

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday 7 May 2003

Mr Speaker (The Hon. John Joseph Aquilina) took the chair at 10.00 a.m.

Mr Speaker offered the Prayer.

CRIMES AMENDMENT (SEXUAL OFFENCES) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr DEBUS (Blue Mountains—Attorney General, and Minister for the Environment) [10.02 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Government is pleased to introduce this important legislation. The Crimes Amendment (Sexual Offences) Bill amends the Crimes Act 1900 to provide for the equal treatment of sexual offences irrespective of whether the victim or the perpetrator is male or female. The Crimes Act is presently discriminatory in that it provides different penalties for sexual offences depending on whether the perpetrator and victim are male or female. The Act is also discriminatory in that it provides different ages of consent for heterosexual and homosexual intercourse. The bill removes this discrimination and ensures equal treatment before the law. The bill rationalises the age of consent in New South Wales to 16 years of age for all persons irrespective of gender or sexual orientation. The lower age limit is absolute—no specific statutory defence is provided for.

The bill removes gender-specific offences and amends the Crimes Act for the consistent use of non-gender-specific language. Previous attempts to bring about equity in this area have been unsuccessful in this Parliament. As a result, New South Wales is the last State in Australia to have a discriminatory age of consent for males and females. In 1999 the Hon. Jan Burnswoods, MLC, introduced in the Legislative Council a private member's bill providing for equal age of consent in New South Wales of 16 years of age. The bill failed to pass the Legislative Council at second reading by one vote. In 2002 Ms Burnswoods introduced a further private member's bill that also provided for equal age of consent of 16 years of age. The bill was referred to the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues.

The bill now before the House has several crucial differences from the private member's bills previously introduced, as it contains important additional safeguards to protect our young people from sexual exploitation. These further safeguards include the removal of the defence to carnal knowledge based on reasonable mistake of age, the establishment of new aggravated child sexual assault offences and the rationalisation of offences to bring greater rigour and consistency to penalties involving child sexual assault. A number of Australian royal commissions, committees and reports have been supportive of a reduction of the age of consent for homosexual intercourse to 16 years of age. These include the 1997 Wood Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service, and the Model Criminal Code Officers' Committee of the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General. Justice James Wood in his 1997 royal commission found that the current legislation contributes to a climate conducive to corrupt law enforcement practices and possible extortion of young gay men. It is of particular significance that bodies of such high standing support the introduction of a uniform age of consent.

The age of consent in other jurisdictions in both Australia and overseas is currently as follows. In the United Kingdom, Victoria, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory the uniform age of consent is 16 years. In South Australia and Tasmania the uniform age of consent is 17 years. Queensland has a uniform age of consent which is not gender specific, 16 and 18, for different kinds of sexual activity. In the Northern Territory it is unlawful to have sexual intercourse or commit an act of gross indecency with a female under 16 years. For males it is unlawful to have sexual intercourse or commit acts of gross indecency with other males under 18 years. It is relevant to note that a number of countries have an equal age of consent that has existed for some time. France, for example, introduced a non-discriminatory age of consent in the Code Napoleon in 1810.

The age of consent in France is 15. In Italy, the uniform age of consent is 14; in Germany, 16. Poland and the Czech Republic have an equal age of consent of 15, while in Spain it is 13. Interested members can obtain from my office a table setting out the position in various jurisdictions—I suspect that they may find it instructive.

While New South Wales has lagged behind other jurisdictions in this area, the social cost of these discriminatory laws has continued to be felt in this State. Of particular importance to the debate are the public health issues involved in the present environment of discriminatory unequal age of consent law. These include the increased difficulty in combating HIV-AIDS, rates of violence towards gay men, and rates of male youth suicide. Most young gay men grow up in a decidedly homophobic environment, facing threats to their psychological and physical wellbeing. Research has found that young gay men are up to 300 per cent more likely to commit suicide than their heterosexual peers, making suicide the leading cause of death among young gay men. This is a staggering statistic, which is the cause of greatest concern by the community. In the Government's view, the present discriminatory legislation in New South Wales provides tacit support to entrenched homophobic elements that negatively impact upon social integration and the psychological health of young gay men.

Research in the United States of America and Australia leaves little doubt that stigmatisation of sexuality and criminalisation of victimless sexual conduct are significant contributors to both the high rates of violence towards boys perceived as gay and to male youth suicide. The 1994 Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues report entitled "Suicide in Rural New South Wales" found that this was particularly the case in rural New South Wales, where support services, such as counselling, are not readily available. Research has also found that the unequal age of consent has impeded the fight against HIV-AIDS in this State, as the criminalisation of victimless conduct makes it more difficult to achieve widespread behavioural change to reduce transmission risks and poses an impediment to early diagnosis of infection.

The same applies to the public health problems of other sexually transmissible diseases. The present legislation relating to sexual conduct means that disclosure of risk status, disclosure of possible transmissible events, or even just seeking testing for HIV, could lead to criminal prosecution. Similarly, the offence under section 78Q (2) of the Crimes Act of soliciting, procuring, inciting or advising a male person under 18 to commit or be party to an act of homosexual intercourse, or an act of gross indecency with or towards a male person, is inconsistent with public health initiatives, including counselling of gay youth about safe sex.

On 21 December 2001 the Crown Advocate provided an advice to me concerning the likelihood that the Court of Criminal Appeal would grant a guideline judgment with respect to child sexual assault offences. That advice suggested that at the present time it is unlikely that the court would grant a guideline judgment, partially because the legislation itself is inconsistent in the penalties imposed. The Crown Advocate went on to make a number of recommendations concerning the rationalisation of the legislation regarding child sexual assault.

To partly address these recommendations, the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Standard Minimum Sentencing) Act 2002 repealed the offences of homosexual intercourse and attempted homosexual intercourse with a child under 10 years of age—sections 78H and 78I of the Crimes Act. The amendment Act increased the penalties for the offences of sexual intercourse and attempted sexual intercourse with a child under 10 years—sections 66A and 66B of the Crimes Act 1900—from 20 to 25 years imprisonment. These amendments ensured that all sexual assaults upon children under 10 years of age will be brought under the same non-gender-specific provisions.

The Crown Advocate also highlighted the disparity in the maximum penalty between the offence of sexual intercourse with a child under 10 years of age of 20 years imprisonment—section 66A—and sexual intercourse with an 11-year-old child of only 8 years imprisonment—section 66C (1). The amendment Act, by increasing the penalty under section 66A to 25 years, further increased this disparity. This disparity and others that require legislative amendment are addressed by the present bill, which includes a recommendation that the maximum penalty for an offence under section 66C (1) be increased from 8 to 16 years.

There are cogent arguments why there should be no distinction between homosexual intercourse with a child and heterosexual intercourse with a child. Either is equally abhorrent. It may be said that to send any message of a distinction between homosexual and heterosexual sexual assaults upon children is inflammatory and archaic. The point of such legislation is to protect children from sexual exploitation by sexual predators. The logic of the argument for rationalisation of child sexual assault legislation is simple—the harm to children is the same regardless of gender. It is absurd to suggest that a homosexual act on a young boy is more heinous than a

sexual assault on a young girl. The current law makes sexual assaults of young girls less criminal than sexual assaults on young boys. Such a distinction is discriminatory and has no justification in logic.

In proposing a uniform age of consent in New South Wales the bill employs further strict safeguards to protect children from exploitation by sexual predators. The sexual exploitation of our children is criminal conduct of the most heinous and abhorrent kind and must be deplored by the Legislature through the imposition of heavy deterrent penalties. The bill therefore increases penalties for sexual offences upon children under the age of 16 years. The bill eliminates the defence currently available to consensual sexual activity with young people aged between 14 and 16 years, formerly known as carnal knowledge.

The bill removes the express statutory defence presently provided in section 77 (2) (c) of the Crimes Act that the person charged had reasonable cause to believe, and did in fact believe, that the child was of or above the age of 16 years. As a consequence, it will no longer be possible to argue that a uniform age of consent of 16 years creates an effective age of consent of 14 years. The increased safeguards also include the introduction of additional aggravated sexual offences against children. The bill repeals a number of separate offences relating to homosexual acts with males between 10 and 18 years of age. The result will be that sexual assault and offences against children will be dealt with by the same set of provisions that apply irrespective of whether the victim or the perpetrator is male or female. It will also result in a uniform age of consent of 16 years.

Under clause 48 of the bill, consensual male homosexual acts that took place before the commencement of the amendments between persons who were not less than 16 years of age at the time will cease to be unlawful. In relation to the offence of sexual intercourse with a person under 16 years and over 10 years, the bill increases the maximum penalties and establishes new aggravated offences. The bill reduces the inappropriate disparity between the offence of sexual intercourse with a child under 16 years and over 10 years, currently 8 years imprisonment, and the offence of sexual intercourse with a child under 10 years old, currently 25 years imprisonment.

Under the present Act, an offender convicted of having sexual intercourse with a 9-year-old is liable to a penalty of 25 years imprisonment, whilst an offender convicted of the same offence with an 11 year old is only liable to 8 years imprisonment. The bill increases the penalties as follows: where a child is between 10 and 14 years of age, from 8 years to 16 years imprisonment; where a child is between 10 and 14 years of age in circumstances of aggravation, from 10 years to 20 years imprisonment; where a child is between 14 and 16 years of age, from 8 years to 10 years imprisonment; where a child is between 14 and 16 years of age in circumstances of aggravation, from 10 years to 12 years imprisonment.

The offence of aggravated sexual intercourse without consent, the aggravation being that the person is under 16 years of age, will continue to attract a penalty of 20 years imprisonment. Sexual intercourse with a child under 10 years will continue to attract a penalty of 25 years imprisonment. The bill extends the circumstances of aggravation applicable to sexual assault to offences of sexual intercourse with a person under 16 years and over 10 years. In particular, section 66C (5) (d) refers to the alleged victim being under the authority of the alleged offender. It is intended that this provision cover a broad range of relationships in which a child is under the care of an offender, even if only for a football club day trip, church outing or after-school sporting activity.

A further circumstance of aggravation featured within the bill under section 66C (5) (g) is the situation where an offender takes advantage of an alleged victim being under the influence of alcohol or a drug in order to commit the offence. This will provide protection from sexual predators who deliberately drug children, as well as those who take advantage of children who have self-intoxicated. The bill will remove the anachronistic term "carnal knowledge" and utilise the term "sexual intercourse", which is consistent with the modern language of the Act. The offence of procuring carnal knowledge by fraud found in section 66 of the Act is removed, as it is an obsolete offence. The issue of fraud is incorporated through amendment of the consent provisions found in section 61R of the Act.

The bill also removes the offence of carnal knowledge by a male teacher, parent or step-parent under section 73 of the Act. The provision is replaced with the offence of sexual intercourse by a teacher. The revised offence will apply to both male and female perpetrators and complainants. References to parent and step-parent have been removed as they are adequately dealt with in the revised incest provision. The revised incest offence applies to any person who has sexual intercourse with a close family member of or above the age of 16 years. The Act presently only criminalises behaviour defined as carnal knowledge, within a family, committed by a male against a female or allowed by a female to be committed against her by a male.

The bill also provides for the equal treatment of offences relating to child prostitution, irrespective of the gender of the child concerned. The amendment rectifies the present situation where section 91D (2) provides for a defence relating to girls but not to boys. This ironically makes child prostitution with girls more defensible than child prostitution with boys. That cannot have been the intention of the Legislature. The defence will now apply equally to alleged offenders irrespective of whether the offender or the child is male or female.

The bill repeals an obsolete provision relating to the guardianship of female incest complainants by male offenders. This provision is replaced by the new section 80AA, a general provision that allows a court to refer the matter to an appropriate child protection agency where a person is convicted of any sexual offence and the victim is under the authority of the offender. The Government takes the view that it is more appropriate to refer the issue of guardianship, irrespective of the gender of the guardian or the child, to the appropriate expert tribunal where detailed safeguards are in place in relation to care proceedings, rather than leaving it to the determination of a criminal court.

The bill will remove discriminatory provisions from the Crimes Act and ensure that certain types of sexual misconduct by any person, whether male or female, against any other person, whether male or female, will be dealt with on the same bases, including as to the age of the victim, the defences available to the accused and the penalties for the offence. It is clear that the arguments in favour of a uniform age of consent of 16 years in New South Wales are extremely powerful. The present discriminatory laws have been found to have serious detrimental impacts not only on the mental health of gay youth but also on public health issues generally. The introduction of a uniform age of consent in New South Wales will therefore have a positive impact not only on the physical and mental wellbeing of our youth but also will have a positive impact upon society generally.

The repeal of current laws that discriminate purely on the ground of sexual orientation will serve to provide a more just, equitable and tolerant society. The opponents of previous attempts in this Parliament to remove that discrimination have focused upon the potential for the exploitation of young people. This legislation removes any such apparent connection. The Crimes (Sexual Offences) Bill establishes an absolute uniform minimum age of consent of 16 years. There are no statutory exceptions. At the same time the bill creates new factors of aggravation to deal with exploitation, and rationalises and increases penalties. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Tink.

VICTIMS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr DEBUS (Blue Mountains—Attorney General, and Minister for the Environment) [10.21 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Victims Legislation Amendment Bill proposes three sets of reform to the rights of victims in New South Wales. The first reform proposes to amend the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 to enable victim impact statements to be read out in court by victims of serious offences or their representatives. The second reform reintroduces amendments to the Victims Rights Act 1996 with respect to providing victims of crime with information about the prosecution of accused persons. Finally, the bill provides for an amendment to the Victims Support and Rehabilitation Act 1996 to provide counselling benefits to members of the immediate family of persons killed in a homicide involving the use of a motor vehicle.

