by the city librarian, Laurie Urane. The book is now on display at Hurstville City Council.

Hurstville Oval has a fine sporting tradition and has hosted a number of our great athletes, including Sir Donald Bradman, Ray Lindwall, Arthur Morris, Bill O'Reilly and Brian Booth. Those international cricketers played for the St George district club. The oval hosted athletes such as Albie Thomas and Fleur Mellor, who attended Saturday's function. Unfortunately, Basil Dickenson, the great 1936 Olympic athlete who still holds the triple jump record for the St George athletics club, was unable to attend the function. Cycling was represented by some great men of the St George cycling club: Ron Bates, Phil Bates and Frank Bates. The entire Bates family has been involved in cycling. The St George area has produced in excess of 100 Olympic and Commonwealth Games cyclists, all of whom have competed at Hurstville Oval. I was pleased to be able to catch up with Eddie Stapleton and John Bradshaw, two gentlemen from the St George rugby club. Saturday was a great opportunity for everyone from the district who is involved in sport to be a part of the launch.

Following that function I had the pleasure of attending the annual general meeting of the St George athletics club, which was chaired by its president, Albie Thomas, a former world record holder in a number of distances who still participates in amateur athletics. He is doing a great job in the eighty-first year of the St George athletics club. I was pleased to be able to speak with the patron of the club, Ron Gribble, and Dennis Joliffe. Sadly, both gentlemen spoke about the passing of the secretary of the club, Bob Molloy. Honourable members will recall that last week I spoke about that in this House. I was pleased to note the performances of some of the athletes, such as Tim Gayton, the Delaney family, Chris and Matthew Barakat and Stephanie Beck. They are only some of the people who received awards on Saturday. I congratulate them and others on receiving their awards at the presentation component of the annual general meeting. I am sure that the St George athletics club will continue its fine tradition for many years.

Last night, as President of the Georges River-Penshurst-St George Junior Cricket Association, I was pleased to host the annual presentation evening at the Hurstville Entertainment Centre. In excess of 700 people attended the presentation. This year the association fielded 99 teams and close to 1,200 players. As president of the association I was able to welcome the Mayor of Hurstville city, Councillor Vince Badalati, the President of St George district cricket club, Murray Bennett, and many life members, including the co-patron, Mr Keith Compton. I was also pleased to note the presence of Mr Hamish Solomons representing Kingsgrove Sports Store, which is a great sponsor of cricket in the Georges River-Penshurst-St George area. I also acknowledge the support given by other sponsors: Lynne Humphries from the Oatley Hotel, Michael Lyons from Erin Motors, Frank and Peter Bresnahans from Bresnahans Foods, Steve Scott from the Punchbowl Bus Company, Connex SouthTrans, Lanham and Associates, Sovereign Motor Inn and Laurence and Laurence, solicitors. I also acknowledge the magnificent individual performances of all trophy winners, particularly Moses Henriques, who was awarded cricketer of the year, and Mitchell Brown and Samantha Han who were the individual representative players of the year.

ALBURY AND WODONGA AMALGAMATION

Mr GLACHAN (Albury) [5.45 p.m.]: Some years ago Jeff Kennett, when he was the Premier of Victoria, suggested that the cities of Albury and Wodonga should be united to form one city on the border between New South Wales and Victoria. At the time the Premier of New South Wales, Mr Carr, indicated that he did not think much of the idea. However, towards the end of March last year the Victorian and the New South Wales cabinets met in Albury Wodonga. On that historic occasion both Premiers announced that they had decided that Albury Wodonga should be united to form one city on the border. They did not spell out how that would be done, and people were concerned about how it would be achieved. The Premiers also announced that Ian Sinclair would chair public meetings to enable communities on both sides of the border to be informed and have a say about whether they wanted the two cities to be combined.

Many people in the area asked for a referendum, but the governments decided against it. Later, however, the city of Albury held a referendum. Unfortunately, not many people voted, but those who did voted strongly against the amalgamation of the two cities. Somehow or other the shire of Hume got mixed up in discussions about whether there would be one city on the border. It was suggested that the city of Albury should take over all or part of the shire of Hume. I do not believe that the Premiers had that in mind, but somehow or another it got mixed up in the discussions when Mr Sinclair was arranging public meetings. The Hume Shire Council became concerned and upset. Subsequently, it held a referendum. There was a fairly strong turnout and a strong vote against the Hume shire amalgamating with the city of Albury.

The plan to amalgamate the two cities was for local government purposes only. It had nothing to do with changing the boundaries of the States, as some people immediately assumed. It had nothing to do with having one registration for vehicles in the two cities. It had nothing to do with co-ordinating holidays for schools on both sides of the border. It was simply to combine the administration of both cities and provide one council for the two cities. The announcement has caused a great deal of confusion. People in the area wonder what will happen. We have had no real firm proposal and no timetable as to when the proposal will be implemented or, indeed, if it ever will be implemented.

We are all left up in the air. A little while ago an article in the local newspaper said that legislation was being prepared by both governments to enable the combination to occur. But as recently as today the Premier of Victoria was reported on ABC local radio as saying that the Victorian Government was still a long way from preparing any legislation. It is more than 15 months since the first announcement was made. Today we are no closer to finding out what will happen than we were 15 months ago. There will be great problems in combining the two cities. In April last year—it was announced some time after that—I predicted that the New South Wales side of the combined city would have to be put under the control of the Victorian local government department for the combination to be successful. But the two major cities, Albury and Wodonga, on either side of the Murray are wondering about their future. Albury City Council is developing plans for the city of Albury. Wodonga is acting similarly. Nobody knows whether they will remain as two separate cities or will combine into one city. I ask the Minister for Local Government and the Premier when they will tell the citizens of these two cities whether there will be one council or whether the two councils will continue as they presently are. We deserve and want an answer.

[Private members' statements interrupted.]

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: I welcome to the Chamber Mr Maosheng Niu, the Governor of the People's Government of Hebei Province, China, and his delegation.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

[Private members' statements resumed.]

TRIBUTE TO Mr ARTHUR RUSSELL "MICK" JURD

Mr HUNTER (Lake Macquarie) [5.52 p.m.]: Tonight I pay tribute to a great man, Arthur Russell Jurd, also known to family and friends as Mike or Mick. Mick was born on 2 January 1910 and passed away on 5 April 2002 aged 92. He is survived by his wife, Grace, and an extensive family. Mick's funeral was held at Wallsend on Wednesday 10 April. As Parliament was sitting I was, unfortunately, unable to attend. However, I was represented by my father, Merv Hunter, who was a great mate of Mick's, and also by my electorate officer, Helen Bristow, who over the years had become a dear friend to Mick. Mick's funeral was deemed a celebration of his life. Mick Jurd was a family man, carpenter, cabinetmaker, musician, miner and dreamer.

Mick, as I knew him, had a long association with my family as a friend and community member. He was a long-term member of the Australian Labor Party and a true socialist. I knew Mick for many years, primarily in his work with my father, Merv Hunter, when he was the member for Lake Macquarie, and since that time as Merv continued to work with Mick in advancing the Westlakes Mineworkers Retirement Village. In February 1998 an article entitled "Retirement Village for Mineworkers" that was written by Jim Priest appeared in *Common Cause*. It stated:

The Westlakes Mineworkers Retirement Village Limited saw its commencement in 1982—built by retired mineworkers for retired mineworkers.

The article went on to state:

The Westlakes Mineworkers Retirement Village Limited is a non-profit organisation, located at James Street, Teralba, NSW, in the Shire of Lake Macquarie, approximately 20 kilometres by road to Newcastle and 25 minutes by rail from Booragul Station to Newcastle...

The office of the company is housed in the on-site mining museum, which is an octagonal-shaped building designed and built by Mick Jurd, retired mineworker and founder of the village. The museum houses some excellent mining history, including working models of early underground mines of the area.

Those models were also built by Mick Jurd. In the June 2002 edition of *Common Cause* a tribute was paid to Mick Jurd by Jim Comerford, who wrote:

With the recent death of Mick Jurd, the Northern District has lost one of its most outstanding mining veterans. Most of Mick's 92 years were spent using his special skills on works for the good use of his fellow worker citizens. With that went intense union activism and banner bearer for the advancement of working people through genuine left wing movements.

Mick came into the coal industry in 1940 at Old Bulli pit. From there he moved North to Killingworth, John Darling and Lambton B; always as a highly competent carpenter. At Killie he served as President of the Mechanics Lodge. His accomplishments as musician, composer, painter became legendary. He even built his own organ to perfection.

Following the Wye State Mine Disaster he became the core as planner and supervisor for a committee set up to establish the Miners Memorial Music Shell at Freeman's Waterhole in the shadow of the Wattagan Mountains. For a long time Mick and other young organists gave recitals there on Sundays to the delight of big audiences.

The article continued:

Beside his farsightedness, dedication and high principles Mick Jurd was a very worthy citizen. You always felt it was great to be in his company. More often than not he was clad in his khaki carpenter's overalls.

From all of his community-friendly projects Mick never sought a cent payment for himself. The profit motive and self-serving lay outside of his convictions.

It was great to be listed as a friend to one like this who cherished home and family. There should be more like him.

Mick was very good with his hands, not only in building houses and other large projects such as the Music Shell at Freemans Waterhole but also with smaller artistic things. He was also a lover of music and an accomplished organist. A fine desk complete with hand engraved coat of arms and intricate locking devices made by Mick and presented to my father in recognition of his assistance to retired mineworkers is a testament to his fine craft work as a cabinetmaker. When I was elected to Parliament in 1991 Mick presented me with a handmade timber work of art for my office—a man sitting playing a large pipe organ—all hand carved and hand painted, which I still proudly display in my reception area. Whenever he visited my office he always left with the words, "That bloke is still playing." Although Mick is no longer "playing", he leaves a proud legacy to his family, friends and community. Vale Mick Jurd.

Mr FACE (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [5.57 p.m.]: I also would like to put a few words on the public record about the life of Mick Jurd. He made an extremely great contribution to life in the community of the Hunter region after he moved from the Wollongong area. But most, and overall, Mick Jurd was somebody who could be described as just a true gentle friend to so many people. As the honourable member for Lake Macquarie said, he was well known for playing the organ at the Freemans Waterhole Music Shell. He was the founder of the Westlakes Mineworkers Retirement Village and a mining veteran at the old Killingworth mine. He also worked at Lambton B, which was known as the old Durham, in my electorate and in the John Darling, another BHP colliery. He was an excellent tradesman, something that stopped with him. Even in his advanced years he could do with woodworking tools what many people half his age could not do.

He was close to the Hunter family. Merv Hunter, the former member for Lake Macquarie, like the present member for Lake Macquarie, would be deeply distressed at the loss of Mick Jurd, a true friend to the Hunter family. Mick was also generous, not only with his time and his talents but to many of the people who needed guidance and compassion at various times in their lives. Mick had a tremendous depth of human understanding about life. He could transmit this to other people in times of grief and need of support or understanding. He could be described as a gentle person. He became a grand figure in the life of the labour movement and the Australian Labor Party, and the mining industry, as so aptly described by Jim Comerford. Mick's passing will leave a great hole. But a lot of people in this world would have liked to make even a quarter of the contribution that this man made to society generally. I put on public record my appreciation of and respect and admiration for Mick Jurd and the contributions of his life.

LIFELINE NEW SOUTH WALES

Mr STONER (Oxley) [5.59 p.m.]: I draw the attention of the House to the hugely important work done in this State by Lifeline New South Wales. No doubt members are well aware of the vital telephone and in-person counselling services delivered to more than 150,000 callers and 15,000 in-person clients by Lifeline counsellors every year. However, perhaps members are not fully aware of the impact of mental health issues upon that wonderful volunteer organisation. Recently I visited Lifeline Mid Coast (New South Wales) and met with its chief executive, Milton Drake; administration manager, Marilyn Stone; supervisor, Mary Gillespie and secretary to the board, John Avery.

I hesitate to describe John Avery as a retired police commissioner, because he is still very active in community work and gives enormously of this time to worthwhile causes, including Lifeline. Ever year Lifeline Mid Coast helps 6,500 people in need, and 1,000 of them in person. Of those using the counselling services, 30 per cent have mental health issues. Across the State that percentage is as high as 60 per cent. The high proportion of clients with mental health needs is a result of both the overall increase in the prevalence of mental health issues as well as a tendency for people with mental health problems to remain under treatment in the community rather than in institutions.

Lifeline has done a magnificent job in meeting the challenge, as those with mental health issues are at a greater risk of suicide than those in the general population, given the effects of depression, schizophrenia, neurosis and other mental health conditions. However, the problem is that Lifeline's volunteer counsellors, who do a superb job, are not necessarily trained or qualified to respond to people with mental health conditions. That adds an extra dimension to the type of counselling work they do; it requires a different approach and response to that adopted during normal counselling.

That in turn places extra demands and stresses on the volunteer counsellors at Lifeline. The New South Wales public health system already uses Lifeline's services and refers clients from public hospitals or mental health wards to Lifeline for counselling. Lifeline provides that counselling on referral from the New South Wales Government. However, Lifeline is an entirely voluntary organisation and raises its funds from the community. At this stage it does not receive funding from the Government. The Lifeline counsellors need some professional training and the close support of staff with qualifications, perhaps in psychology, or experienced mental health nurses.

Lifeline needs that support in each of its 17 centres throughout the State. Trained, qualified people would be able to provide the necessary coaching and training to the counsellors, who give so generously of their time, to equip them to deal with the additional stresses placed on them by clients with mental health problems. It is estimated that that would require up to \$150,000 per annum in each centre, which totals \$2.7 million across the State. Obviously, that is beyond the resources of Lifeline New South Wales. A delegation is to meet with the Minister for Health to discuss the proposal to put qualified people into each centre. That would certainly be a far less expensive option than having the public health system deal with those clients on its own; it would be a partnership with the wonderful volunteer community organisation. I urge the Minister for Health to seriously consider that proposal.

