

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 3 September 2002

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

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL VACANCIES

Joint Sitting

Mr SPEAKER: I report the receipt of the following message from Her Excellency the Governor:

I, Professor MARIE BASHIR AC, in pursuance of the power and authority vested in me as Governor of the State of New South Wales, do hereby convene a joint sitting of the Members of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly for the purpose of the election of persons to fill the seats in the Legislative Council vacated by the Honourable Douglas Moppett and the Honourable Elaine Nile, and I do hereby announce and declare that such Members shall assemble for such purpose on Tuesday the third day of September 2002 at 3.45 p.m. in the building known as the Legislative Council Chamber situated in Macquarie Street in the City of Sydney; and the Members of the Legislative Council and the Members of the Legislative Assembly are hereby required to give their attendance at the said time and place accordingly.

In order that the Members of both Houses of Parliament may be duly informed of the convening of the joint sitting, I have this day addressed a like message to the President of the Legislative Council.

Office of the Governor
Sydney, 28 August 2002

I direct that the joint sitting with the Legislative Council in the Legislative Council Chamber for the election of members of the Legislative Council be set down as an order of the day for 3.45 p.m. this day as appointed in Her Excellency's message dated 28 August 2002.

ASSENT TO BILLS

Assent to the following bills reported:

Parliamentary Remuneration Amendment (Recognised Office Holder) Bill
Community Services Legislation Amendment Bill
Public Sector Employment and Management Bill
Environmental Planning and Assessment Amendment (Anti-Corruption) Bill
Crimes Amendment (Police and Other Law Enforcement Officers) Bill
Crimes Legislation Amendment (Penalty Notice Offences) Bill
Firearms Amendment (Public Safety) Bill
Summary Offences Amendment (Public Safety) Bill
Legal Aid Commission Amendment Bill
Mining Legislation Amendment (Health and Safety) Bill
Police Service Amendment (NSW Police) Bill
Radiation Control Amendment Bill
Statute Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill
Witness Protection Amendment Bill
Olympic Co-ordination Authority Dissolution Bill
Sporting Venues Management Bill
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
Game and Feral Animal Control Bill
Poultry Meat Industry Amendment (Price Determination) Bill
Property, Stock and Business Agents Bill
Rural Fires and Environmental Assessment Legislation Amendment Bill
Western Lands Amendment Bill

MINISTRY

Mr CARR: I have to inform the House that on 11 July 2002 her Excellency the Governor accepted the resignation of the Hon. Faye Lo Po' as Minister for Community Services, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Women and as a member of the Executive Council and the Hon. Carmel Mary Tebbutt as Minister Assisting the Minister for the Environment. I have further to inform the House that, on the same day, the Governor appointed the following persons to the offices indicated: the Hon. Sandra Christine Nori as Minister for Women and the Hon. Carmel Mary Tebbutt as Minister for Community Services, Minister for Ageing, and Minister for Disability Services.

I have to inform the House that Ministers in the Legislative Council shall be represented in the Legislative Assembly as follows: the Hon. John Aquilina will represent the Hon. Michael Egan as Treasurer and the Hon. John Della Bosca as Special Minister of State and Assistant Treasurer; the Hon. Richard Amery will represent the Hon. John Della Bosca as Minister for Industrial Relations; the Hon. Harry Woods will represent the Hon. Michael Egan as Minister for State Development and the Hon. Eddie Obeid as Minister for Minerals, and Minister for Fisheries; the Hon. Morris Iemma will represent the Hon. Michael Costa as Minister for Police; and the Hon. Kim Yeadon will represent the Hon. Carmel Tebbutt as Minister for Community Services, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Juvenile Justice, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Youth.

VARIATIONS OF PAYMENTS ESTIMATES 2001-02

Mr Aquilina tabled, under section 26 of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, two variations of the receipts and payments estimates and appropriations for 2001-02, 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.

Mr Aquilina also tabled, under section 24 of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, variations of the payments estimates and appropriations for 2001-02 relating to Treasury and the Ministry of Energy and Utilities.

INDEPENDENT COMMISSION AGAINST CORRUPTION

Reports

Mr Speaker announced the receipt, pursuant to the Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988, of the following reports:

Report into Corrupt Conduct Associated with Development Proposals at Rockdale City Council, dated July 2002.
Investigation into the Conduct of Officers and Students at the University of Technology, Sydney, dated August 2002.

Ordered to be printed.

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Report

Mr Speaker announced the receipt, pursuant to section 31AA of the Ombudsman Act 1974, of the report entitled "Improving the Management of Complaints—Assessing Police Performance in Complaint Management", dated August 2002.

Ordered to be printed.

INSPECTOR OF THE POLICE INTEGRITY COMMISSION

Report

Mr Speaker announced the receipt, pursuant to the Police Integrity Commission Act 1996, of the report of the Inspector of the Police Integrity Commission for the year ended 30 June 2002.

Ordered to be printed.

AUDIT OFFICE

Reports

The Clerk announced the receipt, pursuant to the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, of the following Performance Audit Reports:

Department of Land and Water Conservation—Regulating the Clearing of Native Vegetation, dated August 2002
Managing Sick Leave—NSW Police and Department of Corrective Services, dated July 2002

The Clerk also announced the receipt, pursuant to the Annual Reports (Departments) Act 1985, of the report of the Audit Office for the year ended 30 June 2002.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE QUALITY OF BUILDINGS

Report

The Clerk announced the receipt of the report of the committee entitled "Report upon the Quality of Buildings", dated July 2002.

PETITIONS

Ku-ring-gai Municipality Planning Control

Petition praying that planning control removed by implementation of State Environment Planning Policies Nos. 5 and 53 be returned to Ku-ring-gai Municipal Council, received from **Mr O'Farrell**.

Karuah Rezoning

Petition praying that Karuah be rezoned as rural rather than urban to aid in attracting medical and other services, received from **Mr Bartlett**.

Stem Cell Research

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

Freedom of Religion

Petitions praying that the House reject legislative proposals that would detract from the exercise of freedom of religion, and retain the existing exemptions applying to religious bodies in the Anti-Discrimination Act, received from **Mr Amery, Mr Armstrong, Mr McGrane, Mr E. T. Page, Mr Price, Mr Tink**.

Lake Munmorah State Recreation Area

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

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**.

Eastern Suburbs Bus Services

Petition calling for an immediate review of the effects of recent changes to bus services in the Eastern Suburbs which seriously affect the safety and mobility of those who rely entirely on bus services for transport, received from **Mr Debnam**.

Hornsby Shire Commuter Parking Facilities

Petitions requesting additional commuter parking facilities be provided at railway stations in the Hornsby Shire, received from **Mr O'Farrell** and **Mr Tink**.

Northbridge Primary School

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

Alcohol Sale Control

Petitions praying that alcoholic beverage sales be restricted to existing outlets, that opening hours be reduced, and that warning labels be placed on all alcoholic beverage containers, received from **Mr Bartlett** and **Mr O'Farrell**

Cessnock Shooting Complex

Petition praying that the proposed Cessnock Shooting Complex near Kitchener not proceed, received from **Mr Hickey**.

Casino Policing

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

Cronulla Police Station Upgrading

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

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**.

COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**Report**

Mr Campbell, as Chairman, tabled the report of the committee entitled "Society and Early Child Development. Daniel P. Keating—The 3rd Macquarie Street Lecture for Children and Young People, 9 May 2002", dated August 2002

Ordered to be printed.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Mr SPEAKER: I draw the attention of the House to the presence in the gallery of the Fijian Minister for National Reconciliation, Information and Media Relations, the Hon. Josefa Vosanibola, who is accompanied by his Chief of Staff and Acting Permanent Secretary, Mr Eliko Bomani. I welcome them to the Parliament of New South Wales.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

MINISTER FOR MINERAL RESOURCES, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES AND OASIS LIVERPOOL DEVELOPMENT

Mr BROGDEN: My question without notice is to the Premier. When did he first learn of allegations of attempted bribery by Minister for Mineral Resources, and Minister for Fisheries and what steps did the Premier take to satisfy himself of the Minister's innocence before the Premier said that he had full confidence in the Minister, describing the allegations as utterly false and reckless?

Mr CARR: The Leader of the Opposition would be the only one trying to breathe life into ludicrous allegations. The Minister has no role in assessing or approving the licence.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition has asked a question He will listen to the answer in silence.

Mr CARR: I was aware of this when I first heard of these allegations on Friday morning.

Mr Souris: Friday morning, okay.

Mr CARR: Isn't it great that in the reshuffle on the other side Leader of the National Party is still the shadow Treasurer. We did not want him shifted. The Minister for Mineral Resources, and Minister for Fisheries has no role in approving poker machine licences.

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

Mr CARR: The Minister for Mineral Resources, and Minister for Fisheries has no role in the Crown land issue. Moreover, the Government did not countenance amending the law to give the Oasis development an exemption from a statutory freeze on poker machine numbers. The Government did not contemplate that; it never would have contemplated that because we introduced a freeze on poker machine numbers.

Mr Stoner: When did you become aware?

Mr CARR: I have answered that question. He is slow, isn't he? He has just made it back, as an afterthought, a postscript, to the front bench. I met with representatives of Canterbury Leagues Club on 7 August 2000. I heard about their plans and, to the best of my memory, heard about their proposition that they should get 600 or 1,000 poker machines. I was so impressed by their application, their submission, that five months after that meeting I announced a freeze on gaming machine permits. Some months after that, after we distributed our comprehensive gaming package, the Government capped the number of gaming machines in the community and introduced tough new restrictions on clubs gaining access to permits. That is the record. I am sure that everything we did disappointed the proponents of the Oasis development, but for very good reasons we introduced a freeze, a statewide cap, and the development could not proceed.

Mr O'Farrell: What did Eddie say in Cabinet?

Mr CARR: We are all happy for you, Barry. We are delighted you are back. What are you doing sitting down there? You should come up this end of the front bench.

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

Mr CARR: That is the position; it is pretty clear. It should be clear even to the dullards opposite.

Mr BROGDEN: I ask a supplementary question. Does that mean that when Mr Obeid was contacted by the *Sydney Morning Herald* on Thursday he did not contact the Premier or his office?

Mr CARR: I would be delighted to know that when he heard such a preposterous allegation he took it as seriously as I did.

KURNELL PENINSULA

Mr COLLIER: My question is directed to the Deputy Premier, and Minister for Planning. What is the Government's response to the Federal Government's decision to reject community calls for it to buy a section of Kurnell peninsula?

Dr REFSHAUGE: In today's *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* the honourable member for Miranda devoted a section of his widely read column, "Collier's Corner", to this issue. Kurnell peninsula is the birthplace of our nation. It is where Captain Cook stood to survey the fine land already being enjoyed by indigenous Australians. They have an equally strong link to the place as the site of European invasion. The peninsula has been a wonderful playground for many generations. Its spectacular environment has been used as a backdrop in several big movies: the 1938 Charles Chauvel classic *40,000 Horsemen*, *Phar Lap* and *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*. Kurnell peninsula is of national significance, but clearly the national Government has no interest in its future. Despite the repeated pledges by the Federal Liberal member for the area, Bruce Baird, before the 2001 Federal election to fight to protect the peninsula, unfortunately the Howard Government has now walked away. When there were votes in it, Bruce Baird gave the people of Sutherland hope by saying that the Commonwealth would purchase this nationally significant site.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Lane Cove to order. The Leader of the Opposition will cease injecting.

Dr REFSHAUGE: Listen to what was written in a letter from the Federal member for the area, Bruce Baird.

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

Dr REFSHAUGE: Bruce Baird wrote a letter to the mayor of Sutherland, Tracie Sonda, on 22 March 2001, in which he offered two possible solutions for the purchase of Kurnell peninsula.

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

Dr REFSHAUGE: In his letter he suggested a proposal to buy Kurnell peninsula under the national reserve system. Another proposal, which came from the Deputy Prime Minister at a meeting they had, was that part of the proceeds from the sale of Sydney airport should be used to buy Kurnell peninsula. These are two proposals by the Federal Liberal member for the area, Bruce Baird—and one of them at the suggestion of the Deputy Prime Minister. What has happened? The election is well and truly over; the airport has been sold and not one cent from the proceeds has gone to buy the peninsula or part of it. What about the other possible suggested solution? Just last week a letter arrived—I will table it in a moment—from the Federal environment Minister, in which he confesses. Despite all the promises to the people of Sutherland, the Federal environment Minister said:

I am unable to support acquisition ...

In other words, the Federal Government will not do one thing to preserve Kurnell peninsula. The Hon. David Kemp, writing again to Sutherland Shire Council, said:

I am unable to support acquisition ...

So Bruce Baird gave hope to the people of Sutherland—indeed, to all of us—to preserve Kurnell peninsula by having the national Government buy it. Now they have dashed our hopes in terms of the proposal by the Deputy Prime Minister and the proposal involving environmental trust funds. Given that disgraceful con job, today I am announcing a major environmental study into the sensitive Kurnell peninsula and the surrounding catchment. The Commonwealth may feel comfortable walking away from its responsibilities, but the State will not abandon this important site. In line with our regional strategic approach under Plan First, the study will create a comprehensive regional blueprint to guide all future land use on Kurnell peninsula and the surrounding catchment. It will ensure, once and for all, that any future development is not allowed to harm the environmental and social values of this important area.

This southern Botany Bay strategy will not only achieve those aims but also respond to the concerns raised by the Healthy Rivers Commission. It is an important part of our plan properly to assess and protect all of our precious waterways. Strategies have already been undertaken for Sydney Harbour as well as Parramatta

River, Georges River and Cooks River. To reassure the people of Sutherland and all Australians concerned about the future of Kurnell, I will not approve any current or future development proposals in this area until the appropriate studies are complete. This applies to the rezoning sought by Australand. Any future proposal from any developer will now have to meet the strict requirements that come into force as a result of this new regional strategy. In light of the position I have taken, I am pleased to advise that Rocla, the company seeking approval for substantial new sandmining at Kurnell, has today withdrawn its development application.

Initially, \$450,000 has been committed to the first stage of this process. I have instructed my planning department immediately to begin preparatory work and to commence the study as soon as possible. I am advised that this complex and detailed assessment process should be completed by late next year. I congratulate the honourable member for Miranda, who has taken up the issue of looking after Kurnell peninsula at every possible opportunity. I also thank the mayor of Sutherland, who I know was expressing as recently as last night her disappointment with the Federal Government's backflip. After many decades of stress and impact on this very important national site, I look forward to the completion of a new blueprint to give certainty to the people of Sutherland and to ensure that Australia's birthplace is treated with the respect it deserves.

MINISTER FOR MINERAL RESOURCES, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES AND OASIS LIVERPOOL DEVELOPMENT

Mr SOURIS: My question without notice is directed to the Premier. Can the Premier explain why, in light of the allegations raised by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Mr Mark Wells, Mr Al Constantinidis and other unnamed witnesses, he has not asked the Minister for Mineral Resources, and Minister for Fisheries, Mr Obeid, to stand down pending an investigation?

Mr CARR: How many months have members opposite had? I do not want to be unkind. I did not come in here to be unfair to anyone, but how many months have members opposite had to prepare for this question time? We get this cobbled together stuff that faded from the media on Saturday and has not been heard of again.

[*Interruption*]

Are these the old Greiner quotes? Terrific! The Stasi never lets me down. I have a quote from Nick Greiner dated 30 April 1990. I do not know which member was under investigation at that time; I do not know what unwholesome episode was being explored by the ICAC at that time. But Greiner said:

We propose to wait until after the ICAC.

Nick Greiner is the bloke who proposed the member opposite for the Liberal leadership. That is what he said about allegations. Remember Wallace Telford Murray and the investigation into North Coast developments and into the Minister for Local Government's mate, Ian Causley? Does anyone remember him with reverence and honour? What was the result of the ICAC investigation? It was a "climate conducive to corruption". It turns one's stomach to hear that. Although it was a climate conducive to corruption, did they stand down? Did Murray or Causley stand down? I do not propose to detain or weary the House with a long recitation of all the ICAC inquiries that did not, of necessity, require the standing down of the Coalition Minister at the time under investigation. I will not bore the House with that, except to mention one name—it is a happy memory. When Nick Greiner was under investigation for the Metherell appointment there was no standing down.

My second argument is that the allegations are inherently ludicrous. The Government publicly, on numerous occasions, actually blocked the development of the club. The Government never raised the prospect of special legislation to exempt the Oasis development from its statewide freeze on poker machine numbers, as proposed by the Bulldogs. Everyone involved knew the development could not proceed because of that. That was the policy of the Government. There was no legislation being drafted. Can you imagine the prospect of legislation: the Poker Machine Freeze Amendment Bill (Exemption of Oasis Development)? It was not under examination; it was not remotely possible. It was not being contemplated. It was not being lobbied for by anyone within the Government.

MID NORTH COAST EMPLOYMENT AND INVESTMENT

Mr BARTLETT: My question without notice is to the Minister for Regional Development. What is the latest information on jobs and investment on the State's mid North Coast?

Mr WOODS: I am pleased to report to the House on the six mid North Coast companies that are experiencing solid growth and creating nearly 140 local jobs. That is 140 pay packets for local families in the communities of Kempsey and Coffs Harbour.

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

Mr WOODS: The first company is the Coffs Harbour based engineering firm W. E. Smith Hudson. The company is celebrating its eightieth year of operation by winning several major contracts totalling \$53 million and creating 45 new jobs in the local area.

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

Mr WOODS: The most exciting of these contracts sees W. E. Smith Hudson supplying 16 titanium heat exchangers, each weighing 24 tonnes, to the Goro Nickel Project in New Caledonia. The company is also a major designer and manufacturer of equipment for the mining, chemical, pharmaceutical and petroleum industries. The Government has provided the assistance to help make this happen. Working in partnership with the Government, the company has been able to expand its current operations to meet the new demands, and this has meant 40 new pay packets for Coffs Harbour.

The second company is Topo-Climate Services, which recently relocated its agri-business consulting operations from New Zealand to Coffs Harbour. This is a great win for Coffs Harbour and it is expected to create eight full-time jobs over the next three years. Topo-Climate Services is an agri-business consulting company, which specialises in intensive soil and climate mapping. They compile this information and cropping data to help farmers and regional communities make decisions about what crops to grow and how much stock to run. Topo-Climate Services' methods are used extensively in the Southland region of New Zealand. Over the past year the company answered inquiries from around Australia and it is working on several projects in Western Australia, Tasmania, Queensland and New South Wales.

Coffs Harbour is not the only place this is happening: A planned expansion of Lahey Detailed Joinery in Kempsey has the potential to create 23 additional jobs over the next three years. Lahey Detailed Joinery employs 46 people and is confident it will have 69 full-time staff on the books within three years. The company intends to extend its factory in South Street, Kempsey and install a range of new machinery, including an automatic paint line to service larger contracts. Once the expansion is complete the bulk of the company's new contracts will be serviced from Kempsey.

The timber industry in Kempsey is doing well if the next three examples are any indication. Australian Architectural Hardwoods, a locally owned company, will employ an extra 23 people over three years, taking them to a work force of 37. The company secured government assistance to build a new factory to meet the growing demand for its specialty timber products ranging from beams and columns to flooring and treads. Australian Solar Timbers is also doing well, investing in new technology that could see it create 22 new jobs in just 18 months. The development of its microwave timber drying technology and the upgrading of its tongue and groove flooring line have been big steps forward for the Kempsey company. The company plans to export to the United Kingdom and the United States and it is currently exporting to Singapore, New Zealand and Hungary.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is far too much audible conversation in the Chamber. The honourable member for Lachlan will resume his seat.

Mr WOODS: Finally, north of Coffs Harbour, G. & R. McCann's hydroponic vegetable-growing operation at Woolgoolga is expanding to create seven new jobs. The company has been operating a hydroponic vegetable facility from its current Sandy Beach site for nearly six years. It supplies quality tomatoes, Lebanese cucumbers and red capsicums right across the country. This expansion is good news for the community of Woolgoolga, good news for the North Coast and good news for New South Wales. The Government has a strong commitment to promote jobs in country New South Wales. These six companies only scratch the surface of many success stories right across country New South Wales. I welcome the comments by the companies about the assistance they receive and the professionalism of the Department of State and Regional Development [DSRD]. The CEO of W. E. Smith, Derek Firman, said:

...the support given by the New South Wales Department of State and Regional Development was particularly valuable especially during the company's change of ownership in March 2001.

He continued:

...the DSRD office in Coffs Harbour has also provided us, as a management team, with important advice about exports and other development matters.

Peter Drinkwater, a partner in Australian Architectural Hardwoods, was also very pleased with the assistance he received. He said the help meant that the company could get on with installing vital infrastructure at its plant. These opportunities are now likely to reach their potential. That would not have happened previously. The Government uses its experience to produce plans, strategies and policies that actually work for business, as those businesses testify. The Government will continue to use its experience to develop plans for the growth of country New South Wales with plans for more jobs in country New South Wales.

HEALTH SERVICES

Mr GREENE: My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. What is the latest information on the impact of winter on the New South Wales health system?

Mr KNOWLES: The figures show May, June and July this year as the busiest winter ever on record for our hospitals. For those three months more than 200,000 people attended emergency departments in the metropolitan area alone. That is a big increase. In fact it is about 11,000 more people than in the corresponding three-month period last year. Across the State that is an increase of more than 20,000 people on top of the loads normally experienced in winter. It might interest members to learn that in the week following 25 July, attendances at emergency departments increased by 27 per cent. That is more than a quarter per cent increase in the numbers of people already attending the busy winter loads at our emergency departments. That particular increase was due to a variety of factors, which I will come to in a moment.

There is absolutely no doubt on the evidence that the substantial proportion of the increased attendances resulted from increased anxiety about meningococcal illnesses. People presenting to emergency departments with flu-like symptoms increased by 62 per cent over the corresponding period for last year. Indeed, in today's newspapers, the World Health Organisation reports an almost 1,000 per cent increase in the number of flu presentations compared with the same time last year. The number of people with acute respiratory infections increased by 21 per cent compared with last year. There was a 13 per cent increase in the number of people presenting with pneumonia, and a 30 per cent increase in the number of people presenting with chest pain.

Those are extraordinarily large extra volumes on top of the number of peak-season presentations, that is, the normal experience in the three months of winter. Young children, and mothers and fathers with their babies turned up in extraordinarily large numbers during that period—a 20 per cent increase on the same period last year. In fact, the Children's Hospital at Westmead—that magnificent paediatric hospital that is as good as any in the world—had particularly large influxes of children and anxious parents during that period, and continues to do so.

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

Mr KNOWLES: The hospital undertook research on why it was getting such enormous increases in presentations at its emergency departments. This information may interest honourable members. The hospital's independent research shows that a number of after-hours medical services in western Sydney are clearly reducing hours of operation. Any Western Sydney member of Parliament knows that to be a matter of fact. How many times over the last year have medical centres that were providing 24-hour bulk-billing services cut back their hours of operation, and stopped providing those services at some part of the day, usually at about 5.30 or 6 o'clock?

Mrs Skinner: Point of order: My point of order refers to the motion of which I gave notice earlier today. It points out that the vast majority of patients waiting too long in emergency departments have conditions of life-threatening urgency. These are not general practitioner patients.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point order.

Mr KNOWLES: I will quickly respond, without disturbing the forms of the House, because I am aware of the notice of motion. The fact is that the terrific doctors and nurses in our emergency departments continue to treat the life-threatening illnesses—known in the trade as triage 1 and triage 2—with exceptional performance. In triage 1, it is 100 per cent of the time, and our performance on triage 2 has improved by a further 4 per cent. All of that information is on the web site.

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

Mr KNOWLES: The research by those great people at the Children's Hospital reminds us that one reason for the increase in hospital emergency service department presentations is the decline in after-hours general practitioner services. Bulk billing in many practices has reduced. Patients are really forced to make a choice. Do they stump up the \$46—or whatever it happens to be now—for a non-bulk-billing general practitioner? For those with two or three children, that is a lot of money. Or do they choose to go for the free service provided by the emergency department of their local hospital?

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

Mr KNOWLES: In most parts of our city, and indeed many country areas, these days there is no longer a choice because for many hours of the week no doctors are available, even if one could afford to pay the GP consult fee. That is occurring, as is evidenced by the research of the Children's Hospital. One of the reasons, they point out, for that occurring is the rise in medical indemnity costs. This appears to be a factor in general practitioners' decisions to cease bulk billing. Of course, GP surgeries are very busy. Stories abound of general practitioners having long waiting lists and of people simply being unable to get in to see their practitioners.

An increasing number of general practitioners now send children off to the public hospital, almost as a second-opinion insurance policy, in their desire to share the responsibility of subsequent potential litigation, all to do with medical indemnity. Of course, that is in addition to the normal load of winter illnesses, the onset of winter and that increased fear and worry by parents, legitimate as it is, about meningococcal disease. The decline in bulk-billing general practitioners and in after-hours services is just one example of the number of issues affecting health systems right across Australia. Workforce shortages are, of course, a prime concern and major issue, not just in nursing but in the allied health professions, as is the range of specialty services that we need from our doctors. Equally, we are now seeing a dramatic closure in the number of nursing home beds.

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

Mr KNOWLES: There has been a dramatic increase in the number of elderly people who are not sick, just old, but have nowhere to go. The Commonwealth has assessed them as suitable for a nursing home bed but, because of the closure of nursing homes, particularly on the north shore of Sydney, they end up occupying acute beds. We have seen a large increase in the number of people over 80 years of age now turning up at our emergency departments. Of course, those matters, medical indemnity issues and free services—in many places the only service—all make our hospitals very busy places. Over winter our hospital staff have done an extraordinarily good job coping with those massive increases in demand and the pressures that come with them—the biggest increase, the busiest winter, ever on record. I pay tribute to the doctors and nurses, the ambulance officers, the entire team of health professionals for the work that they have done.

The Government has backed them with additional nursing staff. There are now 925 more permanent, full-time nurses working in the public health system than there were at the beginning of this year. We have created additional clinical initiative nurse positions in all of our busy emergency departments. Their role is to communicate with and assist in the triaging of patients. We are in the process of employing 24-hour emergency department geriatric assessment liaison teams to provide that specialised care needed by the increasing number of aged who are coming through emergency department doors. We are also in the process of trialling a specialised paediatric service at Campbelltown Hospital as part of the new redevelopment of that hospital, to fast-track children who present to emergency.

Those initiatives assist the work force in our public hospitals. But as the number of bulk-billing general practitioners continues to decline, and after-hours services continue to fall, the pressure on the free public health system will continue to grow. It might interest honourable members to know that in the past 12 months there were 3.4 million fewer general practice bulk-billing services provided across Australia. That decline now puts us at an absolute 10-year low in the number of general practitioner bulk-bill services. Based on work around the country and particularly in New South Wales, the evidence is clear that towns without a bulk-billing general practitioner will have a 60 per cent higher level of attendances at the local hospital emergency department than a town that does have a bulk-billing general practitioner. There is the contrast: if you have a bulk-billing general practitioner, you will use that practitioner, and you will make sure you use the service appropriately. If you do not, you can expect a 60 per cent increase in the number of attendances at your local hospital emergency department.

Another interesting piece of information that is new today relates to the number of general practitioner home visits. We have done further research of Health Insurance Commission statistics. Remember the doctor who used to come to your home if you were crook, particularly if you were an elderly person? Somebody had to phone to get the doctor. That is becoming very much a thing of the past. In the last 10 years GP home visits in Australia have dropped by a staggering 40 per cent. In 1993 there were in excess of one million home visits—that is, doctors being called out at all hours of the day and night, and being willing to front up and visit people, to look after people, in their homes. In 2001-02 that number dropped to 600,000. That is, 400,000 home visits disappeared.

The other thing that disappeared with home visits is the bulk-billing service. Before, you could get a doctor who bulk billed on a home visit; that is, the elderly, the poor, and people on fixed incomes and people with large numbers of children might be able to get somebody to come to their home on a bulk-billing scheme. These days the minimum charge is about \$40. If you are in any one of those categories and simply cannot afford to pay, what do you do? Either you wait for treatment and get sicker and present to the emergency department in a higher triage category, or you get yourself to the hospital and add further pressure to the free emergency department in our public hospital system. That is a major shift in the way our communities are cared for right across the nation.

Mrs Skinner: Point of order: This is an appalling abrogation of responsibility by a Minister for Health who is trying to shift the blame elsewhere at the same time as he is proposing to downgrade emergency departments and lock patients out.

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

Mrs Skinner: Tell the Minister to sit down if he cannot stop lying to this House.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for North Shore will resume her seat.

Mr KNOWLES: The honourable member for North Shore mentions the fantastic district hospitals report which was released last week and she suggests that there is a dilemma. Far from it! Every district hospital will receive a major upgrade. There are honourable members present who visited local district hospitals with me during the past week where medical staff councils, who are not known for their support of Labor, were cheering the prospect of new facilities, new services and extra funding. I have to tell all Government members that the honourable member for North Shore did herself absolutely no service by her treatment of the chairman of the task force committee during the briefing that he gave her last night, and I have to tell the honourable member that if ever she had prospects of receiving clinical support, last night she lost them all. Those people are very tired of her antics and her performance.

Mrs Skinner: Point of order—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for North Shore has taken three points of order and not one has been a legitimate point of order. I remind her that she is on three calls to order.

Mrs Skinner: The Minister referred to a meeting that he tried to gatecrash by sending a ministerial staff member. That is appalling behaviour and I ask you to ask him to be honest in giving information to this House.

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

Mr KNOWLES: The honourable member for North Shore may criticise me, but she runs a grave risk when she criticises the 500 doctors, nurses and ambulance officers who prepared the report on the future of our great metropolitan hospitals. She has disenfranchised members on the Opposition side from the votes of the doctors and nurses who formulated the plan. Government members have seen the support for the plan. Some people are saying that it is the best thing they have seen for metropolitan hospitals in 25 years.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister will return to the substance of his answer.

Mr KNOWLES: In returning to the main subject of my response, I point out that the reduction of general practice services is more than a cost shift, a dislocation of services, and additional pressure for our public hospitals system. When one thinks about it, general practice services of the type delivered by the old-

fashioned local GP have been fundamental in providing both prevention and primary care to people when they are ill. If that service is removed, or if the opportunity to obtain that service is removed because people cannot afford the \$46 fee recommended by the Australian Medical Association [AMA] and because doctors cannot afford to continue to bulk bill owing to the paucity of the Commonwealth's payment of approximately \$24, which has rendered doctors unable to run their business, one begins to understand that the entire health care structure in this country is under threat.