The first proposed reform would give victims of crime the right to make a verbal statement to the court explaining how the crime affected them. At present a written victim impact statement can be received and considered in the Supreme and District Courts in relation to an offence that involves actual or threatened violence, including sexual assault, or the death of, or any physical bodily harm to, any person. Statements may also be received and considered in the Local and Children's Courts in relation to an offence that involves the death of any person.

The proposed reform would allow these victim impact statements to be read out to the court following a conviction, but prior to sentencing of the offender. The statements will still need to be tendered to the court in

written form following a conviction and will be required to meet any existing rules concerning content. However, victims, or their representative on their behalf, would be given the opportunity to read their statements, either in whole or in part, to the court. The victim impact statement is about the impact of the crime on the victim. It is the victim's opportunity to participate in the criminal justice process by fully informing the court about the effects of the crime upon the victim. The proposal to allow the victim to read the impact statement to the court would enhance that process.

The second proposed reform has previously been introduced in the form of the Victims Rights Amendment Bill 2002. The bill was passed by the Legislative Assembly but not debated by the upper House before Parliament rose at the end of last year. The proposed reform stems from a report commissioned by the Government in September 2001. The former Governor, the Hon. Gordon Samuels, was commissioned to review and report on the adequacy of the New South Wales Director of Public Prosecutions' policy and guidelines in relation to charge bargaining and tendering of agreed facts. The review was to have particular regard to a number of matters, including whether the policy and guidelines ensure adequate consultation with victims of crime. It followed public concern about the degree of communication between the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions [DPP] and victims of crime in several matters involving serious personal violence.

The report prepared by Mr Samuels was released in June 2002 and came after detailed consideration of submissions from victims, victims support groups, police, criminal lawyers and judges. Interviews were also conducted with key stakeholders, including the Director of Public Prosecutions, Mr Nicholas Cowdery, QC. The report concluded that the DPP's existing policies and guidelines do provide for adequate consultation with victims. It concluded that, while the existing framework was fundamentally sound, the flow of information to victims and witnesses of crime had to be a priority. A number of recommendations and observations were made in that respect. I have been advised by the Director of Public Prosecutions that all of the recommendations have been accepted.

The Samuels report also commented upon the Charter of Victims Rights, which is contained in part 2 of the Victim Rights Act 1996. Whilst not specifically recommending that the charter be amended, the report suggested there was room for improvement in respect of paragraph 6.5 of the charter. Presently, item 6.5 of the charter provides that a victim should, on request, be informed about certain aspects of criminal proceedings against the accused person, such as the charges laid against the accused, any decision to modify or not to proceed with charges, and the date and place of hearing of any charge laid against the accused.

Under the Victims Legislation Amendment Bill it would no longer be necessary for a victim to ask to be given this information. A victim would be informed of these aspects of the criminal proceedings as a matter of course. The proposed amendments to the charter would assist victims and the immediate family of victims by ensuring that they are informed in a timely manner in relation to the aspects of the criminal proceedings that I have just listed. The amendments also make it clear that, where an accused has been charged with a serious crime that involves sexual violence or that results in actual bodily harm, mental illness or nervous shock, the victim should be consulted before any decision is made by the prosecution to modify or not proceed with the charges. This would include any decision for the accused to accept a plea of guilty to a less serious charge in return for a full discharge in relation to other charges.

It is proposed that the definition of a victim of crime in section 5 to the Act also be amended to provide that, if a person dies as a result of an act committed in the course of a criminal offence, the victim's family may nominate a representative for the purposes of the charter. This would enable the family to receive information provided in accordance with the charter, or to be consulted about a decision to modify or not proceed with charges against the accused. The proposed amendments also recognise that some victims of crime may not wish to be consulted in relation to some or all matters relating to the prosecution process. The Victims Advisory Board, which includes representatives of a number of victims support groups and relevant government agencies, and the Director of Public Prosecutions have indicated their support for the proposed legislation.

The last reform contained in the bill proposes to amend the Victims Support and Rehabilitation Act 1996 to enable the immediate family of someone who dies as the result of a homicide involving the use of a motor vehicle to apply to receive approved counselling services. Under the proposed amendments, counselling would be available in relation to motor vehicle accidents leading to a charge of murder or manslaughter under section 18 (1) of the Crimes Act 1900. At present, when a homicide occurs in New South Wales, members of the immediate family of the victim are eligible to apply to receive an initial period of up to 20 hours counselling from an approved counsellor under the approved counselling scheme. After the end of the initial 20 hours of counselling, further counselling is available at the discretion of the Director of Victims Services.

The scheme provides counselling benefits to a victim's spouse, including de facto partners who have cohabited with the victim for at least two years, a parent, guardian or step-parent of the victim, a child or step-child of the victim or some other child of whom the victim is the guardian, and a brother, sister, step-brother or step-sister of the victim. The approved counselling scheme provides free face-to-face counselling to victims of violent crimes that have occurred in New South Wales. The counsellors with the scheme are social workers, psychologists or psychiatrists who have proven experience of working with victims of crime.

However, these benefits are not currently available in cases where the homicide was caused by the owner or driver of a motor vehicle in the use or operation of the vehicle. The proposed reform would rectify this situation. It would ensure that the immediate family members of the victims of homicide involving the use of a motor vehicle would be able to access the same counselling benefits as are currently provided to the immediate families of other people who die as a result of an act of violence. The package of reforms contained in the bill proposes further support for victims of crime in dealing with the criminal justice system and the impact of crime on themselves and their families. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Tink.

LOTTERIES AND ART UNIONS AMENDMENT BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr McBRIDE (The Entrance—Minister for Gaming and Racing) [10.30 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Government has brought forward this bill to amend the Lotteries and Art Unions Act 1901 following a national competition policy review of the Act. That Act regulates community-based lottery activities, which include raffles, art unions, bingo, sweeps, tipping competitions and trade promotion lotteries. These types of lottery activities are of significant importance to the community. They allow charities and not-for-profit organisations to raise much-needed funds, and they also provide community entertainment. Commercial-based lottery activities are not affected by this legislation; they are regulated under the Public Lotteries Act.

The accepted principle under which lotteries and art unions may proceed is that no-one can claim a right to provide this type of gaming. It is a privilege to be granted by government, subject to thorough probity controls and only in accordance with community expectations. Hence, the Lotteries and Art Unions Act imposes a blanket prohibition on the selling or disposing of money or property by chance. It then provides exceptions to the prohibition. Certain community-based lotteries are authorised on the basis that they accord with the Act, regulations and any applicable permit conditions. For example, raffles, guessing competitions, mini number lotteries and scratch-and-break open lotteries run by non-profit organisations do not require permits.

There are restrictions on these operations that control the value of prizes on offer or the minimum value of profit that must be returned to the organisation. As a protection for the community, the Act also restricts who can conduct lottery or gaming activities, what activities can be undertaken and how those activities are to occur. Essentially, the Act restricts the conduct of lottery activities to charities and other non-profit organisations. The proposal to amend the Act has come about because of a combined national competition policy review of the Lotteries and Art Unions Act and the Charitable Fundraising Act, which was undertaken as part of the New South Wales Government's commitment to the Competition Principles Agreement.

The Charitable Fundraising Act regulates the charitable fundraising sector—a very important sector in our community. The sector comprises donors, charities, professional fundraisers and persons in beneficial receipt of charitable services. The Act imposes a general prohibition on charitable fundraising unless the person who, or organisation which, conducts the appeal is properly authorised. The national competition policy review confirmed the broad objectives of the Charitable Fundraising Act and the Lotteries and Art Unions Act.

One objective is to ensure the integrity of charitable fundraising and authorised lottery activities. That is why the Act provides a regime that requires operation by responsible and accountable persons and eliminates practices that could undermine public confidence. Another objective is to assist with the ongoing viability of organisations that conduct charitable fundraising and authorised lottery activities. This should ensure that such activities contribute positively to the community and develop and operate in the public interest. Charitable

fundraising and authorised lottery activities must be conducted with fairness. This is an important objective because such activities have a significant effect on members of the community.

In line with government policy, one objective is to promote gambling harm minimisation. Community-based lotteries are no less important than other more significant forms of gambling. Another objective is to ensure that the industries are free from criminal influence and exploitation. Finally, an objective is to ensure that the proceeds are applied to the particular purpose or organisation represented during the conduct of the charitable fundraising or authorised lottery activities. The last two objectives are important because if anyone does the wrong thing it may undermine public confidence and the ability of charities to raise much-needed income.

The review identified a number of restrictions on competition. These are entry restrictions, restrictions on conduct, cross-border restrictions, and that all persons or organisations are not placed on equal terms. The review of the Lotteries and Art Unions Act occurred in an environment of increased community concern about the expansion of gaming and the associated potential for adverse social consequences for some members of the community. The development of gaming harm minimisation and other social policy developments in New South Wales and at the Commonwealth level have shaped the recommendations of the review.

The national competition policy review of the Charitable Fundraising Act gave due regard to other inquiry processes into charitable fundraising. One was the Commonwealth's Productivity Commission inquiry into charitable organisations in June 1995, which recommended, in part, that consideration should be given to achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness of fundraising regulation among the States and Territories. Another is the formation of an inter-jurisdictional working party comprising representatives from the various States and Territories to investigate the feasibility of developing greater uniformity of regulation for charities. At this stage the working party has not resolved its position.

The review generally recommends that the current restrictions on competition in the legislation be retained on the basis that the potential public benefits of these restrictions outweigh the costs. The review considered alternatives to the restrictions. However, in each case it recommended retention of these restrictions. It was considered that they achieve the best result in terms of community benefits. Nevertheless, the review recommended that there should be ongoing discussion between the States and Territories to explore the possibility of greater uniformity. The main reason for such recommendations is the need to retain controls that maintain integrity and to ensure adherence to the Government's gaming harm minimisation policy.

At the same time, the retention of these controls seeks to provide an environment that assists the ongoing viability of charitable organisations so that they may continue to contribute positively to the community and develop and operate in the public interest. The bottom line is that the national competition policy report gave due regard to the potential economic and social impacts of maintaining restrictions. It is obvious that the absence of any regulation might well result in an expansion of gaming, with an associated increase in the incidence of problem gambling. There could be an increase in criminal influence and exploitation and an increase in practices that undermine public integrity and threaten revenue for legitimate community groups and charities.

Also, community-based organisations might not be able to offer a competitive product against commercial operators, thereby losing much-needed revenue to finance their worthwhile activities. Although the national competition policy report on the Charitable Fundraising Act does not recommend any amendment to the legislation, the national competition policy report on the Lotteries and Art Unions Act recommends that it be amended in three areas. Those areas are: first, to include explicit objects; secondly, to remove the requirement for a registered club to hold a permit to conduct certain games of chance; and, thirdly, to remove the prohibition on a person conducting a lottery in another State or Territory of Australia from advertising and selling tickets in New South Wales, provided the lottery complies with the same standards expected of a lottery conducted in New South Wales.

The Lotteries and Art Unions Act was drafted in 1901, before the practice of stating objects, and therefore has no explicit objects. The review found that the underlying implicit objectives of the Act are valid but concluded that they need to be stated explicitly. Accordingly, the bill proposes a new section 2 to provide for the objects of the Act. In particular, it provides that the principal object of the Act is to ensure that, on balance, the State and the community as a whole benefit from certain community-based lottery activities. Under the Act, registered clubs are authorised to conduct club bingo and promotional raffles provided a permit has been granted. Since 1998 an authorising permit has been granted to all registered clubs regardless of whether they

wish to conduct the game. The review concluded that, although the current system works well, far greater efficiency and less administrative burden would be attained if registered clubs were authorised to conduct certain lotteries without the need for a licence.

Accordingly, the bill proposes to amend section 4C of the Act to remove the requirement that a permit be issued and makes consequential amendments to other provisions of section 4C. The Act provides for penalties in respect of foreign lotteries. A foreign lottery—I admit that it is an unusual term—is any lottery conducted outside New South Wales irrespective of whether it is legal in the place where it is conducted. The foreign lottery provisions prohibit publication of advertisements for, and the sale of tickets in, foreign lotteries. The restriction means that persons and organisations in other Australian jurisdictions cannot advertise or sell tickets in lotteries in New South Wales, even if the lottery activity is lawful in that other jurisdiction.

For example, a Victorian-based charity, which is authorised under Victorian law to conduct a fundraising lottery, cannot sell tickets in New South Wales. However, the restriction also means that gaming suppliers whose bona fides are questionable cannot openly establish a marketing presence in New South Wales. In order for the Government to pursue the objective of ensuring a safe and responsible gaming environment for the community, it must have regard to the marketing of gaming products into New South Wales by out-of-jurisdiction gaming operators. If all restrictions were to be lifted, it may have an adverse impact on the ability of the Government to control the provision of gaming services to the people of New South Wales, and could potentially exacerbate any social and economic problems.

The restriction ensures that the Government remains capable of controlling gambling. Although other Australian jurisdictions do not exercise a restriction similar to New South Wales, it must be concluded that without uniform standards between Australian jurisdictions the mutual recognition of lotteries authorised in other States would be hazardous. In this respect, unscrupulous persons would choose the jurisdiction with the least restrictive controls from which to operate and to promote their lotteries into New South Wales.