BANKSTOWN OLD TOWN PLAZA FIRE

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.04 p.m.]: Traditionally 17 March is a day of great celebration. It is St Patrick's Day, a day on which we all join in the festivities. Unfortunately, this year in Bankstown 17 March was not such a wonderful day. On that day a terrible fire in the Bankstown Old Town Plaza resulted in the loss of five shops. The fire started in the late afternoon and caused extensive damage to the surrounding area, right in the middle of the Bankstown central business district. More than \$1 million worth of damage was done. Excavation work has been undertaken and it is hoped that new modern premises will be built on the site of the fire.

The fire started in a bargain store named The Liquidators. Many bargain stores can be found throughout the Sydney metropolitan area and the State, including Clint's Crazy Bargains, Roni's Variety Discounts, The Reject Shop, Colonel Clint's and Hot Dollar. Liquidation stores sell products at a bargain price and are very popular. However, I am concerned about the amount of stock that was in The Liquidators store. The fire investigators advised me that the large amount of stock in the bargain store was extremely combustible. Liquidation stores in my area often have stock piled up to the ceiling. That is a safety concern, particularly a fire safety concern, when the stock is combustible.

In this case the firefighters had difficulty in extinguishing the fire, which burned for 34 hours. I commend the Bankstown firefighters for their prompt actions in bringing the fire under control within three or four hours. The fact that it burned for 34 hours, because of the combustible material fuelling the fire, is

alarming. I have contacted local councils, WorkCover and the office of the Minister for Planning to ascertain where the responsibility for those stores lies. The fire safety regulations do not govern those conditions as well as they should. The power of councils to enforce compliance with the regulations should be more effective; they need stronger powers to make those who run the stores more responsible for their stock.

The store owner was only trying to make a quid and was doing so in a market atmosphere. But public safety is paramount. It is clear to me that the amount of stock in that store was what caused the fire to burn for 34 hours. In turn that caused a real problem for the managers of shops in the surrounding area. The Government needs to move on this matter and I will have further discussions with the Minister responsible for WorkCover, the Minister for Planning and Bankstown and Canterbury councils. Many of these stores operate in my electorate and I would like to have something done about making the guidelines for fire safety more effective.

Out of the fire comes the renewed phoenix. Renewal at Bankstown is now occurring. This is a golden opportunity to redevelop the Old Town Plaza to ensure it serves modern shopping needs. I will work closely with Bankstown City Council, the developers who own the site—Andrew and Raymond Whitten—and with local retailers to ensure that the area is developed appropriately. This is an opportunity to refocus that central part of the Bankstown central business district to make it vital and to provide appropriate facilities for commuters and shoppers in the Bankstown central business district.

MURRUMBIDGEE ELECTORATE POKER MACHINE LICENCES

Mr PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee) [6.09 p.m.]: I want to discuss a serious issue that affects two small communities in the electorate of Murrumbidgee, relating to liquor licensing and the placement of gaming machines in hotels. First, I refer to May's Hotel in Morundah, a lovely little town with a great community about 20 kilometres south of Narrandera. The town of Morundah comprises a pub called May's Hotel, a few houses, a couple of silos and that is about it. It has great atmosphere and great character. The licensee of May's Hotel bought the pub in 1997. The hotel had not been particularly well looked after or maintained. The licensee subsequently spent a great deal of money on the hotel and turned it into a great community facility for Morundah and the Coleambally area. He is now faced with a significant problem. Prior to the purchase, the hotel did not have any poker machines. He spent a great deal of money on refurbishing the kitchen and the building to bring it up to an appropriate standard. Then the Government implemented the freeze on poker machine licences. Having made a substantial investment in the purchase and the upgrade of the hotel, the licensee is left with a hotel that does not have a poker machine licence.

When the licensee bought the hotel, the valuation included an entitlement to 30 gaming machines. If he wishes to sell the hotel, it will be sold without gaming machines. That will have a significant impact on its value and on its operating revenue. These days hotels use their gaming revenue to subsidise meals. This licensee is not in a position to do so, which leaves him at a competitive disadvantage to other hotels in the area. He has done a lot of work to make this pub a great part of the community. He is involved in community organisations, such as the Morundah bush picnic, which unfortunately had to be cancelled because of the public liability issue. This hotel business, which is a great facility in the community, is being hampered by changes to the law.

The Conopara Hotel, which is located in Rankins Springs, about 60 kilometres north of Griffith and in my electorate, burnt down about one year ago. There was great difficulty in getting the pub rebuilt because the hotel licence had been sold to Sydney. The new owner, Mr Renzo Zanotto, purchased the site and obtained a new licence. Halfway through building the hotel, the freeze on poker machines was implemented. He is now in a position where he may not be able to have any poker machines in the hotel. He faces the same difficulties as those faced by the licensee at May's Hotel. He has made a substantial investment in the building and in the licence, only to have the value of the hotel reduced by not having any gaming machines in the hotel. It is a tragedy for both of those communities, although the two licensees will continue to provide their services because of their love for their communities.

Both licensees have made a hardship application. I am not aware of how those applications are dealt with, but I hope they are dealt with appropriately. Even if the licences fall outside the strict guidelines set down by the legislation, I hope that the Minister, or those who decide the hardship applications, take into consideration the nature of these small communities. Hotels in most towns and cities are just hotels. In small towns they are a vital part of the community, where people hold meetings and other events. I hope that the hardship applications are considered favourably.

MID NORTH COAST RADIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr OAKESHOTT (Port Macquarie) [6.14 p.m.]: I wish to talk about the need for radiotherapy services on the mid North Coast, particularly, at Port Macquarie. As most honourable members would know, Port Macquarie has an aged population and a tourist community. On a demographic basis, a large number of people in the area suffer from cancer. Unfortunately, every week many people have to leave the mid North

Coast area to undergo radiotherapy treatment. That causes problems because of the travelling involved and accommodation needs. The intensity of the radiotherapy treatment that is needed to be undertaken outside the area places a huge demand clinically on the people involved and their carers. Plans are on the table for a radiotherapy unit to be located on the mid North Coast. The Commonwealth Government in its last budget allocated money for the expansion of radiotherapy services in regional areas. We are heading in the right direction in general terms, but we do not have any official announcement about particular locations.

I call on the Mid North Coast Area Health Service to agree that Port Macquarie is the ideal location both from a geographic viewpoint, being the centre of the Mid North Coast Area Health Service, and because the service has already begun with an excellent oncology team in place. The oncology team is led by Dr Stephen Begbie, who is also head of the medical staff council in Port Macquarie. On both those grounds, the obvious place to locate the radiotherapy unit on the mid North Coast is Port Macquarie.

As to the long-term situation for the entire North Coast, I understand there are plans for two radiotherapy units down the track. The obvious place to locate the radiotherapy units would be one in the northern area at Lismore—for which, I understand, there is community support—and a lead facility at Port Macquarie. The lead facility could service the mid North Coast and the Lismore facility could service the Grafton-Tweed area. I call on the Mid North Coast Area Health Service to recommend Port Macquarie as the location for the radiotherapy unit. I also call on the Minister for Health to support the community campaign that is under way for the placement of the radiotherapy unit at Port Macquarie. I am heartened by the amount of community support for this project. Last week two businesses I visited, Mitre 10 and the Five-Star Fitness Centre, had petitions seeking signatures to support a radiotherapy unit for Port Macquarie. There is broad community support for the unit, with petitions on just about every business counter in town and Rotary clubs are right behind it.

This is one of those issues that unify the community. I would be pleased if the Minister for Health and the Government recognised that community backing and supported the establishment of the radiotherapy unit in Port Macquarie. I believe that Port Macquarie hospital should release plans for the facility. I do not believe that we need to wait for the Government to announce that Port Macquarie will receive the unit. The hospital should put its verbal commitments—which it has given—on paper, announce that the land is allocated and the plans are available, and start to work out the detail of the project. Further, if the unit is located at Port Macquarie, we will have to consider accommodation and transport needs. Rotary and Port Macquarie hospital need to decide whether Rotary Lodge is a large enough facility to hold carers and travellers using the unit and, if not, whether plans are needed for expansion purposes. As to the transport needs of people using the unit, I encourage Kings Brothers buses and the mid North Coast community transport team to consider ways in which they can meet transport needs. I call on the Minister for Health and the Mid North Coast Area Health Service to support Port Macquarie as the location for the establishment of the radiotherapy unit on the mid North Coast.

Private members' statements noted.

[Mr Deputy-Speaker left the chair at 6.19 p.m. The House resumed at 7.30 p.m.]

APPROPRIATION BILL

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION (SPECIAL OFFICES) BILL

GENERAL GOVERNMENT LIABILITY MANAGEMENT FUND BILL

PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT OPERATIONS AMENDMENT (TRADEABLE EMISSION SCHEMES FUND) BILL

PUBLIC FINANCE AND AUDIT AMENDMENT (BUDGETING AND FINANCIAL REPORTING) BILL

STATE REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (BUDGET) BILL

Second Reading

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Take-note Debate

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Ms HARRISON (Parramatta) [7.30 p.m.]: It is with pleasure that I speak in support of the Government's 2002-03 budget. This Labor Government, through the fiscal management of Treasurer Egan, has

for the seventh successive year succeeded in producing another surplus budget, a budget that not only cuts taxes but also increases spending. This is a sure sign that New South Wales is subject to the best financial guidance possible. This budget builds upon the consistent successes of the previous seven budgets. I notice that the Leader of the Opposition referred to the budget as lazy. He must have a very interesting thesaurus if it defines "lazy" as capable of supplying surplus after surplus, a feat accomplished by only two former New South Wales Treasurers, and then only once each.

Most important, spending will increase by 2.1 per cent in 2002-03 to a total of \$32.3 billion. Another \$3 billion will be spent on new schools, hospitals, roads, prisons and police. This is not accomplished by being lazy. It is competent management achieved through hard work and successful experience, both virtues obviously in short supply on the Opposition benches. I am pleased to report that my electorate of Parramatta will reap its share of the benefits. During 2002-03 capital expenditure in my electorate will total \$124.5 million. The record budget allocation for policing will see extra spending on law and order in the Parramatta area. This builds on the recent success of police operations Vikings I and II, about which I spoke in this House last week. This will be effective where it is needed most, that is, on the front line against crime.

I am most pleased to be able to relate that \$14.2 million has been secured to begin building a brand-new police headquarters in Parramatta. Leasing 32,900 square metres, construction of this building is a great win for my electorate and the Parramatta area in general. It will be welcomed not only by the police officers themselves but by the Western Sydney community as a whole. The community supports the police and this expenditure will provide a practical and morale boost. Anything that helps police in their day-to-day activities will strongly benefit all of us. Major benefits will flow from the transfer of police headquarters from the Sydney central business district [CBD] to Parramatta. This will be not only a capital benefit but those benefits to be found in personnel deployment. Nearly 2,400 permanent jobs will be relocated to Parramatta, the biggest decentralisation of public servants out of Sydney in the last 15 years.

I recently inspected the site of the new police headquarters with the Minister for Public Works and Services, the largest construction ever in the Parramatta CBD. This move will save \$18 million through lower rent and more efficient work spaces. Along with other police budgetary allocations the new headquarters will support new Commissioner Moroney's plans for a high-impact, highly visible force. The major focus is to free police from desk duties so they can take their place in the front line against crime. Another major benefit separate from the fight against crime such as recently evidenced by the Vikings operations is that the building of the police complex will generate 1,000 construction-related jobs. It will boost building activity in the Western Sydney region in general and Parramatta in particular, a great outcome for the geographic centre in Sydney.

The building will be located a block from Parramatta railway station and two blocks from Westfield at Parramatta. It will be nice for the law-breakers to know that Sydney's biggest stop sign for them will be situated in the heart of Parramatta. Additionally, \$170,000 will be spent on the construction of a vehicle examination facility. This will be situated at the Westmead forensic services unit. Forensic equipment and facilities are essential in the battle against crime. It is satisfying to know that some of New South Wales' most notorious crimes have been solved from within the Parramatta area. Parramatta will also win a healthy share of the record \$6.3 billion being spent on new and upgraded schools, hospitals, roads and other public facilities. The budget also allocates \$300 million for road improvement in Western Sydney.

The Parramatta electorate will gain from this, with \$80.8 million set aside for completion of the Parramatta to Liverpool bus-only transitway. This, the first in a network of bus-only routes across Western Sydney, is due to open in 2003. I was recently at Parramatta station in the company of the Minister for Transport when he released details of the planned new transport interchange destined for the heart of Parramatta. An allocation of \$100 million is for construction of the Parramatta transport interchange, creation of which is expected to commence early next year. This is a major enhancement to the New South Wales Government's Western Sydney transport initiative. The master plan includes a substantial upgrade of Parramatta railway station, fit-out of a new bus station, construction of a bus-only tunnel through the retail centre of Parramatta station, new provisions for taxis and interstate coaches, improved pedestrian connections across Parramatta city centre and a proposed interchange building with potential for retail or commercial development.

This interchange will facilitate a substantial increase in the level of public transport into and out of the Parramatta CBD. This will be achieved by connecting CityRail services to the new transitway, local bus networks and other transport modes. The new interchange will play a major role in the revitalisation of Parramatta, not only as a major regional transport hub but as a strong commercial and retail centre. Another \$1 million will fund development work on the Parramatta to Epping rail link, a project that is eagerly anticipated by many people in north-western Sydney. My electorate also did well out of the Roads and Traffic Authority

budget, with \$6.763 million being allocated for network development, which includes the Liverpool to Parramatta transitway, the Parramatta to Strathfield transitway, the north-west transit link and the Parramatta to Granville cycleway, which I am pleased has received an allocation of \$4.074 million. Miscellaneous planning, investigations, acquisitions and finalisations will receive \$90,000. There will also be an upgrade of the Great Western Highway-Parramatta Road from Broadway to Woodville, part of which falls within my electorate.