If the only option for people who cannot afford to pay for GP services is the acute care part of the health system, it is axiomatic that everyone will go to public hospitals for treatment. It bodes poorly for the community when people are simply not able to obtain the treatment they need from local doctors. That is why every State and Territory Minister for Health has been asking the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Kay Patterson, to revisit the relative value study and pay more to GPs so they will return to bulk billing and provide after-hours care. Without that provision of service, the pressure that has been experienced recently by this State's very busy hospital emergency departments during the busiest winter on record will continue. Conversely, if the matter is addressed, this State will be able to move back to a model of care that provides quality of service for the people who need medical attention when they are ill.

MINISTER FOR MINERAL RESOURCES, AND MINISTER FOR FISHERIES PECUNIARY INTEREST DISCLOSURE

Mr BROGDEN: My question without notice is directed to the Premier. Why does he continue to believe that the Minister for Mineral Resources, and Minister for Fisheries, Eddie Obeid, is honest—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition is entitled to be heard in silence when he asks a question. Hansard and all members of the House will then be able to hear him.

Mr BROGDEN: Why does the Premier continue to believe that the Minister for Mineral Resources, and Minister for Fisheries, Eddie Obeid, is honest, when documents show that he failed in the register of disclosures 1994-95 to declare that he continued as a director of Al Constantinidis' company, Jensay, and also as a director of Constantinidis' piggery company, Olympia Group?

Mr CARR: This matter was thrashed out in the upper House ages ago and was answered in the upper House ages ago. What a pathetic performance by the Leader of the Opposition on the first day Parliament resumes! Yesterday the honourable member for Coogee and I visited one of this State's very finest public schools, Clovelly Public School, and we heard some first-rate year 5 students make speeches. I told them they ought to be in Parliament.

Mr Brogden: Point of order: My question relates directly to a failure of disclosure by the Minister for Mineral Resources, and Minister for Fisheries, Eddie Obeid. I ask you, Mr Speaker, to direct the Premier to answer that question.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! If members on both sides ceased interjecting, the Premier would be able to answer the question. Interjections cause a reaction and in most cases that reaction takes the Minister away from the answer. Obviously, if members want to hear the Premier's answer, they should cease interjecting.

Mr CARR: The Leader of the Opposition has a little problem with pecuniary declaration: he runs a company named Northmist Pty Ltd and he receives a payment from PricewaterhouseCoopers, but he has not declared the companies he has chosen to represent to earn that payment. What companies has the Leader of the Opposition represented to earn that payment? I see what has happened. It is all very well to attack the Minister for Mineral Resources, and Minister for Fisheries, Eddie Obeid—a Minister who is not in this House.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I place the honourable member for Bega on three calls to order.

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order. Before the Premier presumes to misrepresent members of the Opposition on pecuniary interest, let us just get an answer about the Minister for Mineral Resources, and Minister for Fisheries, Eddie Obeid, who is the only Minister to have bought his place on the front bench by bankrolling backbench members of the Labor Party. He paid his way into the Ministry, and the Premier ought to reveal to this House the questions he asked the Minister for Mineral Resources, and Minister for Fisheries, Eddie Obeid, about his disclosures, what the ministerial Code of Conduct obliges the Minister to tell the Premier, and why the Premier continues to help a man who tells lies to this Parliament time and time again. Mr Speaker, you are on your feet and you should direct the Premier to answer questions about this man Eddie Obeid.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I place the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai on four calls to order.

Mr CARR: It is one thing to attack a Minister who is not in this House about matters that were fully debated on another occasion in another place, but the Leader of the Opposition cannot talk about his failure to fully declare why he got a payment from PricewaterhouseCoopers or spell out in his pecuniary declaration the companies he represented to win that payment.

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

Mr CARR: Let us repeat the essence of the situation with regard to Oasis.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The behaviour of members contravenes the standing orders. Members on both sides of the Chamber are equally to blame. I place all members on three calls to order, with the exception of the honourable member for Ku-ring-gai, who is on four calls to order. If he is called to order again he will leave the Chamber.

Mr CARR: Let us review the Bulldogs situation at Oasis. First, the club lacks a licence; the Licensing Court has not approved one. Second, if the club does not have a licence it cannot have gaming machines. It cannot even apply for the permits. Third, the gaming package that was announced in July last year places stringent new restrictions on clubs gaining access to poker machine permits. They can apply to the Liquor Administration Board for additional permits, but they must complete a social impact assessment.

If the Liquor Administration Board cannot see justification for approving additional gaming machine permits, it will not. But, even if it did, the Government's cap on gaming machines that was announced last year means that the club would have to buy and transfer the permits from other clubs. The Government's gaming policy announced in July last year was backed by legislation that went through the Parliament last year. Under that legislation no new club or existing club can have more than 450 gaming machines. The Canterbury Oasis proposal for twice that number is barred by law, and has been for some time. There has never been a tremor of a suggestion within government that the law should be amended to accommodate that proposal.

RAIL SAFETY LEGISLATION

Mr MOSS: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Transport. What is the latest information with respect to transport safety in New South Wales?

Mr SCULLY: In November last year the Government issued its response to Justice McInerney's final report into the Glenbrook rail accident. The Government accepted 93 of the 95 recommendations and is in the process of implementing them. I can advise the House today that yesterday afternoon the New South Wales Government approved for release as an exposure draft a new Rail Safety Bill. When the bill goes through the House, the 93 recommendations that the Government accepted will either have been implemented or will be in the process of being implemented. Rather than comprehensively amend the existing rail safety legislation, which is nearly a decade old, I decided to completely rewrite it.

The scope and complexity of the task has been considerable, and I would like to thank the scores of public servants at senior and not so senior levels in the Department of Transport, the rail agencies, and the office of the co-ordinator general for the work they have done. It is important to introduce this bill as an exposure draft rather than to introduce it in the normal way, and as much consultation as possible will take place on it. I would like staff, management and all stakeholders to express their views on it to the Government. I would also like Opposition members and all other members of Parliament to consider it. In a spirit of bipartisanship I will make available to the honourable member for Vacluse and any other members in this Chamber a detailed briefing from the senior public servants who were involved in drafting this legislation. They will be able to tell honourable members why the Government believes this is the best way to introduce the legislation.

Some of the major changes proposed by the Government in the exposure draft bill include the introduction of a statutory Rail Accident Investigation Panel with an independent chair with powers of self-referral in relation to major accidents; a tougher accreditation system using a risk management approach for rail operators; enhanced penalties and offences; and fatigue management for rail safety workers. A significant recommendation in Justice McInerney's report, one that has some sensitivity, is drug and alcohol testing. The legislation proposes that not just in the rail industry but across the transport sector staff will be random tested for alcohol and drugs before and after they sign on.

The Rail Accident Investigation Panel will investigate more serious accidents. Less serious accidents will be investigated by the director-general through the rail regulator. Under the proposed legislation the chair has self-regulatory power. The panel will have powers to compel witnesses to attend and answer questions. The Minister will be required to table in Parliament reports of investigations within 28 days. I propose to ensure that there is as much consultation as possible in relation to this exposure draft. Over a period of some six or seven weeks all honourable members, stakeholders and interest groups will have an opportunity to make their views known to the Government. I welcome the involvement of honourable members, stakeholders and interest groups in this process. I intend to introduce the legislation in about the third week in October, at which time there will be a second reading debate. I seek leave to table the exposure draft Rail Safety Bill.

Leave granted.

Exposure draft bill tabled.

DROUGHT ASSISTANCE

Mr ARMSTRONG: My question without notice is directed to the Premier. Having refused today to debate drought as a matter of public importance and having failed to provide drought relief to 82 per cent of the State's drought-stressed areas, will the Premier now retrospectively declare all drought-affected areas, backdated six months, to make them eligible immediately for critical drought relief?

Mr CARR: This question comes from a joker who, as a former Minister, rejected retrospectivity during the last drought. He ruled it out and argued against it. He would not have a bar of retrospectivity in the drought of the early 1990s. What a joke! What hypocrisy! By every test this Government has provided drought relief faster in this drought than the former Coalition Government did when it encountered a drought in the first half of the 1990s.

SCHOOL SECURITY

Mr E. T. PAGE: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Education and Training. What is the latest information on improvements to security at schools?

Mr WATKINS: Low-lifes who vandalise and burn our schools are beneath contempt. They deserve to be published to the fullest extent of the law. They ruin our children's prize possessions and destroy the hard work of our teaching and other staff. Whilst we must do all we can to catch vandals and arsonists after the event, it is clear that we need to do more to prevent these attacks. According to figures released last year, insurance claims for public schools have risen from \$11.2 million in 1995-96 to \$31.8 million in 2000-01—which is a really disturbing increase. Today I announce that this financial year the Government will spend an unprecedented \$21.7 million on protecting the security of our schools.

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: The Minister has just admitted that he is making a ministerial statement and that he is not responding to the question. There are forms in the House that allow him to make a ministerial statement and allow me to respond. The Minister ought to follow those forms.

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

Mr WATKINS: That includes \$9.3 million of new initiatives designed to step up school security. I can advise the House of two new plans. First, a new schools-only mobile security service will patrol our schools at a cost of \$5.5 million per year. Second, this year \$3.85 million will go towards upgrading alarms for at-risk schools. These initiatives come on top of stepping up the fencing program I announced a couple of weeks ago. For over 10 years local security companies have patrolled schools along with other local properties such as shops and factories. But during last year's Christmas holidays a new dedicated security service was trialed in nine school districts, and it was a success. The Department of Education and Training has informed me that this dedicated service reduced the amount of damage, including the extent of a number of school fires, due to faster response times.

Today I can inform the House that I have approved an expansion of this service which will mean that our schools will always be the top priority for security guards on duty. It will also mean that guards should be available at times when they are needed and in locations where they are needed. The service will feature round-the-clock patrols by mobile guards visiting high-risk schools; a focus on high-risk areas and high-risk periods

such as weekends and school holidays, when much of the damage occurs; mobile guards responding to alarms within their patrol areas; and better intelligence gathering because it is a schools-only service. The department is currently liaising with the security industry with a view to awarding ongoing contracts as soon as possible.

I can also inform the House that, as we speak, the Department of Education and Training is evaluating tenders to install and upgrade security alarms in schools. Currently more than 1,400 schools and other Department of Education and Training properties have back-to-base alarms. Of these, around 900 are part of an alarm system owned by the department. Technical reviews have established that the system needs to be substantially upgraded, to provide the best possible security service. That is why field testing of a new \$3 million commercial alarm system to replace the department's system will occur from next month. The installation contract will be awarded as soon as possible after testing occurs. In addition, other high-risk schools will receive, for the first time, an alarm system.

These latest initiatives are part of the Government's plan to make sure our schools are as safe and secure as they can be. Recently I announced the establishment of a new Safety and Security Directorate in the Department of Education and Training, under the command of former Assistant Police Commissioner Ike Ellis; the fencing of more than 200 schools, with a further 50 to be fenced during the current financial year; a much closer relationship between education and police, with the establishment of Task Force VAR; and a new schools response group in the department to provide critical incident assistance, advice and support to schools. There is nothing worse than the low-lifes that vandalise and burn our schools. We will do all we can to protect our schools into the future.

Questions without notice concluded.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

Drought Assistance

Mr AMERY (Mount Druitt—Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Corrective Services) [3.33 p.m.]: I ask the House to give priority to the motion for urgent consideration of which I gave notice prior to question time. As everyone would be aware, 82 per cent of the State's land mass is now affected by drought. It is extremely important that there be placed on the public record the details of this drought, what assistance can be given to the farming and rural communities, and many other issues relating to the drought.

Tow Truck Industry

Mr DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [3.34 p.m.]: My motion is urgent because today there are still frequent death threats and intimidation in the tow truck industry that put many people at risk daily. The issue is urgent because Peter Anderson remains a key Carr Government adviser today, despite having betrayed the interests of tow truck industry workers. It is urgent because Kevin Waters and Steve Willis remain influential operators in the tow truck industry today, despite serious allegations being reported to the Carr Government.

This issue is urgent because the Carr Government has refused to acknowledge allegations of collusion since February. It is urgent because the Minister for Transport refused to act on police information. The issue is urgent because the Carr Government has continually frustrated the efforts of industry workers trying to highlight serious problems. It is urgent because the transport Minister is the Minister who appointed Peter Anderson, Frances Marshall, Kevin Waters and Steve Willis to critical positions in the industry.

This issue is urgent because the Minister for Transport has betrayed the interests of tow truck workers. It is urgent because thousands of people in the industry know that the Carr Government has not acted in their interests to date. The issue is urgent because leaked documents show that the Minister for Transport was advised in June 2001—not in the past few weeks—of the urgent need to identify "links of a criminal nature involving various players eg associations/relationships with Outlaw Motor Cycle Gangs, brothels, organised crime figures etc" and of police reports of violence and intimidation with one person "standing over other tow truck drivers ... threatening to bash drivers ... allegations of a weapon involved".

The issue is urgent because transport Minister Scully should stand aside from his ministerial responsibilities pending the outcome of a public Independent Commission Against Corruption [ICAC] inquiry into the Tow Truck Authority. As well as misleading Parliament, Mr Scully made all senior appointments to the Tow Truck Authority and the Advisory Council, and it is clear that the Minister was aware of serious allegations more than a year ago.

This issue is urgent because Minister Scully knew about the ongoing problems in the Tow Truck Authority and about allegations of criminal activity but still misled Parliament on 29 May and 26 June this year. It is urgent because Minister Scully's claim in the last fortnight that he "acted immediately" in notifying the ICAC when he became aware of the allegations, is simply not true. In May Minister Scully dismissed my concerns and instead congratulated the Tow Truck Authority and its chairman, Peter Anderson, saying:

He has done a fine job. He has lifted the performance of the tow truck industry ... We have lifted that performance ... The state of the industry is much better than it was prior to Peter Anderson's appointment.

I raised these issues with the Minister for Transport in Parliament last May and again in June. I asked the Minister to inform the Parliament about ongoing difficulties within the Tow Truck Authority, especially given the continuing allegations of intimidation and violence and calls for ICAC and police investigation. For the Minister to suggest he did not know about the problems until last week simply demonstrates his contempt for the Parliament, the public and the media.

It is clear from the memo that was sent on 8 June from the Acting General Manager of the Tow Truck Authority to the Minister for Transport that the issue was to provide advice concerning possible illegal activities in connection with tow truck operators in the Blacktown area. The memo, which attached a memo of 4 June 2001, referred to the need to identify "the links of a criminal nature involving various players eg associations/relationships with Outlaw Motor Cycle Gangs, brothels, organised crime figures, etc". The memo states that on 6 June 2001 the Tow Truck Authority Board concurred with the proposed course of action and directed that the Minister be advised.

Yesterday the Minister told the media that this was a briefing note and he was not obliged to take any action whatsoever. This matter is urgent because the Minister appointed all the key players, including Peter Anderson, Frances Marshall, Kevin Waters and Steve Willis. The memo set out grave concerns about the administration of the Tow Truck Authority and the individuals involved. The Minister should have acted on that information. Yesterday he admitted that he did not so act, but that he considered the information to be a brief and not something he should act upon. Those appointments to the industry were made by the Minister for Transport. These problems go back four years, during the entire time that Minister Scully has been involved in overseeing the so-called reform of the industry. He has not reformed it.

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

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL VACANCIES

Joint Sitting

At 3.39 p.m. the House proceeded to the Legislative Council Chamber to attend a joint sitting to elect members to fill the seats in the Legislative Council vacated by the Hon. Doug Moppett, resigned, and the Hon. Elaine Nile, resigned.

[The House resumed at 3.55 p.m.]

Mr SPEAKER: I report that the House met with the Legislative Council in the Legislative Council Chamber to elect members to fill the seats in the Legislative Council vacated by the Hon. Doug Moppett and the Hon. Elaine Nile, and that Melinda Jane Pavey and Gordon Keith Mackenzie Moyes were duly elected.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Urgent Motion: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr WHELAN (Strathfield—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.54 p.m.]: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow eight additional speakers to the motion for urgent consideration.

Mr ARMSTRONG (Lachlan) [3.54 p.m.]: The motion is welcome because the drought is a priority issue. I have no doubt the Leader of the Government, with his extensive holdings in the Hunter, will be seriously affected by hay prices.

Motion agreed to.

DROUGHT ASSISTANCE

Urgent Motion

Mr AMERY (Mount Druitt—Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Corrective Services) [3.55 p.m.]: I move:

That this House recognises the plight of drought-affected farmers and rural communities of this State and continues to give them support.

I thank honourable members for giving this debate priority this afternoon, particularly when some 82 per cent of the land mass of New South Wales is now affected by drought. The situation has been deteriorating rapidly over the winter months, and we expect it to worsen in the months ahead. Members representing those drought-affected areas should be aware that the whole community, both in Sydney and in country areas, the Government and all members of the House are thinking of the families and rural communities caught up in the drought and the effects it is having on their businesses and their family life.

Drought is part of life in Australia. There can be no argument about that. Rural communities have always known that they can expect to experience prolonged periods without rain, whether or not their areas become drought declared. This may occur every three or four years, or every seven to 10 years. In Australia it has never been a question of whether we will have a drought but a question of when it will arrive. I can inform the House that the Carr Government has been working hard with members of the House, particularly Country Labor members, crossbenchers, including the honourable member for Dubbo, who is present in the House, and also with the New South Wales Farmers Association—and I acknowledge particularly the hard work of its president, Mal Peters—and with organisations far and wide and local government. The West Darling Pastoralists Association deserves recognition for its strong submission about the way funding assistance should be targeted.

All of those people, and many more, have done a lot of work on a plan that recognises the severity and potential worsening of the drought. The plan also recognises that the current drought, like all droughts, has its own characteristics. For example, rainfall has not provided any run-off into farm dams in most areas of the State since about November 2000. All droughts have different characteristics. This drought is creating critical livestock water shortages, and is starting to impact on the security of some town water supplies. Unlike most previous major droughts, this one is so widespread that farmers are unable to secure agistment for their drought-affected stock anywhere in eastern Australia. Even farmers in neighbouring States, particularly in Queensland, are feeling the effects of the drought.

The drought is forcing the sale of stock for slaughter, and that will impact on the rate of recovery of livestock enterprises when rain does come. Extraordinary concentrations of kangaroos and emus have been another feature of this drought. Strong representations were made to Government members when we visited country areas. The issue of emus and kangaroos has been on every agenda. I shall outline some of the major Carr Government responses to the devastating situation. Work is continuing with the organisations I mentioned, particularly the Farmers Association. For example, following an announcement at Bourke, the honourable member for Dubbo convened a drought roundtable at Dubbo on 29 July, after which the Premier announced a package. I shall read onto the record some of the details of that package.

Farmers in rural land protection board areas that have been drought affected for six months or more can access a 50 per cent subsidy on the cost of transporting fodder to feed drought-affected core breeding stock; a 50 per cent subsidy on the cost of transporting water for drought-affected core breeding stock; a 50 per cent subsidy on the cost of transporting drought-affected core breeding stock to and from agistment, difficult as that may be to obtain; a 50 per cent subsidy on the transport of stock from drought-affected properties to slaughter, which was one of the initial announcements; and a 50 per cent subsidy on the transport of domestic water to assist isolated land-holders to maintain an acceptable standard of living for their families. In many far-off places in New South Wales, where farming enterprises are suffering, even the domestic water supply has completely run out. The transport subsidies were backdated for 11 rural lands protection boards that had been in drought for longer than six months.

The Premier also announced the waiving of lease payments for farmers on western land leases and waiving the Wild Dog Destruction Board fees; providing a new allocation of \$1 million for an emergency feral pig and fox eradication program in the Western Division—again an issue raised with us by many deputations; fast-tracking National Parks and Wildlife Service licence requests from drought-affected farmers wanting to immediately reduce kangaroos and emus on their properties; and investigating the easing of restrictions applying to B-double trucks on rural council roads in drought affected areas.

In addition to those measures, the Government undertook to continue to work with the New South Wales Farmers Association to refine and reassess the assistance measures as the drought continues. Members would be aware that the Government appointed Mr Geoff File from New South Wales Agriculture as the New South Wales drought co-ordinator. His work, as it was in the last drought throughout the 1990s, has been excellent. Mr File, on behalf of the Government, has undertaken an extensive tour of the State's drought-stricken areas and has recorded the concerns and experiences in each area.

This process, along with constant discussion with the New South Wales Farmers Association, and particularly its president, Mal Peters, has led to the refinement of the package. Consequently, the Minister for Regional Development, and Minister for Rural Affairs, Harry Woods, announced on 11 August the following assistance measures for country businesses: payroll tax relief for farm-reliant businesses to ensure they can keep their skilled workers during the drought; and a one-off \$3,000 grant to engage an expert—an accountant or other adviser—to help them sustain their operations, both during and beyond the drought. Also, as a result of the Government's close consultative process, the Premier made further announcements on 26 August at Cobar when the Cabinet met there for the first time, as I understand from the honourable member for Murray-Darling.

The Premier announced that the Government would extend transport, water and fodder subsidies to also include core production stock to pick up the 10 per cent or so of producers, particularly in the Far West, who are unable to run breeding stock due to the harshness of their country; and extend the criteria for special conservation loans to also include dam desilting, major repairs to stock water systems, piping and storage of stock water, and planting of perennial species such as lucerne and oldman saltbush.

Further, we extended the criteria for accessing the transport subsidies to include full-time farmers who have had to find work off-farm to supplement their income in order to survive. The criteria for off-farm income has been a barrier for some farmers seeking assistance. Also, we provided free transport for fodder that has been purchased through drought appeals. We would certainly like to acknowledge here today that many organisations, media outlets, charities and individual companies—even a car club—have actually raised money to assist farmers during this drought, and no doubt more of that assistance will be forthcoming. A particular benefit was raised at an event that I was attending. We hope to provide free transport for the fodder that has been purchased through those drought appeals and we expect more of that to come. The West 2000 Board will meet to consider providing more funds for piping of stock water and for future exclusion fencing.

In addition to these measures, the New South Wales Department of Agriculture has implemented a number of other measures that have already been highlighted, such as the creation of the drought hotline and the continual updating of the New South Wales Department of Agriculture web site with the latest drought information. That web site's usage has increased by 750 per cent since January, with over three million hits during July this year. The department also launched a new service to drought-affected farmers by establishing a fodder database on its web site that lists supplies of donated fodder or fodder for sale. The database connects buyers and sellers. Further, the department has produced and distributed 15,000 copies of the drought booklet "Managing Drought". I understand it will print even more copies of that booklet as there has been a great demand for it. The department also conducted more than 53 drought management field days, attracting more than 1,200 farmers, and regional workshops in each of the seven New South Wales Department of Agriculture regions for Agriculture and rural lands protection board staff.

I can inform the House that, following representations from the honey industry, the department has provided measures, including a 50 per cent transport subsidy for sugar solution to feed bees deprived by the drought, short-term access to bees for low conservation value national parks, and the waiving of permit fees charged by State Forests and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. I would like to thank Mr Greg Roberts, President of the New South Wales Apiarists Association, and also Country Labor for those representations.

These assistance measures are comprehensive, but the Government is also considering very closely the fate of the cropping sector and its potential need for assistance. In addition, the Government will continue to liaise with the New South Wales Farmers Association about the prospect for recovery assistance once the drought breaks. Even so, the worst affected parts of New South Wales are justified in hoping that the Federal Government will approve an application for exceptional circumstances assistance as soon as the State Government lodges it. I can inform the House that this application will be lodged with the Federal Government within the next two weeks. I will reserve any other comments to my response to this debate.

Mr ARMSTRONG (Lachlan) [4.05 p.m.]: I take note of what the Minister has said and I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this debate today. However, there are a few extra facts regarding drought. I

agree no drought is the same as the previous one; they are all different. There is no doubt about that at all. In some places that are not yet in drought declared areas, such as south-west of Arianah Park, there are farms that have had less than four inches of rain, or 400 millimetres, since November of last year. That lines up with some of the lowest rainfall in the State. In the middle of those farms is Australia's leading Border Leicester stud, for instance, held by the Gridder family. They have had four inches of rain since last year. There are dams at the back of Ardlethan with a capacity of up to 20,000 litres that have not had run-off since 1997.

As the Minister said, farm dam run-off has been a problem but some excellent farming techniques that have evolved over recent years, such as direct drilling, are probably working against run-off. With direct drilling the moisture goes straight into crops and into pastures. It has done a wonderful job. Many crops—particularly east of the Newell Highway and in the Central West, down through the south and in the Riverina—may yet be saved with 50 points of rain, which in other years some areas have had overnight. Direct drilling is a plus. On the other hand, direct drilling has restricted the run-off into farm dams. I have never seen conditions as bad. I can just remember 1944, when I was a little kid, when water took on a very high-profile.

I urge the Government to be cognisant of the problems created by lack of water and to assist farmers to prepare for the next drought, when this one is over, by providing further assistance for water facilities on farms and in towns. It is ironic that the Minister said today it is going to take another two weeks to lodge the application for funding from the Commonwealth Government. It took the Carr Government three weeks to work out the first one after it announced at the farmers conference that it was going to provide some assistance for the New South Wales drought. It took them three weeks to get that together, yet despite the bleatings of the member for Murray-Darling every other day in his local papers saying that the Federal Government has not responded, the application is not even in. I simply ask the Minister to tell us why he cannot do it? Can we give him a hand? Can I send him a couple of clerical people? Can I lend him a computer maybe? We are only too happy to be bipartisan on this issue. We will make some staff available and we will pop over, if he likes, and help him fill out the application. Even the Premier, when talking to John Laws in July, said with regard to the Federal Government:

Yeah, well that's right and I think it's just. John Anderson was right when he said what they've done on tax concessions for farm deposits is helpful and there's one billion dollars there, and the whole notion—and he's right to remind us of this...

So the Premier acknowledged in July, in that John Laws interview, participation by the Federal Government.

Mr Amery: The Federal Government did not put in the \$1 million, the farmers did.

Mr ARMSTRONG: I will talk to the Minister about that later. John Laws said in the interview:

If you were accustomed to giving 10%, why don't you agree to give 10% now and negotiate whatever is required later, so at least the help can start to go to them?

That was a reference to the negotiation between the States and the Commonwealth regarding financial assistance in exceptional circumstances. Only last Friday State agricultural Ministers rejected any extra funding towards proposed new and more generous exceptional circumstances relief arrangements. However, I should put on record that Mr Truss reassured farmers that the Commonwealth Government will continue to meet its obligations under the existing Commonwealth-State exceptional circumstances agreement. That is, the Commonwealth will continue to honour existing arrangements despite the fact that the States at the moment are playing silly politics over an additional 5 per cent of the business component.

I want to highlight a number of factors relevant to the drought that is affecting this State today. Firstly, we have heard the Minister give a litany of assistance that his Government has provided. He failed to mention some of the essential support industries. He failed to mention the harvest contractors—many of whom have multimillion-dollar machines, harvesting headers, tractors, trucks, augers, bins et cetera—who will not earn any income this year because crops have failed and will continue to fail unless they get some rain. The Minister has not mentioned spraying contractors. They have no work. The Minister did not mention suppliers of chemicals and grain for summer crops. He has not mentioned the rural distributors who are now in trouble. The Minister also did not mention the service centres that service farm machinery. I have had two calls in the past week or so from people saying, "We have X number of mechanics and people in our workshops, but we have no work. What do we do? Do we stand those people down? If we do, they may leave these smaller towns. Then how do we get them back when it does rain?"

I ask the Minister to consider the plight of those in the service industry, particularly machinery dealers. How are they to keep their expert personnel in country towns ready for when it does rain—because there is no

doubt it will rain one of these days? I also ask the Minister to take note of the question that I asked today. In it I requested consideration of the release of special water in the irrigation districts suitable for growing fodder, to provide fodder urgently needed for starving stock. The Lachlan, the Macquarie, the Peel and the Murrumbidgee are just some river systems which, if they receive water this year, could produce thousands and thousands of tonnes of fodder, lucerne in particular, and take the brakes off local economies that have been caused by the drought. I have had a couple of telephone calls today—and I will make more this afternoon after I leave this Chamber and return to my office—about two Warren people who have 800 cows that are currently calving between Eugowra and Cowra. They are out of fodder and water.

The Young and Forbes pastures protection boards have just closed their boundaries and there is nowhere for these people to go to find feed for their cattle. They may have the money, but they cannot buy any feed because it is physically not available. Particularly after last night, with 50 points of rain in the Lachlan Valley, within three or four weeks there would be available lucerne if just a couple of megalitres per hectare of water were put onto the lucerne flats throughout that valley. That may well save the 800 calves that I saw on the road the other day. There are 12,000 head of cattle walking in the Young pasture protection district today in similar circumstances. Many of those cattle came from the area represented by the honourable member for Murray-Darling earlier this year. Some have been walking for up to 12 months now. Most have been walking since late last summer.

The Minister mentioned kangaroos and emus. I ask him to recognise the effect on the food chain. As the kangaroos and emus are dying—many of them being struck on our roads—pigs are eating the carcasses, becoming fat and shiny, and their piglets are doing well. The drought is causing a massive environmental problem not only in the deaths of kangaroos and emus but in the increase in the number of pigs. There are pigs in places in this State where they have never been seen before. Wild pigs are at Boorowa, where I was years ago. They had never been seen in that area before. The honourable member for Londonderry might joke about this, but he should talk to the people of these districts.

I also ask the Minister to consider post-drought restocking grants, assistance with the restocking of breeding stock on farms, as well as assistance for the re-establishment of pastures. That will mean additional economists with the Department of Agriculture. I ask the Minister to re-establish the crop replanting scheme, which was used by previous governments of both Labor and Liberal-National persuasions. That assistance helps farmers with a cash flow to get their crops in. That cash flow is urgently needed by the farmers and the communities. I have mentioned the rural distributors, but I now mention stores such as Target in Condobolin. A couple of months ago that store was going to close, but the locals prevailed on Target to give them another six months. But how can a store like Target in Condobolin reach necessary figures if there is no cash flow in the community?

I ask the Minister to prevail upon his Government to recognise the plight of small business. The drought is being reflected in their cash registers, which have fallen silent. In a couple of months children in those towns will be leaving school and looking for jobs that will not be available in their towns. The social and economic impact of the drought across the rural community is dramatic. In the south of the State, in the higher country, if we lose crops east of the Newell Highway, the Government will have to take the brakes off completely and stop playing politics. I assure the Minister that the Federal Government has said in writing that if he does his homework and gets his application in, the Commonwealth will continue to meet its obligations. I look forward to the Minister getting his application in.