Accordingly, the review concluded that to support the stated objectives of the Act, lotteries based in other Australian jurisdictions must meet the standards of probity and fairness expected of New South Wales based lotteries in order to be authorised to operate here. Where necessary, this would also require non-New South Wales based operators to be authorised under a permit scheme similar to that required of New South Wales based operators. The bill replaces the existing definition of foreign lottery and defines a foreign lottery as: a lottery that is conducted, or is to be conducted, outside Australia whether or not it is legal in the place where it is, or is to be, conducted; or is conducted, or is to be conducted, in another State or Territory and is declared by the Minister, by order published in the gazette, to be a lottery that fails to comply with the standards expected of lottery activities conducted in New South Wales.

An intent of the proposed amendment is to allow a person to advertise and sell tickets in a community-based lottery in New South Wales even though the lottery is conducted in another State or Territory of Australia provided the lottery complies with the same requirements as a lottery conducted entirely in New South Wales. However, a lottery conducted in another jurisdiction may be declared by the Minister, by order published in the gazette, to fail to comply with the standards expected of lottery activities conducted in New South Wales. In that case, the lottery activity would be declared a foreign lottery and would not be able to be sold or advertised in New South Wales. The bill does not propose to amend the Act to allow gaming operators outside Australia to market their products in New South Wales.

During the drafting of the bill it was necessary to make consequential amendments to other provisions. The bill proposes that section 4B be amended to allow an interstate club within the meaning of the Registered Clubs Act also to conduct trade promotional lotteries in New South Wales, provided a permit has been granted. This is essential in respect of clubs operating in cross-border areas. The bill also proposes to replace section 22A of the Act with proposed sections 22A and 22AA. Section 22A currently provides that the Minister may seek orders from the Supreme Court to prevent the conduct of a particular lottery activity or to prohibit a person or organisation from conducting any lottery activity for a period not exceeding two years.

Proposed section 22A provides that if the Minister is satisfied that it is likely that the provisions of the Act or the regulations of the conditions of a permit have not been, or will not be, complied with in relation to a lottery activity, or that it would be against the public interest for the lottery activity to be conducted, the Minister may give a direction prohibiting the conduct of the lottery activity. Proposed section 22AA provides that if the Minister is satisfied that a person or organisation has persistently failed to comply with the provisions of the Act or the regulations or the conditions of a permit, and that the person or organisation is likely to continue to do so,

the Minister may give a direction prohibiting the person or organisation from conducting any community-based lottery activities for a period not exceeding two years.

These new provisions are similar to current section 22A, but remove the need for the Minister to seek an order from the Supreme Court. This should provide a more efficient and less costly process. Under the proposal, a person or organisation dissatisfied with a decision made by the Minister to prohibit the conduct of a lottery activity, or to prohibit a person or organisation from conducting lottery activities, may apply to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal for a review of the decision. Sections 3 and 20 of the Act create offences relating to publishing certain advertisements, information or notices with respect to unlawful lottery activities. The bill proposes to insert a new definition of "publish" in section 2A (1).

Part of the definition will include the words "cause to be published". The proposed definition will clarify the legislative intent of preventing persons from publishing or causing to be published advertisements, information or notices relating to unlawful lotteries. This will improve enforcement functionality, which may reduce the number of unlawful lotteries advertised and therefore protect the community from unscrupulous operators. The bill also makes consequential amendments to the Administrative Decisions Tribunal Act 1997 and the Licensing and Registration (Uniform Procedures) Act 2002. These amendments will streamline the operation of the bill, while maintaining the worthy objectives now stated in it. It has been developed with a view to protecting the integrity of lotteries while not restricting the opportunity of charities to obtain much-needed funds. Representatives of the Charities Ministerial Advisory Council and key stakeholders have been involved in the review of this legislation. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Souris.

GAMING MACHINES AMENDMENT (SHUTDOWN PERIODS) BILL

Bill introduced and read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr McBRIDE (The Entrance—Minister for Gaming and Racing) [10.50 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

As a new Minister in the Carr Government I put on the public record my commitment to socially responsible government. The Premier spoke of this theme on our Government's re-election, and it is a concept that I will be applying during my tenure as Minister for Gaming and Racing. Gaming machine provisions for hotels and clubs are contained in the Gaming Machines Act. This Act contains extensive harm minimisation measures that must be adopted by hoteliers and registered clubs. A number of major initiatives have been introduced by the Government in recent years to minimise gambling abuse and provide safety nets for problem gamblers.

On 26 July 2001 the Carr Government announced a major plan for gaming reform in New South Wales. As part of the plan, it was announced that gaming machine operations in clubs and hotels would be required to close down for six hours each day. Under the Gaming Machines Act 2001, the Government allowed for a phasing-in period from 2 April 2002 until 30 April 2003, during which time clubs and hotels were required to turn off their gaming machines for only three hours each day, between the hours of 6.00 a.m. and 9.00 a.m. From 1 May 2003 the general shutdown period was increased to the full six hours, from 4.00 a.m. to 10.00 a.m. Clubs and hotels are permitted to apply to have the mandatory shutdown period on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays reduced to three hours from 6.00 a.m. to 9.00 a.m., subject to the agreement of the local consent authority.

Also, clubs and hotels that can satisfy the Liquor Administration Board that they had a history of trading as early openers prior to 1997 are permitted to apply for a different closure period to the standard. Since the commencement of the three-hour shutdown, Clubs NSW and the Australian Hotels Association have reported that some of their members are experiencing significant financial difficulties as a result of the three-hour shutdown. I have also had representation from the New South Wales Liquor Trades Division of the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union, which has indicated the effects on its members. In response to these reports, a review of the impact of the three-hour shutdown to date was commenced earlier this year.

A very preliminary examination of available data has been undertaken by the Department of Gaming and Racing, and indicates that a few 24-hour trading clubs appear to have experienced a decline in gaming machine profits since the commencement of the three-hour shutdown. In view of the possibility that a small

number of clubs and hotels may be experiencing considerable hardship from the shutdown, it is further proposed that the legislation be amended to provide that clubs and hotels may apply to the Liquor Administration Board for exemption on hardship grounds from the general increase to the current three-hour shutdown period.

It is proposed to require the board to take specified guidelines into account in considering whether or not to exempt a particular club or hotel from having to shut down gaming machines for more than three hours. The guidelines will be developed in consultation with the club and hotel industries, and with relevant community representatives. While the proposal to allow exemptions on hardship grounds may mean that a small number of clubs and hotels will be permitted to continue to close down their gaming machine operations for only three hours per day, seven days a week, for the vast majority of clubs and hotels the full six-hour shutdown will apply, subject to the existing variations that are provided for under the Act.

One of these variations allows clubs and hotels to apply for approval to shut down gaming machines for only three hours on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. The board is not to approve such an application unless the local consent authority has agreed. The requirement to obtain local consent authority—council—agreement is in direct contrast to section 209 of the Gaming Machines Act, which essentially removes any power from local consent authorities to regulate or restrict gaming machine operations through development consents or other planning powers. It is clear from recent reports that many local consent authorities are having some difficulty with the new requirement to provide agreement to a shorter shutdown period.

Local consent authorities are not the most appropriate level of government to make important decisions about gaming operations. It is not appropriate to split the control and regulation of gaming operations between local and State governments. The bill will correct this anomaly by removing the requirement for local consent authority agreement to a three-hour shutdown on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. The bill will commence on a day or days to be proclaimed. I am aware that the gaming machine shutdown has excited some interest in certain sections of the media in recent times.

At this stage we are unable to say whether or not the three-hour shutdown has been effective in minimising the harm associated with problem gambling. Nevertheless, the Government is not prepared to back away from the introduction of the general six-hour shutdown. At the same time, it is important that a pragmatic approach be taken to the increased shutdown period, and that those venues that are able to demonstrate genuine hardship be given the opportunity to apply to retain the current three-hour shutdown. It is important to remember that the shutdown is not the only aspect of our gaming harm minimisation policy.

Major initiatives have included: the number of poker machines frozen in clubs, from March 2000, and hotels, from April 2001, along with a statewide cap of 104,000; the requirement for venues to undergo a social impact assessment before new machines can be installed; hotels and clubs with gaming machines being prohibited from being established in shopping centres; a primary-purpose test established for hotels to prohibit hotels being conducted as gaming dens; consumer information—Play Smart brochures—on chances of winning being available to patrons in all gambling outlets; funding of the G-line problem gambling helpline; the allocation of over \$56 million for gambling counselling services; the allocation of over \$1 million to promote the G-line service; the commissioning of a \$3 million gambling research program, including an annual contribution to national research; and the launch of a new framework for a more equitable distribution of casino community benefit fund [CCBF] counselling funding.

Specific statutory measures include 24-hour gaming in pubs and clubs being banned; poker machine signs and advertising being banned; a prize limit of \$1,000 on poker machine promotions; venues required to implement counselling and self-exclusion programs for patrons; the requirement for gambling warning/G-line notices to be displayed in venues; cash chequing restrictions of \$400 per person per day adopted; poker machine prizes of more than \$1,000 required to be paid by cheque; ATMs and EFTPOS machines not to be located in gaming areas of hotels and clubs; gambling inducements—free or cheap alcohol and free credits—banned; all gaming staff required to be trained in the responsible conduct of gambling; and enabling disciplinary action to be taken where a venue allows activities likely to lead to gambling abuse.

Whilst a lot has been done in harm minimisation, I believe we can always do more. I will be consulting over the next 12 months with all stakeholders—community, industry, social welfare sector, unions and others—as part of a comprehensive review of harm minimisation policy measures. It is vital that credible research and reviews of policy measures be undertaken. I want to see an evidence-based framework for social policy decisions within the gaming and racing portfolio. It is anticipated that recommendations will be developed for consideration by the Government to ensure that we have the best possible combination of harm minimisation measures to tackle the issue of problem gambling. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Souris.

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (PROPERTY IDENTIFICATION) BILL**Second Reading****Debate resumed from 30 April.**

Mr DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [11.00 a.m.]: The Opposition does not oppose the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Property Identification) Bill. However, I shall make a number of points about the bill and related matters. Obviously, the Opposition wants to help and support police in the undertaking of their jobs on the frontline. We also want to help the Government sort out its mess. Obviously, in relation to police there has been one mess after another. It is difficult for me to understand why it has taken so long for the Government to introduce this bill. With the benefit of hindsight, this bill will close a loophole that the police have been frustrated by for some time.

The objectives of the bill are, first, to amend the Crimes Act 1900 to ensure that persons who remove, obliterate, deface or alter the unique identifier of property can be prosecuted for relevant property damage offences; second, to ensure that the seriousness of the offence is judged by reference to the total value of the property concerned rather than merely by reference to the amount of damage caused to the property; and, third, to amend the Pawnbrokers and Second-hand Dealers Act 1996 to require pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers to report any goods whose unique identifier has been tampered with.

These are commonsense objectives. With any luck, the Government will have learnt from its problems with other bills in the past few days and will ensure that the implementation of this bill flows smoothly. This bill was originally introduced last December but it lapsed when Parliament was prorogued. This bill improves the power of police to identify and track stolen goods and to crack down on the practice of people tampering with unique identifiers. The bill should improve the ability of police to charge people who erase unique identifiers for the purpose of concealing the fact that the property was stolen. In particular, the bill will give police the power to target persons who alter the unique international mobile equipment identity [IMEI] number embedded in mobile phone handsets. I emphasise that the Opposition does not oppose this bill. We hope that the Government has done its homework and that the implementation of this bill flows smoothly. I shall dwell on the issue of mobile phones. On 22 November 2002 the Minister for Police, Paul Whelan, said in his second reading speech:

We have recently seen this tactic of tampering with unique identifiers used in the case of stolen mobile telephones, where a unique identification number, the IMEI number, is altered to give the stolen handset an apparent new identity.

Whilst telecommunications service providers are now moving to block stolen handsets, laws protecting the identity of goods need to be made to keep abreast with technological changes and the responses of thieves to those changes.

That speech was delivered a couple of years after I identified the problem to the Carr Government, specifically to Paul Whelan. At that time the Minister for Police did what the Carr Government does every single day of the week—he said, "It's not my problem." The *Sun-Herald* regularly ran articles about tens of thousands of people having problems with mobile phone theft every single year. I presumed that the limousines used by members of the Carr Government had not been attacked and, as it did not affect the elite, it was therefore not an issue. In a speech I said on 4 December 2001:

Last April I issued a press release headed "We can stop mobile phone thefts".

That had been a point of debate with mobile telephone companies. I continued:

I would again raise this issue in Parliament this week. I have done so on a number of occasions and I have mentioned it in correspondence and questions so that the Minister for Police will take an interest in this issue.

The Minister for Police did not take an interest in the issue then or previously. However, someone in the ministry finally twigged that what I had been saying for a couple of years was correct and that they could do something about it. Dealing with the Carr Government was as difficult as dealing with the telecommunication companies who, for several years, simply told me that they could not stop an IMEI number, as well as the account number, when a phone was stolen. That was contrary to what their technical people had told me. Along with a couple of constituents, I pushed this issue for two years and Telstra was finally moved to do something about it. Telstra did something about it after a young man died after someone tried to steal his phone.

From memory, the young man died on a Friday night or Saturday night and Telstra made an announcement on the Sunday. I have contempt for the executives at Telstra who, for years, held out against

changing the way they deal with stolen mobile phones. My contempt for them is equal to my contempt for the Carr Government, which also held out for a number of years and did nothing about a major area of crime in New South Wales. It was an issue that I had been raising for some time. On 5 April 2001 I put a question on notice to the Minister for Police. I asked:

How many mobile phones were reported stolen to New South Wales police in calendar year 1998, 1999 and 2000?