We also received \$2,214,000 for maintenance, \$136,000 for road safety and \$1,904,000 for traffic and transport. This money will be spent on several projects that will greatly benefit my electorate, including the Parramatta to Liverpool cycleway, which was allocated \$396,000; the bus priority study for Parramatta central business district, which received \$150,000; the pedestrian bridge at Elizabeth Street across the Parramatta River, \$150,000; the cycleway through the Parramatta Valley, \$75,000; the pedestrian access and mobility plan for Parramatta, \$30,000; regional roads block grant for traffic facilities in the Parramatta City Council area, \$136,000; regional roads block grant for traffic facilities in Holroyd City Council area, \$17,280; and regional roads block grant for traffic facilities in Baulkham Hills shire council area, \$5,400.

Housing in Parramatta was also enhanced in this budget, which definitely addressed some housing problems in my electorate. The Aboriginal Housing Office has received \$1.3 million to purchase three accommodation units. The rapid rise in the number of people residing in Parramatta is recognised through the budgetary provision of \$7.1 million to acquire accommodation units in North Parramatta, Ermington and Mays Hill. The Department of Fair Trading in Parramatta will use its \$1.4 million allocation to purchase several information technology systems, including natural language speech recognition. Corrective Services has also done well in the budget, and Parramatta goal is to gain 250 remand beds, which will be funded with a provision of \$300,000.

Education has also benefited from this budget. Some \$2.52 million will be spent on ongoing work for the stage one project at Westmead Public School, which will allow it to continue through 2002-03. The project will enable expansion of the existing school to support its growing enrolment numbers and ensure that Westmead Public School has the most up-to-date educational resources. This is just part of the record \$8 billion provided for education and training in this budget. When we ally this with the money that the budget allocates to teacher training and global budgets, we can be confident about the future of education in New South Wales.

Parramatta's local health services will benefit from this year's budget allocation of \$20.5 million, which will fund a number of health-related initiatives in my electorate. I have no need to remind anyone that Westmead Hospital is one of our most important centres of medicine and an increasingly significant point of focus in the greater west not just in treatment but in ground-breaking research. This budget continues to acknowledge its growing importance by providing \$4.28 million, which will fund a purpose-built newborn and paediatric emergency services facility at the New Children's Hospital at Westmead. This will include a new helipad for the Westmead campus and dedication of the Child Flight base. Some \$1.72 million is allocated for a new research facility at the children's hospital, \$2.37 million will go to the Westmead Hospital Breast Centre—a new centre for statewide services including research, education and screening—and \$8.8 million will fund the major rebuilding of Westmead Hospital, with work to begin this year. I am proud and pleased to have Westmead children's hospital, which is a world leader in paediatric care, in my electorate.

Parramatta will derive more benefit from this budget's abolition of payroll tax for employers of apprentices. This will assist 31,000 young people around the State. In addition, New South Wales now has the lowest general insurance tax rates in Australia. Parramatta and every other State electorate will get ahead as a result of these tax cuts that help families and small businesses. The Department of Community Services Metro West has received \$75.1 million, which is an increase of \$9 million from the last budget. My Parramatta electorate is receiving \$8 million for about 63 local services. These include home care as well as youth services and family and individual support and community development programs. These are funded from the Community Services grants. They include financial assistance for youth-supported accommodation, women's emergency services, programs related to the Drug Summit and an extra \$7.8 million for the DOCS Helpline. These programs offer valuable support to the Parramatta community and this ongoing budget funding demonstrates the Government's commitment to children, young people and families in crisis.

My electorate has again benefited greatly from this record budget in all the areas that I have mentioned, such as health, roads, education, housing and community service—the areas that affect people most. These and other initiatives involving policing and tax relief show that the Government is leading the way with its proficient fiscal management of New South Wales. It has provided increased public service allocations, tax cuts and another budget surplus—which, I am pleased to say, appears to be a habit with this Government. This is another excellent budget and I commend it to the House.

Mr CULL (Tamworth) [7.45 p.m.]: I respond with some disappointment to the 2002-03 New South Wales Budget Speech delivered to this House, particularly as it largely neglects the needs of the electorate of Tamworth. The Carr Government's budget has again failed to acknowledge that people living in rural and regional New South Wales are entitled to a fairer deal and should not be treated as second-class citizens. Despite the fact that country people pay record taxes, basic services in rural and regional New South Wales are second rate, with hospital waiting lists longer than ever, crime rates continuing to rise, classrooms in a serious state of neglect and many schools experiencing a shortage of full-time teaching staff.

The budget papers reveal that, despite the fact that one-third of the State's population lives outside metropolitan areas, the amount of capital allocated to country New South Wales for the Health, Police and Education portfolios in 2002-03 falls well short of the one-third benchmark. Overall capital expenditure on major works in the area of Health totals \$392.2 million, of which \$82.4 million is designated for country New South Wales. That amounts to just 21 per cent. Overall capital expenditure on major works in the policing area totals \$68.9 million, of which \$14.5 million is earmarked for country New South Wales. This amounts to just 22 per cent. Of the all-important new capital works for police, \$2.25 million from \$22.5 million—or just 10 per cent—will be spent in the country. In Education, capital expenditure on new major works totals \$68 million, of which \$18.6 million has been allocated for rural and regional New South Wales. This amounts to just 27 per cent.

Despite Labor's enormous revenue as a result of the property boom and increased economic activity due to the buoyant national economy, services in country New South Wales are getting worse. The Carr Government's recognition of rural New South Wales is centred on the highly populated areas east of the Great Dividing Range. This, the Carr Government's eighth budget, denies country people their fair share of the economic benefits that have flowed from the record growth of our national economy. This Government has collected record revenues. New South Wales is the highest-taxing State in Australia. The average New South Wales taxpayer pays \$2,373 per year in State and local taxes—\$290 more than in the second highest taxing State, Victoria. Between the 1995-96 and 2001-02 budgets the Labor Government collected \$12.2 billion in additional revenue, over and above its estimates. The Treasurer has been riding the property boom, with unprecedented growth in stamp duty revenues. However, very little of this additional revenue has found its way to regional New South Wales.

The rural and regional economies are the backbone of our country. They are the engine room that generates the prosperity that city people enjoy. They create the export income that enables all Australians to enjoy a prosperous lifestyle. Yet this Government continually refuses to invest in the infrastructure necessary to guarantee the viability and expansion of rural New South Wales. A future Coalition government will provide an infrastructure plan that will set out the infrastructure requirements of New South Wales for the next 15 years. A key component of this plan will be the use of public-private partnerships to address the underinvestment in our basic infrastructure. To promote balanced growth throughout New South Wales the Government must commit to maintaining and improving the infrastructure throughout all of New South Wales, particularly the road and rail networks.

Yet in this budget the Carr Government has allocated country councils a paltry \$128.7 million for the construction and maintenance of local and regional roads. With the responsibility for 18,430 kilometres of regional and local roads in New South Wales, councils are dependent on the State Government to contribute substantially to the construction and maintenance of these roads. Compare the fact that the city-centric Labor Government spent \$794 million on the 14 kilometres of the M5 East freeway, yet spent only \$128 million for 18,430 kilometres of regional and local roads. It is clear that the Government is not interested in retaining a viable rural road network. I was disappointed that there was no budget commitment towards the improvement of rail access to the north-west region to promote balanced growth throughout New South Wales.

The Government must commit to the development of the Ardglen tunnel through the Murrurundi Range. The huge coal reserves in the Gunnedah and Boggabri basin remain underdeveloped because of the excessive freight costs, which are in turn due to the inadequate rail infrastructure through the range. If the capital investment is not forthcoming northern New South Wales will lose a considerable amount of freight to the ports in Queensland. If this commitment is not forthcoming and if an urgent commitment to the upgrade of the Ardglen tunnel is not made there will be a dramatic loss of freight through the ports of Newcastle and Sydney. This will cost jobs and investment opportunities, as they will relocate to Queensland.

The proposed introduction of Plan First is a complete embarrassment to the Government—asking taxpayers to pay \$4 million for the proposed implementation of major reforms without releasing details of what

the reforms are and how they will be implemented. The Carr Government has continued to ignore local councils across New South Wales in this budget. It contains very little to address their concerns. The budget failed local councils by reducing budgeted funding for the Country Towns Water and Sewerage Scheme from \$88.4 million to \$56.36 million. Also the Government ignored local governments' concerns over the impact of unfunded mandates. It did not deliver a substantial boost to the Department of Local Government in staffing or funding to provide expanded advice and assistance to the 172 councils across the State.

I welcome the increased funding for the New England Area Health Service, with a budget allocation of \$158 million—an increase of \$9.2 million or 6.2 per cent. However, the budget does not address the issues that are preventing local hospitals from attracting more nurses. If we do not attract more nurses, hospital beds will remain empty, waiting lists will continue to grow and emergency departments will have increasing waiting times. Currently more than 64,000 patients are waiting for elective treatment, more than 8,000 of whom have been waiting for more than a year. The budget also does little to attract the necessary allied health workers who are vital to maintaining the service delivery in our hospitals.

The low morale of teachers, highlighted in the Vinson report, will not be improved by this budget. Despite the Government's claim of a \$494 million increase in the Education budget, there is only \$46 million in additional spending over what was spent in schools and TAFE last year. The State Government's much-proclaimed school improvement package has been slashed by \$100 million from what was promised last year. The State is awash with funds, but less money is available to improve school facilities and school capital. The community of Gunnedah is particularly concerned about this Government's commitment to build a new assembly hall at the Gunnedah South School. The Minister for Education promised to fund those capital works in the next financial year. However, there is no allocation in this budget for the proposed works. This is typical of the Carr Government's commitment to regional New South Wales. Gunnedah South School has been waiting for this new assembly hall for eight years and, after agreeing to build the hall, the Government is now renegeing on its financial commitment. That is shameful. I call on the Government to honour its commitment to the Gunnedah South School.

Overall capital expenditure on major police works totals \$68.9 million, of which only \$14.5 million is earmarked for country New South Wales. Increased funding for country New South Wales should have received a higher priority. Law and order has become a major concern in recent times. Mr Costa can talk all he likes about police numbers. The reality is that an increasing amount of people in country New South Wales are becoming concerned about their personal safety as crime rates escalate out of control. With increased funding for the Department of Public Prosecutions there must not be any more excuses for failure to prosecute or appeal lenient sentences. My constituents are demanding that criminals must be not only caught but prosecuted. Judges must reflect community values and expectations when sentencing offenders. Nowhere in the budget is there any mention of any programs or funding made available to address the long-term stress leave that accounts for a loss of police strength of more than 600 police officers.

The troubled Department of Community Services [DOCS] has received little recognition in this budget, with workers maintaining the Government has "amputated itself from humanity". This crisis-plagued department will receive only a 1.3 per cent increase in 2002-03, well below what is required to improve service delivery towards children at risk. The Government has made no promises and allocated no extra funds in this budget to increase front-line child protection—and this is at a time when child abuse reports have doubled. The problems associated with the Department of Community Services in my community were highlighted vividly a couple of weeks ago when it held a rally to try to indicate to the Government that it can no longer operate and provide an effective service to its community without increasing manpower. It is disappointing that this Government has not recognised this need and allocated additional funding so that the department can meet the additional staff requirements of its local communities.

It is disappointing that this budget does nothing to address our State's diminishing competitiveness under the burden of taxation. The Premier has failed to honour his commitment to reduce the payroll tax rate to a level in line with other States. The paltry 0.2 per cent reduction will not address the problem of businesses relocating to other States. We are continually looking for reasons and methods to attract businesses back into our areas, particularly in the rural areas where we can offer people the hope of increased employment. This was an opportunity for the Government to honour its commitment and to encourage businesses to relocate into our regional areas by offering them a competitive payroll tax rate. Country New South Wales is eager to attract business but it is being hampered by these uncompetitive overhead costs. Businesses are being attracted to other States because of the lower cost structures offered. The Government's lack of concern towards rural communities and its lack of commitment towards achieving equitable natural resource reforms is highlighted in this budget.

Again, this illustrates Labor's indifference and arrogance towards farmers and rural businesses, and communities that rely economically on them. At a time when the Government is implementing major natural resource reforms, it has hacked into the Department of Land and Water Conservation by reducing the budget in actual terms and reducing staff numbers by 175. The budget would have been an opportune time for the Government to regain some credibility in natural resource management by offering farmers greater consultation and compensation for loss of their property rights. It is disappointing that the Government did not use this budget to allocate the \$40 million compensation recommended by the Namoi Ground Water Task Force as fair compensation for the proposed water sharing adjustments. This was highlighted on the weekend by a rally held in Narrabri where concerned citizens from our communities expressed their grave reservations about a Government policy in relation not only to water management but also to natural resource management across the board: native vegetation, the wilderness and threatened species.

The Government does not act responsibly, nor does it acknowledge the concerns of rural people and deal with the problems. Water sharing plans, which are being distributed throughout our communities, are very topical. Again and again, following representation from farming communities, the Government has failed to acknowledge its responsibility to offer fair rates of compensation to farmers whose water rights are taken away. We were promised a compassionate budget. However, as with previous budgets, this compassion does not extend to the rural communities that live west of the Great Dividing Range. It is vital that at some time this Government acknowledges the importance of a viable agricultural sector. I hope that one day this Government will realise that to maintain prosperity and growth within New South Wales we must maintain a viable and profitable agricultural sector.

Mr THOMPSON (Rockdale) [8.01 p.m.]: This is the eighth consecutive budget of the Carr State Labor Government. In the words of the Treasurer, the Hon. Michael Egan, when he presented his budget to this House,

The Budget I present today achieves the trifecta of improved government services, lower taxes and, unlike the Costello Budget, remains in surplus.