Mr BLACK (Murray-Darling) [4.15 p.m.]: At the outset I should say it is again a great honour to support my coalition colleague the Hon. Richard Amery, now the minister for droughts, in this particular matter. I might also say at the outset what a disgrace it is that yet again the Leader of the National Party hides upstairs and lets the honourable member for Lachlan carry the can and risk his reputation by trying to defend the indefensible in this Chamber in leading for the Opposition in this debate. As the Minister said, 82 per cent of New South Wales is still in drought, and just on 45 per cent of that part of the State is in the Murray-Darling. The whole of the electorate is now in drought.

Yesterday when I left Broken Hill at just on one o'clock the temperature was 31.4 degrees, there was a howling 44 kilometres an hour gale to the north, and the top of the dust storm just about reached the clouds. Yesterday some thousands of tonnes of the Western Division were transferred to Victoria. The drought is more than savage on the Murray-Darling electorate. It affects both rural and town sectors. I welcome the announcements made on 18 July at Bourke and on 29 July at Dubbo. I recognise the presence in the Chamber of the honourable member for Dubbo. In particular, I welcome the decisions of 26 August at Cobar—a town

which, as the Minister stated, hosted its first ever Cabinet meeting last Monday week. Many great announcements emanated from that meeting. At the meeting the Premier concentrated on drought, as had been recognised widely throughout the community before that. The reception given to the Cabinet meeting by mayor Lilliane Brady was outstanding.

Further, I welcome the decision of 30 August regarding beekeepers. I made representations in this matter on behalf of Lee and Bruce Hughson of Wanaaring to ensure that people could get subsidies to support the transfer of sugar solution for starving bees, which have no food because there were no blossoms to be found. The seriousness of the drought in the Western Division could be measured by the fact that many areas have three-year-old frogs that have not yet learned to swim. To the north and the south there has been a total failure of the wheat industry. For the first time in living memory the winter wheat crop of the north has failed, as has the wheat crop in the south. I noted a letter of the honourable member for Lachlan in the *Barrier Daily Truth*. It was factually wrong. I will deal with that matter on Thursday. As has been pointed out, every dollar put on the table for drought assistance to the pastoral sector is coming from the State Government. Not one cent has come from the Commonwealth Government. There is not one scintilla of evidence that it is coming from the Commonwealth.

Mr Armstrong: Point of order: The Minister has already said that he has not applied for any Commonwealth assistance.

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

Mr BLACK: Not one cent has come from the Commonwealth Government. Every dollar that is on the table has come from the State Government. That is the fact of the matter. The New South Wales Government has not asked for a 50 per cent contribution from the Commonwealth Government. I thank the honourable member for Lachlan for raising exceptional circumstances [EC]. New South Wales Labor Government has stated that it will pay 100 per cent, and that is what is happening now. To return to the Leader of the National Party, George Souris, I publicly invited him to intervene in this matter with the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, and the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Warren Truss, but there was not a whimper, not a word. Ask the Namoi ground water irrigators what they think about John Anderson!

The issues were, first, the 50-50 contribution by the Commonwealth Government and the New South Wales Government. Yesterday's announcement by Warren Truss indicates that he has backed out of it. He told the ministerial meeting in June that he would not back down, but only yesterday he reneged. He reassured farmers in a press release that the Commonwealth would continue to meet its obligations under the existing Commonwealth-State EC agreement. That is a backdown, but the Commonwealth Government has not backed down on the stringency of the EC conditions and 12-month decision-making period remains. In conclusion, I simply point out that the area I am pointing to on this map qualifies for EC drought relief as we speak, whereas the second map shows the areas that are potentially eligible for EC financial assistance over the next few weeks. That is an insult to the people of western New South Wales.

Mr WEBB (Monaro) [4.20 p.m.]: I am pleased to join in debate on the drought that currently is adversely affecting most of New South Wales. It is somewhat ironic that my electorate of Monaro is not part of 82 per cent of the State that has been drought declared. However, without spring rains over the next few weeks, Monaro will join the many other areas of New South Wales that are suffering drought conditions. If the land-holders in my electorate are obliged to wait six months for financial or other support, they will join other farmers and organisations in this State that have been crying out for a long time for support from the Government and for workable eligibility criteria to be put in place. In support of their farming communities rural lands protection boards [RLPBs] across the State have queried some of those criteria. Today I was handed a letter from the Casino Rural Lands Protection Board which states:

At the August Board meeting the directors expressed concern at the 6mth period of drought declaration that would need to pass before assistance measures would be available to producers in the Casino RLPB.

The same story can be told by all rural lands protection boards across New South Wales. Farmers who support those boards are making similar calls. In an emergency meeting yesterday the National Party called on the State Government to authorise the emergency release of water so that fodder can be provided for drought-affected stock, crops can be watered to provide grain and next season's planting can be undertaken as soon as possible. Incentives must be provided for perennial pasture establishment and renovation, yet many pastoralists throughout the State continue to be disadvantaged by the provisions of the Native Vegetation Conservation Act, which have made it virtually impossible for them to rejuvenate, replace or replant pastures. Those pastoralists have to submit applications and undertake a set process simply to enable them to replace a pasture that has been decimated by drought.

I believe the Government does not understand drought, farming and management of the environment. If it did, it would have made an application to the Federal Government for exceptional circumstances [EC] funding long before now. The drought has been foreseeable for months, yet the Government continues to place disincentives before farming communities with measures such as the Native Vegetation Conservation Act, which began with State environmental planning policy [SEPP] 46—"You can't do this, and you can't do that, you have got to get permission to run your farm." No wonder we are in trouble! In addition, farmers have to deal with the Threatened Species Conservation Act and the Water Management Act. Farmers cannot even put dams in; they cannot drought-proof their properties.

Mr Amery: That is not right. We give farmers loans to build dams.

Mr WEBB: The Government's farm dams did not reach the percentage. The bureaucrats are running round this State telling farmers that they cannot build dams and that they should fill in their existing dams. Many farmers have been precluded from developing their properties to make them drought-free. The provision of water for stock, the cultivation of perennial pastures, haymaking and fodder conservation, construction of sheds and facilities to manage stock and crops during periods of drought have all been curtailed by the Government's action. All pastoralists know that this Government has provided little funding in local government areas for weed control; we know how much emphasis the Government has placed on the control of feral animals.

All of those adverse effects not only impact on farmers but have multiplier effects and spin-offs in local communities. The contractors, machinery dealers, small business people and service providers within vital country communities have been ignored. The Government should broaden the eligibility criteria for subsidies. The costs borne by farmers in providing replacement fodder, meeting agistment transport costs and transportation of water should all qualify for Government subsidies. As the honourable member for Lachlan stated, the control of diseases, such as ovine Johne's disease [OJD] and bovine Johne's disease [BJD], has resulted in restrictive zonings being imposed throughout the State which mean that pastoralists who are lucky enough to obtain agistment rights may be unable to have their stock returned.

Measures should be devised to drought-proof this whole State. With vision instead of regulations and by putting in place long-term strategies to drought-proof properties instead of hampering farmers' activities by bureaucratic control, that can be done. The goal is achievable through education and encouragement rather than resorting to bandaid solutions. In times of extreme hardship caused by drought, the rural community of New South Wales needs immediate assistance but also should be given incentives to drought-proof farms for the overall benefit of the State of New South Wales.

Mr MARTIN (Bathurst) [4.25 p.m.]: Once again the New South Wales State Labor Government has taken the lead in the provision of drought relief, despite the rhetoric of members opposite. Last week in Cobar the Premier announced another round of drought relief measures. Honourable members should make no mistake about those measures being sorely needed. I am sure all honourable members on both sides of the House agree with that. As other honourable members have stated, 82 per cent of the State is drought declared. Unfortunately, despite overnight rain in the Bathurst electorate and other areas of this State, there is no relief in sight from the drought, according to long-term forecasts. As Geoff File, the State's official drought co-ordinator, has stated, there is an increased chance based on past experience with El Niño events that next spring will be a continuation of dry periods throughout New South Wales. If that is the case, the future certainly looks bleak.

The good news on the drought has been that the State Government has put politics to one side. Unfortunately, members of the Opposition cannot follow suit. A roundtable conference to discuss the drought was held in Dubbo and attended by representatives from a number of government agencies as well as representatives of the New South Wales Farmers Association, financial institutions and local authorities. Rather than responding to sniping by members opposite, the Government has invited the Opposition to join in its efforts to seek financial assistance for drought-affected farmers, but members opposite seem reluctant to do that. If ever there was an occasion in which to put aside politics and adopt a bipartisan approach for the good of rural families, this is it, because it is that type of co-operation, underpinned by strong support by the New South Wales Government, that delivers results for farmers.

The New South Wales Farmers Association is to be congratulated on adopting a co-operative, non-partisan approach. I take this opportunity to congratulate Mal Peters on assuming the leadership of that organisation, despite recent lobbying by some members opposite at a recent New South Wales Farmers Association conference to ensure that he did not get the job. In the end, I am pleased to announce that he

prevailed. At the historic Cobar Cabinet meeting, Mal Peters delivered a keynote address. The rural Cabinet meeting was a demonstration of the way in which a good government responds during difficult times. The Government has taken advice from the experts and the local people and has acted to look after farming families who are most in need. From day one, the Government resolved to continue to work in partnership with farming families to devise more drought measures.

The Government has been as good as its word, and I pay a tribute to the Minister for Agriculture for the role that he has played. The first round of general drought assistance was announced on 18 July in Bourke and was followed by the roundtable conference held in Dubbo on 29 July, which was chaired by the honourable member for Dubbo. Subsequently the Minister for Regional Development announced a business drought assistance package to assist country business people during the crisis. Despite what has been said by the honourable member for Lachlan, the Government has recognised the flow-on effects of drought in regional towns and country areas. Under the State Government's relief package, country businesses which rely on farming incomes will be able to apply for payroll tax relief, and small country businesses will be able to apply for one-off grants to obtain expert advice on sustaining their operations throughout the drought.

That package is based on the successful model that was put in place by the Premier in December 2000 for businesses in New England which, ironically, at that time were hit by severe flooding. This package will have a crucial impact on businesses in the Central West. It will mean, for example, that local companies that sell farm machinery and local operators who maintain and service that farm machinery can keep on skilled workers during this period of drought. Local small businesses will be able to consult experts to get speedy advice on their operations or they can seek advice about ways of branching out into new product and services. That support has been acknowledged by the State Chamber of Commerce. The Chief Executive Officer of that organisation, Margy Osmond, said:

The Government should be commended—

that is, the State Government—

for realising the stress that country business is under as a result of this drought.

The New South Wales Government's business assistance package will help insulate both small and large businesses from the flow-on effects of the drought.

We heard claims from Opposition members that the Carr Government is dragging its feet in relation to the exceptional circumstance scheme. For the record, the Carr Government is not dragging its feet. An application on behalf of the communities of Brewarrina and Bourke will be submitted within two weeks—not a day later than it should be. What is the Federal Government's involvement in this scheme? If the exceptional circumstances scheme is implemented the Federal Government will be responsible for reimbursing only a small area of the State. So much for the Federal Government helping out all farming families! It is attempting to shift these costs back to the States. If the Federal Government is so concerned about farming families it should come to the party. It does not have to wait for the implementation of the exceptional circumstances scheme. As I said earlier, applications for exceptional circumstances will be submitted on time. This Minister deserves credit for ensuring that all the necessary processes are in place. I commend the Minister and the Premier for their action to date. I support the motion.

Mr McGRANE (Dubbo) [4.30 p.m.]: I support the urgent motion moved earlier today by the Minister for Agriculture. I support also the comments made by all honourable members in relation to the drought. Every drought is different, and this case is no exception. In my view politics should be taken out of this debate. Politics were certainly taken out of the roundtable discussion held in Dubbo on 29 July. That roundtable comprised people from all sectors of the community—businesses, the financial sector, local government and the grazing and farming industry. The Minister referred earlier to the statement made by the Premier after that meeting.

One matter that was not raised earlier by the Minister—road train access to Dubbo—was put up for consideration and debated at that meeting. Minister Scully agreed to road train access from Gilgandra to Dubbo, which will be of invaluable help in the transportation of stock to saleyards and abattoirs at Dubbo. More than two hours will be saved in the time that is taken to transport stock to Dubbo and producers will be paying between \$600 and \$800 to transport stock from the west and north-west of New South Wales through Coonamble, Gilgandra and then to Dubbo. Stock destined for Dubbo used to be transported through Warren, placing additional stress on stock and resulting in additional costs to producers.

I acknowledge that the Government is addressing some issues, but this drought is ongoing. The crux of this matter is that crops in the west and north-west of New South Wales are usually harvested in November and December. This year no grain will be harvested in those areas. The grain harvest in north west and central New South Wales generates a cash flow for all businesses in those areas. As I said earlier, this year no crops will be harvested north west of the Newell Highway and around the Gilgandra area, which will have a devastating effect on smaller communities and cities that service that area. No grain will be harvested until November-December 2003, which will put extraordinary pressure on businesses servicing those rural areas.

Only yesterday 11 employees were stood down in rural and associated businesses in Gilgandra, which will have a devastating effect on businesses in that area. These are only some of the problems that people in those areas are facing. They also have to face social problems such as the prospect of having no income for a long period. I am pleased that families in these areas are receiving support through government agencies, the Salvation Army, the St Vincent de Paul Society and Anglicare. However, much more has to be done. Various rural sectors and businesses need support and they must have access to finance. I am sure that the Government will address this issue in the near future.

The Government must work with lending institutions to ensure that people have sufficient finance to get them through this drought. More importantly, when the drought is over they will need finance so that they can restock their properties. The farming methods that are employed these days are very different from the farming methods that were employed in the past. These days non-traditional institutions are lending money to farmers and contractors, a matter referred to earlier by the honourable member for Lachlan. Farmers and contractors, who play a major part in the rural industry, need financial assistance from the Government to get them through this drought. The Government should provide a financial package to assist these important people in rural areas.

Mr HICKEY (Cessnock) [4.35 p.m.]: I support the comments made earlier in the debate on this urgent motion about the Government assisting farmers in drought-affected areas. Opposition speakers in this debate have claimed that the Carr Government is dragging its feet on the exceptional circumstances scheme. The Carr Government is not dragging its feet on that issue. An application on behalf of the communities of Brewarrina and Bourke will be submitted within two weeks—not a day later than it should be. Opposition members and the Commonwealth Government might claim that that is not the case, but they have no idea of the information contained in that application. There is nothing to stop the Commonwealth from announcing assistance completely separately from the exceptional circumstances funding.

The recent drought assistance measures implemented by the New South Wales Government are being assessed in 20 rural lands protection board areas across the State, or more than 60 per cent of the New South Wales land mass. More measures will be implemented if the drought drags on. At present 82 per cent of the State is in drought, and even if the New South Wales exceptional circumstances funding application is successful, it will apply to only 7 per cent of the State. At the moment no part of the State is receiving any Federal assistance. It is time that the Federal Government and members of the New South Wales Opposition stopped hiding behind the exceptional circumstances scheme and the politicking surrounding its funding formula. Members of the Opposition and the Federal Government are not offering any drought assistance apart from exceptional circumstances funding. I believe that is appalling. Today I listened to Opposition members putting forward all sorts of spurious arguments about the New South Wales Government while the Federal Coalition Government is not offering a cent in funding. The Government has put \$20 million on the table for drought assistance.

Mr Amery: Not a 5¢ coin.

Mr HICKEY: As the Minister for Agriculture said, the Federal Government has not offered a 5¢ coin. All sorts of suggestions were made earlier by Opposition members. Country Labor members accept that restocking is a great idea. However, why has no funding been allocated by the Federal Government? The Commonwealth Government has not allocated a cent towards that program. As I said, exceptional circumstance funding will cover only 7 per cent of the State, but 82 per cent of this State is drought affected.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Barwon will have an opportunity to speak in the debate. I suggest that he restrain himself until that time.

Mr HICKEY: The Cabinet met in Cobar to assess the situation. The Government is taking the matter seriously; it is not simply trying to play politics. An amount of \$20 million has been placed on the table for

farmers to access. Every cent of that \$20 million comes from the State Government; not one cent has come from the Federal Government. The Government lends money to build dams in an effort to drought-proof farms. To try to improve pastoral growth the Carr Government has made available seven times the amount of funding for weed control compared to what has been made available by the Coalition Government. The Federal Government has shown absolutely no vision.

On 18 July at Bourke the Government made announced the following measures: a subsidy for the transport of domestic water, a subsidy for transport of stock to slaughter, a drought inquiry hotline, meetings with welfare agencies, a commitment to provide additional funds to rural financial counsellors, and consideration of a deferral of Rural Assistance Authority [RAA] loan repayments. New South Wales Agriculture and New South Wales Farmers Association will work on exceptional circumstances applications, especially to gather data, and New South Wales Agriculture will work with the RSPCA. On 29 July a drought roundtable was held in Dubbo and the following measures were implemented: waiving lease payments for farmers on western land leases, waiving of Wild Dog Destruction Board fees, the provision of an annual allocation of \$1 million for an emergency feral pig and fox eradication program in the Western Division, the fast tracking of National Parks and Wildlife Service licence requests from drought-affected farmers.

Mr CULL (Tamworth) [4.40 p.m.]: I appreciate this opportunity to speak about the impact of drought, particularly in my electorate and the north-west region of New South Wales. The Government has been slow in recognising the impact of the drought, particularly on the New England and Tamworth regions. It is interesting to note that during AgQuip and an agricultural machinery display which was held in Gunnedah about two weeks ago, the Minister did not take the opportunity to come to Gunnedah so that he could talk to some of the concerned land-holders and farmers to get a greater understanding of the impact that the drought is having on the local regions.

Mr Amery: It's the only place I wasn't.

Mr CULL: It is the place you should have been. It is also interesting to note that the Country Labor tent, which was set up at AgQuip II, was closed on several afternoons. I believe the tent was closed through lack of interest. The area for which the Tamworth Rural Lands Protection Board is responsible has been drought-affected since January. From July it was eligible for the drought assistance that the Government is providing. This drought is unusual, as many speakers have said. Not only is there a feed shortage in the paddocks, there is also a water shortage and an extreme shortage of hay and grain for farmers to purchase to feed their stock. There is also a severe shortage of agistment. I believe that the only agistment available is in the southern areas of the State and there is little of that. Farmers are therefore left with little alternative about what to do with their stock.

That is why it was extremely important for the Government to have indicated earlier to the farming community the assistance it intended to provide. Farmers could have then made up their minds early as to what to do with their core breeding stock, particularly cattle and sheep. Farmers cannot plan without some security and understanding of the benefits that will be available to them. The irony of this drought in the Gunnedah and Tamworth regions in particular is the fact that it has occurred following two poor seasons. In December 2000 there was extensive flooding which caused a great deal of damage to the wheat crop. The 2001 wheat crop was also damaged by rain, and there is now a severe drought.

Whilst recognising the assistance that the Carr Government has provided at this stage, it has been negligent in relation to two matters. The first is the cropping industry. There will be no wheat crop in the north-west region this year. It is questionable whether farmers will have the opportunity to plant and harvest a summer crop. Farmers are suffering severe cash shortages. Not only have they outlaid the cost of planting their crops, they will go through the same problems when they plant their summer crops. At this stage those farmers are not entitled to any assistance. As far as the business community is concerned, the two measures of assistance the Government has provided are payroll tax relief for those with a payroll of \$600,000 or more and the provision of loans to smaller businesses to help them employ professional managers.

Few of the businesses we are talking about—spray rig operators, contract harvesters and farm machinery firms—fall into a category which will entitle them to any assistance. Contract harvesters and spray rig operators have not had any work for the past nine months, and it does not look like they will have any work until next year. It is important that the Government realises that the effects of this drought extend far beyond the farming community. It also affects those who supply product to the industry and those who service the industry. As has been pointed out, at the end of severe droughts such as the present one, pastures that have been established over many years tend to die out. When it rains these pastures will not regenerate.

It is important for the Government to realise that the farming community will not have the cash available to help regenerate its pastures, which are so necessary for them to get their core breeding stocks up to acceptable levels. That will have an impact not only on the farming community but also on the business community throughout regional areas. The Government needs to look closely at the assistance it is providing. Assistance needs to be provided so that the farming community survives this drought and is able to continue to farm in a viable way. Farmers and business people continually contact me saying that they are in a desperate situation and do not know where to turn for assistance. At this stage the assistance being provided by the Government is not helping them.

Mr ANDERSON (Londonderry) [4.45 p.m.]: I support the Minister's urgent motion. On 29 July the honourable member for Dubbo chaired a roundtable conference in Dubbo about the drought. Many offers of help were put forward at that roundtable conference. As other speakers have said, lease payments for farmers on western land leases were waived, Wild Dog Destruction Board fees were waived, and \$1 million was allocated for emergency feral pig and fox eradication program in the Western Division. That allocation did simply apply to specific parts of the State. My electorate of Londonderry, which is in western Sydney, comes under the jurisdiction of the Moss Vale Rural Lands Protection Board. Rural lands protection board officers have been hunting feral pigs in my electorate that have come onto farms because of the shortage of water. A Castlereagh farmer lost tens of thousands of dollars worth of corn because wild pigs are coming out of the national park and causing tremendous damage. Some farmers have refused to plant their watermelon crop this year because of the damage that is caused by the feral pigs.

On most Friday and Saturday nights the officers of the rural lands protection board hunt wild pigs, which are causing so much destruction in the farming community of my electorate. I was amazed to see the honourable member for Lachlan feign concern about my talking about feral pigs. The control of feral pigs is a major issue not only for rural parts of the State; it affects all of us.

All the initiatives introduced at the Dubbo conference were timely and worthwhile. The fact that the eligibility rules were revised from 12 months to six months increased the opportunity for farmers and rural workers to make claims on the Government for assistance where assistance is so dramatically needed. The drought does not affect just the western regions on the other side of the mountains; it affects my electorate also. There is no water in some of the creeks. For instance, so little water is flowing in Shaw's Creek at Yarramundi in my electorate that a number of forestry producers do not have a water allocation for this year's crop. We had to work particularly quickly.

I offer my thanks to the Department of Land and Water Conservation staff at Parramatta for the great assistance we received. Mr Wayne Connors, Mr Brian Graham and Mr Ian De Beuzeville assisted us to get these farmers access to water. I highly commend those officers. The creeks were dry. Twenty-seven jobs in my electorate would have gone by November this year if we had not got assistance. It shows what can happen if we all pull together to provide assistance to our farmers and rural workers who are in need. The motion the Minister has moved today raises an issue for everybody. We all have to work together to make sure we help where we can. Initiatives like that of the honourable member for Dubbo have to be supported and we have to work to make sure that these issues are addressed, and quickly.

Decisions from the Dubbo conference that I considered very credible were the 50 per cent subsidy on the cost of transporting fodder and water to drought-affected core breeding stock and on the cost of transporting drought-affected core breeding stock to and from agistment. There are many opportunities, and the Government has picked up that responsibility. Other honourable members in this debate clearly indicated the contribution of the national Government, but there is very little to be seen. [*Time expired.*]

Mr TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [4.50 p.m.]: Like other honourable members, I welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter for urgent consideration. The plight of drought-affected farmers needs urgent recognition by the Parliament, unlike some other matters that are debated here. Farmers in my electorate have welcomed many of the Government's announcements, and, as the honourable member for Londonderry pointed out, the drought roundtable meeting held at Dubbo, the work of the honourable member for Dubbo and the outcomes negotiated there. There has been a great deal of comment in my local media from the New South Wales Farmers Association, which indicated it played a strong role in negotiating some of the outcomes.

As other honourable members have pointed out, the experts who were assessing drought-affected areas said it was a very difficult job. The criteria made it difficult for them to look at an area and say it is all affected in the one way. That made it difficult for the rural lands protection boards to make their recommendations for

drought assistance and, particularly, for retrospectivity, which has been debated. I want to highlight the areas around Wallangra, Graman and the rest of C Division within the Northern Slopes Rural Lands Protection Board area and some other parts of the tablelands that have been mentioned. The farmers in those areas had the worst conditions on record yet were unable to access the support that had previously been announced. Retrospectivity is needed in the areas that have suffered the worst conditions and have not been eligible for assistance. They are not interested in a handout; they want to take corrective action to ensure that the negative impacts do not last years longer than they should.

I spoke with Wallangra grazier Brian McCosker, whose property has received only 157 millimetres of rain since mid-December, of which 75 millimetres were recorded in one fall. Several graziers in the area have had their stock on the road and were feeding in February. This is an emergency, to say the least. It was interesting to hear other honourable members say that the drought affected not just country people. The flow-on effects touch communities in metropolitan areas, because regional and rural communities and particularly the farming community make a substantial contribution to New South Wales and this country. It is important that we recognise that. When the impact is so negative it should not be the subject of partisan political debate. Some interjections and point scoring are understandable but we should consider the farming community and the impact on them first and foremost. I hope that some other areas can be considered for retrospectivity on their merits, because I believe there is a case for that in some areas of the North Tablelands.

The Federal Government should also make exceptional circumstance funding available for the drought-stricken farming communities, as honourable members on both sides of the House have mentioned. The honourable member for Lachlan is quite right when he says the impacts are very negative, but he held a different view when he was in government. It is important that we focus firmly on the farmers, the impacts, and corrective action; and governments at both levels need to consider the issues on their merit.

[Debate interrupted.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Routine of Business: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr Whelan agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow three additional speakers in the debate and for private members' statements to be deferred until the conclusion of the debate on the motion for urgent consideration.

DROUGHT ASSISTANCE

Urgent Motion

[Debate resumed.]

Ms ANDREWS (Peats) [4.57 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to support the urgency motion on the Government's response to the 2002 drought. I congratulate the Premier and the Minister for Agriculture on the quick response by the State Government to the current drought, which is affecting the vast majority of New South Wales. As honourable members have said, the drought affects not only farmers, their families and small businesses but everyone in the State. I take umbrage at some of the comments made by the honourable member for Lachlan about exceptional circumstances assistance. I hope that when applications for exceptional circumstances are submitted they will be far more successful than the application submitted on behalf of the Mangrove Mountain chicken growers, who faced the worst outbreak of an exotic animal disease that Australia has known since European settlement.

That application was submitted a couple of years ago with the co-operation of the New South Wales Farmers Association and the chicken growers themselves. All the "t"s were crossed and the "i"s dotted but unfortunately the Federal Government saw fit to reject that application. That placed a great strain on the chicken growers in my electorate. The Federal Government encouraged the farmers to make the application and it is a great shame that that Government did not see fit to approve that exceptional circumstances application, which would have helped those farmers at the time. Crookwell farmers who faced horrendous fires and farmers in the northern part of the State who were subjected to floods were denied exceptional circumstances funding by the Federal Government. The Government in Canberra can be very hard-hearted and mean spirited, but with the State facing probably its worst drought ever, I hope it will be a little more considerate and sympathetic on this

occasion. Once again I congratulate the Government on its quick response and the many relief measures that have been announced. They will assist farmers and small businesses. Just as importantly, they will also assist families affected by this disaster.

I draw the attention of honourable members to the booklet "Managing Drought", which was published in September 2002 by New South Wales Agriculture. Some 15,000 copies have been distributed. The booklet gives an outline to farmers in terms of planning for droughts, managing and feeding livestock, animal health and welfare, caring for the land in a drought, and the assistance available to farmers. The back pages of the booklet provide information on family counselling services, listing not only Government agencies but also a large number of non-Government agencies, including a number of religious organisations. That is a great asset for people to have in this time of distress.

If the Federal Government agrees to make payments under the exceptional circumstances scheme, that will benefit only 7 per cent of the State, although the drought is affecting 82 per cent of the State. I cannot see any reason why the Federal Government, with all its resources—honourable members should not forget that we all now pay GST on services and goods for which we did not pay tax previously—cannot afford to announce its drought assistance outside the exceptional circumstances scheme. It is a great shame that we have a Federal Government that is so mean, when so many people are facing great hardship. I point out that this State Government is assisting not only farmers but also businesses. Also, a number of organisations in my electorate of Peats—I refer in particular to the Ourimbah Lisarow RSL club—are assisting [*Time expired.*]

Mr SLACK-SMITH (Barwon) [5.02 p.m.]: I listened with great interest to the contributions of the honourable members representing the electorates of Murray-Darling, Bathurst, Cessnock and Londonderry, as well as to those of my learned colleagues on this side of the House. At the moment more than 82 per cent of New South Wales is in severe drought. This drought is even worse than the 1965-66 drought, in which I was heavily involved, and the drought in the 1940s. Many places throughout New South Wales have registered the lowest rainfall ever recorded in the history of New South Wales. We have a very serious situation on our hands. As the honourable member for Tamworth said, there will be no wheat crop this year and there will be no income in November-December, which is when local communities will feel the impact of the drought.

As honourable members are aware, agriculture is the biggest employer in regional and rural New South Wales. Anything that happens in agriculture has a devastating effect or a positive effect in our communities. Recently I learnt that 11 employees in the little town of Gilgandra have been dismissed because of uncertainty created by the drought. At present there is no feed for agistment anywhere in eastern Australia. Fodder prices have gone through the roof due to the scarcity of feed. People are transporting hay by road from South Australia to north-western New South Wales. In October last year I wrote to the Minister for Agriculture asking him to provide assistance to people west of Brewarrina who were carting drinking water and continue to do so. Their gardens have gone. I am not talking about drinking water for stock, I am talking about drinking water for their own consumption. However, I did not receive a reply from the Minister. This is typical of what this Sydney Labor Government is all about. It has simply ignored people in rural and regional New South Wales.

How much money have farmers received under the package announced by the Government? First, the Government announced that farmers could get a subsidy for sending their stock to slaughter. There was no subsidy for agistment, feed or transporting water. The first subsidy was for sending stock to slaughter. Then, as a result of increasing pressure from New South Wales Farmers and the Opposition, the Government included a subsidy for transport for agistment, transport for fodder and transport for water for stock. I do not know anyone who has received one cent. The State Government has not even applied to the Federal Government for exceptional circumstances. Yesterday the Federal Minister, Warren Truss, reiterated that he was willing to help and to provide funds, but he cannot do anything until the New South Wales Government gets off its backside and makes an application for exceptional circumstances.

Farmers in north-western New South Wales have been feeding their stock for more than two years now, and they have not received one iota of financial assistance. The honourable member for Murray-Darling criticised the Leader of the National Party for not participating in the debate. The Premier and the Deputy Premier have not participated in this debate to respond to the concerns that have been raised. The shadow Minister for Agriculture led for the Opposition in this debate. Many Opposition members would like to speak, but unfortunately the number of speakers is limited. I acknowledge the honourable member for Londonderry's comments about the wild pig problem. We have the same problem in the west. We have kangaroos and emus in the millions, and they knock down anything they cannot eat. It is a huge problem.