Surprisingly, that was one of the few questions the Carr Government ever answered. I was astounded by the answer: in 1998 22,167 mobile phones were stolen in New South Wales. While the Carr Government remained asleep, 33,537 mobile phones were stolen in New South Wales in 1999. The Government was in a deep slumber. In 2000—three years ago—50,871 mobile phones were reported stolen to police. I do not know what has happened since, but I can only assume that the rate has increased. Between 1998 and 2000 the number of mobile phones stolen increased from 22,000 to 51,000. I told the former Minister for Police that that could be stopped, which is why I issued a press release on 5 April 2001 headed, "Mobile phone theft can be stopped". At the time I received a lot of publicity about the matter, both in the print media and on the radio. The community agreed.

Ms Allan: It still didn't stop after your media release?

Mr DEBNAM: As the honourable member for Wentworthville said, the Carr Government did absolutely nothing, despite the fact that I delivered the agenda to the Government on a plate. I can understand the honourable member's frustration: having lost her ministerial role and gone to the back bench, she has had to be a spectator watching an incompetent Government. I share her frustration. I had raised the matter a number of times before, but two years ago I delivered it on a plate not only to the telecommunication companies but also to Paul Whelan, the Premier and the Government. I said, "Look, here it is. You are currently suffering more than 50,000 crimes every single year, and you can stop them—and stop them very quickly." I can only assume that if we come forward two years there will have been at least 100,000 crimes involving mobile telephone theft. I think it would probably be in the order of 150,000 to 200,000 crimes.

Mr Martin: You have always been good at exaggerating.

Mr DEBNAM: I should get the figures. I will put a question on notice seeking the figures. I will then make another speech in a few weeks and give the House the actual figures. But I think it is reasonable to say, based on the year 2000 figure of 51,000 per annum, there have been 100,000 crimes that Bob Carr and his Government could have stopped. He could have stopped these crimes overnight except that, just the same as everything else in New South Wales, he just was not interested. That is the real problem in New South Wales. Even though I delivered it on a plate to Bob Carr, he has no interest in delivering services to the people of New South Wales. He is interested in writing books. He obviously is interested in writing in his diary. He writes a good diary about all his colleagues.

Mr Martin: Do you want an autographed copy? I'll get you one.

Mr DEBNAM: After every election he dumps his diary in the public arena so that we can all laugh at his colleagues. I suppose that is his sense of humour: a sort of black humour, attacking his own colleagues. But that is Bob Carr. He is very good at spin and media manipulation but his Government is lousy in the delivery of services. Even when the Coalition delivers it on a plate and says, "Here are 50,000 crimes that we can stop overnight", Bob Carr does nothing. Then he tries to sneak the proposal into this bill and say nothing about it. Paul Whelan, during a speech in the pre-Christmas rush, included a couple of sentences about it. But in the second reading speech on the reintroduction of the bill this year nothing was said about one of the critical issues in New South Wales: mobile telephone theft and the Carr Government's failure to address it.

The honourable member for Campbelltown and the honourable member for Wentworthville would have heard my speeches in the Chamber in relation to mobile telephone thefts, and they would have heard the cries of their communities to stop these thefts. But it is not just the theft of the mobile telephones. How do offenders get the mobile telephones? They attack people on the streets, smash car windows and break into houses. Labor members of Parliament may laugh now, but I raised in the House a number of times that we were all suffering because teenagers were being attacked on our streets by people who simply wanted to get their mobile telephones. One point I made very strongly to Bob Carr and Paul Whelan was: You can stop these assaults on teenagers in the street. But that was not important to the Labor Party. Labor members are laughing today, two years after they could have prevented perhaps 150,000 mobile telephone thefts.

Mr Martin: Make it 200,000!

Mr DEBNAM: This is a joke to the honourable member for Bathurst and to the honourable member for Campbelltown. It was a joke to them at the time, and so they did nothing about it. As I said yesterday in the House, the Coalition has led the debate on policing for a number of years. We will continue to do that. In 1996 I introduced the car impounding legislation. That was very effective. The Government did not want to do anything about that problem. It was embarrassed into doing something about the matter because there was a huge groundswell from the media and from the community saying, "Adopt Peter Debnam's legislation; put it in place." Finally, the Government adopted the legislation, we supported that and it was put in place from 20 December 1996. It was effective immediately. Unfortunately, because the Government has never really understood that legislation, it has not been using this law effectively in recent years, and it is now less effective. The Coalition also led the debate on police numbers. We got that on the agenda in the 1999 election.

Ms Gadiel: Come on! Give us the facts.

Mr DEBNAM: Perhaps you should have been a member of Parliament earlier; you may have been able to debate this with Bob Carr in the party room. Very few people are able to do that. The honourable member for Wentworthville obviously can have a solid debate with Bob Carr. She is prepared to take him on. Grant McBride, now the Minister for Gaming and Racing, took on Bob Carr. Admittedly, it slowed him down for a number of years, but he finally got on the front bench. We will talk about that later on.

Mr Kerr: And Peter Anderson.

Mr DEBNAM: Peter Anderson took on Bob Carr. Unfortunately, he did not take him on the right way. But, then, Bob Carr repaid him handsomely by rewarding him with about five years with the Tow Truck Authority. I am still trying to find out how much money Peter Anderson was paid to sit on his hands at the Tow Truck Authority and do absolutely nothing for all that time. I come back to police numbers. The Coalition put this on the agenda. The Government was forced to adopt our policy and look at increased police numbers. Four years later the Government is doing something about it. That is why there were more than 500 police at the attestation parade on Friday. It was good to see them. The Coalition is leading the debate on the bail laws. Finally the Attorney General is promising to at least think about doing something with the bail laws. We have pushed that issue time and again, and will continue to do so. The Coalition has led the debate on the Director of Public Prosecutions. I think the Labor Party is embarrassed about the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Mr Orkopoulos: You've been attacking him all the time.

Mr DEBNAM: Does the honourable member want to defend the Director of Public Prosecutions?

Mr Orkopoulos: You've been attacking him all the time.

Mr DEBNAM: I think he has been under attack from the community. The Coalition is trying to bring commonsense into the debate. That is why the honourable member for Epping, the shadow Attorney General, raised the matter in the House yesterday. We will continue to raise issues that are of concern to the community, and we will continue to lead the Government on all policing issues and all legal matters. Where we can help, we are here to do that. When Labor finally embraces one of our ideas we will congratulate it on doing that, but we ask the Government, as I have today, to discuss the issues fully.

Ms GADIEL (Parramatta) [11.16 a.m.]: I support the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Property Identification) Bill. I must correct the honourable member for Vaucluse. He said that Paul Whelan was police Minister in December 2002 but, in fact, Michael Costa was police Minister. The honourable member for Vaucluse should be able to recall that because December 2002 was historic for the Carr Labor Government: it delivered record police numbers and had the largest number of police recruits in the December attestation.

Mr George: Did he have good staff?

Ms GADIEL: He had wonderful staff, clearly. This bill will serve to provide an effective regime for those who maliciously or dishonestly remove, obliterate, deface or alter unique identifiers of goods. Currently, the offences of maliciously or dishonestly destroying or damaging property apply where the value or the function of the property is diminished. This means that those who dishonestly tamper with unique identifiers for the purpose of concealing the identity of rightful owners of stolen goods do not face a penalty for their

deception. The law does not recognise that tampering with serial numbers and the like is damage for the purposes of the Crimes Act. This bill seeks to redress this anomaly in the law. It seeks to ensure that removing, obliterating, defacing or altering identifiers is classified as damage to property under the Crimes Act.

Clearly, people who try to change or alter the identifying characteristics of goods are up to no good, and the law should be able to punish them accordingly. People who attempt to alter the identifying characteristics of goods are trying to ensure that the goods can never be reunited with their rightful owners. It is fair and just that persons found guilty of such an offence should face an appropriate penalty. For years this Government, in its crime prevention policy, has encouraged people to mark personal property with their own identifiers. Neighbourhood Watch has encouraged the same thing. NSW Police crime prevention officers have assisted our community by loaning engraving equipment for this purpose.

Although the Government has already taken legislative steps through the Pawnbrokers and Second-hand Dealers Act 1996 to better target the stolen goods market, it acknowledges that more has to be done, which is why it has introduced this bill. There is a large market in stolen goods. These goods are disposed of informally—for instance, through the man at the pub or through second-hand and pawn shops. The Pawnbrokers and Second-hand Dealers Act require dealers to report to the pawnbroker unit of NSW Police the details of the unique identifiers of goods received. The information is loaded onto the pawnbrokers' database, which is used to identify and track stolen goods. The system is working.

In 2001, police recovered more than 5,023 items of stolen property from pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers. In 2002 New South Wales police recovered more than 7,860 items of stolen property worth more than \$2.6 million from pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers. I am sure that the changes proposed in the bill will result in further increases in 2003. The bill seeks to make it harder for thieves to operate in the stolen goods market. As I have already said, the law dealing with dishonest tampering with identifiers of goods is inadequate. The legislation is a positive step forward, and will assist police to carry out their functions. The Carr Government has never shied away from making penalties harder, and it has never shirked its responsibility to give police the powers they need to do their job. The bill is another example of the Carr Government getting on with the job. We are able to improve the system because we are listening to our community and our law enforcers. I commend the bill.

Mr KERR (Cronulla) [11.21 a.m.]: I do not know who wrote that speech for the honourable member for Parramatta—

Ms Gadiel: Funnily enough, I can write!

Mr KERR: If that is true, the honourable member should resign and get a job as a comedy writer—she would make a much greater contribution to Australian culture in that role. The honourable member knew who the Minister for Police was in late 2002, but she had some inside knowledge because she was on the staff of what was colloquially known as Costa's consorting squad. As she pointed out, the bill is a step forward, but it is a pity it has taken the Carr Government so long to walk. The shadow Minister for Police said in his speech that he has been on the job for quite some time.

Mr Debnam: What were they doing?

Mr KERR: What were they doing during those barren years? It should have been as hard for thieves to dispose of stolen goods as it will be for some Government members to get into the ministry, but it was not. As the shadow Minister pointed out, it was considerably easier because of a loophole in the law. The people who have suffered are those in my electorate who have been part of Neighbourhood Watch, who have identified property and done all the right things for years, but who have been betrayed because all their precautions were to no avail. The legislation seeks to remedy that situation, albeit years too late. The shadow Minister for Police stated that tens of thousands of mobile phones—50,000 last year—are stolen each year simply because the appropriate legislation is not in place, despite the warning.

Once again the Carr Government was asleep at the wheel. The *Sun-Herald* was on the job and most of the media was on the job. However, people in my electorate had to deal with their property being stolen, car windows being smashed and mobile phones being taken. In the Cronulla electorate young people have been robbed of mobile phones on the street. Had this legislation been in place, it would have acted as a deterrent. The provision of inadequate resources seems to be a pattern of behaviour for the Carr Government. If stolen property was recovered and identified it was more than likely that identifiers had been obscured, but even if a person was

caught with stolen property that was identifiable the Director of Public Prosecutions [DPP] did not have the funds to prosecute. The Carr Government has presided over a great law enforcement system! The most fundamental duty of any government is to maintain an orderly society, yet thieves who stole tens of thousands of items of property that could have been traceable if a more orderly system was enforced were given a bit of a free kick.

Thieves were given a further boost when resources were not provided for the DPP to carry out its functions adequately. Law enforcement in this State is a scandal. It is no wonder that the people of my electorate were crying out and demanding that the Government heed the advice and warnings of the honourable member for Vacluse. Finally, the Government has listened and introduced this simple legislation. I would like one of the speakers for the Government to explain why the legislation was delayed and not introduced earlier. Peter Anderson, because of his background in policing, probably would have introduced it at the appropriate time. Unfortunately, something happened to him and that has been diarised. I will not detain the House. The bill is a step forward, but one that should have been taken years ago. Had that occurred, tens of thousands of crimes in this State would have been solved and the number of people who committed not only crimes against property but also crimes against the person would be behind bars now.

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle) [11.27 a.m.]: We have heard enough from the honourable member for Cronulla. I do not recall the him, during the seven years of the former Liberal Government, bringing forward pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers legislation. It was the Carr Labor Government, post-1995, that introduced legislation requiring pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers to register second-hand goods and pawned goods in the record-keeping section of NSW Police that would enable the electronic transmission of identifiers to the police. As the honourable member for Parramatta could confirm, in 2001 some 5,000 items were recovered and in 2002 some 7,860 were recovered, at a value of \$2.86 million. Obviously, the legislation was effective but it was rendered less effective by the process clearly identified by the honourable member for Vacluse, who went on and on about his raising this matter. But others have raised it as well. Every member of this House whose constituents have experienced break and enters, who have tried to relocate their property, are aware of the problem caused by pawnbrokers or second-hand dealers who accept goods with obliterated identifiers. Those problems were communicated to the Government.

Clearly, it is the practice of the Carr Government to amend legislation when necessary. The bill is a case in point. Right across our community, people are subjected to the theft of their personal property. Recently, a break and enter offence was committed at my daughter's residence in Newtown. She lost electronic equipment valued at approximately \$7,000. NSW Police responded rapidly and sent a fingerprint specialist to the scene. Successive Ministers for Police under the Carr Labor Government have introduced specialists to the Police Force to deal with crime. The fingerprint specialist told my daughter that those who commit break and enter offences are well aware of police fingerprint specialists and ensure that they are in and out of the crime scene very quickly. Property owners may have a security system that is linked to a security company, but thieves are able to commit a break and enter in under 40 seconds. They then on-sell stolen property valued at \$7,000 for \$200 at the local pub, or they might fence it through a second-hand dealer.