It's a budget from a Government that is experienced, optimistic, steady and steadfast.

My local political opponents often say that the Government takes the seat of Rockdale for granted because, over the years, it has proven to be a comparatively safe Labor seat. Since its inception in the 1940s, Rockdale has always returned a Labor member. However, not one of those members ever took the people for granted, and neither I nor the Carr Labor Government take the people of Rockdale for granted. The record demonstrates that for sure and certain, and the record is there for all to see. Expenditure on the M5 East, a major part of which is in my electorate, reached close to a massive \$800 million. It has brought many benefits to the area and it has made Rockdale and surrounding suburbs much better places to live. The quality of life in our district has been raised substantially.

Since the M5 East opened last December most of the heavy trucks have been taken off our main roads, and peace and safety have been returned to our local residential streets. The M5 East was built at Government expense and is, therefore, toll free, which encourages the trucking industry, particularly container trucks, to use it. Previously they thundered through our suburbs—particularly in my area of Brighton, Rockdale, Arncliffe and Bexley—in convoy. Local residents support the Carr Government for taking all that heavy traffic off our roads. As a result, road safety in our communities has improved substantially. Property values are continuing to rise as more and more people identify our district as a desirable location in which to live. After all, Rockdale is on the shores of beautiful Botany Bay. I can see the honourable member for Cronulla nodding his head in agreement.

Mr Kerr: Yes.

Mr THOMPSON: The honourable member for Cronulla is also fortunate to have his electorate bordering on beautiful Botany Bay. The people of Rockdale are thrilled that a major part of our district has a beachfront onto Botany Bay, and most of the water in Botany Bay is in the electorate of Rockdale. We are next door to Sydney airport, and only 15 minutes by either road or rail to the city. Rockdale is a great place to live. The railway system in my electorate is good. As reported in the *Sun Herald* on Sunday 23 June, on-time running for trains on the Illawarra and eastern suburbs lines is currently 93.5 per cent and 95.9 per cent respectively. Rockdale is the biggest station by far in terms of volume of ticket sales and commuters. In excess of one dozen bus routes emanate from Rockdale, and it is the biggest station in the St George district other than Hurstville.

I am pleased that work is already under way on the major upgrade of facilities at Rockdale railway station. The budget makes the final payment for the \$14.2 million project, which includes extension of the

station concourse, more and better retail outlets, new toilets, easy access for the aged, frail and disabled through the installation of lifts and a ramp, additional and better lighting, more closed-circuit television cameras for improved safety and security, improvements to the rail-bus interchange and relocation of the taxi rank. There are also other measures to improve commuter access and traffic flow. A new commuter car park will be provided at the end of Geeves Avenue. By any measure this major project will not only benefit rail patrons but also lift the Rockdale town centre, local business and the general community. The budget will particularly assist business. In his Budget Speech the Treasurer, the Hon. Michael Egan, said:

No other Government in New South Wales has achieved two surpluses, let alone seven.

And no other Government in New South Wales has ever reduced taxes in five successive budgets. The tax changes for 2002-03 include:

- ◆ the complete abolition of payroll tax on the wages of the apprentices from 1 July;
- ◆ the reduction of payroll tax from 6.2 percent to 6 percent on 1 July;
- ◆ the broadening of the payroll tax base so that fringe benefits and eligible termination payments will be treated in exactly the same way as the income of ordinary wage and salary earners; and
- ◆ from 1 August the halving of the stamp duty rate on all general insurance, including public liability insurance, from 10 percent to 5 percent, giving New South Wales by far the lowest insurance stamp duty rates in Australia.

The net cost of these taxation measures is \$215 million in a full year. The Treasurer further said in his presentation to this House:

Taxation is the price we pay for civilisation, but the Carr Government is determined to make sure it's not too high a price.

That's why we're the first Government in anyone's memory—perhaps the first Australian Government ever—to reduce tax rates in five successive budgets.

And these cuts to tax rates now amount to a cumulative \$1.4 billion a year—\$1.4 billion a year put back into taxpayers' pockets.

These taxation measures are designed not only to limit the outlays for people and business but also to stimulate economic activity. Small business, which is responsible for much of our local employment, trade and commerce, particularly benefits from these decisions. Greater stimulation of small business will lead to more and better job opportunities, and greater prosperity for our entire community. Our entire community also benefits from a healthy and robust public education system. This budget delivers to education and training record current and capital expenditure of \$8.1 billion in 2002-03. This includes \$6.1 billion in recurrent funds for school education, which is an increase of \$357 million or 6.2 per cent on last year. Other recurrent funding includes \$1.5 billion for TAFE New South Wales and \$89.8 million for the Board of Studies. There is a program of 68 major new building projects and continuing work on 78 large existing ones. Class sizes will be put under the microscope through a pilot study that will examine the educational effects of class sizes in a sample of kindergarten to year 3 classes. The Minister for Education and Training, John Watkins, made these comments subsequent to the bringing down of the budget:

The budget has, as one of its cornerstones, initiatives to improve teacher quality and supply. Teachers' pay and conditions are also vital parts of the strategy.

The Minister also said that school and TAFE teachers would receive a 9 per cent salary increase in 2002-03, with 4 per cent to be paid from 1 July next and 5 per cent from 1 January next. The pay rises will be funded from the budget, including from procurement and information technology savings. The Minister said:

The Carr Government has delivered a teachers and technology education budget.... We are taking one of the best education systems in the world and helping to make it better.

I can see the honourable member for Cronulla nodding once again in agreement. The evidence for those quite confident statements by the Minister is there for all to see. I am immensely proud of the schools in my electorate. I am proud of the students, the teachers, the staff of the schools, the parents and citizens associations, the school councils, the parents and the supportive local people and organisations. I will mention just a few of the local issues concerning education and training that are covered in this budget. First, the St George School is a great project. The school started more than 50 years ago as the St George Spastic School. Since the school's early days the type of students attending it has changed from those with physical disabilities and mild, if any, intellectual disability to students who have severe and multiple disabilities but for whom the primary disability is physical. It is a fantastic school with great programs and outstanding teaching and support staff. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Over the years the school and its facilities became increasingly cramped and overcrowded. It was decided that the best solution was to relocate the school and rebuild on another site. Spare land at the rear of the Moorfield Girls High School campus was chosen as the site for the new St George School. So far \$3.8 million has been spent on the rebuilding, while another \$1.5 million is earmarked in this budget for construction of a hydrotherapy pool and improved student access to specialist areas of the school. Under stage one classrooms, the library, the administration area and an internal courtyard with a covered outdoor learning area will all be completed. I applaud everyone associated with the St George School. I am honoured to be part of a Government that supports and undertakes projects such as the St George School.

Another school I want to mention is Arncliffe Public School, where this Government has overseen substantial refurbishment and construction including classrooms, a new administration building, a new school hall and extensive rehabilitation of the grounds and landscaping. I recently accompanied the Minister for Education and Training on an inspection of the school. He was very impressed by the standard of work and also by the entire school community. As I said earlier, I take great pride in all our local schools and I look forward to continuing to work with them and for them for the benefit of everybody. Some important things have been happening at St George TAFE: \$3.9 million has been spent on extensive refurbishment of classrooms and offices and the conversion of old former trade workshops. In the 2002-03 budget \$523,000 has been earmarked to continue work to improve access for students with special needs. Clearly, the Carr Labor Government is second to none in its commitment to quality education for all.

While St George Hospital is not in my electorate, it is the local public hospital for the great majority of my constituents. Therefore I, like them, have a keen interest in St George Hospital and all its facilities. I believe it is appropriate that I make a few comments about the hospital in the budget context. In the life of this Parliament there have been substantial advances at the hospital in a number of respects, and in this budget there is provision for further initiatives and improvements. Two years ago we opened the medical research centre—a project worth \$10 million—for research into life-threatening illnesses. Last year a new mental health unit with 30 beds and costing \$8.2 million was opened. A new 580-space hospital car park was opened, worth \$3.5 million. Another intensive care unit bed, worth \$742,000, was established, and \$6.4 million was allocated for a day surgery centre and the process for its commencement is under way. There is also a program of refurbishment of renal dialysis and the hospital's Pritchard Wing. All in all, St George Hospital, through the support of this Government, is maintaining and enhancing its role and reputation in the St George and Sydney community.

There are numerous other aspects of the budget relevant to my electorate but I have dwelt on only a few. This is the eighth budget of the Carr Labor Government. It provides for the biggest ever investment by any State government in new schools, new hospitals, new roads and public transport, and other public works and investments. As the Treasurer said in his speech to this House when introducing the budget:

No budget can meet every need or every demand. We will never reach the point where governments or societies have run out of things to do or things to improve.

I think that's what Chifley meant by "the light on the hill".

What we can do though is keep on trying and keep on improving, step by step, year by year, steady and steadfast all the way.

I could not have said it better myself. The Treasurer went on to say:

Like the seven budgets before it, this is another big bold Labor budget.

It's a budget that helps New South Wales get ahead, a budget that puts wind in our sails.

And like all fair dinkum Labor budgets, it's socially responsive and financially responsible.

I echo those remarks of the Treasurer and commend the 2002-03 budget to the House.

Mrs PERRY (Auburn) [8.17 p.m.]: I speak tonight in full recognition of the responsibility that I bear as a State member of Parliament to both the Labor Party and the many people whose interests, needs and concerns I represent. In doing so I also implicitly affirm on behalf of the Carr Labor Government the responsibility that it must accept as an embodiment of the Labor spirit and a representative of the people of New South Wales. I feel it incumbent upon me to be true to the demands that such an understanding entails, and it is with this in mind that I intend to discuss the State budget for 2002-03. The people of New South Wales expect and indeed need a government that is responsive, progressive, intelligent, wise and visionary: a government capable of promoting and cultivating tolerance, harmony, prosperity, social equality and justice. We require

leaders who are able to see beyond the immediate causes of problems and discord and through doing so develop effective long-term solutions, yet who are also committed to doing everything possible in the here and now in the interests of the people. I see much evidence of such a government in the State budget for 2002-03.

It is with a much anticipated sense of appreciation and pleasure that I announce an unprecedented commitment to the people of our State by the Carr Government as manifested by facts such as these: the housing budget stands at \$631.7 million, an increase of \$16 million; a record amount of \$6,350 million will be spent on new and upgraded schools, hospitals and roads; and another further record amount of \$8,000 million has been awarded to the education and training budget. No less significant are such important actions as the abolishment of payroll tax for employers of apprentices and the halving of stamp duty on 33 types of insurance, including home and contents, travel and public liability. New South Wales now has the lowest tax rates in Australia on general insurance policies. I commend the Carr Labor Government for its commitment to the people of my electorate, a commitment that is evident in this budget. I feel compelled to bring to light not only the specifics of what was given and where it went, but also to reveal the underlying wisdom of the Government's decisions.

In the 2002-03 State budget an amount of \$13 million has been set aside for improvements within the arena of Education and Training in the Auburn area, which will enable work to the value of more than \$11 million to be undertaken on Auburn West Public School, Berala Public School and Sefton High School. Upgrades will include the further endowment of such vital provisions as classrooms, toilets, libraries and enhanced administration facilities. The impressive scale of those is highlighted by the proposed two-storey building, complete with a covered walkway linked to existing classrooms and a lift, to be built at Sefton High School. Berala High School can expect to receive a generous sum of \$4.96 million to fund the construction of a new library, classrooms and a covered outdoor learning area. These works, which have been made possible by the State Government, reflect a creative and generous fidelity to the principle that each and every child deserves the best education that society can afford.

I commend the Carr Labor Government for discerning that part of that principle is an understanding that children require more than great schools and teachers. They need reliable, safe and efficient public transport and, perhaps most importantly, the presence of community services adequately equipped with the resources needed to support disadvantaged families. In recognition of that as well as being part of a wider commitment to the general community, the 2002-03 State budget has allocated a record \$641.1 million to the Department of Community Services—an increase of \$48.1 million on last year's allocation. As a consequence of that allocation, 31 local services within the Auburn electorate are in line for ongoing funding to the tune of \$2 million. The services include youth, family, individual support, and community development programs funded by the Community Services Grants Program, the Barnardos Family Support Program and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. The figures I have just addressed reveal that the Government truly has a sense of compassion, foresight and humanity.

I am pleased that the Government has proven most forthcoming and responsive in sustaining and developing an ever more efficient, capable and affordable public transport system in the Auburn electorate. The 2002-03 Transport budget provides \$37.1 million to be utilised for the maintenance of railway lines and train facilities and the subsidising of bus, ferry and train services, which will benefit the large number of people in my electorate who utilise public transport every day. That provision has been mirrored in the New South Wales Roads budget, of which \$6.2 million is specifically directed to the needs of the Auburn electorate. That money will be spent on upgrading roads, improving safety and enhancing travel conditions.

Examples of several planned endeavours include \$600,000 worth of intersection improvements along Parramatta Road, the completion of the Parramatta-to-Strathfield transitway at a cost of \$210,000, and the earmarking of \$60,000 to revamp the intersecting sector of Auburn Road and the Hume Highway, which has been a significant problem for many people at that end of my electorate. Furthermore, the Government has furnished the Auburn electorate with \$75,000 as a contribution to Auburn council's off-road cycleway and consigned \$1.74 million to the construction of the Auburn section of the Parramatta-to-Granville cycleway. Those actions are the mark of a Government intent on cultivating and expanding public recreation facilities and reflect a truly holistic and sound approach to understanding the needs of our community.