Recently the honourable member for Coffs Harbour told me that he has been carting drinking water for his household for the past three months. That is in Coffs Harbour! As honourable members know, the drought is

widespread. The honourable member for Cessnock referred to dams. I ask him how many dams this Sydney Labor Government has built since 1995. The answer is nil. How many dams is the Government proposing to build? The answer is nil. The Government should think about cloud seeding. Trials have indicated that it is a positive science that works, but this Sydney Labor Government has done nothing about it. I challenge the honourable member for Cessnock to tell us what he will do in the next few months.

Mr PRICE (Maitland) [5.07 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the Minister for Agriculture. I express considerable concern about the lack of support provided by the Federal Government in the face of the crisis that now faces agriculture in New South Wales. We are used to drought; it happens from time to time, just as we have bushfires that devastate the land and floods from time to time. Recently in the Upper Hunter a lot of sheep were given away and a significant quantity were shot because of a lack of feed and an inability to import local feed. Until recently the cost of transferring feed from other areas was prohibitive. I say "until recently" because the subsidies now apply. The drought is significant.

The honourable member for Barwon hit the nail it on the head when he referred to the kangaroo pestilence—I am not talking about a locust plague. Even in my part of the world kangaroos have become a major problem not only to people using the roads but to property owners in my electorate, where kangaroos in plague proportions have damaged fences. The Dungog shire has been badly damaged as a result of a request for the Government to deregulate the industry. For many months poultry farmers had a fairly rugged time because of uncertainty. While the electorate of Maitland is not a drought-declared area as such, it is extraordinarily dry. Allyn River is drying up quickly, and Paterson River has weak flows. Those two rivers will affect the water supply to the towns of Gresford and Dungog, although Dungog is on the Williams River, which is still flowing quite strongly.

Nevertheless, these problems are associated with the drought situation. There has been very little rain in the Barrington catchment and the forest is becoming extremely degraded as a result. At the top end of the State there are problems at Bourke and Brewarrina. The Culgoa River is suffering extreme difficulty because of the water problems in St George in Queensland, where there is a major problem with the Queensland Government endeavouring to purchase properties to reduce the amount of water, particularly for cotton production, and farm communities in that area are objecting strongly.

The Queensland Government's action is directly impacting on the availability of water on our western river network. More water from St George would allow for some irrigation and it would certainly contribute to the reduction in salinity. That opportunity is being denied to this State because of the indifference, I suspect, of many of the farming communities in southern Queensland. It is a pity they have not been able to sit down with their counterparts in New South Wales to try to work out a water supply program that would reduce the pressure on New South Wales farmers. Certainly the New South Wales Government has given a great deal of assistance to this State. I have heard some criticism today about the slow start, but that slow start, if it is true, and that is debatable, has certainly been reversed. The outcomes of the Dubbo roundtable conference that the member for Cessnock referred to indicate that farmers who are drought affected for six months will now have significant transport subsidies.

There is a 50 per cent subsidy on the cost of transporting fodder to feed drought-affected core breeding stock, the cost of transporting water to drought-affected core breeding stock, the cost of transporting drought-affected core breeding stock to and from agistment, and the cost of transporting stock from drought-affected properties to slaughter. Also, there is a 50 per cent subsidy on the cost of transporting domestic water to assist isolated land-holders to enable them to maintain an acceptable standard of living for their families. So it is not just a cattle thing. Droughts, as such, degrade the soil. There is no doubt about that. With the summer approaching and anticipated record temperatures and the usual westerlies coming through, there will be a significant degradation of the land in a number of those areas, particularly in the Western Division. Certainly with the prospect of significant bushfires again, that problem can only be exacerbated.

Mr R. W. TURNER (Orange) [5.12 p.m.]: There has been much debate today on what the State Government and Federal Government involvement should be, so I will not deal with that. Fortunately, it is raining in Orange today; I am sure it is raining on the roof of the Minister's office at the head office of the Department of Agriculture in Orange at this very moment. But it is still very light rain and we still need a lot more before we get over what we consider to be, in Orange, a moderate drought that stretches down through the rest of my electorate as far as Cowra. Whilst we might get some crops, they certainly will not be good crops; in fact, at present the canola is coming into flower far too low and the yields will be very low. But we hope at least that those farmers will get some crops.

Wyangala Dam is still moderately safe at around the high 30 to 40 per cent, and Burrendong is in the low 30 to 40 per cent, but I am concerned about the volume of water that is being let out of both dams for what this Government calls environmental flows. I think this Government should give some very serious consideration to adjusting those environmental flows and giving more to the farmers to enable them to grow more fodder to sell to farmers who can afford to buy it to keep their stock going during these dry periods. If the Burrendong-Wyangala area gets reasonable rain, it can supply a considerable amount of water for this purpose.

I would like to refer especially to cloud seeding. A couple of weeks ago I attended a seminar at the University of Sydney, Orange Campus, at which cloud seeding was discussed. It is worth noting that the previous government was carrying out very serious cloud seeding investigative programs in the New England area, but as soon as the Coalition lost government, the present Government stopped those experiments virtually overnight. We were reminded at Orange that the Tasmanian Hydroelectric Authority is still today carrying out cloud-seeding programs to supplement the water in their dams for the production of hydroelectricity. We were told that for every \$1 million that the Tasmanian Hydroelectric Authority spends on cloud seeding, it gets a return of \$20 million—a 20:1 return.

If the New South Wales Government had a positive program in the water catchment areas of our major dams there would now be a lot more water in those dams that could be released downstream to enable farmers to grow fodder to supply to the drought-stricken farmers further west. There are many contractors within my electorate who would normally be starting to harvest wheat and other crops in Queensland and then return south to be back down in their own areas by December. This year those contractors will not be taking their headers out of their sheds, but the lease payments on those machines will not stop.

We need to consider that because in 2000—if I remember correctly, things went reasonably well for them last year—they were stuck in mud and floods in the north west and they could not get back to the central west to take off their own crops. They had one disastrous season, then a moderate season last year, and this year they probably will not get any work. This Government should acknowledge the difficulties those contractors go through, as well as retail businesses, whose incomes have fallen considerably. I especially ask the Government to seriously consider—although it is probably too late to assist in the present drought—reintroducing cloud-seeding experimentation. Take advantage of the years of experience of the Tasmanian Hydroelectric Authority and introduce cloud-seeding programs into our water catchment areas so we can get more water into our dams that can be released to farmers to grow fodder.

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [5.17 p.m.]: I recognise the plight of all drought-affected areas, especially on the north coast of New South Wales. I join with all my colleagues in reiterating the needs of this State at the moment. We need a lot of help, especially for producers and small business owners. The honourable member for Monaro commented on a letter from the Casino Rural Lands Protection Board. I also received a copy of that letter. I was speaking to Steve Cansdell, the National Party candidate for Clarence, who is extremely concerned about the Grafton Rural Lands Protection Board. New South Wales Agriculture has declared only the area west of the railway line as drought stricken. The Pillar Valley, Tucabia and all the area east of the railway line are in severe drought, and the New South Wales Agriculture has virtually ignored the pleas of the Grafton people and the Grafton Rural Lands Protection Board.

Things are so bad at Grafton that the Grafton abattoirs had to close today. That is very sad because that means that in excess of 200 people are out of work because of the drought. Today in this House the Minister for Regional Development spoke about jobs along the north coast of New South Wales. Sadly the meatworks in his own electorate, a major employer in the electorate of Clarence, has closed, yet we talk about jobs in other parts of the area. We must continue to support these businesses. I want to place on record my concern for farmers, producers and small businesses alike in my electorate because they are desperate for help as well. I say they are desperate because they have a problem with bovine Johne's disease [BJD]. The Casino Rural Lands Protection Board is isolated by the BJD status and in most cases it cannot shift its cattle anywhere. If agistment were available, most producers would be in the unique position of not being able to shift their cattle, and that is of concern. The same applies with ovine Johne's disease [OJD].

I place on record also a plea for help from the Northern Co-operative Meat Company. Sue Ryan, a representative of the Department of State and Regional Development was at the company two weeks ago, when the company's concerns about the effects of the drought were expressed. We were seeking the payroll tax support announced as part of the drought relief package. However, that was a mere deferral of payroll tax payments, and companies will have to make those payments further down the track. That is not the kind of support that these big organisations need at this time. Already the Grafton abattoir has closed. The Casino operation is seeking urgent help.

These abattoirs are processing the same number of livestock that they were killing prior to the drought. Then, the yield from the boning room would have been 800 tonnes of meat. Now the yield from the same number of livestock is 500 tonnes of meat. Because of decreased yields the costs increase, making it impossible for the abattoirs to operate profitably. Operators in this field soon lose a lot of money. I repeat, the Grafton abattoir has already closed. The Northern Co-operative Meat Company has already spoken to a representative of the Department of State and Regional Development seeking help on not only the payroll issue but other issues as well. I am very concerned about the effects of the drought on the future of these businesses.

The Government should consider drought assistance not only for affected producers and small businesses up and down the coast and throughout New South Wales but for the Northern Co-operative Meat Company and other major employers who have payroll tax problems. This is one way in which the Government may be able to support them. However, it is of little use to give this support in six months time. Organisations such as those at Grafton and Casino need the support now to keep them viable. Support in six months time or the deferral of payroll tax payments for six months will not help them. They need support on the ground now. Farmers especially need freight and other feed support. I encourage the Government to look at ways in which it can support farmers and everyone else in small towns adversely affected by this drought. I urge the Government to get that support to them immediately.

Mr AMERY (Mount Druitt—Minister for Agriculture, and Minister for Corrective Services) [5.22 p.m.], in reply: In the five minutes available to me I will make a brief response to this very extensive debate regarding support of rural communities affected by the drought. I thank honourable members for the positive comments they made to bring to the notice of the House the various difficulties that their communities are suffering as a result of the drought. I will not be able to respond to all of their comments. However, I should say that all positive comments made will be taken into account as the drought is assessed and reassessed, following consultation with the Farmers Association. The honourable member for Lismore raised a good point about abattoirs being even more adversely affected than farms. The honourable member for Lismore and other honourable members highlighted that the effects are felt throughout the business community.

Some negative comments were made, particularly by the honourable member for Lachlan, who led for the Opposition in this debate. Not all of his comments were negative, but I think it is a bit rich for the honourable member to attack the State Government regarding the exceptional circumstances application process and then rely on an argument that the only responsibility of the Federal Government regarding the drought is to fund areas that qualify for exceptional circumstances assistance. If the State Government hid behind the exceptional circumstances concept and the national drought strategy, the only areas that would benefit from the announcements I made today would be the Bourke and Brewarrina rural lands protection boards, when exceptional circumstances are declared. Those would be the only people who would get assistance if the Government stuck by the exceptional circumstances criteria now recognised by the Federal Government and the honourable member for Lachlan. The exceptional circumstances component is very important. It has household income support, farm business support and so on.

The New South Wales Government's recent drought assistance, which I have already highlighted to the House, will not be paid to just 7 per cent of the State—as the only areas to qualify under the exceptional circumstances criteria in a couple of months time—but currently to 20 rural lands protection boards throughout New South Wales. This means that producers in more than 60 per cent of the State are eligible for this State Government assistance, and more will come on board every month as those areas go into drought for a period of six months. At the moment no part of the State—not one farm, nothing in New South Wales—is receiving any Federal Government assistance. I am not asking the Federal Government to fund exceptional circumstances assistance before it even gets an application. It would be absurd to do that. Many honourable members have raised issues about the effects of the drought on businesses, including abattoirs, and have raised issues about cropping and so on. There is nothing to stop the Federal Government doing as the State Government did, and coming up with its own unique, dedicated drought assistance package to assist all drought-affected areas of the State, not just those that qualify under the current exceptional circumstances criteria. It would be absurd for me to say that the Federal Government is at fault because it is not paying exceptional circumstances assistance when this State has not as yet applied for it.

In relation to an exceptional circumstances application, it is not just a case of me, as Minister, sending off a letter to the Federal Minister and saying that we want exceptional circumstances assistance for those two areas of the State because we believe they qualify. At the moment, exceptional circumstances are very difficult to establish. As the honourable member for Peats said, the greatest exotic diseases event in Australia's history did not qualify under the exceptional circumstances criteria. An exceptional circumstances event is a rare event which has a serious, long-term adverse impact on the viability of a farm business. Long-term adverse impact is often seen as a low or negative cash flow, certainly lower than the average income over the past five years.

The rare event component is demonstrated by climatic data, particularly rainfall data, and by soil moisture levels, pasture condition, dam and other stock watering levels, and general seasonal conditions. Farm business data generally is gained from farm surveys and data from the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics. The climatic condition required is a one-in-25-year event. A lot of technical data is involved. If I had the details available to me tonight I would prepare an application and have it driven to Canberra in the early hours of the morning. But that data is not before me at the moment. Whilst my office has made approaches to determine whether we can speed up the process, the advice to us clearly is that any political interference in the exceptional circumstances application could result in the application being flawed, and therefore rejected by the Federal Government. I do not believe we can put the welfare of farmers at risk by playing political games.

The honourable member for Lachlan and the National Party in particular have got to stop hiding behind the exceptional circumstances criteria. This has been bandied around before. If I applied for exceptional circumstances assistance tonight, and it was approved at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning, only the 7 per cent of the State in Bourke and Brewarrina would receive it. If it is the National Party view that the only obligation of the Federal Government to assist people affected by the drought is to fund according to its current exceptional circumstances criteria, then I believe it does not represent the farming communities in broader New South Wales. I thank all honourable members for their contributions to the debate.

Motion agreed to.

Pursuant to resolution business interrupted.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

NATIONAL RUGBY LEAGUE SALARY CAP

Mr GIBSON (Blacktown) [5.28 p.m.]: This evening I speak about the situation in which New South Wales rugby league finds itself. I refer to the issue regarding the Canterbury Bulldogs, a problem that arose from the salary cap on players. Many people in the Blacktown electorate who are supporters of the Canterbury Bulldogs ask why the club is in its present predicament. I do not for one moment condone what the club may or may not have done in relation to cheating on the salary cap, but rugby league has always been about the spectators, the fans, the supporters and the traditions of the game. Of course, it is about the players. Rugby league is the greatest game of all. It has survived world wars, the Depression and many other disasters, including Super League. I do not think the game can take much more.

It should be remembered that rugby league is the main football game played in New South Wales. The real losers in this conflict are the followers or supporters of rugby league and the game itself. To my mind, the best immediate resolution of the conflict would have been to impose a fine on the Bulldogs but for the team to remain in this year's competition—the players and supporters have earned that much—and participate under suspension next year without being awarded any points. Such a course would not penalise the players who have played so hard and earned points this year, and would not take away points that the team has already won. That would be a far better way to handle the resolution of the current conflict.

As I stated earlier, the real problem is the salary cap. I have always believed that a salary cap serves only to protect bad administrators. For argument's sake, I point out that a salary cap of \$3.5 million in Sydney should not be compared to a salary cap of \$3.5 million in Brisbane, Melbourne, Canberra or New Zealand. It is quite evident that the cost of living, prices, wages and expenses are much higher in Sydney than they are in other places. Salary caps are a joke. The National Rugby League [NRL] has to make a decision on whether it wants a professional game, a semiprofessional game or a game played by amateurs. I believe that in one way or another, most clubs have exceeded the salary cap. Canterbury was caught and will pay a very heavy price. There is no doubt that Peter Moore, who was a very good friend of mine, was probably the greatest league administrator ever. I also know Turvey, Steve Mortimer, very well. He is one of the greatest rugby league football players, and I am confident that he will do a very good job in leading the club.

If a club wants to spend millions of dollars on players and becomes bankrupt, so be it. The game should be strong enough to allow such matters to balance themselves out even though it may mean that in years to come only eight teams will be participating in the competition because only those teams have been able to

support themselves in a highly competitive environment. If that is the way rugby league is destined to go, matters should be allowed to take their course. Can honourable members imagine Lleyton Hewitt, who has earned prize money worth \$14 million, forgoing endorsements worth \$80 million or \$100 million? People such as Ian Thorpe, Grant Hackett and Pat Rafter, radio announcers and many other professionals are paid endorsements from all quarters, and that is as it should be. Why should rugby league players be treated any differently by what probably amounts to a restriction of trade?

The NRL must decide whether rugby league will become fully professional or face the consequences of dealing with salary cap conflicts over and over again. When the Canberra Raiders won the competition a few years ago I was very pleased for the players, but they had exceeded the salary cap. At that time the New South Wales Rugby League board decided not to make the fact public until after the grand final had been played. It is absolutely scandalous that the NRL has mentioned inspecting the tax returns of players. Canterbury has paid the harshest penalty of any sporting club. Honourable members should make no mistake—the real losers in the most recent conflict have been the supporters of rugby league, the greatest game of all.

DEATH OF Mrs LOLA DOROTHY WELCH

Mr O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai) [5.33 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House important issues relating to the death of Lola Dorothy Welch on 30 June last year. While walking along a footpath on Mona Vale Road, St Ives, Mrs Welch was crushed beneath the wheels of a 19-metre, 13-tonne truck accessing an infill State environmental planning policy [SEPP] 5 development. Mrs Welch's skull was crushed under the truck's trailers. Her injuries were so horrific that it took five days to establish legal identity and then only through the use of dental records. The driver of the truck involved in the incident had his licence suspended in September 2000. That means that at the time of Mrs Welch's death he was driving illegally.

Mrs Welch's death occurred at 12.20 p.m. on a Saturday. According to the conditions laid down for the development, work at the site should have ceased at noon. If those conditions had been obeyed, Mrs Welch would be still alive. Large trucks of the type involved in this incident regularly entered and left the development site. Despite their regular and illegal crossing the median strip of Mona Vale Road to make these manoeuvres, no effort was made to have a flagman on site to help with traffic control. No police enforcement of road rules was undertaken. A week after Mrs Welch's death the Coroner's Office advised by a letter dated 5 July 2001 that an inquest would be held at Westmead Coroner's Court. In another letter, the clerk of the Westmead Coroner's Court stated:

The death of your wife, Lola Dorothy Welch, has been reported to the Coroner at the Court. The role of the Coroner is to inquire into the cause and circumstances of her death.

Mr Welch desperately wants such an inquiry. He wants the full circumstances of the accident to be revealed and wants to ensure that no other family goes through a similar ordeal. Given these two letters, Mr Welch was surprised to receive another letter on 6 September advising that following consideration of medical and other reports "the Coroner has dispensed with the holding of an inquest into the death of your wife". No other explanation was given. Following a call from Mr Welch to the Coroner's Court he received a further letter dated 19 September stating that the Coroner was satisfied that the circumstances were sufficiently disclosed and that there was no evidence to suggest that any person committed an indictable offence in relation to Mrs Welch's death. Mr Welch then set out to bring material he had collected about the incident to the attention of the court. In November last year, the court agreed that the State Coroner would review the matter.

One assumes that if Mr Welch was able to obtain this information so, too, could NSW Police, the WorkCover Authority or other State Government agencies, if they were doing their job properly. A month later Mr Welch was told that officers of the Coroner's support unit had been asked to investigate the circumstances of the death and report back to the State Coroner. This in-house inquiry would not have occurred without Mr Welch's persistence. The coronial system in this State—at least in this instance—seems to be seriously flawed if it has to rely upon grieving relatives to uncover information that may result in a proper investigation into a death. Mr Welch came to see me in June—days before the anniversary of his wife's death. No conclusion to the Coroner's investigation had been received; no inquest had been held. Mr Welch saw me after he had approached the honourable member for Dubbo, who separately raised the issue with me and provided me with documents about Mrs Welch's death.

Everywhere Mr Welch turned—the NSW Police, the WorkCover Authority, and the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] at Ku-ring-gai—he was met with hand wringing and blame shedding. His experiences reveal major problems in the way in which laws and regulations are enforced and the grey areas between rules where

nobody accepts responsibility. The Land and Environment Court—the body responsible for approving this and so many similar infill developments, against the wishes of local communities—certainly never accepts responsibility for the impacts of its decisions. After Mr Welch's visit I wrote to the Attorney General to try to obtain an inquest. Last week I received an undated reply from the Attorney. It advised that the investigations are continuing.

Nine months after Mr Welch was told that the Coroner was reviewing the matter, there has still been no resolution. The delay beggars belief. As a result of the death of Lola Dorothy Welch, Allan Welch has suffered through two ordeals: the aftermath of the loss of a loved one, and the ongoing failure of the State to investigate the death and take action against those whose actions, or inactions, contributed to it. No-one should have to go through what Mr Welch has been put through since the death of his wife. It has taken a personal and financial toll. More importantly, it highlights a disregard by relevant authorities to learn from the experience of Mrs Welch's death. For how much longer can we put up with a system in which a commercial driver can lose his licence, yet continues to work because employers are unable to check whether a valid licence is held?

For how much longer can we allow police, RTA and councils all to claim to have no responsibility for the way trucks and other heavy vehicles access, and operate on, development sites, despite development consent conditions and despite road rules? Mr Welch and the wider community demand action on these and other relevant issues. I draw the attention of the House to this matter today, the first sitting day in two months, to urge the immediate opening of a coronial inquiry into the death of Lola Dorothy Welch and to express my utter disgust with the delays, obfuscation and buck-passing which Mr Welch, who is in the gallery, has been put through over the past fourteen months. Lola Dorothy Welch deserves justice, the community deserves lessons from this tragic event, and Mr Welch deserves to have his life put back together. An inquiry must be held.

PORT STEPHENS ELECTORATE MEDICAL SERVICES

Mr BARTLETT (Port Stephens) [5.38 p.m.]: The Port Stephens electorate is struggling with a shortage of general practitioners [GPs], a problem that also confronts the wider community of rural New South Wales. On 27 February this year—as recently as seven months ago—I brought to the attention of this House the plight of my electorate as a result of the lack of medical services in Karuah following the death two months earlier of the area's only doctor. The situation is so bad that I recently presented to the Parliament a petition signed by almost every adult resident in Karuah and the surrounding area. It is now nine months since people in Karuah had a general practitioner.

Five months ago the chemist in Karuah approached me and said that her business was under threat because a doctor was no longer writing prescriptions for her. She gave me the telephone number of a doctor who wanted to practise in Karuah. I contacted that doctor and asked him what was stopping him from relocating to Karuah. One thing that is stopping this doctor from coming to Karuah is that Karuah is rated as an RRMA 2 or urban area. Tomaree peninsula, which is located nearby and which is classed as an RRMA 4 area, has about 24 doctors. Karuah, which is a much smaller area, cannot obtain the services of a doctor. An RRMA 2 doctor receives in the vicinity of \$15 for every patient visit. However, an RRMA 4 doctor receives \$24 for every patient visit. The doctor to whom I spoke said that one of the problems he would face would be that he would have to see many more patients before he could earn the required income.

The other problem is that the doctor requires a service provider number which he would have to obtain from the Commonwealth Government. That service provider number would be given to him for a period of only six months. So he would have to relocate his family, start up a business, put his kids into school, purchase a home and, six months later, lose his service provider number. The health system actively prevents a doctor from relocating in Karuah. Residents in Karuah have had enough. I attached a letter to the petition that I presented to Parliament which was written by Sandra Read of 14, George Street, Karuah, who states:

We are now entering the ninth month since the death of our Doctor, everybody in Australia and overseas know of our need it having been advertised on Television, Radio, Newspapers, Internet and Medical Magazines.

Earlier in her letter she states:

The current position is that... we have to advertise for a full month...

The people of Karuah need help now to obtain the services of a doctor. I refer also to the practice of bulk billing, which has ceased in many areas of Port Stephens. Doctors on the Tomaree peninsula do not bulk bill unless they

are required to do so because of the special needs of their patients. Doctors who are not bulk billing are not able to run their businesses because of insurance costs, staff expenses and building costs. On the Tomaree peninsula \$42 to \$46 is being charged for the provision of medical services. People have been forced to leave the area because they require more frequent access to medical services and they cannot afford to pay additional charges. Dr Chris Boyle of Raymond Terrace is reported today as stating:

The Federal Government has two reasons to be pleased with the fall in the GP bulk billing rate ("Sickest patients forced to pay extra"...). First, patients who cannot afford to see a Medicare-funded GP attend a state-funded public hospital accident and emergency department. This enables the Federal Government to shift the cost of medical care to the States.

Honourable members would be aware that the Minister for Health referred to that issue today in great detail. Dr Boyle continues:

Second, there is a fall guy: the GP can be typecast as a "greedy doctor". It is the children overboard tactic revisited—lies and someone to blame.

That letter was written by a doctor who is trying to provide a service to his community. [*Time expired.*]

Mr FACE (Charlestown—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Hunter Development) [5.43 p.m.]: I share some of the concerns expressed by the honourable member. As Minister for the Hunter it is a matter of real concern to me. I would not say that the area described by the honourable member is isolated but there are vast areas either side of the Port Stephens area that are uninhabited. Serious accidents occur on the roads running through that area.

Mr Armstrong: It needs a good bypass.

Mr FACE: As the honourable member for Lachlan said, a bypass is required in that area. In my traffic patrol days I patrolled that section of road. Karuah urgently requires the services of a medical practitioner. I am surprised that Bob Baldwin, the Federal member responsible for that area who has a lot to say about other issues—which is his prerogative—is not jumping up and down about this issue. He should work with the State member, regardless of political persuasion, to try to rectify this problem. People could be involved in accidents on that busy piece of road and they could require medical attention. While I would not say that that area is progressing in leaps and bounds, it has consolidated considerably in the last few years. Recently, when I was driving down side streets in that area I was surprised to see how many people have chosen to live there. This is an issue that certainly must be addressed.

AGED CARE SERVICES

Mr ARMSTRONG (Lachlan) [5.45 p.m.]: Tonight I refer to a letter written by the manager of the Young Retirement Village which states:

In February we unfortunately had an incident of aggression at the Village in which a 56 year old male resident in an unprovoked attack, punched a 93 year old female resident in the right breast. Fortunately, in this instance only minimal physical harm was sustained however the lady suffered severe shock and her family were understandably horrified.

Our actions following this incident have been plagued with red tape and bureaucratic "passing the buck". After the aggression incident we contacted police and were informed that it would be pointless to pursue any changes to due to the resident having a dual diagnosis of developmental delay and mental health history. We also contacted the local Mental Health Team requesting assessment and assistance to find alternative accommodation for the resident. The Mental Health Team completed their assessment and found that the problem was related to his developmental delay and therefore should be referred to Community Services (Department of Ageing & Disability). We then contacted the Cootamundra Office of Ageing & Disability for their advice and assistance. We were informed that we would have to apply for funding before they could provide any assistance as he was not a client of theirs. We proceeded to complete the numerous application forms and were told it would take several weeks for these to be processed. In the meantime we had arranged for the resident to be transferred to the Young District Hospital and all concerned were informed that the Village was not prepared to continue to provide residential accommodation for him.

Over the next few weeks everyone concerned became increasingly agitated as to the lack of progress we were making.

- the Hospital felt he should not remain in hospital
- the Mercy Care Centre would not accept him in care due to his aggression
- Lambing Flat Enterprises were unable to assist with residential accommodation due to history of aggression
- the family of the victim were increasingly worried that the Village would be forced to take him back into care under the terms of the Aged Care Act 1997.

During March the Department of Ageing and Disability organised an assessment to determine if he fell within their responsibility, the result of this was that it was not related to his developmental delay and therefore it was a mental health issue. Mental Health were asked to conduct a further assessment and once again stated it was not a mental health issue and referred it to the Aged Care Assessment Team. The responsibility of finding an alternative residential placement for the resident rested solely with ACAT and the Village, every attempt we made to find accommodation was met with the same response that due to history of aggression he would not be accepted. In desperation I contacted the Aged Care Complaints Resolution Scheme to seek their advice on accepting the resident back into care. We were instructed that under no circumstances were we to accept him back into care, however the ultimate responsibility for finding alternative accommodation did rest with the Village. We have not found a placement for the resident at a facility in Sydney and have effected his transfer.

Over the past couple of years I have heard about many similar sad cases involving residents of retirement villages. The Forbes resident to whom I referred, who was a well-known and lovely gentleman, lost his mental capacities and continually exposed himself. The retirement villages are at an absolute loss to know what to do with such residents. It appears that, first, the department will not take responsibility and, second, the required facilities are not available. In the case of the Young retirement village resident to whom I referred, the manager spent hours, perhaps even days, on the telephone trying to get information. Eventually, without any assistance from the State or Federal governments, she arranged to have the gentleman placed in accommodation in Sydney.

I ask that this half-way house matter be dealt with and that the State and Federal governments co-operate to find places for these unfortunate people and provide some sense of security for the management and residents of retirement villages. The problem is certain to increase. We have an ageing population and an increasing number of people going into retirement village accommodation. If the issue is not addressed, it will become even more critical. I urge the Government to take note of the matters I have raised. The Opposition is happy to work with the Government in an effort to overcome this problem for bureaucracy: given our ageing population we are failing to realise that a section of the community is in need. We are making it extremely difficult for the managers of retirement facilities and for the families of the residents.

SURF LIFE SAVING ASSOCIATION ILLAWARRA BRANCH

Mr CAMPBELL (Keira) [5.50 p.m.]: I wish to speak about the efforts of the volunteer surf lifesavers of the Illawarra branch of the Surf Life Saving Association during the 2001-02 summer season. The branch held its presentation awards at the Illawarra Master Builders Club on Saturday 13 July. I was pleased to attend the event and was grateful to my wife, who accompanied me on that occasion. It was a sentimental evening for Ken Sweeny, the retiring branch president. Ken had been the branch president for a number of years. During that time Ken contracted diabetes and was losing his sight. Despite his declining health, Ken continued to work hard in his role as president. Many people paid tribute to Ken's efforts. He was amongst a number of life members who were present on the evening. Other life members in attendance were Ron Bradley, John Meehan, Col Laughlin and Laurie Kelly, who was Speaker of this place for a number of years in the 1970s and 1980s.

A number of awards were presented on the evening. The nineteenth BHP Patrol Efficiency Competition Award was presented to the Bellambi Surf Life Saving Club. The BHP medal for the most outstanding patrolling member was presented to Linda Yeo, who is from the Bellambi club, a small club within the Illawarra branch. The club has only a few active members but has been very successful in patrol efficiency over a number of years. The Board of Life Saving Control Member of the Year Award, which was sponsored by Sydney Water, was presented to Gerald Davies, who is from Coledale. Sydney Water also sponsored the Most Improved Club for Patrols Award. It was pleasing that the Port Kembla club, which is undergoing resurgence in membership, was the recipient of that award.