One would think it would be difficult to do that, and one wonders why thieves do it. However, if there are no identifiers on the property a less than prudent second-hand dealer may not be bothered about identifying ownership. The bill deals with such circumstances. It amends the Crimes Act 1900 and other Acts that deal with unique identifiers of property. The unique identifier may be any numbers, letters or symbols that are marked on or attached to property, either by the manufacturer or, as the honourable member for Parramatta pointed out, by the owner. The Government's crime prevention policy has promoted the importance of adding unique identifiers in the form of words or a registerable symbol for the protection of property. That policy has been promoted through the Neighbourhood Watch program and by crime prevention officers of NSW Police, who also assist by providing engraving equipment.

The Government also encourages the use of microdot technology. Car manufacturers have taken up that innovative measure by spray-painting vehicles so that every item on a car may have thousands and thousands of information details. That makes it difficult to fence vehicle accessories, a matter of significant concern to the community. The theft of personal property and the on-selling of property are problems for both the police and the community. In 1996 the Government introduced the Pawnbrokers and Second-hand Dealers Act to restrict the pathways used for the disposal of stolen goods. Report details of unique identifiers are conveyed by those dealers to police, who maintain an electronic database of second-hand and pawned goods. Because the legislation to date has not dealt adequately with the removal of identifiers, the illegal sale of property by thieves or receivers has to some extent been facilitated.

The purpose of the bill is to ensure that persons who remove, obliterate, deface or alter the unique identifier of property can be prosecuted for relevant damage to property under the Crimes Act 1900. The bill also defines a unique identifier to include identification numbers, letters or symbols that are marked on or attached to property as a permanent record to enable the property to be distinguished from similar property. The bill also amends the Criminal Procedure Act 1986 so that the quantum of damage to the property in cases of tampering with the unique identifiers is the value of the goods, not the lower value of the damage. If those who remove identifiers are apprehended with property valued at \$1,800 or \$5,000, that is the value that will be contained in the charge they will face, not the cost of the relatively small amount of malicious damage to the property.

The bill also amends the Pawnbrokers and Second-hand Dealers Act 1996 to define tampering as suspicious circumstances which require a licensed dealer to report the goods to NSW Police. The bill closes a loophole that may have been available previously to unscrupulous dealers. I hasten to make it clear that the majority of second-hand goods dealers are highly scrupulous and co-operate with the police, but those who are not will find that this bill firmly closes the door to illegal trading in stolen property. This bill is yet another example of the Carr Government taking positive action to make the people of New South Wales and their property more secure. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr WEST (Campbelltown) [11.36 a.m.]: I support the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Property Identification) Bill, which makes it an offence not only to damage goods so that their function is diminished but to remove, change, hide or otherwise hinder unique identifiers of goods. The bill also requires pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers to notify police of suspicious circumstances. It is probably one of the most important reforms since the Medici and Lombard families hung three golden balls outside their shops in the Middle Ages. It has always intrigued me why three golden balls are the symbols for pawnbrokers, so I undertook research into the mystery surrounding it. One of the most popular myths is that the symbol has its origin in St Nicholas, who was also known as Santa Claus. From the cradle to the grave Nicholas did many things, and the miracles purported to have been worked by him are quite amazing.

One of his acts was to assist a citizen of Patara who lost his fortune. Because he could not raise dowries for his three daughters he was preparing to give them over to prostitution—a terrible outcome, of course. After hearing that, Nicholas took a bag of gold coins and threw it through the window of the man's house at night. The eldest daughter was married with it as her dowry. For the next two nights he threw a bag of gold through the window until each daughter was able to be married and avoid being forced into a life of prostitution. Those three purses are thought to be the origin of the pawnbrokers symbol of three gold balls. During the Middle Ages, when people were raising dowries, presumably they had to pawn various items. It is great that not only is there now a tradition to pawnbroking but also that people no longer have to worry about dowries.

The removal of property identifiers by thieves on a parcel of goods to which they have no right is the way they hide their tracks; they then pass the goods on to unsuspecting buyers. Removal of unique identifiers makes it difficult for police to prove that the items have been stolen. More important, it also makes it difficult to locate the rightful owner and return the goods. All honourable members have heard stories of people who have found their goods being offered for sale in a shop. With the identifiers having been removed, they have been unable to prove their original ownership, which otherwise would have entitled them to the return of the goods. That is a distressful situation. Clearly, those who undertake to remove identifiers maliciously or dishonestly should be held accountable. As the law stands currently, the removal of identifiers is not an offence unless the value or function of the goods is diminished. Thus the removal of an identifier from a musical instrument is not an offence unless the musical instrument no longer produces its sound. This allows thieves to make the job of police harder and reduces the opportunities to return goods to their rightful owners. The bill changes that.

The removal of an identifier—a number, letter, symbol, or combination of them—whether engraved, microdotted or affixed, will render the goods damaged to the value of those goods. For example, removal of an identifier on a \$2,000 computer would be considered as damage to the goods to the value of \$2,000. The bill further amends the Pawnbrokers and Second-hand Dealers Act 1996 to define tampering of unique identifiers as a suspicious circumstance requiring the licensed dealer to report the goods to NSW Police. The police will add the goods to their database and try to find the rightful owner and prosecute the criminal. The bill is an important reform relating to the security of goods, and I welcome its introduction.

Mr GREENE (Georges River) [11.40 a.m.]: I support the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Property Identification) Bill, which was first introduced into this House on 11 December 2002 and has been reintroduced by the Minister for Police. I clearly remember arriving home on Easter Monday 1999 after an outing with some friends.

Mr Debnam: Name them.

Mr GREENE: If I named all those friends we could be here for a long time. After attending a barbecue I arrived home with the younger half of my family. To our bemusement and distress we found that a number of items had been removed from our home. For another week we found various items to be missing, including my son's school bag. The police acted swiftly, attended our home within five minutes of being called and took a note of the missing items.

Mr George: Didn't you go through the Police Assistance Line?

Mr GREENE: This was in 1999. Although the goods taken were replaced through insurance there was an ongoing impact on the family. At that time our younger children were somewhat distressed and had difficulties going to sleep that night and for a week or two afterwards. They were frightened that someone may come into their home again and take items or perhaps do something worse to them. They are now well and truly over that fear. Those sorts of criminal activities have an impact on family life, making the loss of the goods somewhat incidental. Neighbourhood Watch groups have been set up in local areas to encourage people to work with the police in an endeavour to reduce the incidence of crime in our communities. We all acknowledge that crime has been occurring for many thousands of years. In fact, the first recorded crime was the murder of Abel by Cain.

Neighbourhood Watch groups encourage the identification of goods by making available to their members and communities, through the police, engraving machines so that personal identifiers such as licence numbers or telephone numbers can be recorded on goods. That record establishes the ownership of the goods and allows for future identification should the goods be stolen. In addition, some goods, particularly electrical items, have specific serial numbers which assist in tracing them. In my area, every second month the Oatley West Neighbourhood Watch Group holds a meeting, which is chaired by Anne Jones; Jan Smith Eagles is the secretary. I regularly attend those meetings. That successful and hard-working group encourages the identification of goods. The Lugarno Progress Association works with local Neighbourhood Watch groups. Its monthly newsletter reports any criminal activity in the area. That association continually reinforces the message of engraving personal identifiers on goods that are easily able to be stolen.

I congratulate Senior Sergeant Rick Simpson from the Hurstville Local Area Command on the work he does with local Neighbourhood Watch groups. As noted by earlier speakers this amending bill supports the use of personal identifiers. Sadly, all too regularly the criminal element takes the opportunity to try to remove those identifiers. I hope the proposed penalties to be imposed on those who remove those identifiers will deter that practice, and, most importantly, deter thieves from removing the goods in the first instance. The bill defines the removing, obliterating, defacing or altering of the unique identifiers of property as damage for the purpose of the Crimes Act 1900. The bill also defines the unique identifier to include numbers, letters or symbols that are marked on or attached to the property as a permanent record so as to enable the property to be distinguished from similar property.

As I said earlier, the identifier could be a licence number, telephone number or date of birth—whatever is used as a personal identifier—and is often applied to the goods by the engraving machines provided by the Neighbourhood Watch groups. The bill also amends the Criminal Procedure Act 1986 so that the quantum of damage to property in cases of tampering with the unique identifiers is the value of the goods, not the small value of the damage occasioned. A number of speakers have commented on the impact of that provision. The value of an article may be \$2,000 and the damage may be valued at only \$5 or \$10, but the value of the article will be taken into account in calculating the seriousness of the offence. The bill also amends the Pawnbrokers and Second-hand Dealers Act 1996 to define such tampering as suspicious and requires the licensed dealer to report the goods to the NSW Police.

The criminal element in our society tries to offload goods through pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers. The bill reinforces pressure on licensed dealers to report any such instances to police and will assist police in their work. Obviously, the aim of the bill is to reduce the amount of crime in our society and gives police all the avenues they require to apprehend those who, sadly, choose to remove goods from the rightful owners. Any legislation to reduce crime and its impact on our communities is good legislation. Therefore, I commend the bill to the House.

Miss BURTON (Kogarah) [11.48 a.m.]: I congratulate the Government on the gains it has made in the fight to protect victims of crime. A lot of work has been done on pawnbroking legislation. The bill is another

step to punish criminals and protect victims of crime. The object of the bill is to ensure that persons who remove, obliterate, deface or alter the unique identifier of property can be prosecuted for relevant property damage offences. The bill ensures that the penalty for putting a scratch mark on property will be the value of the property. That provision will assist in deterring people from stealing goods. It will also help them understand that if they get caught they will be given an additional penalty.

New section 19 refers to unique identifiers. Members of the community must ensure that their goods are uniquely marked or identified with serial numbers, et cetera. While many manufacturers or retailers are now ensuring that goods have serial numbers or unique identifiers, the Government, through its crime prevention policy, is encouraging citizens to mark their goods if serial numbers or unique identifiers are absent. Earlier the honourable member for Georges River said that the Neighbourhood Watch program and crime prevention officers assist by engraving equipment that is not marked. The amendments to the Pawnbrokers and Second-hand Dealers Act will reduce the extent to which pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers are wittingly and unwittingly involved in the disposal of stolen goods. There are a number of pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers in the St George area. While most pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers operate reputable businesses, a small percentage of them do not conduct proper checks to ensure that the goods they are receiving have not been stolen.

The bill will amend schedule 3 to the Pawnbrokers and Second-hand Dealers Act to ensure that, if a pawnbroker or second-hand dealer suspects that an item has been stolen and the unique identifier has been tampered with, he or she should notify that fact to police, thus assisting in the timely investigation of a case to determine whether goods have been stolen. This notification requirement will also act as a deterrent to those second-hand dealers who may be tempted to trade in stolen goods. Originally, the bill was aimed at targeting the theft of mobile phones. In 2001 about 40,000 mobile handsets were stolen or lost in New South Wales. Overseas high-tech thieves have been able to erase mobile phone identifiers by changing their international mobile equipment identity [IMEI] or digital serial numbers, and the handsets are then rebirthed and sold. There are many stories of young people who have been accosted and had their mobile phones stolen. If the bill makes it more difficult for dealers to trade in mobile phones it should reduce the incidence of this crime.

The legislation, which is intended to keep pace with criminal technology, will provide a blanket response to dishonest tampering with identifying markers. It will also bolster the commitment by Australian mobile carriers to block from their networks lost or stolen mobile phones. The provisions in the legislation relating to removing, obliterating, defacing or altering unique identifiers on goods will be included in the Crimes Act definition of damage to property. The value of the damage to property by tampering will be equal to the value of the goods. Unique identifiers will include all identification numbers, letters or symbols attached to the property to distinguish it from similar products used by either manufacturers or owners.

I congratulate the Government on introducing legislation that will go some way towards assisting victims of crime and ensuring that second-hand dealers and pawnbrokers do the right thing and are not tempted to trade in stolen goods. These businesses are a definite disposal point for those who want quick cash for stolen goods. The bill will impact on crime in the St George area and reduce the number of break and enter offences. Members of the community must correctly label their goods so that they can be identified in the case of theft. If criminals are caught they will be in trouble and will face hefty penalties. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr WATKINS (Ryde—Minister for Police) [11.55 p.m.], in reply: I thank honourable members who participated in debate on this important bill. Property theft affects our entire community. Those who have had their property stolen not only suffer a financial cost; they also suffer the emotional effect of having had their homes broken into. Thieves who remove specific unique identifiers make the return of stolen goods impossible. There is no way of determining the original property owners. The bill seeks to address that issue. Police have been working hard and effectively to reduce property theft. The most recent figures from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research show the statewide drop in offences relating to property crime. The bill also tightens the regulations relating to the second-hand market, where a lot of stolen goods are disposed of. The bill seeks, first, to deter property crime; second, to provide heavier sentences when property crime occurs and is detected; and, third, to help clear up crime and assist in the return of goods to the original owners. This important bill will be welcomed by the people of New South Wales.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time and passed through remaining stages.

NATIONAL PARK ESTATE (RESERVATIONS) BILL**Second Reading****Debate resumed from 1 May.**

Mr GREENE (Georges River) [11.58 p.m.]: The National Park Estate (Reservations) Bill, which was introduced by the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, and Minister for Natural Resources, will go a long way towards protecting a large percentage of forests in the north-east of this State. The bill will protect the region's icon forests while balancing the needs of the timber industry. The inclusion of pristine rainforests and old-growth forests in 15 new national parks and State conservation areas will be of great benefit not only to that region but also to New South Wales as a whole. There is no doubt that the Carr Labor Government has as one of its priorities the protection of our natural environment. The bill continues the Carr Labor Government's proud tradition of meeting the needs of the timber industry and protecting jobs in that industry. That is clear from the most recent memorandum of understanding with the Boral company that will protect its logging interests in the north-east.