Housing in the Auburn electorate continues to be an area of major need and one that requires a significant degree of attention and assistance. I am pleased to say that the State Government has confirmed the compassionate, socially aware and proactive approach it has taken in this budget by allocating \$6.1 million to be utilised in the construction of 56 new properties and the improvement of government-subsidised housing in the Auburn area. In broader terms, it is worth stressing that in the face of continuing Commonwealth cuts, the State

Government has increased funding to help those most in need, including the elderly, people with disabilities, large families and people with support needs. In addition, the State Government continues to improve upon its record of sustained and generous contributions to Aboriginal housing. The Government is committed to the underprivileged and to the crucial task of healing past wounds.

The Government has proved itself once again to possess a true and unyielding desire to ensure that the best medical facilities and services are provided to the people of this State. That is evidenced by the allocation of \$180 million to health services in the Western Sydney region. Specifically for the Auburn electorate, \$8 million has been allocated for the sole purpose of supplying much-needed assistance to the mental health assessment unit at Silverwater. That action is appropriate in light of the acute, though often unnoticed, suffering of the mentally ill. That allocation will enhance and build upon the current health services. In the previous budget Auburn hospital was granted \$23.6 million, and planning is well under way to upgrade the obstetrics wards and improve on existing specialist services, amongst other initiatives.

As part of the struggle to combat the difficulties many in our community face, I make special mention of the help afforded to problem gamblers and their families by the Government in the budget. A total of \$7.4 million has been approved, bringing to more than \$62 million the combined amount allocated by the State for problem gambling treatment services, research, and education projects since 1995. The people of the Auburn electorate alone will benefit from more than \$460,000 that has been allocated to aid Lifeline Western Sydney, Centacare Catholic Family Services, and the Auburn Asian Welfare Centre in their compassionate endeavours to ameliorate the hardships faced by gambling addicts and their families.

In an acknowledgment of the importance that intelligent, aware and proactive policing represents in protecting the safety of the public, I commend the Government for its emphasis in the budget on visible, high-impact street policing in collaboration with the deployment of new crime technology designed to save valuable police time. The State's biggest ever police force will continue to grow with funding for more police in line with the Government's target of 14,407 police officers by December 2003. I am pleased that part of the \$8 million allocated to recruit and train new police for front-line duties will be spent on ensuring that police officers with life skills are brought on board. I have no doubt that the Auburn electorate will greatly benefit from the fresh, vigorous and engaging initiatives of the Government. Earlier this year my two local area commands, Auburn and Bankstown, received a total of 47 new local police officers. That important addition to both my local area commands increased the visibility of police in my electorate.

The Commonwealth Government has affirmed its ideological affinity to the notion that the world has entered a new era of threat and destabilisation fuelled by the monsters of terrorism, fanaticism and hatred, and it may well be right. But it would be foolish indeed to believe that military and policing solutions alone could end this dilemma or that borders and containment policies hold the key to security, peace and prosperity. What is needed is an understanding of the root causes of problems, effective policies and leadership capable of exercising courage, integrity and vision. This budget demonstrates that the Government has addressed those matters to a large extent.

Through this budget the Carr Labor Government has illuminated the understanding that the origins of discord and instability lie in injustice, poverty, ignorance and disregard and that the key to the future most worth living for can only be found in the unrelenting commitment to enabling each and every member of society access to adequate education, health care and employment opportunities. I commend the budget. In so doing, I congratulate the Premier, the Treasurer, the Ministers and my Labor caucus members who contributed to the formation of this fiscally and socially responsible budget.

Mr ORKOPOULOS (Swansea) [8.30 p.m.]: I am proud and pleased to follow the honourable member for Auburn in the debate on the 2002-03 budget brought down by the Treasurer earlier this month. In doing so I will respond to the policies and programs of the Labor Government, whilst also raising issues of concern to the Swansea electorate. I also intend to contrast this Labor budget with the mean and dishonest Commonwealth budget, which is terrorising families, the disabled and the poor, vulnerable and weak in our community. As the Treasurer stated in his speech, a strong public works program not only provides jobs now but also bolsters the prospects for a strong economy and a strong society in the future. The budget details a \$26 billion four-year program for new capital works and investment, which is an increase of \$5.4 billion on the \$20.7 billion spent in the past four years.

In 2002-2003 the total State Asset Acquisition Program will total \$6.4 billion, with the Hunter and Central Coast regions receiving a substantial share of that capital works funding. The budget also provides tax

relief to the 23,574 households and the many community volunteer groups in the Swansea electorate. From 1 August 2002 stamp duty on all general insurance, including public liability insurance, will be halved from 10 per cent to 5 per cent, giving New South Wales the lowest insurance stamp duty rates in Australia. That decision will not only be welcome relief from the extraordinary increases in insurance premiums in this State and nation during the past year, but also underlines the Carr Government's commitment to reforming public liability insurance. In other words, we cannot be fair dinkum about reforming the structure of the civil liability system in New South Wales while clawing back significant stamp duty revenues. The State Government has been constructive in tackling the civil liability crisis and has forgone revenue to underline how fair dinkum it is in reducing the impact of the crisis on the general public and community groups.

Other tax changes announced include the complete abolition of payroll taxes on the wages of apprentices from 1 July 2002; the reduction of payroll tax from 6.2 per cent to 6 per cent, also from that date; and the broadening of the payroll tax base so that fringe benefits and eligible termination payments will be treated in exactly the same way as the income of ordinary PAYE wage earners. Those combined measures will cost the Treasury \$215 million in a full year. I contrast those responsible, constructive and broadly based tax cuts by the Labor Government with the tax cuts for the rich and price slugs on families, the disabled, the sick and the unemployed by John Howard. Underlining the Government's commitment to the public sector is a massive capital injection to rebuild our public infrastructure across the State.

The Carr Government cannot be accused of being Sydney-centric when the Hunter and Central Coast regions have clearly benefited from capital works spending for their communities. There is not one member from either side of the House who can honestly claim that his or her electorate has not been fairly dealt with by the Government. The cumulative impact of the expenditure priorities announced in the budget will be felt at a local level, not only continuing the employment-creating capacity of public investment—public investment has a higher multiplier than private investment—but also improving the quality of life for our communities.

I now turn to the details of the capital works affecting the Swansea electorate. In Education \$3.5 million has been allocated to Northlakes High School at San Remo for a capital upgrade of the school. The House may recall that enrolments at Northlakes High School peaked three years ago with more than 1,300 students. That was at a time when the new \$19 million Lake Munmorah High School was being planned and the increase in the school population reflected the increase in population growth in the north Wyong shire during that time. The school was clearly bursting at the seams. I undertook, on behalf of the Northlakes High School Parents and Citizen Association and the school community, to seek funding to upgrade the school, given that the advanced design of the new facilities would dwarf Northlakes High School. That was stated at several public meetings I attended, and I am pleased that the Labor Government has delivered for the students, staff and the community of Northlakes High.

Students from the electorate of my colleague the honourable member for Wyong also attend the school. Recently I met with the principal, Ms Anne Holcombe, and her executives, Mrs Jenny Quiring, the president of the parents and citizens association, and other community members to discuss the capital funding injection from the budget. Clearly, they were pleased with the outcome. A steering committee has been formed. I am confident that the upgrade will provide a significant boost for the educational opportunities of students at that school. This budget allocates a record \$8.13 billion in recurrent and capital expenditure to Education and Training, which is an increase of \$494 million on last year's budget. It reflects the Government's commitment to providing the best quality education for our young, an investment in this nation's future.

I turn to some of the smaller announcements in the budget that were made in the Transport portfolio. A new bridge, at a cost of \$1.45 million, at Shepherds Creek over the gully on Macquarie Drive, is a welcome addition. That area was identified in a route study undertaken by the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] and community workshop two years ago as a bottleneck. It is clearly a difficult area for bicycle riders, with two lanes reducing to one lane on a narrow bridge. This is one of the last missing links in the cycleway around Lake Macquarie, which I am sure is warmly welcomed by cyclists who use the path. Further consultation with the community as to plans and design drawings will be undertaken later this year, as advised by the local RTA.

Funding of \$100,000 was allocated for the other intersection identified in the route study for upgrade, the intersection of Croudace Bay Road and Tingira Road at Valentine. Other major allocations that I believe are worthy of comment include \$270,000 for the erection of traffic lights at the intersection of the Pacific Highway and Marks Point Road, Marks Point. The Marks Point community has for some time asked for traffic lights at that intersection. The recent changes to the Newcastle bus timetable highlighted the significance to the community of traffic lights at that intersection.

The good news for patrons of the Belmont Golf Club is that the club has indicated it will realign access to the golf club with the intersection to improve access for patrons. At present patrons wishing to travel north virtually have to do an illegal U-turn, which is clearly unsatisfactory. Improvements to the intersection through the provision of traffic lights will make it safer for pedestrians to cross the highway. The reintroduction in September of bus route 349 will provide the community of Marks Point with public transport. The budget also included an allocation of \$300,000 for intersection improvements at Scenic Drive and Wills Road, Doyalson. That is the main entrance to San Remo, and the local community there is extremely pleased.

I have received a number of letters expressing the community's approval for the Government's initiative, following articles in the *Central Coast Sun Weekly* about community representations over some time. The intersection improvements will enhance the safety of vehicles turning from Wills Road into Scenic Drive towards the Doyalson lights. It is opposite the entrance to Munmorah power station and is a major intersection for the residents of San Remo. The budget also allocated \$150,000 towards intersection improvements at the Pacific Highway and Tall Timbers Road, Chain Valley Bay. Over time the Roads and Traffic Authority has undertaken work on this intersection but the community has made representations for further work. This allocation is a reflection of that community agitation to improve the intersection. The work will increase the storage lane for vehicles travelling towards Sydney, making it safer for them to turn right.

Other highlights of the budget include \$250,000 for cycleway improvements at Chain Valley Bay, \$150,000 for a cycleway at Lake Munmorah and a further \$80,000 for a cycleway along Elizabeth Bay Drive to Lake Munmorah. That will improve cycle access and will be a safe alternative route for young people travelling to Lake Munmorah High School, Lake Munmorah Public School or St Brendan's school in Carters Road. Other improvements to the transport system that affect Swansea constituents include 30 new wheelchair-accessible airconditioned State Transit buses for Newcastle at a cost of \$9.6 million. We have copped a great deal of criticism from the real opposition in Newcastle—and it is certainly not from members of the National Party or the Liberal Party. It is from a few carping, whining, whingeing journalists from the *Newcastle Herald*, who have whipped up hysteria about the age of the bus fleet in Newcastle. Clearly, they have made inaccurate statements in their campaign. I am extremely pleased with this further addition of government buses employing the latest technology in the Hunter region.

The budget has allocated \$509 million to the Hunter Area Health Service, an increase of \$28.4 million or 5.9 per cent on last year's budget. That funding will continue to finance the Hunter and Newcastle strategies, which have been undertaken with community consultation. Major initiatives include the upgrade of Belmont District Hospital, which will receive \$20 million over a number of budgets. A new accident and emergency department is currently under construction. A new alcohol rehabilitation ward has already been built at Belmont District Hospital. An eight-bed high dependency unit will be constructed at the John Hunter Hospital at a cost of \$1.2 million, \$600,000 has been allocated for additional diabetes service staff, \$500,000 for improved paediatric services, \$4.1 million to develop clinical information systems for improved patient care and \$2.1 million for enhanced service provision in oncology, stroke services, emergency departments, the hand unit, drug and alcohol, and ophthalmology, among others.

On the Central Coast \$228.3 million has been allocated to the Central Coast Area Health Service, an increase of \$21.7 million or 10.5 per cent over last year. Wyong Hospital will receive \$28.33 million for its redevelopment to bring it to the standard of a level four hospital, incorporating expanded in-patient services, a high-dependency unit, operating theatres with peri-operative services, consolidation of outpatient functions, expansion of clinical diagnostic and support services, and expansion of education facilities. The project also includes a new large mental health service. This budget reflects priorities. I have mentioned only some allocations that affect the Swansea electorate.

However, I cannot let this opportunity pass without referring to the \$1 million allocation to help eradicate caulerpa taxifolia, a noxious weed that is choking parts of Lake Macquarie and, if left untreated, could adversely impact on the habitats of juvenile fish. It attacks seaweed, which is the medium for juvenile fish to grow in. That makes it easier for me to catch them whenever I have time to fish, which is not often. The priorities outlined in this budget by the Government—and covered inadequately in my contribution because there are so many of them—are in stark contrast to the paucity, meanness and callousness of the Federal Government.

Mr MILLS (Wallsend) [8.48 p.m.]: The 2002-03 budget is about New South Wales getting ahead, good government and responsible financial management. The Government has achieved six successive budget surpluses and we are now aiming for the seventh successive surplus. In the Carr Government's seventh budget, a

surplus budget, the Hunter region and the Wallsend electorate win a healthy share of the record \$6,350 million being spent on new and upgraded schools, hospitals, roads and other public facilities across the State. The budget will help the people of the Wallsend electorate get ahead with increased investment to improve community services, and tax cuts to help families and small business.

This budget will help young people to get ahead. It abolishes payroll tax for employers of apprentices, which will help 31,000 young people across New South Wales. Local residents and businesses will benefit from insurance tax cuts, which will reduce household insurance bills by an average of \$40 a year. Small business insurance costs will be cut by an average of \$150 a year. New South Wales now has the lowest tax rates on general insurance policies in Australia. Effective from 1 August, the Government will halve stamp duty on 33 types of insurance, including home and contents, travel, public liability, strata unit, boat, business interruption, burglary, bad debt, stock damage and property damage. They are very useful tax cuts for New South Wales families and businesses.