Dianne Robertson from the Corrimal club was presented with the McDonald's Junior Volunteer of the Year Award. Dwyers sponsored the Most Improved Junior Club of the Year Award, which was presented to the Scarborough-Wombarra club. The Female Junior Lifesaver of the Year Award was presented to Casey Bowditch from the Towradgi club, and Anthony Astrall from the Helensburgh-Stanwell Park club received the Male Junior Lifesaver of the Year Award. John Meehan presented his own trophy for the Branch Championships Point Score Award to the Bulli club. The award was accepted by Grant Joy, the club president and long-time member of the club. WAVE FM sponsored the Surf Life Saving Illawarra Volunteer of the Year Award. Troy Johnson from the Woonona club was a surprised and humble recipient of that award.

The Rookies Lifesaver Achiever Awards have been presented for a number of years. Westfield has sponsored the Rookies program, which encourages juniors to move into the senior surf-lifesaving movement. The program has been very much an initiative of Ken Sweeny. A popular award on the evening was the Ted Marshall Memorial Medal for Illawarra Surf Life Saver of the Year, which was presented to Gerald Davies of Coledale. I congratulate Gerald on being presented with two awards on the evening. An important matter that

was spoken about on the evening was the development of a leadership group of five young surf-lifesavers, a group that has been involved with the board of management in designing programs and supporting the Rookies program.

The program is about ensuring interaction between the junior and senior levels of surf-lifesaving at the Illawarra branch. Ken Sweeny is to be congratulated on that initiative. As I have said, on the evening many tributes were paid to the work of Ken Sweeny, who has been a life member of the Illawarra branch for a number of years. He has also been the branch president for the past four or five years and is still working hard despite failing health. Ken's efforts were well recognised on the evening, and rightly so. I offer my congratulations to all surf-lifesavers who contribute to our community, particularly those from the Illawarra branch.

FULLERS ROAD, CHATSWOOD

Mr COLLINS (Willoughby) [5.55 p.m.]: The State has just experienced the driest winter on record since 1895. The drought that ravages so much of the State has probably played a role in keeping road accident statistics down in many areas, because wet roads obviously contribute to a higher accident rate. Today I speak about wet roads in my electorate, in particular Fullers Road, Chatswood, which, as a secondary artery, does not have any speed obstacles such as chicanes, roundabouts or speed humps. I do not argue that the road should have those sorts of traffic obstacles, because it conveys a substantial traffic volume through my electorate and intersects with the Pacific Highway at Chatswood.

However, it has been drawn to my attention that there has been a spate of accidents on Fullers Road, and I wish to bring the matter to the attention of the Minister for Roads. I brought this matter to the attention of the Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] and the Minister for Police on a previous occasion. I am advised that at present the accident statistics do not warrant intervention. However, I was recently advised by a Willoughby councillor, Councillor Terry Fogarty, that since the RTA or its contractor resurfaced Fullers Road some time ago there has been a spate of single-vehicle accidents every time it rains. It appears that the surface applied to the road is inappropriate. I understand that although the surface was designed to minimise noise, the surface water has increased, and when it rains the water is retained on the surface of the road and vehicles tend to aquaplane.

There have been a number of incidents in front of the petrol station at the corner of Range Road and between Park Avenue and Greville Street. I was advised that there have been a number of recent incidents in front of Mrs Michelle Warren's property on Fullers Road. I understand that recently two cars crashed through her fence. There have also been reports of cars slewing off the road at the corner near Mrs Warren's property when travelling uphill to Chatswood.

The reason I bring this to the attention of the Minister for Roads today is that yesterday, 2 September, two cars went off the road between 10.00 p.m. and 11.00 p.m. No damage was done on either occasion but one car ended up in Mrs Warren's driveway and the other on the asphalt part of her nature strip. It had rained for only about 10 minutes and the road was hardly wet. Obviously, there is a spate of accidents when it rains. The road surface there may well be contributing to, not minimising, the probability of accidents. It is a matter that the Minister for Roads needs to address urgently.

Fullers Road is a major secondary road, and takes a heavy volume of traffic. Although we may have been fortunate in one respect with minimal rainfall in recent times, inevitably it will rain again and when it does that road surface may well contribute to a further spate of accidents. We have been fortunate that those accidents have not resulted in any fatalities, but when motorists are using the road at or above the speed limit when it has rained and the road has become more hazardous, lives may well be lost. The Minister for Roads and the RTA need to urgently address this matter, which has just come to my attention. I hope the Minister for Roads will look at the matter and have the RTA respond to Mrs Warren and other residents as soon as possible.

HEATON PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr MILLS (Wallsend) [6.00 p.m.]: Last week I had the distinct pleasure of attending the opening by the Minister for Education and Training of the new \$2.3 million facilities at Heaton Public School. The school was rebuilt following a fire in 1999 that destroyed almost all of the previous school. The new facilities are of terrific quality. They are of modern design and incorporate the latest in new technology. They represent a good win for the students of that area, as well as the parents and the local community. The ceremony was chaired by year 6 student Kate Gillard, who also moved the vote of thanks. Principal Brendon Daley welcomed people and I introduced the Minister, who officially opened the facilities and unveiled a plaque. School Council President Mrs Jenny Brockelsby made a speech of appreciation to the Minister.

The school captains, Melissa Callen and Adam Griffin, made a presentation to the official guests. The Minister got a baseball cap and I was pleased to receive a little satchel with "Heaton Public School" written on it. A giant balloon was released, along with some subsidiary balloons and a 2½-metre long banner that said "Heaton". The balloon took off into a slightly cloudy blue sky. I am told that for environmental reasons the balloon would explode at a height of 4,000 metres. If it got a little higher it may have blown all the way to Heaton, which is a suburb of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in the United Kingdom. There would have been a great celebration if it had done so. The Minister cut the official cake and the school choir presented an excellent item *What a Wonderful World*.

Among the other guests present was Janina Sulokowski, the Acting District Superintendent of the Department of Education and Training. I was pleased to meet Mrs Erika McLuckie, whose husband, Merv, was the first principal of Heaton Public School more than 40 years ago. Also present was Barry Corlis of Jesmond Lions. The Lions raised \$3,500 for books immediately after the fire so that a temporary library could start the following year while the school was made up of demountables. Next week is Education Week. Heaton is a shining example of the strength of public education in New South Wales. The strength is the people involved: the teachers, the school leaders, the parents and the community. Working together and with dedication we can achieve such wonderful outcomes for the children. These outcomes were on display that day.

I thank the people of the community of Heaton Public School for what they did for their kids after that fire in December 1999, their commitment, co-operation, courtesy and care. I spoke about that in the House in April 2000. We now know the tremendous way the teaching staff, the staff of the Department of Education and Training and many adults throughout the school community made special efforts, both organised and informal, to reduce the trauma of the kids. A great deal of trauma is visited on the kids when virtually the whole of the school is burnt down. That trauma was reduced and by the beginning of the following year the kids had a positive outlook. At a Christmas party after the fire one of the kids asked Santa Claus for a new school for Christmas. He has it.

The people to be thanked are Laurie Tabart, the District Superintendent of Education; Louise Ferguson from his office; John McConnell, the principal of Jesmond High School, which is next door to Heaton Public School; the officers of the Department of Public Works and Services; the school steering committee and Anne Littlewood, Ross Hopton, Betty Crockett, Barry Wheeler, Jenny Brockelsby, Richard Farrell, Sonia Barnes, Ron Robinson, Garry Butt and Neil Foster. Many of them were on the delegation I took to the former Minister for Education and Training, John Aquilina, in June 2000. I thank John Aquilina for his efforts. I thank Transfield for the great work it has done. I thank Narelle Hunt, who was the acting principal for 2001, and I particularly thank the Minister for Education and Training, the Hon. John Watkins, for doing the honours at the opening last week.

Mr WATKINS (Ryde—Minister for Fair Trading, Minister for Corrective Services, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) [6.05 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Wallsend for that acknowledgment. It was a sad and tragic day when Heaton Public School burnt down, but from the ashes has regrown a stronger school community. It was a happy day at the Heaton Public School when I officially opened the new facilities, which cost \$2.3 million. It now has state-of-the-art buildings for good teaching and learning. The warmth of the school community and the happiness on the faces of the children will stay with me. Buildings are important but the real heart of our education is the relationship between teachers and students and between teachers and the school and parent communities. That day it was obvious that those relationships are extremely strong. They have been through the fire and have come out stronger.

I acknowledge the work of the principal and the staff members in rebuilding the school, working through holidays and putting in so much of their own time to get the school back on track. I thank also the administrative staff of the school for their efficient and swift completion of the huge task of ordering and receiving and getting the school back on track. It was delightful, with the school captains, to let go a huge balloon to commemorate this happy day. The honourable member for Wallsend has been active and has a great deal of support in the Heaton Public School community, as he should. He has worked so closely with the community. Education is improving in the Newcastle and Wallsend areas, and the reopening was a great day to visit the area.

KINGSTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOL

Mr TORBAY (Northern Tablelands) [6.07 p.m.]: When I recently visited Kingstown Public School in my electorate I found the students in the middle of two projects. One was on local government and the other was

"Why I Like My School". They had prepared for my arrival with a long list of questions about my job. I am used to being quizzed about being a member of Parliament, particularly in primary schools. However, at Kingstown school I found not only the usual barrage of questions but also that the students had a great deal to tell me. Indeed, they had so much to tell me that I told them to write it down and send it to me so that I could read it out in Parliament. Today I will fulfil that promise; I think it will be an eye-opener to honourable members representing metropolitan seats who spend a lot of time discussing disciplinary problems and safety issues in their local schools.

Kingstown Public School has 32 students and two full-time teachers. The only disciplinary problem they have had this year was dealing with a student who dropped a popper drink carton in the grounds on two consecutive weeks. The principal, Vicki Holman, said the reason there are few disciplinary problems is that the students make their own rules at a special meeting at the beginning of each year. They make sure the rules are kept because they own them. The students also choose the books in their library. Each student is allocated \$30, and the whole school takes an excursion to a Tamworth bookshop to select the books. Most of the students travel to school by bus, with some leaving home as early as 7.25 a.m. There is virtually no truancy.

The school community, although small, is supportive and this year has raised \$4,000 for the students in years 3 and 6 to take an excursion to Newcastle. The parents and citizens raise an additional \$3,000 a year to assist with equipment and other school needs. Parents come in regularly to support reading classes. So this is a school that writes its own rules and has its own code of ethics. It encourages students to be assertive, to have a go, to be proud of their achievements and not to miss out on anything. The letter they sent me after my visit should encourage all those who support our school system. The letter stated:

The things we didn't get to tell you about were what it is like being at a small country school. We thought we would write this letter so we could tell you now. Living in the country is a lot different to the city. We can see the advantages of living in the city but we do not really believe that we miss out on too much.

We believe that we have a great school for these reasons:

- We keep our school clean
- We wear our uniform with pride
- Everyone listens when someone else is speaking
- We get a good education
- Our parents are involved and support our school
- We do what we are meant to do
- The children at our school are always cheerful and happy
- We are good sports
- Our captains look after us
- We are proud of ourselves
- We have good teachers
- We always do our best
- We respect and welcome visitors and new students
- We all help each other
- We have good friends

Kingstown is a small and happy place and even though we are a long way from town we do lots of interesting things. Each year we have a big dance which is organised by the Student Council. We put on a concert in which every single child has an important role. We have big sports days with other smaller schools in our area and we go on great excursions.

At school we have quiz championships, art shows, an international dinner once a term and we raise money for Stewart House. Next term we hope to have a walkathon through the bush—this too will raise money for Stewart House.

In class every single student in this school does the very best work they can do. We put our work on display and each term we publish a magazine.

At present we are considering all the different ways to make our school looked better. The students in our school make these decisions and we take our ideas to the P&C who then have working bees to complete the jobs.

Our major project is to extend our shade areas in the school because it gets very hot in Kingstown. We are hoping to cover our assembly area and basketball court with proper covers so that we can have a shady and dry place to play.

This is proving to be very expensive and we are trying very hard to raise more funds so that we can pay for the project. We are hoping that the Department of Education and Training will provide us with some of these funds.

In this place we spend a lot of time discussing what is wrong with our education system. Today I present a lot of things that are absolutely right. I am pleased that the Minister for Education and Training is in the House. Kingstown is a proud school with proud students, quality teachers and caring parents. I hope that the Minister's contribution can assist this school in its cause.

Mr WATKINS (Ryde—Minister for Education and Training) [6.12 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Northern Tablelands for bringing Kingstown Public School, which is a unique school, to my attention. It sounds like another jewel in the crown of our public education system. It was great to hear the letter read out. I ask the honourable member to pass on my best wishes to those 32 beautiful students at Kingstown school. Schools like this give students a positive attitude towards education that they carry through their lives. The school community, the parents and students, are dedicated to working together to create a nurturing environment at the school. We have more than 2,200 schools in New South Wales. Each one of them is unique in caring for students and giving them the best start in the life.

As Minister for Education and Training I am privileged to visit schools throughout New South Wales. There is something special about our country schools, especially our small country schools. I have visited some schools with as few as 11 students; the largest school I have visited had 1,700 students. Each of those schools, and everything in between, is dedicated to the future of their students. In particular, the teachers deserve to be praised and acknowledged at every turn. They are dedicated and caring individuals. The teaching profession in New South Wales is wonderful. Teachers are doing a great job. Indeed, the literacy results at the end of last year showed that New South Wales leads the world in literacy. So I thank the teachers, especially those at Kingstown Public School. It is heartening to hear about this harmonious and pleasant place. I hope that at some stage during my time as Minister for Education and Training I am able to visit Kingstown with the local member. I especially thank him for his energetic work on behalf of his community generally and his schools in particular. Once again I thank the honourable member for telling us about Kingstown Public School.

NAMBUCCA VALLEY MARINE RESCUE ASSOCIATION

Mr STONER (Oxley) [6.14 p.m.]: I raise an issue concerning the Nambucca Valley Marine Rescue Association. As the title suggests, the association is a rescue squad situated at Nambucca Heads on the beautiful Nambucca River. It performs an extremely important role on that stretch of coastline between Coffs Harbour and South-West Rocks, and provides a marine rescue service for areas including Stuart's Point, Grassy Head, Scotts Head, Gumma, Nambucca Heads, Valla Beach, Hungry Head and Urunga. The Nambucca Valley Marine Rescue Association is strongly supported by the local community, including Nambucca Shire Council, the Banana Coast Community Credit Union and members of the community generally. In 1999 the association raised \$30,000 towards the purchase of a new rescue boat, an aluminium Stobiecraft. In that vessel the squad performs numerous marine rescues in and around the dangerous bars along that stretch of coast and further out to sea. Indeed, recently the squad assisted a large pleasure craft that had broken down.

The issue concerning the Nambucca Valley Marine Rescue Association relates to accommodation. The association is located on Nambucca River near the river mouth, and has a rather old, cramped and inadequate building. Although it is ideally located with its own ramp to enable a quick response to marine emergencies, the building is insufficient for that role because it is too small and has no facilities, including showers, for the squad members. Recently, the building was vandalised. The association urgently needs to upgrade and extend its accommodation. Indeed, it has received a grant of \$20,000 from the Volunteer Rescue Association [VRA] to do that, and it has the plans and is ready to proceed. It has sought some adjacent land from the Department of Land and Water Conservation, which has responded to Nambucca Shire Council, saying that it is prepared to give that land in exchange for other land held by the Marine Rescue Association.

The only problem is that the land they are seeking and for which they are prepared to swap other land has a three-metre tall mangrove tree right in the middle of it. The members of the marine rescue association have in the past allowed it to grow. The mangrove would have to be removed to enable the urgent extension of and upgrade to the building. This then becomes a Fisheries issue. I wrote to the Minister for Fisheries seeking approval to remove the mangrove. Both the Nambucca Shire Council and the Nambucca Valley Marine Rescue Association have suggested that they could propagate mangroves in front of the land they formerly held, which would be transferred to the Department of Land and Water Conservation.

They are offering a two-for-one deal so long as they can remove the mangrove to extend the building. I hope the Minister takes into account that this is an emergency rescue service that has, on numerous occasions, saved lives. We must place lives first. Both the squad and the council are willing to propagate additional mangroves in the adjacent area. I urge the Minister for Fisheries to approve the removal of this one mangrove tree to enable the provision of suitable accommodation for the Nambucca Valley Marine Rescue Association.

ASHCROFT HIGH SCHOOL

Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [6.19 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House and the Minister for Education and Training the request by Ashcroft High School for the construction of fencing and gateways at the school. The school community is firmly of the view that such facilities are needed, and I am only too happy to

convey their request. One issue is that the geographic location and physical layout of the school seem to encourage intruders to enter the school grounds. The intruders include not just people using the school grounds as a shortcut, but also those entering the school grounds for more nefarious purposes. This can be particularly disconcerting when it occurs in school hours.

Geographically, it should be noted that public access to the school is physically possible from a number of different directions. People can access the school from five different points. Maxwells Avenue, on the generally northern side of the school, is at the front of the school. The eastern side has two separate places of access. One is a pedestrian laneway that extends from the school oval to Stanwell Crescent, exiting opposite Wilberforce Street. Such laneways are characteristic of the suburbs developed in Green Valley in the 1960s. Many have now lost their social utility and they have been closed. The other access site on the eastern side of the school is from open land abutting the school, separating it from Stanwell Oval.

On the western side of the school access can be gained from another pedestrian laneway, Eureka Crescent. There is also open ground which allows access to the school from the direction of Edwin Wheeler Oval. Additionally, at the rear of the school is a footbridge over Cabramatta Creek, which allows access between the adjoining suburbs of Ashcroft and Cartwright, which would otherwise be separated by the creek. Currently, most of the school has various wire fences around it. The fence around the oval can be easily jumped over. Access points along that fence allow people to enter the school. The access points provide a multiplicity of places for intruders to enter the school grounds. Equally important, however, is that they reflect the many routes that intersect at the school, which make it a very convenient and attractive short cut.

Unauthorised entry to the school grounds has resulted in a very direct financial cost. I have seen the list of security breaches for the last 12 months that have resulted in property damage. This adds powerfully to the case to provide adequate appropriate fencing. During the period 12 June 2001 to 12 June 2002 windows were damaged in 14 separate incidents, which resulted in a repair bill of \$3,825. That is not the only property damage the school has sustained. Fence panels, a skylight, a locker and padlocks have been damaged. Panels in a roller door had to be repaired. In addition, graffiti had to be removed. The repair bill totalled \$6,785. Obviously, the construction of an adequate security fence would reduce dramatically the likelihood of anything else like this happening and, thus, save money on repair bills.

It is not just physical damage to the school, but also the disruption to the life of the school that is a problem. As I indicated earlier, a number of people use the school as a thoroughfare. It suits them to use it as a convenient short cut. This can be a real problem during school hours. It can interrupt physical education and sports lessons. To exacerbate the situation, when intruders are confronted often they completely disregard requests to stay off school grounds, and they continue to disrupt classes. These cases are even more serious if the unauthorised entrants are intoxicated or under the influence of various substances, which can lead to offensive behaviour that is very disruptive.

The scale of the problem can be seen from some of the problems the school has had to deal with over the past 12 months. A lounge suite was dumped on the oval and set alight. The butchered remains of a sheep were left on the oval. Spot fires were lit on school fields during the night. Garbage has been dumped in the school grounds. The position is well expressed in a letter to the security unit of the Department of Education and Training by the school's then relieving principal, Gary Joannides, which states:

I am extremely concerned by the number of intruders/trespassers who use our school as a thoroughfare. The dreadful event at Miller Public School on the last day of school of 2001 vividly demonstrates the potential dangers that exist when unauthorised people come onto school grounds.

Since our meeting I have met with the Deputy Principal, General Assistant and PE staff to discuss and to quantify the number of intrusions per day. Our observations based on many years of experience indicate a minimum of six trespassers per day. In fact, it is often much more than this. The General Assistant in 1998 did begin to keep a log of intruders, but ceased as it was too time consuming. These intruders' behaviour include:

- abusive language
- drunken behaviour
- drug influenced behaviour
- disrupting PE/sport lessons
- lighting fires
- riding motorbikes through school grounds
- dangerous behaving in cars
- damaging school property

I have personally witnessed and experienced all these types of events in the five-years and particularly in the last 12 months.

Schools are very safe places for children and students. Generally, they are much safer than the outside community. One of the reasons for that is that there is, and needs to be, a constant effort to maintain that situation. In that spirit I particularly encourage the Minister for Education and Training to look favourably upon the school's request.

ST ANTHONY'S PRIMARY SCHOOL, MARSFIELD

Mr TINK (Epping) [6.24 p.m.]: On behalf of Ian and Deborah Mooney of Eastwood I raise the need for improved road safety around St Anthony's Primary School at Marsfield. St Anthony's is located near the intersection of Agincourt and Balaclava roads. A letter from Mr Mooney states:

While a 40 kph limit has been imposed on Agincourt Road outside the front of the school, this limit increases to 50 kph immediately prior to the round-about/intersection with Balaclava Road. Balaclava Road runs with a 60 kph limit, although it is common to witness drivers exceed this limit, particularly through the pedestrian crossing which is to the north of the Agincourt Road intersection.

As a member of the local traffic co-ordination committee, I hope you might be in a position to review if a 40 kph limit could be placed on Balaclava Road. I appreciate this road is a busy thoroughfare used by many motorists crossing through the area. Until such time as the often proposed County Road is eventually built, it must be accepted that the traffic volume will only increase and with this increased traffic comes the increased risk to our children. The impost of the 20km/h reduction in speed for a small stretch on Balaclava Road beside the school and including the pedestrian crossing to the north, is unlikely to delay drivers more than 20 to 30 seconds in their overall travel time. I have seen similar speed restrictions successfully imposed on much higher traffic volume roads, such as the 6 lane section of Kissing Point Road near Dundas Railway Station.

I would implore members of your committee to take the time to stand near this intersection and witness first-hand the speed at which some motorists negotiate it. If necessary, I would be more than willing to discuss this further with your committee members.

I have also raised this matter with the Minister for Education and Training, the Hon John Watkins, who represents the electorate of Ryde. He has been supportive of the approach to council. As a result, the matter was listed at the traffic committee meeting last week. The attached papers from the council state:

Balaclava Road is a Regional Road and has a speed limit of 60km/hr. There are some accident problems at the Balaclava Road/Agincourt Road roundabout. Council has previously requested that traffic signals be installed to overcome the accident problems and to assist pedestrians. The pedestrian crossing north of the intersection is controlled by a crossing supervisor during school times.

No doubt there are vehicles exceeding the speed limit in both Agincourt Road and Balaclava Road. It is proposed that a 40 km/hr School Zone in Balaclava Road be supported and the request be referred to the RTA for consideration.

That matter was considered by the traffic committee, which noted that Balaclava Road is a regional road with a 60-kilometres-an-hour speed limit. Although there is a school boundary on Balaclava Road, there is no entrance to St Anthony's Primary School from this street. It was also noted that the approval for the installation of a 40-kilometre-an-hour zone had to be referred to the Roads and Traffic Authority for determination. I understand there is some issue about putting 40-kilometre-an-hour zones on a street from which there is no entrance to a school, even though the school may bound the street, as in this case. However, I have a good personal knowledge of this part of Balaclava Road and there is no question but that children not only use the Agincourt Road crossing but also cross Balaclava Road. This is highly dangerous, notwithstanding the best efforts of the person who acts as traffic control supervisor.

I think we have made out a very strong case. Notwithstanding that it does not come directly within the 40-kilometre-an-hour school zone guidelines, the case is nonetheless meritorious, particularly as about half the school population tend to cross Balaclava Road to the north and to the west of the school. The committee strongly supports the recommendation and members of Parliament strongly support the recommendation. I understand that the Roads and Traffic Authority representative, Mr Ken Moon, an outstanding officer, also supports the recommendation. I raise the matter in the hope that the Minister for Roads will favourably consider this proposal at the earliest opportunity. I draw this matter to the attention of the Minister in the hope that a 40-kilometre-an-hour zone will be installed on Balaclava Road outside Saint Anthony's Primary School, notwithstanding that the school does not strictly comply with the warrant. I ask the Minister for Roads to take heed of the request that both the honourable member for Ryde and I make and to accept this recommendation at the earliest opportunity.

Private members' statements noted.

[Madam Acting-Speaker (Ms Beamer) left the chair at 6.29 p.m. The House resumed at 7.30 p.m.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Routine of Business: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr Whelan agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow the order of the day to be read for Government Business Order of the Day No. 2 and for the member for Port Macquarie to speak again in the debate.

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS

Financial Year 2002-03: Take-note Debate

Debate resumed from 28 June.

Mr OAKESHOTT (Port Macquarie) [7.30 p.m.]: A great deal has changed since the budget was handed down. Many projects have been delivered in the Port Macquarie electorate over the past few months since the Budget was delivered in this Chamber. Most significantly, about one week ago the Minister for Transport announced funding of \$3.2 million for Stingray Creek bridge. I thank the Minister for that funding. The bridge, which divides the communities of North Haven and Laurieton, had major concrete cancer and structural problems. A feasibility study undertaken by the local council indicated that \$6.4 million was needed to completely replace the bridge. I am pleased that the State Government, through its budgetary process, has agreed to contribute \$3.2 million to work on the bridge. That significant amount is greatly appreciated throughout the Camden Haven region.

An announcement has finally been made that the extension of the Oxley Highway into Port Macquarie from the doughnut to Wrights Road will go ahead. These roadworks have major planning and safety implications for the entire community of Port Macquarie. As it is situated on the coast, Port Macquarie cannot grow further east, and it cannot grow further north because of the Hastings River. The options for growth are west and south. There are huge demands being made to expand further west. The council and the local community, through private developers, have been keen to have subdivisions in the area. Until the planning directions about the realignment of the Oxley Highway were made, the council put development plans on hold. That delay has resulted in land shortages and a whole range of planning problems, so I am pleased that the announcement has now been made. The \$80 million project will take several years to complete, but finally the ball is rolling and that will enable growth issues to be resolved at the local planning level.

Recent announcements for projects in the Manning Valley include \$150,000 for the construction of a walkway next to Cedar Party Creek bridge and a similar contribution for work on Charity Creek bridge. The Manning region, in particular, has a large number of issues about bridge failures. I understand that, after Kyogle, the Manning region has the highest number of bridges in New South Wales. There are many issues about the failure of all the bridges in the area, which are coming to the end of their lifespan. Last week a bridge went at Moto, and Duffs Bridge went the week before. Requests for funding for those bridges have been put before the Minister, and I hope he sees the value of provide support at a State level to their repair and maintenance. The communities that are divided by those bridges have been split.

I am very pleased that the Coopernook deviation on the Pacific Highway is to go ahead. When these roadworks are finished, the Coopernook Bridge will no longer be part of the Pacific Highway dual carriageway. The Coopernook Bridge is one of the worst black spots on the highway. Over the past five to ten years, under State and Federal governments, both Liberal and Labor, there has been a significant increase in improvements to the Pacific Highway. I believe that the roadworks on the Pacific Highway have been the greatest project of our time on the North Coast. The end of O'Sullivan's Gap and the Bulahdelah bends has resulted in a major improvement in travel for people on the mid North Coast.

Another significant step forward will be the end of Coopernook Bridge as part of the Pacific Highway. That work, which will be completed in the next couple of years, is greatly appreciated by the entire community. I acknowledge the bipartisan support and the work done by both levels of government on this project. The local community of Coopernook wants to maintain the Coopernook Bridge. As part of the Pacific Highway, the Coopernook Bridge is dangerous, but once the bypass is constructed the bridge will be suitable for local traffic, and the community wants to maintain it. I can see the value in retaining the bridge and I support the community's request.

Mr Gaudry: It is nice and close to the pub.

Mr OAKESHOTT: It is right next to the Coopernook pub, which is a very good pub. The bridge should be retained for a number of reasons. It is used for emergency services as the one way in and out, and it provides easy access during flooding. From a planning point of view, the Roads and Traffic Authority says that the loss of the Coopernook Bridge would significantly increase the travel time to Taree. Mid Coast Water runs its pipes into Coopernook underneath the bridge. It is willing to make a significant contribution, in the order of \$100,000 to \$150,000, to help manage and maintain the bridge and to build local trust, rather than undertake the costly exercise of knocking down the bridge and relaying the water pipes, with the associated problems created by rerouting the entire community of Coopernook. Although there have been many projects in the Roads portfolio, there is a great deal more to do. Roads throughout the local area require upgrading. Hastings Council and Greater Taree City Council have forwarded their proposals through me to the Minister. I hope that we get continued feedback and improvements in our local roads.

The mid North Coast renal health plan was announced in the past month to two months. That \$1.7 million plan, which was well received by the community, makes renal health one of the model areas of health care on the mid North Coast. The area has gone from having "urgent and crisis" status to now receiving appropriate levels of funding. I am pleased that our area has received funding for that service. Over the past six weeks our local area has received funding for a crime prevention officer and \$40,000 for the coastal walk. The coastal walk is potentially one of the most exciting projects in Port Macquarie. Within the next couple of years we will have one of the best coastal walks in New South Wales—from Town Beach to the lighthouse, through the Innes ruins and back into town.

If private landowners, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Department of Land and Water Conservation can reach consensus on the remaining 25 per cent of the walk it will become a very exciting project. It is also pleasing that a full-time film and television officer has been appointed to serve the entire mid North Coast region. It is expected that the two films and up to 15 advertisements that will be produced in the region each year will result in the establishment of a small film and television industry in the area. I am pleased to acknowledge the appointment of 19 police officers to the region—10 officers to the Manning district and nine to the Port Macquarie police commands—and that the Police Accountability Community Teams [PACTs] will be announced this week. These Government announcements have been pleasing for the community on the mid North Coast and reflect, I hope, the effectiveness of changed representation. Having said that, I also recognise that much remains to be done by the Government.

The mid North Coast area is screaming for assistance in the provision of health services. Mental health services in Port Macquarie and the mid North Coast area generally are in desperate need of support. The fact that the inquiry by the Legislative Council Select Committee on Mental Health has received more submissions from Port Macquarie than from any other area of New South Wales demonstrates two things: that the Port Macquarie community is very active, which is good, and that there is a great need in the Port Macquarie community for mental health services, which certainly is not good. I hope that the parliamentary committee members and the Minister for Health are listening to the continued cries for support from mid North Coast areas because in regional areas the provision of sufficient mental health services and facilities is literally a matter of life and death.