The Government is conscious not only of the State's environmental requirements but of the need to maintain jobs. This Government has a proud record in that regard across the whole of the State—throughout the south-east and now in the north-east. We are custodians of the sensitive New South Wales environment, which we have a responsibility to maintain for current and future generations. We have tried hard to refine the environmental decisions of the past. Such remediation work has already cost this Government much money, but we must continue to protect the interests of future generations. This bill goes a long way towards maintaining the Government's proud record on the environment while safeguarding jobs in the forest industry. I commend it to the House.

Ms ALLAN (Wentworthville) [12.01 p.m.]: I am delighted to contribute to the debate on the National Park Estate (Reservations) Bill. Mr Deputy-Speaker, I congratulate you on your re-election as Deputy-Speaker in this Chamber. One of the constants in conservation protection debates—of which we have had many since the Carr Labor Government came to power—is the opposition to Government legislation from the Coalition, particularly the National Party. Therefore, I must admit that it is refreshing to see that the only National Party members in the Chamber today are the honourable member for Lismore, the National Party Whip, and the new member for Clarence, who is probably trying to pick up a few pointers on how to behave in debates such as this. It is great to see him here as Labor members will offer him good advice regarding his future contributions. One could produce a ticker tape of contributions from National Party members to debates of this type. They are invariably negative—

Mr Bartlett: Violent.

Ms ALLAN: The honourable member for Port Stephens reminds me that such contributions are usually energetic—verbal violence is the order of the day. Many National Party members, including the new Leader of the National Party, hail from the North Coast. Therefore, I expect the North Coast Nats to contribute more vigorously than usual to the debate on a bill about North Coast forest reservations. We may not hear those speeches in the next hour or two, but we will hear them eventually—and they will be enormously predictable. We had a small hint of what is to come during question time yesterday when the Leader of the National Party asked the Premier about protecting the jobs of timber workers in the context of the Government's announcement during the election campaign of new forest reservations. The Premier gave the appropriate response but it did not seem to satisfy the National Party—surprise, surprise! It is never satisfied on these issues.

Mr George: Point of order: I ask the honourable member for Wentworthville to explain to the people of Casino the closing of Cassino Timbers, which is to take place in three weeks.

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

Ms ALLAN: I am looking forward to hearing the honourable member's contribution to this debate. He would do better to make a speech than to take foolish, farcical points of order that are intended to waste my time. As the Premier said yesterday, the Government's announcement of its intention to protect particular forests—which included a commitment to introduce the National Park Estate (Reservations) Bill on the first day of the parliamentary session—was one of the most important announcements of the election campaign. I refer particularly to the Premier's press release issued in Dorrigo on Sunday, 2 March 2003, during the height of the election campaign. It is obvious to me from his question yesterday that the Leader of the National Party has not even read that press release.

His question—it was his lead question so the issue is obviously important to his party—focused on the loss of timber jobs, when at least 50 per cent of the Premier's press release addressed the issue of job protection. That is not unusual in the debates that we have had on environmental issues since Labor came to power in 1995. I do not think the honourable member for Lismore was in Parliament at that time. If he had been he would have realised that, ever since it decided to protect much of New South Wales by declaring national parks, the Carr Government has prioritised the needs and the future of timber workers.

National Party members should know this because the interest groups that represent the timber workers—the relevant union and the Forest Products Association—acknowledge it. They understand that since 1995 this Government has tried not only to protect 330 national parks, as the Premier said yesterday, but also to ensure job security for timber industry workers. We have succeeded in that endeavour and I congratulate the Minister for the Environment, who is at the table, the new Minister for Natural Resources and the previous forestry Minister, the honourable member for Granville, on playing a vital role in creating national parks and ensuring job security in the timber industry.

Mr George: Where?

Ms ALLAN: We have created jobs in national parks. Is the honourable member for Lismore totally ignorant? I am surprised that he is being paid the higher salary of National Party Whip when he does not know even that. The press release to which I referred mentioned job protection specifically. Job security concerns were reflected in the question from the honourable member for Oxley to the Premier and I am sure they will be central to the inevitable contributions to this debate from National Party members. I think the honourable member for Coffs Harbour should simply table his speech because it is totally predictable. For example, he will ignore the fact that the Government's decision to preserve another 65,000 hectares of national park on the North Coast was accompanied by several new policy announcements that go to the heart of job protection in the timber industry. I will outline those measures as members opposite are grossly ignorant in such matters.

For the first time permission will be granted for logging on the North Coast in what is known in the industry as the buffers on buffer zones. That announcement was made the day before the Minister delivered the second reading speech on this bill. Members opposite will find all the relevant details in *Hansard*. I am pleased to see that the honourable member for Lismore is taking notes as they will help him in speaking in this debate. Honourable members should not listen only to the honourable member for Coffs Harbour, who will benefit from this announcement. I am delighted that by protecting iconic areas we will improve economic opportunities in the Coffs Harbour area. Why does the National Party oppose that decision?

Mr George: What about Casino and Woodenbong?

Mr DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Lismore will have the opportunity to speak later in the debate.

Ms ALLAN: Why is the National Party opposed to the creation of the Pine Creek and Sherwood Forest reserves, which will directly contribute to increased economic opportunity in Coffs Harbour and which are desperately sought by constituents in Coffs Harbour? Other iconic nature reserves that will be protected are Queens Lake, near Port Macquarie, and Chaelundi, near Dorrigo, which will benefit the honourable member for Coffs Harbour.

Mr George: You still haven't commented about Lismore or Casino.

Ms ALLAN: I still have six minutes and 27 seconds to speak in this debate. The honourable member for Lismore should read the press release and keep himself informed on these issues now that he is being paid big money as National Party Whip. It is appropriate that we protect these iconic areas, many of which I and the Minister for the Environment have visited in the past 10 years. We are well aware of the enormous political stress that has been felt in some of these areas. For example, people who protested about the logging of Whian Whian and Chaelundi national parks were arrested and evicted from the areas. This is obviously an important ecological announcement, but I am also concerned to deal with issues that relate to job protection. It is completely unfair for the Leader of the National Party and the Opposition to insinuate that jobs were not a priority in the Government's announcement during the election campaign, and that it will not implement legislation to protect them.

As the Minister said in his second reading speech, we are going to take advantage of the fact that better harvesting technology has enabled those buffer zones to be available for timber resource. We have confirmed

that the interim forest management zones will be available for timber production. These issues have been debated for many years between the forestry industry, the Government and the conservation movement. I am delighted that we now have agreement, not only from the Government but also from the conservation movement, that these areas are available for future resource. The Government is taking the bold step of seeking to renegotiate fresh supply agreements with the timber industry—something that never happened when the Coalition was in government. I congratulate the Government, corporate Australia and Boral on ensuring that those supply agreements are about to be renegotiated.

The honourable member for Lismore should be delighted that corporate Australia is seeking to renegotiate and realises that it has some conservation responsibilities. Boral is the first cab off the rank. The honourable member for Lismore is being paid to do some research. The smaller players, the other members of the Forest Products Association, are also seeking to renegotiate their supply agreements. I wonder whether the honourable member for Lismore has read the Forest Products Association's press release. In the past it has been an active group supporting the Coalition, but the Opposition has chosen not to read its press releases.

Mr George: Press releases mean nothing: jobs are what I care about.

Ms ALLAN: Tell that to the honourable member for Vacluse, who, in an earlier debate, squawked about his press release relating to stolen mobile phones. The honourable member for Lismore should get his act together. The press release of 1 May states:

Russell Ainley, NSW Forest Products Association Executive Director, today acknowledged significant benefits for the timber industry included within the National Parks Estate (Reservations) Bill.

If the honourable member for Lismore wants to get on, he should do the basic research: He should read that press release. The Forest Products Association, the National Parks Association, Greens New South Wales, the Government and local communities are coming on board to support this legislation. As the Minister acknowledged in his second reading speech, this legislation is part of a continuum of protection for the national park estate, which this Government has been undertaking since 1995. I have taken part in the debates—unlike the honourable member for Clarence. In 1995 the Government had a process with integrity, and that has continued. That is why we can say that a number of outstanding areas on the North Coast are now being protected. It is a process of integrity because the Government focuses on not only the conservation areas but also the protection of jobs in the timber industry.

Unlike members opposite, I am prepared to congratulate the Premier on his outstanding achievement to protect these 65,000 hectares of national park estate on the North Coast and do as much as possible to ensure that timber workers do not lose their jobs but, where possible, are given opportunities for alternative employment. That has been one of the outstanding achievements of the Carr Labor Government. I believe it is yet another reason we did so well in the recent State elections. It is an acknowledgement of the fantastic record of this Government in conservation and job protection.

Mr MILLS (Wallsend) [12.15 p.m.]: I am pleased to support this legislation. As the Minister for Natural Resources said in his second reading speech, this bill builds on the already considerable achievement of the Government in the important area of forest conservation and reform. It was with a great sense of excitement and satisfaction that I heard on 2 March the announcement by the Premier of the Government's intention, if re-elected, to legislate for the preservation of 15 icon areas of north-east forests. I was pleased to meet people such as Claire Dunn, from the North East Forest Alliance. I visited the Jilliby site, in the Olney State Forest—one of the icon areas—with my colleagues in the Hunter Valley, who I am sure will contribute to this debate. We also had dealings and many discussions with Peter Morris, of the United Residents Group for the Environment [URGE] of Lake Macquarie.

This bill does the right thing by future generations of Australians. A vital ingredient of the bill is its protection of our biodiversity. It also preserves the habitat of vulnerable and other native fauna. The bill is correctly based on scientific assessments that have been undertaken through the regional forest agreements. I congratulate the Government, the Premier, the Minister for the Environment, and the Minister for Natural Resources. I commend the strong contributions from the former Minister—the honourable member for Granville—and the honourable member for Wentworthville. The Minister for Natural Resources, the honourable member for Granville and the honourable member for Wentworthville have worked hard on this issue since the early 1990s. They must truly be pleased, as would the Minister for the Environment, to see the culmination of that long process to achieve what is good for our environment and for future generations.

The bill protects and preserves some 65,000 hectares of the last remaining icon areas of north-eastern New South Wales, including high conservation value old-growth forests and rainforests. It certainly recalls the decision made 20 years ago by the Wran Government to save Terania Creek, and some of the other rainforests in that area are now on the World Heritage list. Since this Government came to office more than eight years ago, nearly a million hectares of national parks, nature reserves and State conservation areas have been created through the Government's forest policy.

It is pleasing to note the other side of the coin. In a statement on 3 March—the day following the Premier's announcement—Boral was pleased to say that its timber unit had successfully completed talks with the New South Wales Government on the long-term supply of hardwood resources, and that the increased certainty of resource volumes would enable Boral Timber to complete its \$45 million investment program in the New South Wales timber industry. Boral had recently spent more than \$16 million in capital upgrades and was to spend another \$15 million on its mill at Herons Creek, with \$14 million to be used to develop processing plants to produce flooring products.

Boral Timber employs more than 700 people. It will be developing a hardwood plantation strategy to improve the sustainability of the North Coast hardwood timber industry. So this decision by the Carr Labor Government is a win-win situation. We are preserving jobs, and we are preserving the New South Wales hardwood timber industry and at the same time we are achieving conservation outcomes. I note the Government's decision and commitment to, as well as its engagement in, ongoing negotiations with other timber companies—including smaller ones, as there are, for example, in the Hunter Valley—to ensure that fresh supply agreements will be reached. The Government has invited smaller bodies, via the Forest Products Association, to enter into arrangements to meet their individual needs and timber availability.

I am pleased to say that the Forest Products Association has responded with in-principle agreement, and negotiations are now proceeding. Renegotiating these contracts with the timber industry and with a range of suppliers of significant size and area means that we keep faith with the industry while making this historically important conservation decision. The package also demonstrates the Government's commitment to the Regional Forest Agreement. That agreement provides for ongoing modification and improvements as circumstances change.

I am pleased to say the bill creates several new State conservation areas in areas of known or likely mineral potential. In one case, Jilliby State Conservation Area, the reservation is restricted to a depth of 50 metres to allow underground coalmining. This new category of reserve was established by the Carr Government with the dual purposes of protecting conservation values while permitting mineral and petroleum exploration and production. This is another win-win situation. It is certainly typical of the Carr Government's approach to solving problems in ways that benefit the community. Coalmining is still the major wealth generator for the Hunter Valley, and of course it is a major and vital wealth generator for our State and the nation.

It is 199 years since the first coalmining took place in the Hunter Valley. The first export shipment of anything from the new colony of New South Wales was of coal to Norfolk Island. Many would not realise that it was export coal from the Hunter Valley that enabled the first industries to set up in the new territory and American state of California, with trade going on across the Pacific. So that industry has been the cornerstone of wealth generation and employment in the Hunter Valley for almost 200 years. This is the kind of win-win situation that the Government has developed. Jilliby, for example, is a State conservation area, rather than a national park, so that coalmining may continue and allow employment and wealth generation.