The budget provides much good expenditure for the Wallsend electorate and the Hunter region as a whole. I refer in particular to the allocation of \$3.3 million, which is part of the \$12.6 million upgrade of John Hunter Hospital. This work was initiated under the Hunter strategy, which was developed a number of years ago. Almost \$1 million has been allocated this year as part of the \$4.4 million Hunter Water Corporation upgrade of Shortland waste water treatment works. Some \$640,000 has been provided as part of the new \$3.1 million building for the child and adolescent health unit at John Hunter Hospital. The budget provides \$410,000 to improve the McCaffrey Drive and Lookout Road, New Lambton intersection with traffic lights. The planning of that work has been delayed to ensure that the intersection has additional safety features. Some \$1.5 million has been allocated for the \$6.3 million stage two upgrade of Callaghan College at the Jesmond, Wallsend and Waratah campuses. A provision of \$350,000 will fund the new Glendale train station interchange and car park.

As well as repeatedly reducing State taxes, the Government has approved the largest capital works program ever undertaken by a State government. This year an extra \$800 million will be spent on capital works—8.5 per cent more than in last year's budget. Since 1995 the Carr Government has cut the State's net debt and liabilities by \$10.8 billion, which means savings of about \$900 million in interest payments in comparison with those of 1995. These vital funds can now be spent on local hospitals, schools, police, transport and other government services. The Treasurer outlines on page 3 of his budget speech how the Government's seven-year financial strategy is already paying big dividends. Five years ago \$14 in every \$100 that we spent was required to service our debts and liabilities. It is now down to less than \$9 in every \$100, which means that we have about \$1.6 billion more each year to spend on recurrent services, capital works and lower tax rates.

When Labor came to office in 1995 general government debt stood at \$12 billion, or 7.3 per cent of gross State product. That has now been reduced by \$7 billion to 2 per cent of gross State product. During the same period our total net financial liabilities in the general government sector have fallen from 19.8 per cent to 8.8 per cent of gross State product. We began to pay our way, and each year we put something aside for the future. We are the first government in the State's recorded financial history to achieve six successive surpluses, and we are aiming for a seventh. That is an excellent financial record for the Carr Government in New South Wales.

The Hunter Valley has again received a strong boost in this year's State budget, which provides the conditions for future economic and employment growth in the Hunter and continues the expansion of health, education and law and order spending in the region. The Hunter has its fair share of the State's record capital works budget for this year. I will outline a few important projects not only in my electorate but across the Hunter region—we work together in the Hunter. Stage two of the Callaghan College project involves upgrading the Jesmond senior campus and two junior campuses at Wallsend and Waratah. We spent about \$1.2 million on the first stage of the upgrade when the college was established in the last calendar year.

The second stage at Wallsend will involve the construction of a new library and new staff facilities, the refurbishment and upgrading of the administration block and refurbishment of several classrooms whose function will be altered by the new staff facilities above the new library. This is an excellent upgrade that has been badly needed for many years. It has helped the Wallsend campus community to be enthusiastic about becoming part of Callaghan College. I commend teaching staff at Wallsend High School for the enthusiasm with which they have embraced the new pedagogy for the junior high school, years 7 to 10.

The most important part of the stage two work on the Jesmond campus will be, first, the upgrade of three brick classroom blocks; and, secondly, the upgrade of administration. Preliminary work will also be

undertaken to remove the old Bristol classroom blocks. These classrooms were made from material from disused British aircraft hangars built during the Second World War. The material was transported to Australia in the early 1950s and reconstructed as classroom buildings at Jesmond High School. They will be replaced in stages by new classrooms. The students in the western corridor of Newcastle will derive most advantage from the establishment of Callaghan College. There will be new teaching outcomes and much higher retention rates of students in the public sector. The Jesmond senior campus will offer the widest available subject choice of any high school in the area—it will even be better than at St Francis Xavier College.

My colleague the honourable member for Newcastle, who is in the Chamber, will acknowledge the benefits that Callaghan College is bringing to students at Waratah campus and the great work of teachers at that campus, who have enthusiastically adopted the new teaching procedures for the junior high school. They are making an important contribution to the education of our kids in the western corridor of Newcastle. Almost \$1 million will be spent on the stage one upgrade of the Hunter School of Performing Arts, which the children of many of my constituents attend. The budget will also fund a big TAFE upgrade in the Hunter region. The kitchens at Glendale TAFE will be upgraded. This work has been needed for some years and it is great to know that hospitality students will gain better education outcomes as a result. Cessnock TAFE will have a considerable upgrade and Kurri Kurri will benefit from a \$5.8 million upgrade.

There are also great improvements in health. I have mentioned the child and adolescent unit. The Newcastle strategy announced in last year's budget saw the expenditure of more than \$8 million this year, with money expended particularly on the John Hunter campus and at Belmont hospital. Stage one of the Hunter strategy will see the completion this year of the upgrade of the accident and emergency department and the intensive care department at John Hunter Hospital, and the completion of the refurbishment of Rankin Park rehabilitation hospital. Rural areas of the Hunter have not been forgotten. Denman Hospital and Health Service will benefit from a \$3.4 million redevelopment. The people of the Hunter region will derive significant advantages from increased spending on roads. The major item of expenditure is the completion of the West Charlestown bypass at a cost of more than \$20 million. The work is due to be finished by around the end of the year. Construction is starting now on the Main Road 217 duplication, which extends from Wallsend down the west side of Lake Macquarie.

In past budgets provision was made for the widening to four lanes of Lake Road in Elernmore Vale, and now that duplication and widening is being extended further south into the electorate of Lake Macquarie. There will be a big upgrade of Vincent Street in Cessnock. I am particularly pleased for my constituents who live in Beresfield and Tarro, Mr Deputy Speaker, two suburban areas that are divided by an electoral boundary between Maitland—your electorate—and Wallsend. Provision of \$3.3 million will allow the start of construction of a link road that avoids the dangerous New England Highway, to connect Beresfield and Tarro to Thornton at the west. Many of the people who work in the industrial estate there live around Beresfield. It is important to have that safe connection and I commend you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for your efforts in proposing and bringing that program to fruition. It will be of great benefit to my constituents in Beresfield and Tarro.

It is also pleasing that \$3 million will be provided for reconstruction of Nelson Bay Road from Bob's Farm to Port Stephens, work that is necessary to assist safe driving. The Karuah bypass will be commenced under this budget. That project will be of value to Hunter region residents and to everybody in New South Wales in that it will enable safe driving and reduce holiday traffic jams on the Pacific Highway going north. There is also plenty of development on the Pacific Highway, on the dual carriageways between Karuah and Bulahdelah, and on planning for the Bulahdelah bypass.

One of the most interesting items of expenditure in the Hunter region is the purchase of 30 new buses. Those of us who have Newcastle bus and State Transit routes in our electorates have known for years that local people complain that we never seem to have any new buses in the Hunter region. We always seem to get Sydney's cast-offs. Our Government has done the right thing by the people we represent in spending almost \$10 million this year to buy 30 new buses, ones with easy boarding facilities for the benefit of people with disabilities. To have brand new buses in Newcastle is a triumph, I can assure you. I know that the member for Coffs Harbour, who was born and grew up in Newcastle, also appreciates that it will be great for people's enthusiasm for public transport in the Hunter that they will have brand new buses after this year, instead of the old ones.

Easy access facilities are being installed at Beresfield railway station. Construction is soon to start. The station itself is in your electorate, Mr Deputy Speaker, but certainly half the people of Beresfield and Tarro who use that station are in the Wallsend electorate and that is an excellent achievement by our Government.

Reconstruction has commenced of the new railcars for the Hunter Valley line that runs from Newcastle through Beresfield, Thornton and Tarro up to Maitland and beyond, as promised by the Government. A budget of \$131 million is provided for the construction of the new millennium railcars at the EDI plant at Cardiff in the Hunter region. The Broadmeadow railway station car park will be upgraded for \$367,000 and the Glendale railway station bus interchange and car park project will be allocated \$350,000.

We are delighted that more jobs will be coming into the Hunter through the relocation of the Infringement Processing Bureau to Maitland, with about \$4.5 million allocated for the building and relocation. A new Children's Court in the Hunter will cost \$1.5 million. Sport and recreation is not forgotten with \$1.4 million being spent at Myuna Bay Sport and Recreation Centre on new lodge accommodation, dining hall and kitchen facilities. The Hunter Water Corporation is spending \$59 million on a variety of projects to improve water and sewerage supply and various environmental protection projects. In Wallsend electorate 32 units of Department of Housing accommodation will be constructed at a cost of \$4.8 million. The Fire Brigades expenditure for Wallsend/Cardiff will involve, with appliances and station expenditures, \$876,000. I mentioned the McCaffrey Drive/Lookout Road improvements, but last week work commenced on the installation of traffic lights at the roundabout outside John Hunter Hospital to improve traffic flows and reduce traffic jams at peak hours, northwards in the morning peak and southwards in the afternoon peak.

I turn to health services in the Hunter. In addition to the capital expenditure that I have already referred to, \$509 million is the recurrent budget for the Hunter Area Health Service. That is a record. It is an increase of over \$28 million, or about 6 percent, on last year's budget. This is the third year of the three-year plan announced by the Minister for Health three budgets ago. What it means is that for the first time in the Hunter region we are getting our fair share of recurrent health funding. This budget has achieved that important milestone. No longer can we complain in the Hunter we are not getting a fair share. The enhancements to health services funding that have taken place with this current three-year plan have ensured that we are now getting our fair share. That is a great achievement by the Carr Government.

The Families First program will receive a number of new community services to help families and parents in the Hunter who need extra help to raise their children. In addition to ongoing projects announced previously this year, \$75,000 has been granted to the Migrant Resource Centre at Newcastle for a family worker service; \$68,000 to the Wesley Mission for a family worker service for West Lake Macquarie; and \$85,000 to the Family Action Centre for a volunteer home visiting service for Newcastle and the East Lake Macquarie areas. In the Wallsend electorate the subsidies for the transport of students, welfare services for the aged, welfare services for people with a disability, program funding for transport for Wallsend electorate, and concessions and community service obligations, amount to a total of \$3.7 million.

Provision for the Department of Community Services [DOCS] in the Hunter region will increase most significantly from \$36.6 million to \$42.7 million. Also a 12 percent increase is provided in the budget for parks services in the Hunter, mid North Coast, Northern Rivers and tableland regions. Finally, I contrast what we are doing for public education in New South Wales with the Commonwealth Government's approach in its Federal Budget. Under that budget the ratio of Commonwealth funding of non-government schools to government schools is 1.77, that is \$3,710 million for non-government schools compared to \$2,089 million for government schools. The Federal budget projects for 2005-2006 an increase of 37 percent for non-government schools and 22 percent for government schools. The ratio will increase from 1.77 currently to 2.00 in the future. We are seeing Federal Government wedge politics using unfair biased funding of non-government schools compared to funding of government schools. The New South Wales Government in contrast is giving significant increases in education expenditure across the whole range from recurrent expenditure through to capital works. I commend this budget to the House.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [9.08 p.m.]: It is a pleasure to follow my colleague the member for Wallsend in speaking to this eighth budget of the Carr Labor Government and to congratulate Treasurer Michael Egan on bringing forward once again a typical Labor budget. It is a budget that expresses policy, and a budget that is based on very constructive planning. The budget takes into account the needs of the New South Wales business community and the need for infrastructure development across this State, and recognises the need for social infrastructure. Funding in the Health and Education portfolios and massive funding for the Police portfolio indicate that the Government is following very clearly its plans to improve the lifestyle of the people of New South Wales and support those in our community who need additional care. It is a pleasure to have the Minister for Public Works and Services in the House because there is no doubt that the budget dedicates an enormous amount of funding to public works and infrastructure. It is worthwhile reflecting on what the Treasurer said in his Budget Speech:

Between 1949 and 1974, Australia built the great Snowy Mountains Scheme.

Over those 25 years it cost \$820 million, or \$8.5 billion in current dollars.

On budget day the Treasurer announced a \$26 billion, four-year program for new public works and investments. In other words, three times more over four years than Australia spent on the Snowy Mountains Scheme over 25 years. This represents an increase of \$5.4 billion or 26 per cent on the \$20.7 billion spent in the past four years, which included all the expenditure on the Olympic venues and infrastructure. We planned for and delivered the Olympic Games at cost and within budget, but it was clear that we had to plan for infrastructure projects spread across New South Wales to ensure that in the post-Olympic period the economic performance of the State did not suffer from a slump. There is no doubt that the great majority of the projected 96,000 jobs generated from capital works will be in regional and rural New South Wales.

It is pleasing to note that large amounts of the \$26 billion will be used to improve the health infrastructure of the State. My colleague the honourable member for Wallsend referred to spending within the Hunter region, and mentioned specifically the allocation of \$509 million, an increase of \$28 million on last year's allocation, as part of the three-year plan to provide the Hunter with spending at a level that we consider to be our fair share. That is all the people of the Hunter and Newcastle ask for. An extra \$554 million has been allocated in this year's budget for health, bringing total health spending to almost \$8.9 billion. More than 25 per cent of the budget is dedicated to the health of the people of New South Wales both in capital and recurrent spending to keep our hospitals running: to pay our nurses and our health professionals, and maintain the standard of health that the people of New South Wales need and deserve.

Funding has been provided for an additional 226 mental health beds on top of the extra 150 beds announced previously. I am sure that every member of this House would recognise the need to inject funding into mental health services. However, funding remains inadequate to meet the full needs of the community. I have no doubt that all honourable members would advocate for more funding not only from the State Government but particularly from the Federal Government for mental health. Many people in our communities suffer from various mental health problems that impact not only on them but also on their carers and families. The additional \$16 million allocated for dental health services will provide an extra 85,000 services per year and a further 4,000 denture services for older people. Everyone would applaud the State Government spending that money, and at the same time recognise the impact of the Howard-Costello Government withdrawing dental services. Even though we are dealing with that problem, dental health services continue to lag.