Recently a court case dealt with an individual who arguably, with appropriate mental health care, could have been prevented from murdering his family. It is all very well to draw conclusions with the benefit of hindsight, but the huge demand for mental health services on the mid North Coast cannot be ignored. The need is clearly manifested in tragedy after tragedy and in police officers and ambulance officers screaming out for support. Mental health workers are currently unable to schedule patients due to the private ownership of the Port Macquarie Base Hospital. The people of the Port Macquarie electorate need support from the Minister and the Government in the delivery of a quality mental health care plan for Port Macquarie and the mid North Coast.

A company named Sagacious contracted with the Port Macquarie Base Hospital outsourced the provision of food to the hospital. Local businesspeople who supplied milk and fresh fruit and vegetables have been caught by the collapse of the company after it supplied food to Mayne Health for only three months. As a result, approximately 10 small businesses are out of pocket to the tune of \$40,000. A local milk supplier stands to lose \$4,500 and the loss could break him. I am pleased that Mayne Health is making payments directly to the suppliers since Sagacious folded, but there is a gap in payment for a couple of months. If the matter is not resolved, community debate may intensify on the issue of the Port Macquarie Base Hospital being treated differently to other public hospitals in New South Wales. I had hoped that interest would have moved beyond that debate.

I will hold the Government to the words of the previous director-general who compiled the area's four-point plan. He made it clear that the Port Macquarie Base Hospital would be treated no differently to any public hospital in New South Wales. If the four-point plan is to have any worth and merit, the State has an obligation to underwrite payment to individual suppliers, just as it would for any public hospital in New South Wales. The matter is not as simple as a three-month gap in payments and the collapse of a company; it is all about the role of the State in ensuring that the Port Macquarie Base Hospital is treated no differently from any other public hospital in New South Wales. I hope that the words of the four-point plan and the words of the Minister and the Government which have indicated that the hospital would not be treated any differently from any other public hospital will become the reality so that community concerns and the concerns of out-of-pocket suppliers may be alleviated. An ongoing debate surrounds the provision of radiotherapy services on the mid North Coast.

Mr Fraser: It is coming to Coffs Harbour.

Mr OAKESHOTT: I acknowledge the interjection by the honourable member for Coffs Harbour. The relentless problem of the politicisation of the provision of clinical and health care is extremely frustrating, especially for clinicians, specialists and the oncology team that is based in Port Macquarie. I acknowledge that very strong arguments may be advanced in support of the location of radiotherapy services at either Coffs Harbour or Port Macquarie, but the existence of the college of specialists tips the balance in favour of Port Macquarie. In such circumstances, I would hope that the entire community of the mid North Coast would support the location of radiotherapy services in Port Macquarie. I mention that issue because it is a persistent factor in determining the provision of services throughout regional and rural New South Wales.

I am disappointed that a representative from Port Macquarie was not included in recent area health board appointments. I am sure that applications for appointment were submitted by residents of Port Macquarie, yet no-one from the Port Macquarie electorate was appointed to the board. The current board has some members who are residents of Port Macquarie, but no residents from Port Macquarie are to be included in the new board's membership. It is frustrating to have to deal with continued politicisation of the area health boards, despite all the assurances given by the Minister for Health that appointments would not be a political exercise. The practice has continued, without regard for the health needs of the local communities, and politicisation seems to be for the purposes of sorting out local politics and self-advancement for some individuals. I had hoped that a resident from Port Macquarie would be included in the appointment of the 12-member board. If the Minister needs to undertake another round of appointments I would happily support that move. I hope that residents of Port Macquarie who submitted applications are successful in being appointed to any position that remains to be filled.

In the time that remains, I will deal with the education issues affecting my electorate. As a result of the Southern Cross University's withdrawal from the Port Macquarie area—which disappointed everyone—the North Coast Institute of TAFE has developed relationships with other universities to create a tertiary institution on the mid North Coast. I am pleased that a close relationship has developed between TAFE and the University of Newcastle through the funding for academic positions. An announcement is imminent relating to the delivery of university services in Port Macquarie which, as the largest population area north of Newcastle, is certainly deserving of a university.

Recently the Minister for Education and Training visited my electorate. I was pleased that he was able to meet with every school principal—no mean feat. I emphasise that despite increases in the population and consequential infrastructure demands, several issues remain to be addressed at all local high schools in my electorate, including the need for planning of new schools. I refer particularly to the Lake Cathie primary school and the need for improvements to existing school sites. Port Macquarie High School is a good example. It wants to rejig the site layout but is consistently frustrated by a lack of money and support. Wingham Brush school has some major structural problems that fall into the occupational health and safety category. These matters and those of the existing primary school must be addressed.

I must mention several people from my area who have died or been seriously injured in accidents in the past few days. Last Saturday I was involved in a rugby match during which a man from Kempsey died in a tackle. The death of Kullen Beathe was a great shock to the mid North Coast rugby community and to the communities of both Kempsey and Port Macquarie. His funeral is to take place on Friday and a coronial inquiry is currently under way. Our thoughts are with his family at this sad time. On the same day Alan McCabe from the Southern Cross university team was choppered to Sydney with a broken back and I understand that his diagnosis is not good. Our thoughts are with him and with the Coffs Harbour community at this time. Finally, I learned recently that an old flatmate was involved in an accident that has left her in a coma. My thoughts are with my good friend Gemma Daley and her family, to whom I send my best wishes.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Yeadon.

BILL RETURNED

The following bill was returned from the Legislative Council without amendment:

Young Offenders Amendment Bill 2002

KYOTO PROTOCOL**Matter of Public Importance**

Mr YEADON (Granville—Minister for Information Technology, Minister for Energy, Minister for Forestry, and Minister for Western Sydney) [7.52 p.m.]: I ask the House to note as a matter of public importance the need for Australia to ratify the Kyoto protocol and the impact of this protocol on New South Wales. The Coalition is failing the people of New South Wales, particularly the people of rural New South Wales, by refusing to ratify the Kyoto protocol on greenhouse emissions. The Prime Minister's pig-headedness means that carbon credits generated in New South Wales will not be able to be counted under the protocol. This means that New South Wales and the rest of rural Australia will miss out on the opportunity to make the most of investments in renewable energy and forestry plantations. Australia is in the embarrassing position of having everyone from the *Australian Financial Review* to Greenpeace pointing out the impact that this will have on investment—an impact that is apparent to everyone except those opposite. Perhaps they can see it as well but are choosing to ignore it and what it means for rural New South Wales. Last week the front page of the *Australian Financial Review* stated:

Investment is suffering because Australia won't sign the Kyoto Protocol.

This week Greenpeace referred to Australia and Canada as "America's poodles". Greenpeace went on to say that Canada and Australia:

... just sort of follow along licking at their heels and occasionally get kicked in one direction or another.

It is simply not good enough. Country Labor recognises that rural New South Wales deserves more: We deserve a policy that benefits rural Australian communities not the United States of America. That is why the Carr Government has worked hard to provide leadership on greenhouse issues. We set up the Sustainable Energy Development Authority, provided loans and grants to renewable energy projects, worked with business to reduce not only its electricity bills but its greenhouse gas emissions, and we will introduce greenhouse benchmarks for electricity retailers to take effect from 1 January next year. Most importantly for rural New South Wales, we have led the way in developing the carbon market. In fact, New South Wales took the lead internationally by introducing world-leading carbon rights legislation. This has given us an incredible first-mover advantage in developing an environmental services market—an advantage that is being whittled away by Howard. As the Australian Conservation Foundation points out in today's *Australian Financial Review*:

Why is Australia working to block some of our most innovative companies' access to these opportunities and literally driving them overseas?

State Forests has already seen more than \$9 million invested in plantations by international companies such as the Tokyo Electric Power Company. There is more investment on the horizon, with future deals worth up to \$120 million. There is potential for much more. I am pleased to inform the House that the New South Wales Government has made an agreement that will see 500 hectares of hardwood plantations established on the New South Wales mid North Coast. The new plantations will be established under the new forestry investment program developed by N. M. Rothschild and Sons (Australia) Ltd. I am advised that there will be a new job for every 50 hectares of plantation, so 10 jobs will be generated by that initiative. This investment is worth more than \$1 million. Rothschild is a leading financial institution that has chosen to make its first move into timber plantation investment on the New South Wales North Coast. Rothschild has contracted State Forests of New South Wales to establish and manage the plantations.

As I have said, this investment will establish 500 hectares of new hardwood plantations on land west of Taree. State Forests will plant up to seven species of eucalypt known to grow well in that area. The venture aims to provide solid returns to investors from the production of high-value sawlogs and veneer logs when the trees reach about 30 years of age. However, there would be even more benefits with an international market for the carbon stored in those trees. I mention this new investment because if the Federal Government were to ratify the Kyoto protocol it would be possible to sell that carbon on the international market. Although there are emerging markets and possibilities for alternatives within Australia, unfortunately the Federal Government is impeding

the development of these markets. The New South Wales Government, however, is continuing to work with the investment sector to accelerate this kind of forest investment and to look for innovative market opportunities—especially opportunities to generate environmental benefits through carbon sequestration, salinity control and land repair as well as traditional financial returns. Indeed, these opportunities extend to the development of an environmental services exchange—a green stock exchange—and the establishment of Sydney as an environmental services hub for the Asia-Pacific region.

Just last Friday Rothschild announced an Australian first, the Carbon Ring Consortium, which will give companies the opportunity to examine carbon: its risks, opportunities and potential benefits. The Carr Government is talking about its benefits, which are real. They should be available to us now, generating country jobs and investment, if only Howard would get out of the way. We must ratify the Kyoto protocol if Australia is to build on this opportunity and gain access to the international market arising out of that protocol. That is something the Prime Minister refuses to do. Unless we ratify, New South Wales will lose its first-mover advantage. Markets are developing quickly in the United Kingdom and Europe and if we do not move now investment in rural and regional Australia will suffer.

It is particularly galling for New South Wales to see the position adopted by the Federal Government. This Government has worked over a number of years to ensure that New South Wales is well placed to capture the emerging environmental services market. We have been so diligent in our work in that regard that we are recognised as world leaders in putting together wide-ranging initiatives—not simply the practical application of planting trees on the ground as an environmental service but also ensuring that we have taken care of legal and protocol issues. We have put into legislation carbon rights that are quite separate from timber rights.

Our approach will result in securing enormous investment that would be directly beneficial to rural areas throughout Australia. As rural New South Wales is suffering the effects of a drought we must diversify and be innovative in our primary production. We will benefit not only from extraordinary investment. This is no pipe dream. As I said earlier, the Tokyo Electric Power Company deal has been in place for a number of years. Tonight the Government announced another deal that has been secured with Rothschild. Nobody can say that this is a pipe dream or that it is pie in the sky. This is real investment for New South Wales that is occurring now.

At the same time as we are generating income in rural New South Wales we are dealing with a range of environmental issues. Greenhouse gas emissions, or reducing carbon emissions, is just one such issue. Just as importantly, the planting of trees will solve many wider environmental issues such as salinity and soil degradation. If we take into account the benefits to be achieved for rural New South Wales there is no argument for not pursuing this area. The only thing that stands in our way at present is the Federal Government and its head-in-the-sand approach to the Kyoto protocol. I call on Howard to ratify the Kyoto protocol.

Mr D. L. PAGE (Ballina) [8.02 p.m.]: I indicate at the outset that it would have been desirable if all the countries that participated in the Kyoto protocol actually signed it. The reality is that they did not. The situation is much more complex than the one just outlined by the Minister. Climate change, an important issue, must be tackled in a way that encompasses all major global greenhouse gas emitters. I stress that this is a global issue; it is not just a State or a national issue. It is important that we approach this issue on a global basis but also on a fair and economically efficient basis.

The Kyoto protocol does not at this time provide an effective framework. It will make only a modest contribution of around 1 per cent to reducing the growth of global emissions. Even as a first step it does not provide a clear path towards developing countries' commitments. The United States of America has indicated that it will not ratify the protocol. Together those countries already produce most of the world's greenhouse gas emissions—an important point to remember. Most of the world's greenhouse gas comes from countries outside the Kyoto protocol. So far the protocol processes have offered no real pathway to bringing them in.

The protocol does not include the world's biggest emitter—the United States—which contributes about 25 per cent of the world's greenhouse gases, nor the major developing countries, in particular, China and India, which together with other developing countries will be the world's biggest emitters within a decade. It is fair to say that the Federal Government has taken a decision not to ratify the Kyoto protocol because, under present arrangements, it is not in Australia's national interests to do so whilst both developing countries and the United States are not included in the protocol.

If Australia were to abandon its long-expressed and clearly articulated requirement for a more comprehensive global response it would send a signal to investors that Australia was prepared to expose itself to

binding legal commitments that could in the future impose costs not faced by neighbouring regional economies. For Australia that is not a trivial matter; it is a significant issue. Investment in greenhouse intensive industries such as natural gas, alumina and aluminium production, coal, paper and metal processing, is of great significance to our economy. Furthermore, our processing industries are relatively energy efficient.

Any greenhouse penalty not shared by our competitors could see Australia lose plants offshore with no benefit to global greenhouse effort. For example, the new steelmaking technologies being adopted in Western Australia are among the most greenhouse friendly in the world. Any shift in this production offshore would cause significant harm to the Australian economy but undoubtedly would also increase global greenhouse gas emissions. At the same time, many of the greenhouse gas emissions arising in Australia help others to lower their emissions.

For example, Australia's recent success in concluding a liquid natural gas [LNG] deal with China will mean that, although Australia will emit around 1.5 million extra tonnes of carbon dioxide annually to produce the LNG, China will emit seven million tonnes less than if it had used coal. The global atmosphere benefits even though Australia's emissions have increased. Australian industries are world leaders in greenhouse responses. They should not be penalised when there will not necessarily be a benefit in global emission reductions.

Many of the countries that would benefit from investment leaving Australia have lower emission standards than Australia. It remains in Australia's interests to have an effective international response to climate change. The Federal Government will continue to work in international forums and co-operate with major strategic and trade partners to address climate change. The climate action partnership between the United States and Australia is a practical collaboration that will advance Australia's efforts to address climate change.

The United States and Australia have agreed on 19 projects under the partnership, which includes exchanging experience on the research and development of hydrogen fuel cells and clean coal technologies and facilitating the installation of sustainable remote power in developing countries. Even though Australia is not signing the Kyoto protocol, it is within striking distance of its greenhouse gas emission targets which were expressed at the Kyoto protocol—those targets being 108 per cent of 1990 emissions over the period between 2008 to 2012.

On current policy settings, Australia is projected to reach around 111 per cent of 1990 emissions by the end of the decade, which is far closer to Australia's 108 per cent target than many climatic change commentators have predicted. Even though Australia has not signed the protocol it is getting close to what the protocol requires. We are still a fair way from meeting the final time horizon. Australia's economy is becoming less greenhouse intensive with projections showing a 43 per cent improvement from 1990 to 2012, which is significant.

The Federal Government's \$1 billion investment in greenhouse programs is having a major impact on emissions, saving annually 60 million tonnes of greenhouse gases by the end of the decade. That is the equivalent of taking all cars off Australian roads. Furthermore, the Federal Government has achieved these gains without sacrificing Australian jobs and whilst maintaining one of the highest rates of economic growth in the developed world. Now, with the \$12 million national carbon accounting system, Australian scientists have developed the world's leading system and delivered it two years ahead of schedule and with capabilities extending far beyond its initial scope.

This system will enable us to include, for the first time, accurate emissions for land-use change which is necessary to calculate our 108 per cent target. Without the action taken by the Federal Government over the last six years Australia's greenhouse gas emissions would grow to 122 per cent of 1990 levels by the end of the decade. The Federal Government has also announced the way forward for Australia both in bridging the final 3 per cent gap to meet Australia's 108 per cent emissions target and positioning us for a strong competitive economy and an even lower greenhouse gas signature for the twenty-first century.

The 2000 national greenhouse gas inventory, the third national communication report and the land use change estimates from the national carbon accounting system are now available. For the first time we have a clear picture of where Australia has been and where it is going with emission trends. As recently as today an article appeared in the *Australian Financial Review* by Professor Warwick McKibbin, Professor of International Economics at the Australian National University which related to the approach commonly adopted and which reflected the Minister's comments about how the Federal Government is dragging the chain in signing the Kyoto protocol. Under the heading "Kyoto approach all too familiar", the article states:

To think that we must act quickly to create markets within a very badly designed Kyoto system is fundamentally misguided. The Kyoto edifice will fall because it is fundamentally flawed. Thus all the current enthusiasm about trading Kyoto credits within that framework is extremely risky and unsound.

That is an important point, but even though Australia has not signed the protocol we must acknowledge the need to reduce greenhouse gases. It is a global issue and the Federal Government is more than willing to make its contribution. Indeed, it has already done so. However, it urges the American, Chinese and Indian governments to sign off on the protocol. Australia will strive for a more comprehensive global response to climate change, including all emitters, not merely signatories to the Kyoto protocol, while contributing responsibly to a global effort. For an effective global response the United States of America will be a key player. I strongly believe that the United States should also sign off on the Kyoto protocol.

The Federal Government will facilitate Australia's energy intensive and trade-exposed sectors to respond to the challenges posed by greenhouse gas emissions. The Federal Government will continue to encourage the development of promising low emission technologies, such as coal gasification, geological sequestration, coal gas to liquids and the hydrogen economy, based on the work of centres such as the CRC for Coal in Sustainable Development, the CRC for Clean Power from Lignite and GeoScience Australia. More than \$13 million has been committed to these projects and there will be strong focus under the climate action partnership agreement with the United States on technology development. [*Time expired.*]

Mr MARTIN (Bathurst) [8.12 p.m.]: I support the Minister on this matter of public importance expressing the need for Australia to ratify the Kyoto protocol and its impact on New South Wales. The honourable member for Ballina failed to point out that Australia has the highest per capita emissions in the world. I would be concerned if Australia did not sign the protocol because it slavishly follows the United States of America. We should certainly consider this matter independently because it is an issue for country New South Wales in particular—something that the Coalition does not seem to understand.

Only yesterday David Kemp, the Federal Minister for the Environment and Heritage, said that it did not make economic sense to ratify the Kyoto protocol. It is unfortunate that many communities will miss out on new plantations and, more important, new jobs because Dr Kemp and his Coalition colleagues are sitting on the sidelines and do not seem to understand the impact of not ratifying this protocol. The Federal Government would have us believe that Australia will meet its commitment under Kyoto to reduce emissions with or without our ratification. However, refusal to ratify will prevent investment in rural and regional areas, as international companies look to develop Kyoto-compliant offset mechanisms.

Until tonight we have not heard a peep on this issue from Opposition members. While they sit back and let country New South Wales cop it sweet, Country Labor is out in the community actively looking for new opportunities. Only last week the Minister and I made an announcement about the economic benefits of existing pine plantations for the Central West. Expressions of interest were sought for 450,000 tonnes of pine logs from the plantations, with the potential for the creation of more than 100 jobs. Although this is great news for my region, these benefits could have been significantly increased through carbon credits. Not only would the value of new plantations increase but a real, international carbon value would attract significant private investment in additional plantations, creating more jobs and wealth for the region.

This applies also to many other regions in country New South Wales—the North Coast, the Southern Slopes and the Central Tablelands in particular. The Tokyo Electric Power Company agreement [TEPCO], which has potential for up to \$120 million worth of investment in plantations in the Tumut and Tumbarumba areas and hardwood plantations on the North Coast, is a good example of this. Of course, this relies partially on whether TEPCO can count this under Kyoto and whether the Federal Government becomes a signatory. Such implications should be kept firmly in mind. This Government is acting on its commitments to the people in rural and regional New South Wales, but it continues to be hampered by the attitude of the Federal Government.

The honourable member for Ballina expressed the views of some academics but I could quote academics with a differing view. Recent activities in South Africa demonstrate how difficult it is to reach international agreement on sustainable development. Bathurst has traditionally been a coal-producing area, with two major power stations. Although they do contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, significant efforts have been made to clean up those power stations. Mount Piper power station has lower emissions than the Wallerawang power station. Extensive work has been carried out on ultraclean coal and the first shipments have been sent to Japan. Traditional industries need not disappear overnight, but we must show leadership and use our influence with the United States to persuade it to ratify the proposal. Australia should divorce itself from the economic argument, because there are arguments both ways, and this can be done without the economic penalties to which the Opposition referred.

Mr YEADON (Granville—Minister for Information Technology, Minister for Energy, Minister for Forestry, and Minister for Western Sydney) [8.17 p.m.], in reply: I did not intend to respond but after listening to the contribution of the honourable member for Ballina, I must echo the sentiments of the honourable member for Bathurst, especially those relating to leadership. The contribution of the honourable member for Ballina epitomises everything that is wrong with the National Party. No wonder it is increasingly on the nose among its own constituency! The honourable member for Ballina argues that this issue is the responsibility of others. It may shock him to learn that this is a global issue—and Australia is a continent on planet Earth.

Because of our small population on this continent, Australia does not have the overwhelming majority of emissions but, unfortunately, it does have the highest per capita greenhouse gas emissions in the world. The honourable member for Ballina presented a litany of excuses about why it is all too hard to deal with. He says: Let's just kick a few rocks down the road and see if the problem sorts itself out. That is the problem with the National Party. The same thing happened with the forestry industry. For seven years under the former Coalition Government there was a violent brawl in the National Party constituency. National Party members simply say, "The environmentalists should just go away and leave us alone." That will never happen; there must be a plan. The Carr Government has a plan—

Mr D. L. Page: Point of order: The Minister is straying way beyond the leave of the matter of public importance in speaking about previous forestry legislation. I said quite plainly that even though Australia is not a signatory to the protocol, it is making a very significant contribution. We will make the targets that are implicit in the Kyoto protocol.

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

Mr YEADON: It shows again that the National Party never has a plan for anything. National Party members simply want everything to pan out, or everyone to go away. They never show any leadership; they never have a plan. The honourable member for Ballina simply says it is all too hard—

Mr D. L. Page: Point of order: I did not say anything like that. Under the standing orders the Minister is not allowed to misrepresent me.

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

Mr YEADON: The honourable member for Ballina says we are doing a whole range of things. The reality is that as a country we are not. We have 2 per cent renewables at the Federal level, which is simply not dealing with the issue. What gives the lie to his argument is that even companies like BP—which is a petroleum producer; an organisation that is in the business of greenhouse gas emissions—are calling on the Federal Government to do something in this area. We are not talking about Greenpeace or some other radical group; we are talking about a company like BP. As I said earlier, everyone from the *Australian Financial Review* through to Greenpeace is saying that the Federal Government must get on with this issue. This Government is saying the same thing. However, we are saying it not just to deal with the important issue of greenhouse gas emissions; we are saying that here in New South Wales we have spent years doing a lot of qualitative work to position ourselves as well as possible internationally to get investment from this, and the Federal Government is simply allowing that opportunity to pass us by and let everyone else get the jump on us.

Discussion concluded.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Bill: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Motion by Mr Gaudry agreed to:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to permit the introduction forthwith and progress up to the Minister's second reading speech of the Fair Trading Amendment (Employment Placement Services) Bill, notice of which was given this day for tomorrow.

FAIR TRADING AMENDMENT (EMPLOYMENT PLACEMENT SERVICES) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr AQUILINA (Riverstone—Minister for Land and Water Conservation, and Minister for Fair Trading) [8.24 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill contains significant consumer protection reforms for job seekers. It also takes into consideration the changing environment in which employment agents and the recruitment industry and consumers conduct their business. Licensing of employment agents has been an element of industrial relations legislation in New South Wales for many years. In 1996 the employment agent provisions were separated from the Industrial Relations Act and the Employment Agents Act 1996 came into being. This new Act, together with the Employment Agents Regulation 1996, provides the mechanism for the regulation of the industry in New South Wales. In recognition that the key components of the legislation involve the protection of job seekers as consumers of employment agency services, the legislation has been administered by the Department of Fair Trading from that time.

During 2000 a review of the operation of the Act was initiated consistent with the Government's commitments under the Competition Principles Agreement. It is the Government's policy to ensure that review processes take into account the full range of public benefits of legislation and that all views are thoroughly considered before any reforms are proposed. To achieve this, a steering committee chaired by the Department of Fair Trading was established to conduct the review and a reference group comprising industry representatives and consumer advocates was formed.

Consultation occurred with a number of groups, including the Recruitment and Consulting Services Association, the New South Wales Labor Council, the Council of Social Service of New South Wales and Jobfutures, and I thank them for their involvement in the preparation of this legislation. Seventeen hundred copies of the issues paper were distributed to interested parties, and responses were sought on the issues it raised, as well as any other relevant matter. Relevant parties were consulted individually and given the opportunity to put their views.

The review examined a range of issues, including the possible difficulties faced by job seekers in regard to such matters as misleading advertising, inappropriate charging of fees and deceptive conduct. The review concluded that the current licensing system is not considered to have a substantial impact on competition or business costs. It also found, however, that many of the complaints made by job seekers to the Department of Fair Trading were matters which could be addressed by the Fair Trading Act. The peak industry body, Australian Business Industrial, said in its submission:

The Act operates as a barrier which, while not overly onerous, is unnecessary and irksome.

This bill maintains the essence of the current legislation and strengthens the enforcement provisions by retaining and enhancing relevant consumer protection mechanisms and removing an ineffective licensing regime. The bill provides for the repeal of the Employment Agents Act 1996 and the inclusion of specific consumer protection provisions relating to employment placement services. It also includes consequential amendments to schedules in the Fines Act 1996 and the Industrial Relations Act 1996 to omit references to the Employment Agents Act 1996.

During the consultation process it became apparent that there was much confusion among consumers and industry with regard to the difference between employment agents and labour hire firms. The bill seeks to address this under proposed section 60P by defining an employment placement service as a service provided by a person as an agent for the purpose of finding or assisting to find a person to carry out work for a business seeking to have work carried out, or finding or assisting to find employment for a person seeking to be employed. In other words, in order for a business to be considered an employment placement service for the purposes of the legislation there must be an agency relationship between the placement service and the job seeker.

An employment placement service does not have an employee-employer relationship or a contract of employment with the worker. If it did so, it would be considered a labour hire firm. A labour hire firm is one that uses its own employees to provide services to other businesses seeking to have work carried out. Alternatively, such a firm may also find workers to provide services to other businesses seeking to have work carried out and employ these workers directly. In both cases, an employee-employer relationship or a contract of employment exists to protect the worker.

Issues surrounding labour hire firms have been examined in the final report of the labour hire task force. Defining employment placement services in this way does not prevent the business from charging a prospective employee for other services it may provide, such as preparation of a resume or advice on how to present at interview. These are not employment placement services within the meaning of proposed section 60P. Proposed section 60Q establishes the key consumer protection provisions of the bill.

Proposed section 60Q (1) prohibits a person from receiving a fee, charge or remuneration for the provision of employment placement services to a person seeking employment. The bill provides for a maximum penalty of \$5,500 if this provision is breached. Although this is a continuation of a provision in the Employment Agents Act 1996, it is an important consumer protection mechanism because it prevents job seekers from being exploited by agents. In the past agents may have claimed to have legitimate jobs for prospective job seekers and charged a fee for referrals or information but job seekers have found that there was no position actually available.

There have also been allegations of "churning". This is the practice of sending unsuitable applicants to clients in an effort to boost profits, because the client must pay the agent for each applicant sent to fill the position. The provision of information standards in the new bill will appropriately address these issues by requiring agents to inform job seekers that they are prohibited from charging job seekers a placement fee and must not send job seekers to unsuitable positions or non-existent positions. Any such fees inappropriately charged are recoverable under proposed section 60Q (3).

The Government has a responsibility to protect consumers from being exploited in the marketplace. Often the best way to achieve this is to ensure that consumers go armed with information about their rights and about the obligations of the traders with whom they deal. The fact that a customer—in this case a job seeker—is provided with information by the employment agent about what is acceptable or unacceptable business practice constitutes a powerful incentive for businesses to do the right thing.

The bill provides for a regulation-making power for the establishment of information standards under proposed section 60R. This key provision provides a mechanism for requiring employment placement services to provide job seekers with access to information regarding their rights and available methods of redress in relation to those rights. The general penalty provisions currently in the Fair Trading Act 1987 will apply to persons who breach the information standards. This means that if the information standards are breached by an individual, a maximum penalty of \$22,000 is available, and in the case of a body corporate a maximum penalty of \$110,000 may be incurred.

The Department of Fair Trading cannot always be present at the agent's premises and the requirement for the provision of information standards will ensure consumers are adequately informed. The standards will ensure the provision of appropriate information to job seekers about their rights and responsibilities, thereby reducing the possibility of exploitation and deception by the agent. The nature of the employment agents' operating environment has changed over the years due to advances in technology and changing regulatory requirements. This amendment bill seeks to address the changing environment of the employment placement services industry and provides a sound foundation for the future operation of employment placement services in the marketplace and maintaining protection of consumer rights. I commend the bill.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Fraser.

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (PERIODIC AND HOME DETENTION) BILL

Second Reading

Debate adjourned from 28 June.

Mr RICHARDSON (The Hills) [8.36 p.m.]: I lead for the Opposition in this debate on the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Periodic and Home Detention) Bill. The Opposition will not oppose the bill but proposes to move amendments to it in Committee. I summarise objects of the bill as follows: first, to require an application for leave of absence from periodic detention to be lodged up to seven days before the leave period; second, to revoke a periodic or home detention order where an offender is subsequently sentenced to a term of full-time detention; third, to require the Parole Board to revoke a periodic detention order on the application of the commissioner where the offender has been absent without leave for three or more detention periods, regardless of whether the absence has occurred in one sentence or consecutive sentences; fourth, to require the commissioner to apply for revocation of a periodic detention order if a detainee has been absent without leave for three or more consecutive detention periods; fifth, to prevent the Parole Board from rescinding a revocation order made on the basis of three unauthorised absences; sixth, to allow the Parole Board to reinstate a revoked periodic detention order after the offender has served three months full-time imprisonment; seventh, to allow the Parole Board to reinstate a revoked periodic detention order rather than a revoked home detention order where the home detention order was made in lieu of a revoked periodic detention order; eighth, to make anyone who has previously served full-time imprisonment for more than six months ineligible for periodic detention; and, ninth, to ensure that home detention is not used as a soft option for periodic detention.

The Opposition has long been a critic of the Government's administration of the periodic detention system. Honourable members may recall that last year my predecessor as shadow Minister for Corrective Services, the honourable member for Davidson, revealed problems relating to the Wollongong detention centre, where on 17 November there was an after dark party involving pizzas and movies. An earlier party involved a prison guard partying with female prisoners, who were allowed to wander around freely. That is not what the public believes periodic detention, which is punishment for the commission of crimes, is all about. The problem with periodic detention as a sentencing option is that historically it has been honoured more in the breach than in the observance. That was highlighted during the budget estimates committee hearings, where it was indicated that on, I think, 3 February this year only 73 per cent of the 915 offenders who were subject to periodic detention orders bothered to turn up. That means that 247 offenders did not turn up. We know from other information we have garnered that only 18 offenders a week have their periodic detention orders revoked. Obviously, in some instances there may have been good reason for the offenders not attending, but in many instances there were not. At the budget estimates committee hearings the Minister made great play of the fact that the statistics had improved by 16 June to—wait for it—77.6 per cent of offenders turning up. We believe the figure should be closer to 90 per cent. That is what the public expects.