I now raise a concern that has been brought to me by Aboriginal people. It relates to the impact of this transfer of land with Aboriginal special sites from State Forests to national parks and reserves. The regional forests agreements of some years ago provided for Aboriginal co-management agreements in State forests. I ask that very great care be taken in the way this legislation progresses, so that local Aboriginal communities do not lose the rights that they have negotiated with State Forests to teach and carry out their cultural practices. The icon areas of which I am aware that have Aboriginal co-management agreements between local communities and State Forests are those at Whian Whian, Queens Lake, Jilliby and Tuggolo.

The worry for Aboriginal people is that, while their communities can preserve their sites and their cultural practices in State forests, the change to national park status might spoil their chance to undertake cultural activities at the sites. In a national park, in the past, there were restrictions on some activities. Those restrictions were on things like having fires, mining ochres, collecting bush tucker and hunting animals for food. In addition, the elders felt they could not teach the young people on the site if the map site, for example, was in a national park—as it is in the Wattagans, where the Kupa Kupa elders have an agreement with State Forests.

An important aspect of these Aboriginal co-management agreements is that they are entered into in a practical way with the Aboriginal elders on behalf of the Aboriginal people who live in those local areas. That contrasts with the traditional National Parks approach and the native title approach of entering into agreements only with traditional owners, who are often difficult or impossible to find because of the forced migration of children and the break-up of families during the Stolen Generation years. So I ask that these Aboriginal co-management agreements, which are of benefit to local communities, be preserved in some way so that the cultural practices and teaching also may be preserved.

I brought this matter to the attention of the Government a couple of weeks after the announcement was made and the matter was brought to my attention. I appreciate the responses I have had from the Minister for the Environment, Mr Debus, who indicated that there is a variety of co-management agreements between Aboriginal people and National Parks. One of the examples he gave me was of the Arakwal National Park, in respect of which there is an indigenous land use agreement. I know that Aboriginal people, especially those who brought their concerns to me, say: "Yes, Arakwal is a good model, but it is one that has been made with the traditional owners." They seek some flexibility in the approach taken by National Parks so that something like the Arakwal model might be used, not with the traditional owners but with people who live locally and with the elders of people who live locally.

Some of the agreements that National Parks has entered into have included arrangements for the utilisation of wild resources, hunting and gathering as well as other cultural practices. There is a variety of cultural renewal programs for Aboriginal communities through culture camps in national parks, and there is a way of educating youth through national parks regarding hunting, fishing, food gathering, bush medicine, firewood, camping and cultural sites of significance. Hunting and gathering in parks is an important issue for the Aboriginal people, and the Minister has acknowledged that. I thank him for it. It has been widely discussed with many communities.

The Minister gave me an assurance that, with regard to the co-management agreements at Whian Whian, Queens Lake, Jiliby and Tuggolo, the National Parks and Wildlife Service will meet with any affected Aboriginal communities as soon as possible with a view to reaching agreement on issues such as access and use after those areas become national parks. I thank the Minister for indicating his willingness to commence discussions with those communities to seek a way of preserving those practices.

In particular, I thank the Minister for indicating just yesterday a commencement to this process. Those conversations have started. I look forward to a more flexible approach from National Parks to enable the preservation of Aboriginal cultural practices at Aboriginal sites in these lands that are being preserved. I trust that the Government will respond during the reply to the second reading debate regarding the progress on that matter. Once again I express my great delight and enthusiasm for this legislation. It is a great win-win situation. It is great for the future of New South Wales and Australia. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BARTLETT (Port Stephens) [12.28 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to speak to the National Park Estate (Reservations) Bill. This is a bill to transfer certain State Forests lands to the national park estate and for other purposes, to come into effect from 1 July 2003. As the honourable member for Wallsend said, it was an election promise of the Carr Government, made on 2 March 2003, to establish these 15 new national parks and State conservation areas. The flow-on effect of preservation and environmental improvements in my electorate, one of the most beautiful electorates in the State, will be the creation of many jobs. The Carr Labor Government said that it would introduce legislation on the first sitting day, which it did, to declare 65,000 hectares of native forest as 15 new national parks, State conservation areas and State forest reserve. It is important to note that this declaration is in addition to 330 new national parks covering more than 1.8 million hectares declared by the Carr Government since 1995.

Country Labor, especially the coastal fringe, has recognised the benefits of national parks and conservation areas to tourism and the environment. Unfortunately, it seems that the National Party has become a dinosaur. This issue is similar to the supply of doctors to country areas. Country Labor is fighting for these issues, but it does not seem to have any support from the National Party. In many ways it appears that the National Party is out of touch and out of time. It is like a violin playing the same tune it was playing 15 years ago. The National Party has not moved forward to engage people in debate.

The new additions to the national park estate will protect old-growth forests and rainforests, as well as some 500 different bird and animal species, including prime koala habitat and more than 4,000 plant species. The Australian Koala Foundation believes that overseas tourists who come to Australia to see koalas spend in

the vicinity of \$9 billion a year. The Copeland area, which is just inland from Gloucester, is very close to my heart. Gloucester and Port Stephens have published the "Snow Gums to Sand" booklet, which we hope will encourage ecotourists to visit not only the Gloucester area but also the Port Stephens area. Copeland Tops has a protected area of 2,037 hectares. My family and I and our friends have spent many a happy time taking our canoes and kayaks to the Barrington River. Once we cross the Barrington River we usually turn left to Rocky Crossing and up to Binderra where we launch the canoes for a three-hour paddle from Binderra down to Rocky Crossing. We could then paddle for another three hours from Rocky Crossing to the Barrington Bridge. It is also possible to continue further up the road off the Barrington Bridge to Copeland and launch there for a nine-hour trip. It is a wonderful experience in a wonderful area.

These additional national parks, which will preserve the water quality of our sparkling rivers and farming along the banks of our rivers, will create tourism, which, in turn, will create jobs. They are a wonderful addition to the national park grid. An area of 4,197 hectares has been declared just north of Port Stephens at the Myall River. Approximately 12 months ago some 700 hectares of Mt Karuah was put into the national park grid. For as long as I remain the member for Port Stephens I will continue to support additions to the national parks and conservation areas. I draw the attention of the House to one of the 500 species of birds, the Lathan Snipe—also called the Japanese Racing Pigeon—that flies every year from the wetlands in Kushiro, which is in Hokkaido in Japan, to Port Stephens. Kushiro and Port Stephens have a sister wetlands agreement to preserve the habitat of the bird.

When I visited Kushiro I noted that the Lathan Snipe was very noisy, but when it comes to Port Stephens to get away from the winter it is very quiet and very difficult to find. The Hunter region has a very large bird-watching fraternity. Recently I was disturbed to hear from that fraternity that the 17,000 migratory birds that passed through the Hunter estuary 15 years ago are now down to 3,500. Obviously, national parks along the coast will provide some sort of protection for these migratory birds. The Lathan Snipe flies 9,000 kilometres a year from Kushiro to Port Stephens, then it turns around and goes back. They do not fly constantly for 9,000 kilometres; they have to stop along the way. If the stopover sites are continually degraded the birds face extinction. It appears that fewer and fewer of the birds are making the distance. An extremely good friend of mine in Kushiro, Shinsho-san, is very worried about the flight path of the birds, particularly with the development in southern China and Korea as population pressures increase, as well as coastal areas of Australia. I am very much in favour of anything that will help to preserve these migratory bird species, which are certainly under threat.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service has been allocated \$17.5 million in recurrent expenditure and \$7.5 million in capital expenditure over the next four years to manage these new additions on the North Coast. I remember the dinosaur debates from the last term of the previous Parliament, when those opposite wanted to know where the money was coming from for the new national parks. Even with the addition of 330 national parks we have doubled the amount of money per hectare for national parks since we started the process in 1995. Not only is capital and recurrent expenditure going in, we have doubled the expenditure per hectare after declaring an extra 345 national parks. I will not refer to the areas in the Hunter alluded to by the honourable member for Wallsend. The proposal includes almost 19,000 hectares of old-growth native forest that will be protected in special conservation zones within State forests.

When I was asked to speak on the bill I dug into my file and pulled out a book to which I often refer entitled *Blueprint for Living a Continent*, published by the Wentworth group. It contains some very interesting views about the big picture in Australia. The book states that we need to recognise the importance of environmental flows in our rivers and reward people for environmental stewardship. Our generation can, and I think we will, leave a legacy of healthy rivers and healthy landscape, not drains and dustbowls. The book goes on to say that Australia is the driest inhabited continent on earth. It also has the most variable climate. We are the most ancient continent with a salt inheritance buried deep within it. These three elements—our current climate, our ancient soils and our evolutionary history—make Australia unique, but our agricultural practices were developed for wet fertile landscapes, not our own.

During last summer's bushfires dust storms swept across the State and it was estimated that several million tonnes of irreplaceable soil were swept into the ocean. I read subsequently that this phenomenon benefits the whale-watching tourism industry along the coastline. The huge iron content in the dust that is dumped into the ocean builds up plankton, and creates good plankton breeding stock and, consequently, healthier whales. The whale-watching season in Port Stephens commences on 1 June, during which it is expected that 3,500 migratory whales will make their way along the coastline. It is important to preserve remnant native vegetation to prevent further damage to the Australian landscape from dust bowls and wind

storms. The Wentworth study estimated that approximately 687,800 hectares of native bushland—nearly 7,000 square kilometres—was cleared across Australia in 2001 and that approximately two-thirds of that area was remnant bushland. That is equivalent to 50 football fields being cleared every hour.

I am pleased to take part in this debate, and I support the bill. Some people say that the Government makes promises but never delivers. I point out that this bill represents a promise that was made on 2 March. Today the Government is delivering on that promise with the creation of 15 new national parks, making a total of 345 additions to the national park estate since the Carr Government was elected in 1995. That is the record upon which the Carr Government stands at election time. It is a record that the National Party, despite all its violin tunes, cannot get anywhere near.

Mr COLLIER (Miranda) [12.41 p.m.]: As a society, it is important for us to preserve and maintain our pristine rainforests and old-growth forests for future generations of Australians. As caretakers of our children's future, it is incumbent upon us to protect the habitats of threatened plants and animal species whenever and wherever possible. The National Park Estate (Reservations) Bill is intended to preserve, protect and maintain our natural heritage. The bill protects 65,000 hectares of native forests of high conservation value in the north-eastern part of the State. This area is in addition to the 350 national parks covering 1.8 million hectares that have been declared by the Carr Government since 1995. The new conservation reserves contain pockets of rainforest and old-growth forests, more than 4,000 plant species and more than 500 species of animals and birds. This bill will protect 15 of the north-eastern forest icon areas that are rich in biodiversity, including Wollumbin and Whian Whian. Wollumbin forest reservation adds 2,092 hectares to the Mount Warning National Park near Murwillumbah. Anyone who has visited the Mount Warning National Park, as my wife, Jeanette, and I did for the first time approximately 31 years ago, could not but be impressed by its beauty.

The doubling of the area of the Mount Warning National Park and linking it to the Border Ranges National Park will protect important rainforests such as the World Heritage listed Amaroo rainforest and coastal old-growth forests. Wollumbin is a natural habitat for threatened plants and animals, including the marbled frogmouth and the Albert lyrebird. Years ago, together with my son, Michael, and my daughter, Sarah, I hired a boat in Audley, which is in the Royal National Park—the second oldest national park in the world—on the edge of the Sutherland shire. In the late afternoon, when the shadows lengthened as evening slowly descended, my two young children and I were sitting in the boat when out of the bush came a lyrebird to drink at the water's edge. The excitement of the children was fabulous and I had a hard time keeping them quiet. But in the stillness of that late afternoon I realised the importance of maintaining our environment and protecting the heritage of our State. It is important to protect native species such as the lyrebird, not only for our natural heritage but for the sake of our children. Later that night at home we looked at several books, and found stamps and coins depicting the lyrebird. The experience illustrated the importance of preserving native species. The burden falls on us as members of Parliament to do so.

The wollemi pine also grows naturally in Whian Whian and nowhere else. By coincidence, this morning I strolled through the Royal Botanic Gardens, which are located near the harbour and just north of Parliament House. I came across a two-metre wollemi pine that has been encased in steel. The species was thought to be extinct, but we are fortunate to have one growing in this State's Royal Botanic Gardens in Macquarie Street. A plaque provided information on the location of its discovery. It reminded me of how important it is for us to preserve such precious species in their natural habitats, rather than their being preserved and observed in a museum or pressed between the pages of a book. The Royal National Park adjoins my electorate and borders the Sutherland shire. The national park brings enjoyment to my constituents and to visitors from farther afield. As a result of this bill, additional areas will be protecting our natural heritage so that we, as an increasingly mobile society, will have the opportunity to enjoy even more of the State's biodiversity for years to come.

The conservation achievement represented by this bill is not being won at the expense of the region's timber industries. In consultation with representatives of the timber industry, measures have been taken to ensure that the industry continues to be supplied with a more reliable supply of timber. These measures are based upon long-term sustainable logging of all available areas of State forests. The Government has had contact not only with industry representatives but also with the region's mill owners in relation to the implementation of these new initiatives. This bill and its associated package of reforms make clear the Government's commitment to the Regional Forest Agreement and to the maintenance and improvement of the native timber industry of this State. The Carr Government made this promise before the March State election. When one examines the bill one cannot help but note the commencement date of the bill, which is 1 July this year. That is proof positive of the Carr Government delivering on its promises, and delivering protection and preservation of our natural environment for future generations. I support the bill.