The budget provides \$3.285 million for the Hunter strategy and almost \$9 million for the Newcastle strategy. Honourable members would be aware that the Newcastle strategy is a \$234 million program. The project will be allocated \$30 million in 2003-04, \$75 million in 2004-05, and \$118 million in 2005-06. That capital funding will totally transform acute care medical hospital services in the Newcastle area. It will involve the redevelopment of the Belmont Hospital to provide a new emergency department for the people of Lake Macquarie, and a new bone and joint centre and ambulatory care centre at John Hunter Hospital to provide world-class acute care services currently provided at Royal Newcastle Hospital. It has been designed to deliver all diagnostic and treatment services to the patient in one location. It is a very important factor in the development of the John Hunter Hospital complex. Development of the Mater Hospital will include a new emergency department, new wards and new facilities to treat cancer and blood disorders. I know the enormous amount of input by the Deputy-Speaker when the Mater Hospital was in his electorate, and how much pleasure he will derive from the services currently being developed.

A new polyclinic in the Newcastle central business district that will cost in the vicinity of \$20 million will serve the needs of the people of the Newcastle city area and provide a whole range of services for the community including community health and nursing services, after-hours medical and general practitioner services including x-ray pathology, rehabilitation and therapy services, child and family care, central health services, diabetes services, drug and alcohol services including methadone, needle and syringe programs, nutrition and dietetics, dental services, mental health services, post acute care community teams, a community stroke team, spinal cord unit, outpatient clinics and non-government organisations. Over the next four years the capital funding program will totally redevelop services within the area. The program is very much appreciated by the people of Newcastle and the Lower Hunter. Once again, it is a clear indication of the approach of the State Labor Government. Minister Knowles commissioned the Menadue and Sinclair reports, redressed the recurrent funding issues and put in place a positive program of reconstruction of the hospital system across the State.

I congratulate the Government on its approach to policing. Improvements have been made in their working conditions and equipment so that they can be proactively involved in policing work. They have been

provided with safety equipment and the necessary move-on powers. They now have the powers to deal with criminals and the necessary forensic skills. The Government has introduced legislation and programs to assist police in the carrying out of their duties. The police budget is \$1.758 billion, an increase of 62 per cent or \$671 million over the last Coalition police budget in 1994-95. By December 2003 there will be 14,407 officers in the NSW Police. We have set aside \$8 million to recruit and train new police for front-line duties to meet community demands for a highly visible, proactive force.

On 1 July, just next week, the restructuring of the police service will be rolled out. There will be a move to five regional commands and the development and setting up of police and community accountability teams. I am sure the community and front-line police officers will appreciate the new approach. The budget provides some \$6 million for the eradication of black spots in the NSW Police country radio network. I am sure that regional and country members will be pleased at the provision of \$2.85 million to deploy 32 rural specialist crime investigators. We have provided \$2.7 million to extend Livescan fingerprinting technology to 25 rural and regional police stations, assisting police in crime detection and prevention work.

The budget provides \$2.8 million for new police stations at Griffith, Muswellbrook and Thirroul. The new \$6 million police station at Waratah provides police in my electorate with twenty-first century accommodation. They now have the powers, the technology and the facilities to carry out their sophisticated policing work. We have provided \$4.5 million for the movement of the Infringement Processing Bureau to Maitland, including the upgrading of computer systems. This will provide an employment boost in the electorate of the Deputy-Speaker, the honourable member for Maitland. The Government is decentralising major departments to regional and rural areas, where employment is always an issue. In the Hunter and the electorate of Newcastle the higher unemployment levels—despite programs to attract employment-generating industries—are always a consideration for local, State and Federal members. The Government is not only assisting to attract industry but also moving departments to provide employment—particularly higher-level employment—in the area. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The Government is dedicated to improving the situation across New South Wales and focusing on areas of need by introducing positive programs. I turn now to education, an issue that is important to every electorate in New South Wales. Government spending in this area is massive. Callaghan College is shared between the electorates of Newcastle and Wallsend. The three campuses are Wallsend, Jesmond and Waratah high schools. Jesmond High School is the year 11 and 12 college. This year we will spend \$1.5 million of a \$6.3 million program to upgrade facilities. The Hunter School of Performing Arts is a selective high school that takes students from across the Hunter. It is located in the electorate of Newcastle. This year we will spend some \$700,000 of a \$4.7 million upgrade. That school provides a level of excellence way beyond the physical conditions of the school. That has been recognised by the Government. The improvement of the facilities there is much needed and will be greatly appreciated by the students of excellence and the teaching staff at the school.

I commend the teachers of New South Wales, particularly the teachers in my electorate, for their high level of professionalism and dedication. There could not be a clearer indication of that, or the wonderful talents of the students of our public school system, than was demonstrated recently at the wonderful tenth annual Star Struck performance in Newcastle, which I had the great pleasure to attend. Star Struck involved 3,500 students and a 700-strong choir. The dedication of parents, teachers and children within our public school system was amply demonstrated on the night. Spending by the Government in those areas is much appreciated.

Another area of public education is the TAFE system. The 53,500 TAFE education students in the Hunter and Central Coast areas represent one in every 10 people between the ages of 15 and 60 in the Hunter. The enormous range of apprenticeships and training focuses on delivering not only lifelong education but education that is required by the diverse industries setting up in the Hunter. In recognition of the Newcastle and lower Hunter area as a performance centre for music and art, the Government has allocated \$259,000 this year and the balance of \$275,000 next year for the development of a TAFE music industry centre. That centre will provide local young people with the opportunity to develop their talent in a range of music areas, particularly the technology of music. I have outlined only three examples of Government funding to assist the excellent public education system in the Hunter.

I turn now to transport and roads, which are important to the infrastructure of the area. Newcastle is in a convenient location: it is linked to Western Sydney by rail and the F3, to Barwon in the north-west by road—cotton seed produced in the Barwon electorate can be transported through Newcastle—to the North Coast, and to Dubbo and all areas west of the mountains. The Golden Highway provides access to the wonderful granaries in Dubbo. In addition, Newcastle has a fantastic port.

Mr Iemma: It is also close to the wineries.

Mr GAUDRY: As the Minister for Public Works and Services reminds me, Newcastle is close to the wineries.

Mr Iemma: Which employ 7,000 people.

Mr GAUDRY: Yes, the wineries employ 7,000 people in the Cessnock electorate. Newcastle has tremendous assets, but it needs transport linkages that can cope with the flow of traffic. The honourable member for Wallsend referred to the Government's allocation for 30 new buses capable of transporting wheelchairs in the Newcastle area. The Newcastle bus system is undergoing some changes and has encountered some difficulties. Local members are working with their communities to implement those changes and to meet the needs of the people. These wheelchair accessible buses will be energy efficient and a great boon for public transport.

The 14 new rail cars will provide access to a first-class transport system for the people of the upper Hunter and those on the Dungog line. The honourable member for Maitland has been an advocate for improved rail services in those areas. These much-needed allocations for rail are welcomed. In every area in which the Government has invested dollars, it has done so in compliance with a well-developed policy and with step-by-step planning. The Government has a strong commitment to ensuring that businesses can operate effectively, and that health, education, safety and policing are effective and well-resourced and have the personnel to provide efficient services. The budget is dedicated to the future of the people of this State, to their prosperity and social growth. I commend the Treasurer and the Carr Labor Government for this eighth Labor budget for New South Wales.

Mr SLACK-SMITH (Barwon) [9.35 p.m.]: I listened with interest to the contribution of the honourable member for Newcastle. He takes pride in his electorate, and I agree that Newcastle is a thriving and exciting city. If the State Labor Government were fair dinkum about making Newcastle a great city the first thing it would do is fix up the Murrurundi tunnel to ensure that goods and services from the north and north-west are able to—

Mr Price: Be patient, it will come.

Mr SLACK-SMITH: Yes—so is the second coming, and we are not too sure when that will be. We have been talking about the Murrurundi tunnel for a long time. Beyond the Great Dividing Range the north-west has a vast coal resource, cotton and wind industries, with which I am involved, but the restrictions on freight to Newcastle are a problem. Without doubt, Newcastle is the most efficient grain port in Australia but because of the high transport costs the trains travelling over the Great Dividing Range are half empty. That places an additional cost burden on wheat growers in the north and north-west of the State. Despite the rhetoric and grand announcements of the past month, people from country New South Wales—who comprise one-third of the State's population outside metropolitan areas—have received nowhere near the amount of funding they deserve. They have been treated badly. New South Wales taxpayers are paying record taxes—New South Wales is by far the highest taxed State. Since the Hon. Michael Egan has been Treasurer the budget has been overblown every single year. He has been rescued only because of the backflip on stamp duty on the sale of property.

He has been getting out of gaol through the higher stamp duties, not because of good economic management. Throughout its entire history the Australian Labor Party—whether governing New South Wales or Australia—has been absolutely hopeless with respect to fiscal management. This is another example of that mismanagement. The Sydney-centric obsession of the Carr Labor Government is evidenced by the one Cabinet member who lives outside Sydney, Newcastle or Wollongong—that is the Minister for Local Government, who represents the electorate of Clarence. It is interesting to compare the ALP Cabinet with the shadow Cabinet—which will be the Cabinet after March 2003—because eight members of the shadow Cabinet come from regional and rural New South Wales. But the tide has turned. The honourable member for Mulgoa would be interested to learn that the overall capital expenditure on major works totals \$392 million, of which \$82 million, or only 21 per cent, is designated to country New South Wales.

Thirty per cent of the State's population live outside metropolitan New South Wales. Who is getting the rough edge of the deal? In the Police portfolio the overall capital expenditure on major works totals \$68.9 million. Of that figure, \$14.5 million is earmarked for country New South Wales, which amounts to 22 per cent. Police capital works for country areas totals \$2.25 million out of an overall \$22.5 million; that is,

10 per cent is allocated for country areas. I know that this Government is Sydney-centric and is controlled from Sussex Street, and I understand that there is no way in the world that Country Labor, despite its rhetoric, has any say in this Government. I refer to the Western Lands Amendment Bill, which was introduced recently following a review. The Nature Conservation Council of New South Wales has been appointed to the Western Lands Advisory Council, despite objections from land-holders and despite the rhetoric of Country Labor. That is a typical case of "Roll over and do as you are told". Country Labor members can carry on with all the rhetoric they like outside this place, but we do not listen to them.

When we look at the Native Vegetation Conservation Act, the Wilderness Act, the Threatened Species Conservation Act and the Water Act we see how potent and virile Country Labor is in New South Wales. Its members are completely controlled by Sussex Street and they have no say at all. If they did, they would try to change legislation that is decimating country and regional New South Wales. I was interested to hear in the past 24 hours that the Minister for Education and Training is taking over from the Minister for Transport as the Minister for announcements. During the past few years the Minister for Transport has had a reputation for announcing all sorts of things several times over, getting the headlines but not delivering anything. It seems that the Minister for Education and Training has taken over the title of Minister for announcements.

Despite the rhetoric of the Minister for Education and Training in the last few months, we now learn that not one computer has been supplied to any school in the past 12 months. The Minister for Transport should take note because his position as Minister for announcements has been challenged by a very good performer: the Minister for Education and Training. I refer again to the Police portfolio. In New South Wales we have one police officer for every 360 people. Of the 14,000 police in New South Wales, a maximum of 4,000 police officers are on duty at any one time. The rest of the police are on court duty, leave, stress leave and so on.

Mr Price: You can change that, can you? Get real!

Mr SLACK-SMITH: The honourable member for Maitland should wait until I finish what I am going to say. New South Wales has one police officer for every 360 people. In rural New South Wales officers appointed under the Land and Water Conservation Act have undertaken courses at the Goulburn police academy and have been trained to prosecute farmers. There is one such officer for every 36 farmers in New South Wales. If Country Labor is really fair dinkum, it will look seriously at the anger and frustration of country people and their complete lack of respect for departmental officers, many of whom are fine people. They have been told by the Minister that their job is not to help the farming community in rural and regional New South Wales, it is to police them. It is an unfortunate situation.

A few of my friends who are officers of the Department of the Land and Water Conservation hate doing their job, but they do not have a choice. They have to carry out the Minister's instructions. It is simple: if they do not undertake their duties, they lose their job. No-one else will employ them because they are the same age as I am. They do not like what they are doing and they have lost the respect of the people they are supposed to be helping. It is a sad day for the Department of Land and Water Conservation and the Department of Agriculture when people of this ilk and talent are forced to do a job they do not want to do—that is, being police rather than friends to farmers. That is an unfortunate situation. The Treasurer made a promise that he would cut payroll tax to 5 per cent by 1999 and to 4 per cent by 2000. That is the same as the Premier talking about signing his life away in blood and halving waiting lists in hospitals.

Mr Price: It is actually 2 per cent less than you blokes—

Mr SLACK-SMITH: The honourable member for Maitland should realise that the waiting lists in hospitals have increased by 75 per cent since this Government came to office. The budget of the Department of Land and Water Conservation has been cut from \$562 million to \$558 million. There has not been any allocation for assistance for water users in the Namoi Valley. Irrigators in the Namoi Valley have offered to contribute \$40 million to the groundwater problems in the valley. This Government promised \$15 to \$20 million. The Federal Government, through Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson, has offered \$40 million. This Government is not fair dinkum about trying to solve the groundwater problems. Road maintenance funding has been cut in real terms by \$41.8 million. The cost of laying a tarred road is between \$70,000 and \$100,000 per kilometre. Cutting \$41.8 million from that budget will have a huge impact on rural and regional New South Wales.

There has not been an increase in preschool funding. The Government has failed to address class sizes in the beginning years. Many honourable members have received correspondence from teachers in their

electorates raising major concerns about the number of pupils in their classes. Despite the rhetoric of the Minister for Education and Training, teachers have not been provided any great incentive to go to rural and regional New South Wales, particularly across the Great Dividing Range. Teachers and police must be given incentives. In the police force the phrase "remote posting" is inadequate to get enough police to work in the north and north-western part of New South Wales. I have several local area commands in my electorate. The Darling, Barwon and Castlereagh local area commands are now classified "remote". When they previously advertised for a position in their local area command, they would receive 30 to 40 applications. With the reclassification of those regions from "semi-remote" to "remote", they receive two applications. That is why Castlereagh Local Area Command, as I speak, is understaffed by 14 police officers and eight sergeants. This is a common situation throughout all my local area commands. It is a matter of great concern and one of the greatest law and order issues we have in New South Wales.