Mr Fraser: Why not 100 per cent?

Mr RICHARDSON: The honourable member for Coffs Harbour thinks it should be 100 per cent. Perhaps we could aim for perfection but, realistically, we think the figure should be around 90 per cent or maybe a little better. That is certainly what the public would expect. They pay the taxes. They expect people who have done the crime to do the time. That has not happened under the Government. It is astounding to learn that the Minister should only now be legislating to require offenders to apply for leave of absence before they are required to turn up for detention rather than afterwards. Last year the then Corrective Services Commissioner, Leo Keliher, said:

The changes to the scheme introduced by the Government [in 1999] ensure that periodic detention is a credible, rigorously monitored alternative to full-time custody.

If that is the case, why is it that around 25 per cent of offenders on any one weekend do not turn up for detention? When offenders do not turn up without letting anyone know and then ring during the following week to say, "Sorry, I could not get there, I will give you a medical certificate," one can understand that it is not in any sense a rigorous alternative to full-time detention. Section 87 of the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act allows the Commissioner for Corrective Services to grant leave of absence to a detainee for health reasons, on compassionate grounds, on the grounds that the offender is in custody or for any reason that the commissioner sees fit. The honourable member for Coffs Harbour said attendance should be 100 per cent, but there will be occasions when an offender cannot turn up. However, the current situation leaves a lot to be desired.

There will be some exceptional circumstances in which is not possible to provide advance notice of an inability to attend, but they will be the exception rather than the rule. The Parliamentary Secretary in his second reading speech mentioned, first, a coma or, second, an administrative mistake within the Department of Corrective Services. That is covered under new section 175, which provides for a decision after a review to revoke a periodic detention order. Under the new system a detainee will have to make a phone call and then supply a written excuse to the governor within seven days of the beginning of the detention period. One would hope that the administration of this section of the Act is not too lenient. No-one could run a business with an absentee rate of 27 per cent—it would go broke. I want to take up the provision of medical certificates. In the recent Auditor-General's report on managing sick leave within the police service and the Department of Corrective Services, the Auditor-General was critical of the current Department of Corrective Services sick leave policy. He reported:

The *Sick Leave Policy* provides that managers may rely on medical certificates to validate absences due to sick leave. This means that sick leave that is supported by a certificate from a medical practitioner, is not monitored.

Research from the United Kingdom indicates that reliance upon medical certificates tends to:

- discourage dialogue with doctors to resolve employee problems
- preclude effective management of factors that are contributing to absenteeism.

The *Sick Leave Policy* also provides that managers may arrange an independent medical examination where there is a concern that:

- an officer is not fit for duty
- the officer's pattern of sick leave warrants further investigation ...

If it is good enough for prison officers, why should it not be good enough for prisoners? Most members of the public would believe that detainees would need a fairly good excuse not to turn up for periodic detention. It is not good enough that 27 per cent of detainees are not turning up on any weekend. The Opposition believes the sanctions for being absent without leave should be strengthened. It is one way to ensure that more detainees turn up and perform their community service as expected. Section 89 of the Act simply says that if detainees do not turn up for periodic detention or report late they will have an extra periodic detention period tacked on, whether or not leave of absence is granted, plus one additional period—usually one additional weekend—as punishment. That is a joke and it is no wonder that attendance rates are so low. The punishment for not turning up should be strengthened. The Opposition will move an amendment in that regard.

Amendments to section 163 of the Act mean that the commissioner must apply to the Parole Board for revocation of a periodic detainee's sentence if the detainee has accrued three consecutive unauthorised absences. Why should that apply only if those absences are consecutive? Periodic detention is a sentencing option designed to allow offenders to maintain normal family lives, to maintain jobs and to enable them not to have to go through the same difficulties of rehabilitating back into the community as full-time detainees. That is why we support periodic detention. It was a Coalition government that first introduced periodic detention in this State in 1971. It is not meant to be a soft option. Someone in gaol full time cannot come and go at will. For many periodic detainees, turning up for a weekend appears to be optional, something they will deal with after the event. Not too many members of the public would agree that periodic detention orders would be revoked only if detainees failed to turn up on three consecutive occasions. Three times during any sentence should be sufficient. We will move an amendment along those lines.

On 27 July I visited the Parramatta Periodic Detention Centre. Governor Tony Kelly and Regional Superintendent Don Rogers took me out with a work party. That was a useful exercise. The work those people were carrying out was worthwhile community service. Periodic detainees have been working for several years on remediation work on the banks of the Parramatta River. It is a valuable exercise. The detainees were genuinely taking pride in what they were doing. The same can be said for the work that has been done at Sophia Doyle Reserve at Crestwood in Baulkham Hills shire along Toongabbie Creek. That work has also been going on for the past three years. It is work that would not be carried out were it not for the availability of these offenders. I repeat that the Opposition supports periodic detention as a sentencing option. It certainly provides an opportunity for offenders to reflect on what they have done, and one hopes that most of them will not reoffend and will not end up in full-time incarceration.

New section 164A has been incorporated to give periodic detainees a second chance if their periodic detention is revoked. If that order is revoked the offender must serve the remainder of his or her sentence in full-time imprisonment. Indeed, that is a serious matter because if a person has 12 months of periodic detention to serve, he or she will get 12 months full-time imprisonment and will serve seven days a week, not two days a week. Two years ago the Government amended the Crimes (Administration of Sentences) Act to allow the Parole Board to reinstate a revoked home detention order after the offender has served at least three months full-time imprisonment. The bill extends the same leniency to periodic detainees. An amendment to section 168A also provides that when a home detention order is made under section 165 in lieu of a revoked periodic detention order and the Parole Board subsequently revokes the home detention order, the Parole Board may reinstate the original revoked periodic detention order. The Parliamentary Secretary, in his second reading speech, admitted that some members may at first consider that new section 168A (1A) gives an offender too many chances. He said:

After all, the new section will mean that an offender may breach a periodic detention order and a home detention order and still have the original periodic detention order reinstated.

He was right. A number of members will believe that new section 168A (1A) gives an offender too many chances. The public expects the punishment to fit the crime and expects people who have been sentenced to periodic detention to fulfil that periodic detention in an appropriate fashion. There should be no soft sentencing options. However, the Opposition accepts that some discretion can and should be exercised by the Parole Board. The Parliamentary Secretary said:

Members should also bear in mind that in some instances home detention orders are revoked not because of a breach by the detainee, but because one or more of the detainees' co-residents withdraws their consent for the detainee to reside with them, and the detainee is unable to find alternative accommodation suitable for the home detention scheme.

Once again, occasionally there are extenuating circumstances in relation to home detainees. The Opposition does not agree with the second-chance option for periodic detainees. If a detainee fails to turn up, goes absent without leave—and that is not too onerous: all the detainee has to do is make a phone call and provide a medical

certificate—cannot be bothered to do the right thing and treats his punishment in a light-hearted fashion, the Opposition believes that the detainee should pay the price. However, we have no problem with new section 165AA, which allows an offender to be released pending assessment for home detention, given that the offender's sentence will be extended by the period for which he or she is absent from custody. The Opposition understands the rationale behind new section 165AA.

The bill also amends the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999. The Opposition agrees with the Government that periodic detention is not an appropriate sentence for hardened criminals and that the periodic detention scheme would be improved if those hardened criminals were excluded from it. However, while we support the Government's amendments that will deny periodic detention as a sentencing option to anyone previously sentenced to more than six months in gaol, that provision does not go far enough. Once again the Opposition will explore that issue further in the Committee stage. Amendments to sections 66 and 78 provide that a court must explain why it has made a decision that is contrary to the assessment of the Parole Service. Those amendments improve the transparency of the sentencing process and, again, are eminently sensible. New section 80 (1A) ensures that home detention is not used as a soft option instead of periodic detention. That is consistent with the hierarchy of punishments currently available to magistrates and judges and has been a principle exercised in the courts for some years.

I draw to the attention of the House and the Minister a serious issue brought to my attention by the honourable member for Bega, that is, the practical limitations to providing periodic detention as a sentencing option in the Batemans Bay area. Previously the Department of Corrective Services had provided transport from Batemans Bay to Wollongong, to the Unanderra Weekend Detention Centre, on Friday afternoons. In July that service was cancelled without any notification to the court, the magistrate or prisoners who had been using it. Apparently the local probation and parole officer was advised of the cancellation only after the event. It is not reasonable that someone serving periodic detention has to have a car that is sufficiently reliable to get from Batemans Bay to Wollongong. The cancellation of the bus service limits the range of sentencing options available to magistrates on the far South Coast.

That is a poor state of affairs. In many cases in rural areas home detention is not available as a sentencing option. To have also knocked out periodic detention as an option is false economy. If the people who would have been sentenced to periodic detention and would have carried out valuable community work in Wollongong are sentenced instead to full-time detention, that is likely to cost the State significantly more money. I draw that to the attention of the Minister, who could resolve the problem very simply. There is no excuse for not providing a full range of sentencing options wherever possible around the State. In conclusion, I repeat that the Opposition does not oppose the legislation but intends to move amendments in the Committee stage.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Anderson.

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL VACANCIES

Joint Sitting

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills): I table the minutes of proceedings of the joint sitting held this day.

Ordered to be printed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mr AMERY: I seek the leave of the House for private members' statements to be noted for a period of up to 90 minutes.

Leave granted.

KURNELL DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS

Mr KERR (Cronulla) [8.57 p.m.]: This afternoon the House witnessed the Carr Government doing a Captain Cook and discovering Kurnell. Today the Government, having been in office for seven long years and

having done nothing for Kurnell, informed the House, through the Minister for Planning, about the future of Kurnell. That was despite the Government's refusal to hold a commission of inquiry into Kurnell. As recently as last week I called for a commission of inquiry, as I have done for some years. Mayor Kevin Schreiber also called for a commission of inquiry. Unfortunately for the Government, Minister Knowles had previously refused that request in writing.

Because of the inaction of the Government the applications of Rocla and Australand have been on foot for some time. No-one doubts that the development applications would have been refused by Sutherland Shire Council had they been presented to it. Those applications continued to have a life because the Carr Government stripped Sutherland Shire Council of planning powers in relation to them. The Minister should tell the House and the people about the applications by Rocla and Australand that have been approved. He should inform the House of any discussions he has had with those companies and what they are proposing in terms of future use of the sites they own.

This afternoon we heard an attack on the Federal member, Bruce Baird, in relation to Federal Government spending. Bruce Baird has worked with the community and has been responsible for the production of an independent report, which provides an evaluation of Kurnell. That report is a public document and is freely available, and the State Government must respond to the contents of that report. It is not a political report; it is a scientific report and its assessments and merits are there to be judged by all. As the Deputy Premier, and Minister for Planning was speaking this afternoon, trucks carrying sand were pulling out of Kurnell. Those trucks will be back tomorrow to carry loads of sand out of Kurnell, as they will during the course of this inquiry.

The Government should spell out the terms of reference and who will conduct the inquiry. As I said, if the Government had initiated an inquiry when it was called for, we would have been spared the pain and suffering. The people of Kurnell and, indeed, the shire remember when Bayer wanted to put a chemical plant at Kurnell. That application was put forward under the Unsworth Government. The people of Kurnell fought that application and ensured that that chemical plant did not proceed. It is the old story. No doubt Labor members in the shire have been sitting around saying, "We will steal their thunder." However, the people of Kurnell and the people of the shire know who is responsible for the thunderstorm. They gave life to these applications and they now say, "We will save you from the danger that we ourselves have posed."

But have they saved us from danger? Will the Minister guarantee that there will be no sand mining by Rocla and no housing development by Australand? The big spenders have refused to provide money to enable the purchase of six parcels of private land at Towra Point. I made application on behalf of the Friends of Towra Point, which was formed in February 1997. I have correspondence which shows that that organisation made application to the State Government to purchase land, which would have been in the interests of the public and the environment. I make that correspondence available and public.

DEATH OF Mr NORM WATTS

DEATH OF Mrs SUE DARKE

Ms ALLAN (Wentworthville) [9.02 p.m.]: I take this opportunity to reflect on the lives of two important community leaders in my electorate who unfortunately died within the past six weeks. Norm Watts was a long-term branch member of the Australian Labor Party. His involvement in the Labor Party in the Greystanes area predated my election as the member for Wentworthville in 1988. Norm was not only an active member of the Greystanes branch of the Labor Party but also a strong supporter of and campaigner for my predecessor, the late Ernie Quinn. Norm died a few weeks ago. He is survived by his family and his wife, Thelma. I express my deep regret to the family about Norm's passing. In the past couple of years Norm's health was very poor, but it did not diminish his interest in and appreciation of life around him.

Norm was a fierce campaigner for the Labor Party in Greystanes, which is an interesting part of my electorate. Over many years Greystanes has moved from a more solid Labor voting area to one that, while not marginal, has seen perhaps a greater balance between support for the major parties. Norm always worked at Greystanes Public School on election day. He would arrive early in the morning to get the best possible spot and he would stay there all day, irrespective of the weather. He was great with local kids. He involved his own family in campaign activities, and he was well loved and respected by many children in Greystanes. He had been a bus driver, but when I first became known to him, when I was a delegate to the Wentworthville State Electorate Council, he had already retired and was enjoying his family, including his grandchildren.

Norm was a strong supporter of the Parramatta Eels. While he enjoyed good health he never missed a match. In particular, I thank Holroyd City Councillor Ken Morrissey, who is the President of the Greystanes branch of the Labor Party. Ken and the other councillors, as well as the local branch members and I, will miss Norm's contribution to public life. I hope that Thelma and the children continue to enjoy a satisfactory life in Greystanes.

Sue Darke died in her sleep a few weeks ago. She was a marvellous person, and was too young to have died so suddenly. She was a marvellous person, and her death was a shock to her family and others. Sue's husband, Ken, is a director of Wentworthville Leagues Club. Trevor Oldfield, President of Wentworthville Leagues Club, gave the oration at Sue Darke's funeral. He commented that she was a wonderful and good-spirited person. Sue was a strong supporter of the Wentworthville Leagues Club, and she shared in Ken's involvement with the club. She supported young football players through her regular attendance at Quinlan Shield matches, and also strongly supported the involvement of the club in the Metropolitan Cup and the Wheelkings. She attended virtually every game of all those codes.

She was a great contributor to the club, and supported the club leadership. In particular I thank Trevor Oldfield, the president of the club, and Tony Toohey, not only for the support they give me but for the support they have shown Ken Darke since Sue's sudden death. At one time Sue was a lollypop lady at Darcy Road Public School in my electorate. The community will miss both Sue Darke and Norm Watts. It is often said that we do not have enough community activists and leaders in Western Sydney. Both Sue Darke and Norm Watts were active in the community of Greystanes and Wentworthville respectively for nearly all their lives, and it is sad that they have both passed away in the past six weeks.

WEE JASPER RESERVES

Ms HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [9.07 p.m.]: Tonight I raise the significant concerns that many in my electorate and, indeed, throughout the State hold for the future of the Wee Jasper Reserves. Recently I received a letter from Mr Peter Graham, who lives in Bomaderry on the South Coast. Mr Graham wrote:

I realise that I reside outside your electorate but I seek your assistance on behalf of the many residents of the South Coast who have used and wish to continue using the facilities provided by the Wee Jasper Trust. I personally have introduced more than 300 people to the pleasures of Wee Jasper over a period of more than 40 years and I am pleased to now see some fourth generations of families camping in the area.

The village of Wee Jasper is a small picturesque settlement of about 80 people in a pretty valley at the foot of the Brindabella ranges, on the backwaters of Burrinjuck dam. It is located some 54 kilometres by road from Yass. The explorers Hamilton Hume and William Hovell passed through the valley on their 1824 expedition to Port Phillip, which was crucial to the opening up of the country. Wee Jasper's role in their epic journey was as a place where the explorers left their carts as they had proved too cumbersome to use in the mountainous terrain. Usually the Wee Jasper reserves are administered by a trust of unpaid volunteers that manages 115 hectares of pristine Crown reserves. The service consists of 10 parcels of land, six of which are heavily used: Carey's Reserve, Carey's Cave, Billy Grace Reserve, Swinging Bridge Reserve, Micalong Creek Reserve and the Fitzpatrick Trackhead.

The Wee Jasper reserves attract an estimated 30,000 visitors each year. I have been there many times, and I can assure honourable members that the area is well worth a visit. Apart from tourists, the area is used extensively by scouting groups and emergency services for training in search and rescue procedures. In fact, local Yass police frequently hold search and rescue exercises at Wee Jasper, involving NSW Police, the Yass and Gunning State Emergency Service, the Yass Rural Fire Service, the Binalong Volunteer Rescue Association, local offices from the Ambulance Service and the Goulburn Police Rescue Squad.

The reserves offer a wide range of activities including camping, picnicking, swimming, fishing, caving, abseiling and bushwalking in a clean and safe environment. It is not an exaggeration to say that the reserves are a showpiece among the Crown reserves treasured by many New South Wales families. Holidays at Wee Jasper are inexpensive and valued by low-income families because they provide excellent value for money. The Wee Jasper Reserves Trust needs about \$80,000 each year to maintain these wonderful areas. However, each year when the trust submits to the Department of Land and Water Conservation what is a bare minimum budget, that allocation is cut by about \$20,000.

To put it bluntly, the Wee Jasper Reserves Trust has not been able to afford to carry out ongoing repairs to plant and property that are so necessary to maintain the facilities at the reserves. It is now crunch time for the

reserves, which are in financial difficulties. In June I raised my concerns directly with the Minister for Land and Water Conservation and asked him to guarantee additional funding for the reserves. I formally wrote to the Minister and the Premier about this matter, but I have yet to receive a reply. On 1 July the trust held an emergency meeting to decide its future course of action. At that meeting, dismayed by the lack of response from the Premier and the Minister for Land and Water Conservation, the trust resigned in protest. An officer of the Department of Land and Water Conservation has been appointed to administer the reserves.

I have been informed that, under the administrator, the trust has only just scraped through the winter financially. No work has been done on desperately needed infrastructure. Fences and railings are falling down. Waste water runs between shower stalls. The decking on the manager's residence is falling through. Additionally, we are now entering the peak grass-cutting period, but the reserves have no way of transporting their ride-on mower to areas that need cutting. Currently, the mower must be driven illegally for several kilometres along gravel roads, which causes excessive wear and tear on it. This summer the projected very low level of water in Lake Burrinjuck will impact severely on the number of visitors to the reserves. The State Government has made no alternative plans to assist the reserves to survive. A proposal to build a visitor education centre at Carey's Cave has fallen on deaf ears.

If the reserves are forced to close, the results for the residents of Wee Jasper will be catastrophic. The village has only three businesses, all of which are dependent on the continued operation of the reserves. Six full-time and 17 part-time jobs in the village depend on the continued operation of the reserves. I sum up with part of a letter to Minister Aquilina that I received from Melva and Bill Morris of Wee Jasper. I have received many letters about the possible closure of the Wee Jasper reserves. Melva urged the Minister to please reconsider a release of funds to keep the reserves open now and into the future. I reiterate Melva's plea: Minister, please release the funding necessary to keep the Wee Jasper reserves open. [*Time expired.*]

KINGSGROVE AND PENSHURST RSL SUB-BRANCHES ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

DEATH OF Mr RON BATES

Mr GREENE (Georges River) [9.12 p.m.]: As all honourable members would be aware, this year the RSL club movement celebrates its eighty-fifth anniversary. On Sunday 28 July I had the pleasure of attending the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the Kingsgrove RSL sub-branch, which included an impressive display from the St George Regional Cadet Unit under the leadership of Captain Fred Garai. The unit recently celebrated its fifth anniversary. Its continued expansion is a reflection of the unit's commitment and hard work. A couple of years ago I had the pleasure of organising funding for the group to attend the Anzac Day memorial service at Gallipoli.

It is wonderful to see the work that Captain Garai is doing with the youth of our community. The sub-branch President, Mr Alan Barnes, welcomed an extensive group of guests, which included three foundation members. The sub-branch committee—in particular the convener of the celebrations, Peter Lyle—deserves great credit for the high quality of the function. My wife, Frances, and I certainly enjoyed the hospitality. The proud history of Kingsgrove RSL sub-branch was outlined by Mr Reg Boys, DFC, who had a long career throughout the Second World War flying over Europe. His presentation of the history of the club was outstanding.

The following weekend, on Sunday 4 August, I attended the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Penshurst RSL sub-branch. Its President, Mr Russell Norrish, welcomed a full auditorium to commemorate this significant milestone. Penshurst RSL Club President, Mr Wal Chin, joined in the welcome. I was particularly impressed by the performance of the Navy Band. The Penshurst RSL sub-branch has 524 members, and it continues to thrive. Both the Kingsgrove and Penshurst RSL clubs, and their sub-branch members can be proud of their contributions to our community in their fiftieth and seventy-fifth years respectively. At both functions I was pleased to speak to Mr Rusty Priest, the former President of the New South Wales RSL movement. It is pleasing to see that Rusty continues to attend many significant RSL functions.

Sadly, I advise the House that on 8 August I attended the funeral of Mr Ron Bates, an extremely well-known member of the St George community. He was the Secretary-Treasurer of the Hurstville RSL sub-branch and President of the Hurstville RSL Club. Ron was 79 years of age and had given a great deal to the St George area. He was known not only for his involvement with the RSL club movement but also for his dedication and service to the St George Cycling Club. He was involved in many official capacities dating back to the 1930s when he first started as a competitor. His family was also involved with the club. Ron Bates was a St George man through and through. His five children and his wife, Val, are St George people through and through.

His funeral was held at St John's Anglican Church, Penshurst. It was attended by representatives from across the community, including the former general manager of Hurstville City Council, councillors from Hurstville City Council and people from the cycling movement throughout New South Wales. I was fortunate to get inside the church, but about 200 people had to stand outside. The funeral service was the celebration of the life of a man who had given so much to his community. Ron was well known and well loved in the community. He was also known in the local business community. He had run the business Bates Bikes since the 1950s. It is now run by his sons, in particular Phil Bates. He was generous to the community, especially the cycling community. But he was particularly generous to young people. The death of Ron Bates is a great loss to the St George area and the RSL movement. It is a great loss to his family, particularly his wife Val, who is a lovely lady. I note my personal sadness in the death of Ron Bates.

WIZARD LANDSCAPING AND HIPTON PTY LTD

Mr MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [9.17 p.m.]: I have previously referred in this House to the problems associated with the Government continuing to appoint head contractors. This policy has left a trail of disasters, including the Border Trade Centre and the Junee rail station. Tonight I draw the attention of the House to problems experienced by Sue and Jamie Schiller, of Wizard Landscaping, as a result of this policy. In January Wizard Landscaping quoted on landscaping to units for the Teacher Housing Authority for Hipton Pty Ltd at Hay. On 17 January confirmation was received from Hiptons regarding the commencement of work.

On 4 February Jamie spoke to a director of Hiptons about the financial state of the company. The director dismissed the rumours as having been around for 10 years. He assured Jamie that Hiptons was going strong, and specifically mentioned all the work it had on its books, as well as future projects. On 11 February Jamie travelled to Hay, and discovered problems with the irrigation. The architect had not allowed for a pump, as stated in the specifications, the same cut from the job maintenance period was now to be included, and an adjustment of the quoted figure was prepared and accepted.

On 18 and 19 February the units were behind schedule and there was limited access. However, the soil was able to be prepared and beds were worked—this is Wizard Landscaping. On 25 and 26 February they returned and completed the job. On 28th February they invoiced Hiptons for \$26,713. 50, which was due to be paid on 30 March, as verified by the Hiptons' stamp dated 6 March. The quoted maintenance period was to finish on approximately 30 May 2002. On 30 March, instead of the payment, Wizard received a letter from Hiptons stating that an accountant had been employed to sort out the financial affairs.

On 15 April Wizard rang the architect to inform him they had not received any payment, yet were still completing the 13 weeks maintenance schedule as quoted. The architect informed Wizard that two weeks earlier the Teacher Housing Authority had released \$20,000 to Hiptons. The new accountant employed by Hiptons gave the Teacher Housing Authority a direct debit authority to pay Wizard Landscaping. They rang the Teacher Housing Authority and asked to speak to a Darren Ford but were told he was on extended leave. They spoke to another employee and was informed that Wizard Landscaping had not been paid by Hiptons and that they had no direct debit authority. The Teacher Housing Authority refused the request, stating that statutory declarations had been received and that their contract was with Hiptons. The Teacher Housing Authority said that the only money they had withheld was retention money of approximately \$28,000 that they would not release until the contracted period was finished. It appeared that other subcontractors had not received their money.

On 16 April Wizard requested the Teacher Housing Authority to honour clauses in its contract with Hiptons that allowed the subcontractors to be paid directly. The request was denied. Wizard told the Teacher Housing Authority that it could not continue with the quoted maintenance period, because of non-payment. The authority was told to arrange with existing caretakers of previously established units to continue watering the new turf, plants, etcetera. This was accepted by the authority.

On 18 June Wizard received a letter from Nicholls and Company informing it of the creditors meeting on behalf of Hiptons. On 26 June Farrell Lusher Solicitors sent correspondence to the Teacher Housing Authority highlighting clauses in the contract with Hiptons relating to a direct debit authority. On 1 July Wizard attended a creditors meeting and was told that only a small amount of money would be forthcoming from Hiptons. I put this information on the record to relay my concerns regarding the Government's continued policy of appointing head contractors. I want to know from the Minister, who conducted the due diligence with regard to Hiptons' appointment? Who checked the financial statements of Hiptons?

That explanation certainly should be given to Jamie and Sue Schiller of Wizard Landscaping. Jamie Schiller is a young businessman who does great work. He is a family man with three young children, but he has

been duped by this company and he has been duded by this Government's continued policy of appointing head contractors and not pursuing the due diligence and financial obligation checks that should be required when appointing companies to do work on behalf of this Government. I demand a response from the Minister. This young family has been duded because of a dud policy, and the matter must be addressed.

Mr ERIC SWAN LEGAL PROCEEDINGS

Mr IEMMA (Lakemba—Minister for Public Works and Services, Minister for Sport and Recreation, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Citizenship) [9.22 p.m.]: A constituent, Mr Eric Swan, a full-rate pensioner of 73 years of age, has found himself in extremely dire circumstances as a result of a civil law suit brought by a neighbour over an incident in mid-1966. The facts are that Mr Swan's pet labrador, Oscar, was being walked by a friend and neighbour, Mr Ron Drost. At some point during the walk the dog is alleged to have attacked another neighbour, a Mr Carey, who was washing his car in the street. That neighbour, who had a dog that was not on a leash at the time, was also allegedly attacked by Mr Swan's labrador. Police were called to the scene and Mr Carey was subsequently issued with a fine for not having his dog restrained by a collar.

Legal personal injury proceedings were launched by Mr Carey over the incident. Despite the fact that there was a dispute over certain facts, the District Court found in June 1999 that Mr Swan was responsible for the injuries sustained by Mr Carey. Mr Carey was awarded a total of \$52,944 in damages and out of pocket expenses. With interest, the sum outstanding is \$66,000. Mr Swan continued to protest that he had been the victim of a miscarriage of justice. He claimed that he did not ask his neighbour, Mr Drost, to walk his dog. It was revealed in the court case that Mr Drost had his own lead and choker for the dog and was in the habit of taking him for a walk. He claimed that evidence he supplied in the form of a veterinarian's measurement of his dog's mouth—intended to indicate that his dog could not have been responsible for the injury complained of by Mr Carey—was improperly disregarded. He further claimed that he was not informed of the date on which the appeal was to be heard, resulting in his missing it.

All of these claims have been rejected by the office of the Legal Services Commissioner, which has closed its file on this matter. Being a pensioner, Mr Swan has very few assets. He resided in his mother's house that he and his brother inherited as the only benefactors of the estate. As a consequence of his limited financial status, Mr Swan was unable to pay the damages awarded against him, and a caveat was placed on his house to allow Mr Carey to recover his damages. As a result of that caveat and action taken on it, Mr Swan's house has been sold. Now that Mr Swan has lost his only asset—the house has gone to pay the damages awarded against him—he has had to apply for Department of Housing accommodation.

I raise this matter to highlight what I believe to be a grave injustice done to this constituent. To restate the circumstances, he never asked for his dog to be taken by his friend and neighbour, Ron Drost, for a walk on that fateful day that resulted in Mr Carey suffering injuries. Despite protesting his innocence, Mr Swan has had judgment found against him, based on the law of negligence. The matter highlights the litigious nature of some people and the Americanisation that our personal injury legal system has undergone. It also highlights the flaws in the negligence law whereby Mr Swan, who did not know that his dog had been taken by his neighbour and who had no control over his dog on that fateful occasion, has ended up losing his house.

Mr Swan and some of his advocates sincerely believe that the trial judge in the District Court misapplied the legislation that applies to this case and they have been battling for quite some time to achieve some form of justice for Mr Swan. He has no financial means to pursue further legal avenues—indeed, legal avenues in the sense of an appeal have closed—and he has lost his home and is now on a waiting list for public housing. That is an entirely desperate and dire situation for a man who has really committed no wrong. He is innocent, but he has been left virtually penniless and on the street.

NORTHERN RIVERS RENAL SERVICES

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [9.27 p.m.]: The Northern Rivers Kidney Association, which is based in Lismore in Northern New South Wales, is a registered charity and support group for renal patients and their families. Bev Stephenson, a representative of the association, came to see me about a letter she had forwarded to the Hon. Craig Knowles, the Minister for Health. I want to raise this matter in the Parliament because I think the association has a very good point to make and I certainly offer this wonderful group my support and encouragement.

There are three renal units in the Northern Rivers area, including one at Lismore for in-centre and acute care patients and those training for peritoneal dialysis. There is a satellite and home haemodialysis training unit

at Ballina and another in-centre unit at Grafton, with patients from the Tweed area being dialysed at John Flynn hospital on the Gold Coast. Currently, 90 patients are receiving dialysis in the area, and a further 200 people with advanced renal disease are in the pre-dialysis program. There are 2,000 people in Australia awaiting transplants. Of those on the transplant waiting list, 954 are in New South Wales, 816 of whom require kidney transplants.