Country town water and sewerage funding has been cut by almost \$12 million, from \$68.4 million to \$56.4 million. In many small country towns that do not have sewerage, the sewage is spilling into waterways. The great Premier of New South Wales, who is totally environmentally sensitive, intends to lock up the Pilliga State Forest for no reason other than to get votes. This decision has nothing to do with employment or the future of five towns in my electorate. It has nothing to do with the vast gas resources underneath Pilliga State Forest, which could be the largest gas field in mainland Australia. We believe that after the Resource and Conservation Assessment Council [RACAC] process, the land will be locked up and there will be no further exploration of that area.

The studies and surveys already carried out demonstrate that the gas field has great potential to produce a totally non-polluting source of energy and will provide employment for those in rural and regional New South Wales, especially in my electorate. I know I am being parochial about that but I am sure other members would do the same. We are fearful of the RACAC process, which is controlled by extreme Sydney-centric greens and the Minister's bureaucrats, who only report what the Minister wants to hear. The stakeholders and those who live in the north-west and western areas of New South Wales have no real input into the RACAC process.

The ultimate conclusion will be that much of our country will be locked up and controls will be put on private land to ensure that land-holders comply with recommendations made during the RACAC process. I note that compensation has not been mentioned. The idea of unrestricted freehold title in New South Wales because of the Native Vegetation Conservation Act, the Wilderness Act, the Threatened Species Conservation Act and the Water Act, to name a few, indicates that New South Wales is becoming a police State run by extreme greens who have no stake at all. They come to the country from Sydney on huge salaries, throw in their vote, leave on the next plane out, get paid for it and we are left to pick up the pieces. It is a sad situation for this great State to be in.

For a number of years the Coalition has pushed for a national livestock identification scheme. Such a scheme is essential for stock theft and management purposes. If New South Wales is ever in the unfortunate situation of having foot-and-mouth disease or some other horrendous contagious livestock disease, a national livestock identification scheme would be one way of tracing stock. It would be a small tool in a maze of protocols to ensure that disease is kept under control. The Federal Government has estimated that an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Australia would cost \$15 billion. I believe that with the loss of income and jobs throughout most of rural and regional New South Wales the cost would be closer to \$150 billion. Britain did not consider the impact that the disease had on tourism, with people not spending money when travelling around the countryside. The cost of the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in Britain has been horrendous. We are an export nation, whereas Britain is not. Such an outbreak here would affect not only cattle but also poultry and sheep. We are the world's largest exporters of meat, wool, goats and, indeed, camels. Most come from Saudi Arabia but Australia is still the biggest exporter of camels. A national livestock identification scheme is essential.

The budget is disappointing for rural and regional New South Wales. If the Minister for Public Works and Services were fair dinkum he would improve the Murrurundi grades. It is a pity that the Minister for Transport was shamed into having to allocate \$1 million for a study of an alternative route to the Great Western Highway through the Blue Mountains. Today the Great Western Highway is similar to the Pacific Highway 30 years ago. It is a pity that the people of Sydney and western New South Wales do not have access to a decent road. It is unfortunate that the Great Western Highway has 29 different speeds zones, three lanes going into one, and a number of traffic lights. In this day and age it is an insult to the people of the Blue Mountains, Bathurst and western New South Wales that they have to put up with a such highway. The budget is disappointing and does not address many rural and regional problems. It is totally Sydney-centric. The sooner we have a government in office that represents the people of regional New South Wales, the better off we will be.

Mr PRICE (Maitland) [9.55 p.m.]: In speaking to the take-note debate to the Address-in-Reply to the Governor's Speech I express my personal admiration for Her Excellency. She does a tremendous job and is accepted throughout the community. She has a social conscience like no other and a vision for the future of this State. I compliment her on what she has done so far and I look forward to her spending many more years in office. She has a rare insight into the community of New South Wales. Her ethnicity gives her an empathy with ethnic and Aboriginal communities that many of us do not enjoy and with women in all walks of life. Our first citizen has not had that ability for many years. I extend my congratulations to Professor Bashir. She is one of a kind, a woman with a vision for this nation.

I refer first to the section of the Governor's Speech that related to road and transport programs, particularly the rail capacity of New South Wales, and how Her Excellency's comments impact on my electorate. At present a number of extremely popular projects are being undertaken in the electorate. First and foremost is the provision of easy access to three railway stations, which has been well accepted by the community. I refer to the Beresfield, Thornton and Maitland railway stations where easy access will make a tremendous difference to the volume of traffic using the public rail system. It will assist the elderly, disabled people and mothers with babies. Lift access will make passenger services between Dungog, Singleton and Newcastle more passenger friendly. It will make Newcastle far more accessible to metropolitan Sydney and points north and south. The fact that it has put the resources for the provision of that lift access into non-metropolitan areas is a demonstration of the Government's competence and willingness to share.

The number of passenger-friendly stations will total five. In addition to the ones I have already mentioned are the stations at Woodberry and Warabrook, which service the University of Newcastle. Other members have referred to the proposal for the new Hunter Valley trains, which involves the construction of 14 carriages and engines over the next four years, the first to come on line during 2004. The cost of the program is some \$50 million. Today the Minister for Transport announced additional carriages and engines to provide further access for Broken Hill. That demonstrates the Government's commitment to improving and expanding the State's public transport system, particularly the rail system, outside metropolitan areas and it is additional to its good rail infrastructure work in Sydney.

The upgrade of the Dungog-Craven line is another important money spinner for the State. It will allow 30 per cent more coal to be brought down the line from Singleton and Gloucester to Newcastle. It will increase the capacity of trains using the line, increase service frequency and provide a smoother ride, which will hopefully produce less noise for nearby residents. The State Government has so far spent \$9 million noise-proofing the railway line between Tighes Hill in the electorate of Newcastle and Singleton in the electorate of Upper Hunter. A significant amount of that money has also been spent in the Maitland area. Noise-absorbing walls have been built and locomotive exhaust systems have been modified, as have the buffers between the coal-carrying cars on the route to try to reduce noise as much as possible.

I congratulate the Government on its decision to build an underpass at the Metford level crossing. Six railway lines converge at the crossing and traffic delays can be extensive. The coal transportation program is expected to expand by about 30 per cent in the next few years and this underpass will totally eliminate that dangerous traffic arrangement. It will allow much faster and safer passage for trains that traverse the area and a safe and non-stop carriageway for road traffic in the Maitland, Raymond Terrace and Morpeth areas. It is tremendous to see these programs under way, particularly those in my electorate. Rehabilitation of country railway stations continues, several of which have been mentioned. We have heard about the upgrade of Victoria Street station and the Martins Creek station. They are just two stations that will experience an increase in passenger traffic as a result of these upgrades. More attractive access will be provided to country railway stations across the State.

I refer to the hospital and health services that the Government provides, which were referred to by the Governor. The Governor mentioned a significant number of initiatives introduced by the Government. Recurrent funding is running at a record \$8 billion this year. The Hunter Area Health Service continues to expand its services. The new emergency services facility that has been alluded to already is under way and negotiations about it are progressing. Some construction work has already been agreed upon. There are plans to construct a new bone and joint unit at the John Hunter Hospital site. That project is subject to agreement by the various orthopaedic surgeons and the hospital administration. However, the work will proceed and services will be relocated from the old Royal Newcastle Hospital site to the Hunter Area Health Service at John Hunter Hospital.

The honourable member for Newcastle pointed out that the new facility to replace Royal Newcastle Hospital is already at an advanced planning stage and will be located somewhere in the Newcastle city area

close to the Honeysuckle site. Partial funding has been allocated and budget cover for the project will proceed over the next several years. Health services in Newcastle and the lower Hunter region will take on a whole new complexion and will be excellent examples of the sophisticated health provision in the Hunter and beyond. Additional training services will be available through Newcastle university, which will encourage people to enrol in nursing training and reduce the shortage of trained nurses in the public sector. We have heard about those nurses who have returned to service, but the university will offer even greater opportunities for recruitment, training and graduation. This will provide better health provision immediately and ensure the continuity of health services in the region.

The Governor's Speech refers to providing safer communities. I compliment the Attorney General and the Government generally on their foresight regarding several initiatives, particularly the Bail Amendment (Repeat Offenders) Bill. Under that legislation, magistrates may consider a person's criminal record when considering bail applications, and in many cases bail will not be granted to repeat offenders. That measure will certainly require the construction of new prisons. The Governor's Speech alluded to that fact and stated that three additional prisons will be required. Planning for those institutions is already under way and, while it is sad that more prisons are needed, we must ensure that the people of New South Wales receive the protection that the Government has guaranteed them. The community can take comfort from the fact that repeat offenders will not be allowed to roam the streets: they will be incarcerated.

The Government has emphasised the importance of the Families First Program. That initiative has proved to be extremely valuable in my electorate. Families First has been established in the shire of Dungog and in Maitland in my electorate and is operating successfully. Those who operate the scheme take single parents and disadvantaged families under their wing and keep them out of expensive programs by offering individual guidance, assistance and reassurance. They provide an extremely important service to the local community. Honourable members have no idea what impact dairy deregulation, for example, has had on a number of families in the Dungog shire. It has caused much disruption, distress and uncertainty. While Families First cannot compensate for that totally, it can certainly provide a helping hand that was formerly not available. I congratulate the Government on that initiative.

The Government must also be congratulated on its commitment to its post-Olympics program. The increase in capital works in country areas and road programs is extraordinary. I understand that some 52 per cent of the capital works budget will be spent on those programs that were perhaps suppressed in the pre-Olympics period. That money is now being made available for public works and capital works generally in country areas, including roads programs across the State. We are disappointed with our Federal colleagues for backing away from the F3 grade-separated intersection at Weakleys Drive. That has delayed the State program that was to marry with the Federal project. If, for whatever reason, the Federal Government sees fit not to service the National Party electorates of northern New South Wales by providing safe access across the New England Highway at Beresfield that is its problem.

The State Government is fulfilling its commitment: We are providing the link road between Thornton and Beresfield and we will make provision for the grade-separated intersection, if the Federal Government ever gets around to making good on its promise to undertake that work. We look forward to its eventuating at some future time. We certainly need additional funds for local country roads, and I am sure that all honourable members who represent country electorates, particularly Country Labor members, are working with the Government to ensure that wherever possible country councils can initiate additional local road programs. It is not an easy program. It is a large bill but the Government is moving wherever it can and it is certainly providing some relief for people in rural electorates.

The Hunter region has a high unemployment ratio; it is probably close to 100 per cent of the State's average. However, the Government has already moved to improve that figure. The Police Traffic Infringement Bureau, which will provide 160 extra jobs, is being relocated to Maitland. It is currently being fitted out. Only a fortnight ago the Premier visited the site and inspected progress. More than half of those 160 jobs will be filled locally, but 160 wage packets will be spent in the main street of Maitland. That will have tremendous impact on whether a number of commercial and retail operators decide to remain or move to other areas.

The relocation of the Police Traffic Infringement Bureau has been a great boon to the city already. Of course, the relocation of the Department of Mineral Resources to Maitland by the year 2004, with 180 additional jobs, will be an even greater boost to the Maitland community. We are proud of the program of jobs for locals as well as the relocation of Sydney staff. The locals recognise that program as being valuable and relatively easy to implement. Some of those whose lives will be disrupted have some concerns, but they will be accommodated. They will either be deployed horizontally to another department in the metropolitan area of Sydney or they will be given assistance to relocate to the Maitland-Newcastle area.

I compliment the Government on the continuing improvement to the firefighting services provided both by the Rural Fire Service and New South Wales Fire Brigades. Since it came to office in 1995 the Government has provided 1,840 vehicles to the Rural Fire Service. It has spent more than \$550 million on providing vehicles, training, safety equipment and ensuring that the system works. New South Wales Fire Brigades has new stations, new vehicles and upgraded training programs. Recently the Premier visited Maitland to open the East Maitland fire station, which is eco-oriented. The opening was a tremendous success. The station is called the "eco-pod". The energy is supplied by solar power batteries and there is even a capacity to feed surplus power back into the grid. All of the rainwater is retained in underground tanks so the tankers can be filled at the station. All waste water is then recycled and treated at the station. Water is distributed through a tiered garden that surrounds the new station. The garden is decorated by Greening of Australia with fire retardant plants.

This Government initiative is a first. The Government has recognised the value of these things. People will be able to study the process here, and as successful elements and not so successful elements are found, modifications will be made. Future country stations will be built along these lines and metropolitan stations will be converted, wherever possible, to pick up those elements of the station that will satisfy conservation requirements. Of course, once power savings are made, greenhouse gases will be reduced. This is another wonderful initiative of the Government, one that is certainly recognised Australiawide and possibly worldwide.

The effective policies outlined by the Governor in her Speech are designed to benefit the whole community. We are a lucky country and the State of New South Wales has benefited significantly from the Labor Government's initiatives and policies. The policies of Labor are up-front and visible. The policies that are being implemented are regarded by the community as being of great value to them today and to their children in the future. Indeed, the policies will point the way for what should happen in many areas Australiawide. I again congratulate the Governor on her Speech. I congratulate the Government on its initiative and I look forward to the implementation of further Government policies in the near future.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Fraser.

ASSENT TO BILLS

Assent to the following bills reported:

Crimes (Forensic Procedures) Amendment Bill
Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Amendment Bill
Summary Offences Amendment (Places of Detention) Bill
Greyhound Racing Bill
Harness Racing Bill
Local Government Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill

The House adjourned at 10.15 p.m.