These people wait for many years for a transplant and many will die before receiving an organ. Some kidney patients in the Northern Rivers who are awaiting a transplant have become very unwell and incapacitated. One man who had been on dialysis for 14 years became so ill and handicapped that he decided to stop dialysis. He passed away within a few days of ceasing treatment. The group is aware that other long-term dialysis patients have taken the same option. If it were possible for patients to receive a donated organ in the early stages of their illness, they could lead a productive and fulfilling life.

The costs to the Government associated with dialysis treatment are bound to increase as the population ages and co-morbidities increase. Over the next 10 years, 10,000 Australians will possibly become diabetic, and diabetes is one of the main causes of kidney failure. The current costs are approximately \$35,000 for in-centre dialysis per patient per annum, \$17,000 for home haemodialysis, and \$24,000 for peritoneal dialysis. A kidney transplant is the most cost-effective treatment for kidney disease. After the first year the cost of drug therapy for transplant recipients is approximately \$8,000 per annum, which is a great saving to the health-care system. However, with 816 patients in New South Wales on the kidney transplant waiting list, and only 53 cadaver donations available to New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory last year, the chances of a patient receiving a kidney transplant are not great. The transplant waiting list for organs in New South Wales is half the national total.

The Northern Rivers Kidney Association tries to promote not only kidney disease awareness but also organ donation awareness. Its members canvass doctors' rooms and shopping centres to gain permission to display posters and leave organ donation registration forms. Every year they attend the Home and Leisure Show at Alstonville, where they distribute information on both issues, and local renal nurses take blood pressure tests throughout the weekend. They have been doing this for five years and the nurses usually do more than 300 blood pressure tests. They find that many members of the public who have high blood pressure are not aware of it. High blood pressure is another major cause of kidney disease.

During the show weekend they speak to several hundred people and find that many people do not understand organ donation issues and base their decision not to become an organ donor on false premises. They do their best to correct these misconceptions, but they are only a small group and need help. The Northern Rivers Kidney Association is seeking the support of the New South Wales Government. It requests that the Government introduce an extensive program and campaign to raise the awareness of organ donation. If the campaign is successful and the number of organ donors increases, many people, including children, will be saved from prolonged illness and, in some cases, death.

NATIONAL HISTORY CHALLENGE

Mr ASHTON (East Hills) [9.32 p.m.]: Tonight I had the privilege of attending with the Premier the New South Wales National History Challenge 2002 awards for students who won prizes for their presentations on various aspects of history. These students will represent New South Wales in the National History Challenge that will be held in Canberra later this year. I want to place on record my appreciation of the Premier—who, as honourable members would know, is a great lover of all ages of history—attending the function.

I congratulate Julianne Beek, the National History Challenge State Co-ordinator, former colleague Albert Marchetto, the Vice-President of the History Teachers Association of New South Wales, and Kate Cameron, the President of the History Teachers Association of New South Wales. The students who won the various categories were: for years 5 to 6, Liam Howitt from Avoca Beach Public School, Avoca Beach; years 7 to 8, Olivia Bush from St Pauls Grammar School; years 9 to 10, Bridianne O'Dea from John Paul College, Coffs Harbour; and years 11 to 12, Kim Doyle from Narara Valley High School, Narara. Kim also won the Premier's Young Historian award for 2002.

Some of the topics the students dealt with were "In War and Peace", "Asia and Australia", "Life and Times of John Curtin"—which is always a popular topic with Labor members—"Australia's Heritage" and the "Australian Parliament". Four students from John Paul College, Coffs Harbour, presented an exhibit called "Creating a Horizons". I am sure the honourable member for Coffs Harbour would be pleased to hear how well

that college is doing. The awards are sponsored by the Department of Education, Science and Training, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Asia Education Foundation, and the National Museum of Australia, and they are supported by the Australian Council of National Trusts, the Australian War Memorial, the National Archives of Australia, the Parliamentary Education Office of this Parliament, and the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library.

Two to three weeks ago I wrote to the Premier on behalf of the history staff at Picnic Point High School seeking a small donation from his department. As I have previously said in this House, Picnic Point High School has an Anzac Day ceremony that is second to none, and last year's was the first function that Professor Marie Bashir attended in her role as Governor of New South Wales. The school's history staff, of their own accord and with their own money, have begun to set up a special area of the school to commemorate the Kokoda Track tradition of Australia's history in the New Guinea campaign. As all honourable members would be aware, it is sixty years since that battle on the Kokoda Track was fought. We know it was the first time that the Japanese were defeated in proper combat.

I wish to pay credit to the Premier, who was good enough to make funding available for the museum display at Picnic Point High School. On behalf of the school, the students, the parents, the teachers and myself, as a former head teacher at that school, I thank the Premier for his contribution to the establishment of that museum and monument to the series of battle campaigns in New Guinea. It is also worth remembering that it was this Government and Premier Carr who were instrumental in making sure that the modern history syllabus is compulsory until year 10, with a three-unit option to be undertaken in years 11 and 12.

I also acknowledge that the Minister for Small Business, and Minister for Tourism provided financial assistance to the National History Teachers Conference to be held in Sydney in October 2002. Although the funding is only a small amount, it is a good sum for an organisation that has very little money. The History Teachers Association of New South Wales is largely an organisation funded through teachers' contributions. In October the National History Teachers Conference will be held in Sydney, and I thank the Minister for Small Business, and Minister for Tourism for her donation to the cause. Once again, on a night where history is the theme, on behalf of Picnic Point High School, the History Teachers Association of New South Wales, and the students who won the National History Challenge awards tonight, I thank the Premier and Minister Nori.

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [9.37 p.m.]: On behalf of the Government, I reaffirm the comments made by the honourable member for East Hills. The Government and the Premier are very proud to place the focus on education. As the Premier has often pointed out, history is the foundation of tomorrow. The comments made by the honourable member for East Hills tonight emphasises the importance of history teaching. The students who won the awards are to be complimented. The awards demonstrate not only the ability of the students themselves but of the role of education in this great State and its focus on history under the Carr Government.

I commend the honourable member for East Hills for focusing attention on the teaching of history. As the honourable member pointed out, in a past life he was a history teacher at Picnic Point High School, where he focused on ensuring that the syllabus of history received the opportunities and perspectives that need to be in place for young people today. History is a difficult subject. I was a history teacher. The difficulty is not that it is not an enriching subject, but because it is perceived to be a subject that should be put aside to enable other things to happen. History is fundamental to our social sciences today. It is great that the Government is according that perspective its deserved place. It is great that the honourable member for East Hills is putting his efforts into ensuring that young people will deliver our future.

TROUT FISHING

Mr WEBB (Monaro) [9.39 p.m.]: Tonight I raise the matter of trout fishing not only in the Monaro, where it is a very important industry, but in the whole of New South Wales, particularly in tableland areas. Honourable members will be aware that trout fishing is a spectacular recreational activity undertaken by perhaps many thousands of people in this State. The activity is valued at something like \$100 million a year, but is particularly valuable to the Snowy Mountains area. The concerns I raise tonight relate to the stocking of trout waters and the continuation of the trout fishing industry. Trout have been nominated as a fish species that threatens some native animals and critical habitats. I have asked some questions of the Minister in this Parliament. Among those questions were:

Will the currently designated "Trout Waters" on the Monaro remain as recognised trout waters? Why have the Murrumbidgee, Queanbeyan and Goodradigbee rivers, which are all declared "Trout Waters", been redesignated and now are not stocked with

trout species? How can the statement by the Director of Fisheries on ABC Radio on 20 March 2002 that only one per cent of streams are affected when over 150 kilometres of the Murrumbidgee and the entire Queanbeyan River, along with at least six other streams, have been banned and cannot be stocked with trout species, be correct?

I have asked the Minister:

What threatened species have brought about this change? What evidence is there that trout species are the threatening species?

I have asked further questions, to which I did not receive answers, regarding the locations at which the Booroolong frog has been sighted. I asked the Minister when those sightings took place, who recorded the sightings, and whether they have been verified. I asked the Minister whether he agreed with the map produced by Robinson's Field Guide in 1994 which defines the habitat of the Booroolong frog as being in the mid areas of the State on the western side of the Great Dividing Range. In other words, I questioned whether reported sightings of this frog in the southern areas of Monaro can be correct. We must look into this issue because of the impact of the Fisheries Scientific Committee nomination of trout as threatening to some native animals. Recently, the deputy chair of the Fisheries Scientific Committee was reported as describing trout as "a scourge on the environment and one of the most noxious species in Australia".

Further, some members of the Australian Conservation Council have recommended eradication of the trout species. In many of the colder waters of higher areas of New South Wales the trout flourishes. It does not impact on native species. Trout fishermen will relate stories of trout cohabitation with many native species. They tell of cases where they have examined the content of the stomachs of trout that they have caught to determine what animals they prey on and what else they eat. In most cases, their food consists of insects and small crustacea which live side-by-side with the trout in our streams. There is grave concern about faceless people on scientific committees making declarations such as the nomination of trout as a species that threatens native species and habitat—a nomination that threatens a \$100 million a year industry supported by many overseas tourists and others who have enjoyed this sport for generations. I commend Fred Dunford of the Monaro Acclimatisation Society for his work identifying trout throughout the area, for promoting the industry for many years and for being most active in countering concerns about its declaration as a threat to native species. I commend also Scott Levy from Wagga Wagga, a very keen trout fisherman and another person who has been dealing with the issue.

The Wagga Wagga, Burrinjuck, and Monaro electorates and a number of other northern electorates are caught up in this issue. We need to examine the direction in which this declaration is taking the industry. The Minister must deal properly with the socio-economic factors of the industry, not just the environmental issues, and recognise that much of this so-called information does not exist. I have to question why there is so much fuss about trout when this scientific committee of so-called experts has done nothing about the presence of carp in New South Wales waters. Carp is the species that is doing most damage to habitat and native species. Yet this committee acts secretly and nominates trout as a threatening species when it is in fact a spectacular recreational fishing resource. I must therefore question what the scientific committee is saying on this issue.

TRIBUTE TO Mr BERT PONDER

Mr COLLIER (Miranda) [9.44 p.m.]: It is with sadness that I note the passing of Bert Ponder of Gympsea Bay on 26 August 2002. Men and women serve their societies in different ways—through their commitment to families, their friends and our nation, and through the quality of the work they do. They also serve through the time they give and the effort they make in improving their local communities. Bert Ponder served our society in all those ways, and with distinction. He loved his family and he loved his country. Like many young Australians anxious to defend freedom in the Second World War, Bert put up his age in order to enlist. He served in New Guinea in some of the darkest days of our nation.

As a tradesman, Bert was passionate about good workmanship, and that showed in everything he made. I saw that in the staircase at his home, in the miniature tea sets he turned and in the propeller clock he made that now sits on the bookcase in my electorate office at Miranda. It is through Bert's contribution to the wood-turners, to the development of the skills of the members of the Cubbyhouse, and to their activities in assisting local deserving groups that I have most associated with Bert. Bert was an esteemed member of the Southern Sydney Region of the Wood-turners Guild. The wood-turners are an outstanding community-minded group which meets regularly within the electorate at Oyster Bay. Honourable members will no doubt recall that the wood-turners received the Premier's Award for Community Service in May, 2000.

I first met Bert at the opening of the new accident and emergency unit at Sutherland hospital in December 1998. He was there along with Allan Bourne and Clive Cairns, who later became known as the ABC

of the wood-turners. Bert invited me down to a "maxi day at the Cubbyhouse". I said I would come for half an hour. I stayed for three hours and later joined the guild. I will always remember on my very first visit Bert being outside using a lathe and demonstrating a technique to a group that was watching intently. I stood there. I do not even recall him looking up, but he said, a smoke in the corner of his mouth, and nodding at me, "See that bloke over there. He's a barrister, but he's all right." That meant a lot. Bert then went on with the demonstration as if nothing had happened.

But that was typical of Bert—a little matter of fact, refreshingly frank, but generous with his time, and ever willing to pass on his great knowledge and fine skills to other members of the guild contributing to the community. Bert worked hard to establish what has become known affectionately as "The Cubbyhouse". This was an old, disused scout hall in a bad state of disrepair. It was a hall earmarked by Sutherland council for demolition. Bert organised and acted as foreman of the restoration of the hall. Today the hall is used by more than 200 wood-turners in the regular maxi days and mini days and by a number of other local groups. Bert played a key role in developing the extraordinary camaraderie one finds as one walks in the door on any of those maxi or mini days. He was always there at the craft shows, raising funds for the hospital, the Rural Fire Service, the State Emergency Services and more recently the Assistance Dogs for Independence. I will always remember Bert's chess sets on display, the bowls and the miniatures he turned, all done with a view to raising funds for many local and worthy causes.

Bert's contribution to our shire and our community is an inspiration to everyone in public life. His strength of character, determination and courage during his illness provided inspiration to all in the shire. He remains to each of us in the Cubbyhouse a very fine Australian. On behalf of the people of my electorate of Miranda and of the Sutherland shire, I thank Bert for his contribution to my community and for enriching the lives of each and every one of us in the Wood-turners Guild. I extend my deepest sympathies to his wife, Jean, to his sons, Graeme, Terry and Ross, and to his daughter, Gae, and their families. Bert Ponder contributed much to his community and to the lives of the people of the shire. He will be sadly missed by all at the Cubbyhouse.

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [9.49 p.m.]: I concur with the comments of the honourable member for Miranda. People like Bert Ponder are the backbone of every community. For him to be recognised in this fashion is a compliment not only to Bert but to those in the community who have supported him over the years. It is great to see a family-oriented community recognising the achievements of an individual but, more importantly, appreciating how that individual contributed to the community family. I commend that approach to the House tonight.

CROSS-CITY TUNNEL

Ms MOORE (Bligh) [9.50 p.m.]: I call on the Government to abandon the revised cross-city tunnel scheme. Although the supplementary environmental impact statement [EIS] for the revised scheme is inadequate and incomplete, it is sufficient to show that the modified proposal is much more environmentally damaging than the proposal previously approved. I call upon the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads to release all financial details relating to the revised proposal to enable public scrutiny and analysis of whether funding arrangements are driving this environmentally unacceptable scheme that will increase traffic, pollution and urban blight. I understand that as a result of the proposed changes the New South Wales Government will be financially advantaged to the tune of more than \$100 million, while it appears that the preferred tenderer will benefit from proposed project changes designed to maximise toll revenue. The New South Wales public needs to know whether these profits provide an inappropriate incentive to proceed with a project designed to increase tollway usage at the expense of public benefit and improvements to transport in Sydney.

I call on the Minister for Planning to establish urgently a commission of inquiry under section 119C of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act in order to investigate fully why a more damaging scheme is being proposed to replace the previous scheme. The community has the right to expect that any revised project will improve, not worsen, the previously approved project, which had 240 conditions imposed by the Minister for Planning. The revised scheme increases unplanned-for traffic impacts on residential areas, worsens air and noise pollution, is visually degrading, impedes local traffic access and risks building integrity at the eastern portal. Revised traffic conditions at Woolloomooloo will force local residents to pay tolls to get to the harbour tunnel or to use convoluted routes to access the Harbour Bridge. This reduced local access is intended to force 7,000 vehicles per day onto the tollway—more than half the total increase in traffic predicted as a result of the new scheme.

The scheme fails to match tunnel capacity to realistic traffic volumes on congested New South Head Road, which is already congested by 72,900 vehicles a day—well beyond its nominal capacity of 60,000

vehicles per day. The Roads and Traffic Authority [RTA] proposes to add even more: 95,000 vehicles per day by 2006 and 101,000 by 2016, which is 70 per cent above capacity. The modified proposal creates a Los Angeles-style spaghetti junction of roads at the eastern portal. The Kings Cross tunnel eastern exit, cross-city tunnel eastern exit, Craigend Street, Kings Cross Road and a new ramp off Ward Avenue will merge at this point, exposing large numbers of people in this densely populated area to noise and unfiltered pollution emissions from the portal, and degrading the urban environment, the precinct's heritage and the adjacent Rushcutters Bay foreshore parkland. The changed tunnel location threatens the structural integrity of the Elan, Altair and Millennium buildings, whose owners and residents must be guaranteed that their homes will be safe. Residents whose homes were damaged by the Eastern Distributor are still waiting for repairs and compensation.

I have submitted an extensive 17-page response to the revised cross-city tunnel proposal, including 40 recommendations. My submission identified significant and fundamental environmental problems, some of which I have just outlined. Furthermore, despite dramatically increased traffic volumes, the proposal fails to expand traffic monitoring and traffic management to protect the affected surrounding suburbs of Paddington, Edgecliff, Woollahra, Darling Point, East Sydney, Rushcutters Bay and Kings Cross. The revised project increases private vehicle use at the expense of public transport and provides virtually useless cycleways and pedestrian links, despite the stated purpose of the cross-city tunnel to "return roads to public transport, bicycles and pedestrians". The proposal includes increases in current levels of traffic noise and air pollution rather than setting clear targets to reduce this pollution using achievable strategies based on world's best practice to meet those targets.

Vehicle emissions in the tunnel must be filtered to improve air quality rather than dispersed across Sydney via ventilation stacks. Less restrictive construction noise limits are proposed that would cause serious daytime disruption and night-time sleep disturbance without a regime of regular external independent noise monitoring. The proposal deletes the "landscaped lid" over the western end of the Kings Cross tunnel, which was a desirable feature of the previous scheme. The tender proposal presented by the RTA in its supplementary EIS must be rejected and an alternative conforming tender selected that complies with, or improves upon, the approved cross-city tunnel project and its 240 conditions.

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING LAKE MACQUARIE VISIT

Mr HUNTER (Lake Macquarie) [9.55 p.m.]: I wish to speak tonight about the visit to the Lake Macquarie electorate by the Minister for Education and Training. On 28 August the Minister visited Lake Macquarie, accepting my invitation extended as part of a campaign that I have been running to see improvements take place at local schools. The Minister had the chance to meet local school communities, which had the opportunity to highlight their achievements and the positive aspects of individual schools while drawing the Minister's attention to the needs of each school. I wanted the Minister to visit local schools such as Booragul, Arcadia Vale and Dora Creek to see first-hand the need for improved facilities at these growing schools. While at the schools the Minister addressed school assemblies, presented special awards, inspected facilities and met teachers, staff and community representatives.

At Booragul Public School the Minister viewed a technology demonstration by kindergarten and year 6 students. The students showed the Minister their skills by putting together a PowerPoint presentation. The Minister also attended a school assembly and presented student awards to Nicole Skelton, a leading student, and to Nadia King for achievements in public speaking. Nadia delivered her award-winning presentation "Who am I" for the Minister and the school assembly. The school's junior and senior choirs also performed during the Minister's visit. The visit also gave me and the school community a chance to show the Minister that a new school library and staff car park are much needed at Booragul Public School. The Minister took on board our request for the new facilities and I look forward to a positive outcome to our representations.

At Arcadia Vale Public School the Minister presented outstanding achievement awards during an assembly to the Assistant Principal, Ms Robyn Smith, and to teacher's aide, Ms Kerry Whittall. Ms Smith received an award for her contribution to the school's performance program and Ms Whittall received an award for her contribution to debating and other important school programs. While at the school the Minister met for some time with teachers and staff. He recognised the need for a new administration building at Arcadia Vale Public School and other improvements to school buildings and facilities.

The Minister then travelled to Dora Creek Public School where he presented a hoop pine to be planted in the school grounds, just as a former education Minister did some 100 years ago. The Minister also attended a school assembly to present some awards: an outstanding achievement award to Jackson Saunders, who will

represent New South Wales in cross-country running; citizenship awards to students in each grade; and a community award to parents and citizens association and casual staff member Ms Jenny Kemp. Ms Kemp received the award in recognition of her contribution to the school's choirs and other programs.

Dora Creek Public School currently has only one permanent classroom, apart from its library, and is made up of demountable classrooms. After having made representations to the Minister for Education and Training and expressed local concerns in this House, I am pleased to state that the Minister took action even prior to his visit to ensure that new demountable buildings are moved onto the school's site to provide facilities that the school has never previously had. The Minister's visit on 28 August also gave me and the school's community the opportunity to point out that further planning must be undertaken for the school. New permanent buildings are needed and additional land adjacent to the school site could be acquired so that future planning will lead to construction of a new school on an enlarged site.

After visiting the Dora Creek Public School, the Minister travelled to the Toronto High School where he met with approximately 40 school principals of the Lake Macquarie district. The meeting was certainly very enlightening and provided the principals with an opportunity to meet the Minister and ask him questions to assist them in their endeavours as leaders of local schools. I was pleased to have in attendance my colleagues the honourable member for Wallsend, John Mills, and the honourable member for Swansea, Milton Orkopoulos, and principals from schools in their electorates who were also in attendance. I thank the Minister for his visit which gave me the opportunity to highlight to him a number of issues at other local schools such as Cooranbong Community School, West Wallsend High School, Toronto High School, and Wangi Wangi Public School. In the past, I have highlighted issues at those schools and the Minister has agreed to take on board and examine these concerns. I am sure that the Minister will contact me when responding to those school communities.

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS ELECTORATE RAILWAY STATIONS ACCESS

Ms SEATON (Southern Highlands) [10.00 p.m.]: Tonight I wish to draw to the attention of the House and the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads in particular the issue of access to Picton station. As anyone who has visited Picton railway station knows, access is very difficult unless one is what some people jokingly refer to as a mountain goat. It is a very difficult station to move around on and it is very difficult for passengers to go from one platform to another. I am disappointed that the Government's Easy Access Program seems to have completely ignored the very pressing needs of Picton station.

At one of the very first meetings I attended in the Wollondilly area after the 1998 redistribution in the Estonian retirement village at Thirlmere, a matter mentioned by residents was the need to upgrade the facilities at Picton station, particularly the need to make it easier for older people to get around. They made the point that a handrail was needed on the set of stairs leading to the Bridge Street access overpass. I am pleased to inform the House that representations regarding the handrail were successful, but that was really only the beginning of what needs to be done at Picton station. When I met other senior citizens groups and other people who live in Picton, the issue of access at Picton station was repeatedly raised with me. As many honourable members know, Picton is a hilly area. The railway line traverses a very deep cutting. In order to move from one platform to another, rail travellers have to climb a very steep set of steps that have been cut into the side of a hill, walk over the Bridge Street overpass and then back down onto the other platform.

Many people jokingly remark that one has to be a mountain goat to be able to get up and down the steps. The steps are very difficult and I sympathise with people who experience difficulties. On a recent visit to Picton I met people who depend on motorised wheelchairs to be able to get around and another gentleman I met had recently had a hip replacement. These people rely on trains to visit relatives, to keep medical appointments or just to enjoy life generally. They really have a very difficult time when moving around Picton station. Many people avoid Picton station altogether, even though Picton is their home town, and make arrangements to catch a train at Tahmoor instead, or somewhere else where access to the station is flatter.

People have been telling me that they want better facilities to enable them to cross the rail tracks and get from one platform to another without having to go up the steps and down the other side. It is important to address access to Picton station because Picton has a developing tourism industry. Local residents are eager to attract visitors to Picton, which has wonderful heritage and natural environment attractions to offer. The steam train that travels from Picton station to the Thirlmere steam rail museum along the old loop line attracts a great deal of interest, but people who wish to enjoy the trip usually are elderly and experience enormous difficulties when using the station's facilities.

According to a recent announcement, Bowral station has been included in the Easy Access Program. A problem of more importance at Bowral station, however, is that two years ago the Government reduced the station's operating hours by excluding weekends and some of the later hours of weekday evenings. People who journey to Bowral and who expect to be able to use bathroom facilities are unable to do so, except during the limited weekday opening hours. The station does not present commuters, tourists and visitors with a welcoming environment when they get off the train. I have mentioned this matter to the local tourism manager at Wingecarribee who is examining ways of improving signs to direct people to other public facilities that are available in Bowral, but it must be said that the paucity of facilities such as public toilets at Bowral station is becoming a problem. It is a matter that has been remarked upon by local people and visitors. I ask the Minister for Transport, and Minister for Roads and the Minister for Small Business, and Minister for Tourism to take these matters into account with a view to improving facilities.

ADULT LEARNING WEEK

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.05 p.m.]: For all of us, education is a bridge to the future. In the past, life was mostly a matter of receiving a formal education or formal training and then setting off into a field of employment. In many cases people remained in their chosen field for the remainder of their adult working lives. However, as all honourable members know, times have changed dramatically, and many bridges must be crossed during a lifetime of learning. In formal and informal education, a whole array of mechanisms exist through which people may gain knowledge and experience. I am very fortunate to live in the Newcastle community in the Hunter Valley where enormous opportunities for formal and informal education exist, including the University of Newcastle and TAFE, which has 53,000 students involved in formal learning programs. Public and private school systems also provide tremendous educational experiences for students, but that is only part of the picture.

The area boasts a very broad range of training groups including training providers and adult and community education structures. This week is known as Adult Learning Week—an event that has been recognised over the past eight years by a national body, Adult Learning Australia, and the New South Wales Board of Adult and Community Education. This year's theme, "Never Stop Learning", reflects wide recognition that in a formal and informal or empirical sense, learning is a lifelong experience. This week I was very pleased to attend a ceremony to launch "Never Stop Learning" at the Newcastle City Council. Speakers at the event included the Knights coach, Michael Hagan, and the Hunter Area Health Service chief executive officer, Professor Katherine McGrath.

It was interesting to note that in the address given by each speaker, there was an emphasis not only on the achievement of formal education but also on the enormous on-the-job learning that must take place in the development of formal skills. Michael Hagan pointed out that after undertaking studies for the equivalent of the Higher School Certificate in Queensland, he embarked on a professional football career which extended over 12 seasons. Michael then began a successful coaching career, winning in his first year the National Rugby League premiership. He quickly learned that coaching required a high level of sophistication and formal training—the skills package. He undertook a TAFE course in management and organisation and is now completing a MBA at the University of Newcastle, specialising in management and organisational skills, as well as information technology, a necessity for modern coaching.

Professor McGrath stated that changing her role from pathologist, to pathology management and then to managing a huge organisation such as the Hunter Area Health Service has meant considerable on-the-job and continuous learning. Most people would acknowledge that continuous learning is part of modern life. Therefore, it is timely that we celebrate this week. In particular, I commend the Hunter Community College and the Workers Education Association for the numerous array of opportunities given to people to improve their skills and to learn craft activities, all of which are part of lifetime learning in our community.

Mr STEWART (Bankstown—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.10 p.m.]: I join with the honourable member for Newcastle in heralding the importance of education in the community. He rightly pointed out that education is an important investment in our future. I am pleased that the honourable member referred to educational achievements in his electorate as a microcosm of the wider community. We never stop learning. A few years ago people who had completed their school education were not afforded further avenues of formal learning and people went through life with their heads lowered, merely pretending to know better. Today there are no taboos on education and opportunities are now provided through the school system, TAFE and other tertiary institutions to those who were not offered them earlier in life. I commend the honourable member for Newcastle, who was a former Parliamentary Secretary for Education and Training, for being at the forefront in encouraging education for the betterment of not only young people but all people in his community. His private member's statement is a perfect example of that commitment.

WOMEN'S RIGHT TO VOTE ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY

Ms ANDREWS (Peats) [10.12 p.m.]: Tonight I remind the House that this year we are celebrating the centenary of the right of Australian women to vote. It happened so long ago, yet the wheels of change move slowly. Although Australia is one of the most developed countries in the world, in 2002 the total number of women representatives in all parliaments around Australia is only 213, while the total number of male representatives is 816. Sadly, the total number of female representatives lags well behind that of the male representation. In fact, female representation is approximately 25 per cent of the male representation. However, it should be borne in mind that the number of females eligible to vote in Australia is now greater than males.

In New South Wales the female proportion of representatives in the Legislative Council is 24 per cent while in the Legislative Assembly it is only 19 per cent. There are three female Ministers, namely, the Hon. Sandra Nori, Minister for Small Business, Minister for Tourism and Minister for Women; the Hon. Dr Meredith Anne Burgmann, President of the Legislative Council; and the Hon. Carmel Tebbutt, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Juvenile Justice, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Youth. This is in line with the Federal Parliament, which also has three female Ministers.

Victoria has the highest number with eight female Ministers, Queensland has five female Ministers and Western Australia has four. Tasmania has three female Ministers while South Australia and Northern Territory each has two. Of course, it should be noted that the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory is Clare Martin. It should be remembered that the Northern Territory was only given the right to conduct elections for the Legislative Assembly in 1974, with the first elections taking place in 1978 when the Territory was granted self-government.

The percentage of female representation in upper Houses of Parliament throughout Australia is as follows: 29 per cent in the Federal Parliament, 24 per cent in New South Wales, 27 per cent in Victoria, 23 per cent in South Australia, 32 per cent in Western Australia and 37 per cent in Tasmania. As honourable members would be aware, the States of Queensland, Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory do not have upper Houses. In the lower House the percentage of female representation is as follows: 24 per cent in Federal Parliament, 19 per cent in New South Wales, 25 per cent in Victoria, 26 per cent in South Australia, 23 per cent in Western Australia, 27 per cent in Tasmania, 36 per cent in Queensland, 28 per cent in Northern Territory and 12 per cent in the Australian Capital Territory. The right to vote in Federal elections was granted to Australian women on 9 April 1902 and in New South Wales State elections on 27 August 1902.

A reception was held in New South Wales Parliament on Tuesday 27 August 2002 co-jointly hosted by the State Parliament's Presiding Officers, the Hon. John Murray and the Hon. Dr Meredith Burgmann, to mark this auspicious occasion. The special guest of honour was the first female Governor of New South Wales, Her Excellency Marie Bashir, AC. Although Australia and New South Wales were well ahead of most other countries throughout the world in granting women's right to vote, New Zealand—our arch-rival in many areas, particularly sporting events, the most notable being rugby union—was the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote, way back in 1893, although it was not until 1919 when legislation was carried extending to women the right to stand for Parliament. The first election of a female representative in New Zealand took place in 1933.

Australia followed in 1902, followed by Finland in 1906 and Norway in 1913. Countries with which Australia has close affiliation, such as Canada, came on board in 1917, and, despite the best efforts of the suffragettes, the United Kingdom in 1918 and 1928, and the United States of America in 1920. It is interesting to note that women had the right to stand for election in the United States from 1788. In New South Wales women were granted the right to a seat in the Legislative Assembly in 1918. [*Time expired.*]

Private members' statements noted.

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of a group of former students of St Luke's School, Dee Why. I hope you have enjoyed the evening.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

Mr WHELAN: I also note the presence in the gallery of the upper House member, the Hon. David Oldfield.

The House adjourned at 10.20 p.m.