Ms JUDGE (Strathfield) [12.47 p.m.]: I am proud to speak in support of the National Park Estate (Reservations) Bill, which will result in the creation of not one, not five, not 10, but 15 national parks and conservation areas in the north-eastern part of New South Wales. The bill represents a workable compromise between local industry and our precious environment. It is a balanced and comprehensive approach. Previous Government speakers have referred to promises. Although it is easy to make promises, delivering on them shows commitment and that a government is prepared to put policies in place. This Government is committed to conservation, not just for the benefit of the people of New South Wales but for all Australians.

Approximately 45 million years ago the Australian continent became a separate land mass. Prior to that it was known as Gondwanaland and was connected by land bridges to other southern continents. The relative isolation of our continent afforded protection to many rare and wonderful species that are unique to Australia and provided them with protection that they otherwise would not have had if the continent had remained attached to the greater land mass. However, that protection lasted only until the relatively recent European settlement. According to the 2002 edition of the *Australian Almanac*, there are currently 1.7 million documented species of animals in the world. I am saddened by the tragic fact that in Australia 55 species have become extinct. There are 83 Australian mammals, 96 birds and 50 reptiles, not to mention many amphibians, fishes and invertebrates, on the threatened species list.

When our indigenous people arrived in this land they had a wonderful spiritual connectedness with their surroundings. They lived in harmony with nature. I put to you, Mr Deputy-Speaker, that if we do not take these very significant steps now nothing will be left for your children, your grandchildren or their grandchildren to appreciate in the future. When they ask, "Mummy, what's a tiger quoll?" we will have to answer, "Oh, there aren't any tiger quolls alive any more. You will have to look at a CD-ROM, encyclopaedia or textbook." I mentioned the tiger quoll because it is one species that this series of new national parks will protect. The tiger quoll is a marsupial, and it is called by that name because it has dark brown-blackish fur with white spots. I suppose the spots represent what we call a tiger, but the tiger quoll is more closely related to the kangaroo, being a marsupial. It loves to climb trees—and that is what this bill is about: protecting precious trees.

We need to protect our native trees because they are our oxygen factories, our lungs. How would you feel, Mr Deputy-Speaker, if you had only one lung? You would be huffing and wheezing. This bill creates literally thousands of lungs for the human species to survive in this nation and, indeed, the whole planet. The bill is about being inclusive, being connected. Australia's forests and woodlands are some of the most biodiverse in the world, containing more than one-twentieth of the plants and land-based animal species on earth. In short, Australia's forests are some of the most environmentally significant in the world. Managing them is an enormous responsibility, a responsibility the Government is not prepared to shirk. The bill is about sustainability, connectedness and the best interests of the whole community. This bill will protect workplace environments for people living in rural Australia. The Government does not intend to take away their jobs. The Government has consulted with them and come up with a workable partnership, a compromise that will ensure that people living in rural Australia will have the jobs they need to survive.

The Government has a duty, a responsibility, to its citizens and to the environment. Hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, we must take steps to alleviate and obviate any past damage. We cannot make excuses—time is running out. An article prepared by the Wilderness Society, dated 28 February 2000, outlined why Australia's forests should be saved. Already half of Australia's native forests have been cleared since European settlement, 80 per cent of remaining forests have been logged and less than 8 per cent of original old-growth forests remain in our continent. Nearly 400 species of Australia's land-based animals, mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians—one-fifth—use tree hollows as their habitat. This bill will protect that habitat, those wonderful trees, some of which are hundreds of years old. The time to act is now. We must realise that we are only custodians of this great land; we do not own it. Since the Industrial Revolution we have gradually eroded the very life, the very foundation, which sustains us. It is important that we take this hugely significant and important step now. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr WEST (Campbelltown) [12.54 p.m.]: It is pleasing that we have kicked off this session with a monumental bill, the National Park Estate (Reservations) Bill. This is co-operative legislation not only between the Ministers involved—I congratulate the Ministers responsible for the portfolios of Environment, Infrastructure and Forestry—but between many groups that often will not sit around the table together, including environment groups, the timber industry and companies. The bill is most important for future generations. This important process has not been easy, but it has been thorough. An example of that co-operation was the release internationally of a statement by Boral headed "Australia's Boral Secures Timber Deal with NSW Govt". Boral announced that it had completed talks with the New South Wales Government in regard to the long-term supply of hardwood resources.

Boral will continue its investment program, which will ensure long-term security of timber in New South Wales. Boral, one of the largest timber companies in New South Wales which already employs more than 700 people, has welcomed this bill. Boral proposes to invest \$45 million in local towns, jobs and timber sustainability. Indeed, it was only the revival of that increased certainty with the New South Wales Government that Boral could go ahead with its investment in jobs, because of the Government's approach to finding the right balance. If one needs further evidence of the importance of this bill and the sensible approach taken by the Government it is contained in a media release by the Forest Products Association in relation to this bill. It stated:

Russell Ainley, NSW Forest Products Association Executive Director, today acknowledged significant benefits for the timber industry included within the National Park Estate (Reservations) Bill. Constructive and consistent representation by the NSW FPA since the Premier's announcement has produced an outcome to protect the interests of **all** hardwood millers on the North Coast.

The Bill recognises that supply issues currently facing the industry and the imperative of a reliable flow of timber on which to base business and investment developments. The security provided under this legislation will shore up the long-term future of this industry, employment levels and contribution to regional economies. Progressing the Memoranda of Understanding for the whole industry into strengthened timber agreements will provide the security necessary—now, rather than later.

This package of initiatives will provide substantial security to the \$138 million already invested by small, family-based companies on the North Coast.

That peak lobby group endorsed the Government's bill. The bill balances the needs of future generations with our current needs. Substantial areas will now be protected, not just in pockets but in a co-ordinated and linked reserve system in north-east New South Wales, providing many important benefits. Within these 65,000 hectares are areas of high-conservation value, old-growth forests and rainforests, adding to the areas already protected by the Wran and Carr Labor governments. While spending some time in Murwillumbah for a wedding, I went to Mount Warning, one of the many important North Coast protected areas. At other times I have travelled through the areas surrounding Lismore, some in more detail than others. On those occasions I was impressed with many beautiful areas. I note that that area protects more than 500 species of birds and animals and 4,000 plant species, including the koala, powerful owl, tiger quoll, yellow-bellied glider and the Hastings River mouse.

I am sure that honourable members representing electorates along the North Coast would recall that the Hastings River mouse, which was first discovered in 1921, was presumed extinct until it was rediscovered in 1969 when a third specimen was found. Although it has been discovered at other locations, clearly it is still rare and limited in its habitat. It is important that we protect that habitat. That can be done by improving the sustainability of timber harvesting by State Forests and through this bill. This bill not only protects biodiversity through its aim of creating a secure industry for New South Wales timber workers and their families, it also projects jobs. I know that that was high on the mind of timber millers and forest workers whom I met in the upper Hunter as part of a forest caucus committee meeting. I was impressed by their commitment to working towards a sustainable industry by protecting buffer zones, wildlife corridors and the like. Timber workers, State Forests and locals wanted certainty of timber supply, certainty of jobs, and biodiversity and natural heritage for their children. That is what the National Park Estate (Reservations) Bill is about. The bill will provide not only protection but also security. The Minister for the Environment said during his second reading speech:

This package is designed around the principle that there will be long-term sustainable logging of all available areas of State forests. The House would also be interested to hear that purchases of private land by State Forests of New South Wales funded through the 1998 decision on forests, have already added about 5,000 cubic metres to the annual supply, and additional purchases will continue to augment supply. To underscore our commitment to the timber industry we propose to enter into direct discussions with timber companies that hold wood supply agreements in the region in order to provide even greater certainty to industry. At present these agreements subject the mills to a timber supply review in 2006.

The Minister welcomed the announcement by Boral and the Forest Products Association. The bill contains many provisions that will assist in security. Road access to private lands and timber leases will be assured. Mining can still proceed with the concurrence of the Minister for the Environment. Minor adjustments to the reserve area can be made in the transition stage so any unforeseen problem can be solved before it becomes a major issue. Schedule 2 deals with certain areas included in schedule 1 whose reservation is delayed until July 2006 to allow plantations within the new reserves to be harvested once, prior to reservation. This bill, together with landmark co-operation between stakeholders and better harvesting technology, will ensure that children continue to live in a land of timber jobs, biodiversity and spectacular natural beauty. I look forward to visiting more protected areas when I visit Lismore in the future.

Debate adjourned on motion by Mr George.

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

AUDIT OFFICE**Report**

Mr Speaker tabled, pursuant to section 38E of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, tabled the Performance Audit Report entitled "Protecting Our Rivers", dated May 2003.

Ordered to be printed.

PETITIONS**Cudgen Creek Seaway**

Petition requesting that the Cudgen Creek seaway at Kingscliff be cleared of silt, received from **Mr George**.

Dunoon Dam

Petition requesting the fast-tracking of plans to build a dam at Dunoon, received from **Mr George**.

Lake Burrinjuck Water Level

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

Urban Planning

Petition requesting that urban planning designs be decided by local communities, received from **Mrs Hopwood**.

Local Government Planning Control Reform

Petition requesting the reform of planning controls by gazettal as a legal document, oversight by the Department of Planning, public benefit assessment of variations, and a ban on development-related donations to political parties and elected officials, received from **Ms Moore**.

White City Site Rezoning Proposal

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

Freedom of Religion

Petition 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 Bartlett**.

Age of Consent

Petition praying that the Crimes Act be amended to provide a uniform age of consent for lawful sexual activity, irrespective of sexuality, and to remove offences that refer to male homosexuality, received from **Mr Gaudry**.

Mental Health Services

Petition requesting urgent maintenance and increased funding for mental health services, received from **Ms Moore**.

Hornsby Shire Rail Parking Facilities

Petition requesting additional commuter parking facilities at railway stations in the Hornsby shire, received from **Mrs Hopwood**.

Berowra Commuter Car Park

Petition requesting a complete rebuild of the Berowra commuter car park, received from **Mrs Hopwood**.

Surry Hills Bus Services

Petition praying that the State Transit Authority reinstate the old 301 bus route, extend the 352 bus service, provide bus shelters and seats at all stops, reinstate the Market Street bus stop, and provide better information, received from **Ms Moore**.

Bus Service 311

Petition praying that the Government urgently improve bus service 311 to make it more frequent and more reliable, received from **Ms Moore**.

Surry Hills Policing

Petition seeking increased uniformed police foot patrols in the Surry Hills Local Area Command and the installation of a permanent police van or shopfront in the Taylor Square area, received from **Ms Moore**.

Underground Cables

Petition requesting that the House ensure that an achievable plan to put aerial cables underground is urgently implemented, received from **Ms Moore**.

Hawkesbury Electorate Sewerage Services

Petition praying that funding be provided to construct a reticulated sewerage system for Glossodia, Freeman's Reach and Wilberforce, received from **Mr Pringle**.

Circus Animals

Petition praying that the House end the unnecessary suffering of wild animals and their use in circuses, received from **Ms Moore**.

Alcohol Sale Control

Petition 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**.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

PUBLIC HOUSING RENT INCREASE

Mr BROGDEN: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Roads, and Minister for Housing. Why did the Minister tell the House yesterday that the Department of Housing had not withheld notification of a rent increase to tenants during the election campaign when a memo from the Department of Housing proves that the Minister was lying his head off?

Mr SCULLY: In 1999 the Government announced that it would increase public housing tenants' rent from 20 per cent of income to 25 per cent, progressively by 1 per cent a year up to 2004.

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

Mr SCULLY: A press release issued by the then Minister for Housing says:

In order to achieve this we will phase in a rent increase to 25 per cent of income for most public housing tenants from the current 20 per cent ...

Rents for existing tenants will increase by 1 per cent of income from April 3, 2000 and a further 1 per cent each year until being capped at 25 per cent in 2004.

Mr Brogden: Point of order—

[*Interruption*]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

[*Interruption*]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of the Opposition to order. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat and seek the call to take a point of order.

Mr Brogden: Point of order: My point of order is in respect of relevance. My question referred to a memorandum of 26 February 2003 that says, "This would mean that clients were notified of changes for their subsidised rent in the week of the State election." Here is the memo.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat.

[*Interruption*]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition has behaved disgracefully. To throw a piece of paper across this Chamber is grossly disorderly and the Chair takes strong objection to it. The Leader of the Opposition is already on two calls to order and question time has barely commenced. The Leader of the Opposition will observe the stranding orders and traditions of the House or he will be removed. The Minister will be heard in silence.

Mr SCULLY: A press release was issued that told everyone in New South Wales that there would be 1 per cent rent increases for all Department of Housing tenants from 2000 through to 2004. That was not enough so we issued a newsletter to make sure that all the department's tenants were aware. The newsletter stated:

From April 3, 2000 - next year - most Department of Housing tenants will be asked to pay an additional 1% of their household incomes.

I seek leave to table that newsletter.

Leave granted.

Newsletter tabled.

The document to which the Leader of the Opposition referred is, in fact, an unauthorised and unsigned document. He has flung this document across the Chamber and the Opposition will be disappointed to find that it is unsigned, unauthorised and incorrect.

Mr Carr: Another trick.

Mr SCULLY: Yes, a mischievous exercise by the Opposition. In fact, it was prepared for a director in the Department of Housing who read it, put a line through it and said that it was not authorised. The Opposition will be disappointed. The memo issued by the director stated:

Reference is made to an unauthorised memo issued under my name on 26 February 2003 concerning the implementation of the next scheduled rent rebate ...

This memo contained incorrect information and is revoked.

The memo on which the Opposition is relying is an unsigned, unauthorised document that conveniently contains a couple of mischievous paragraphs that refer to the State election.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber.

Mr SCULLY: I seek leave to table both of those documents.

Leave granted.

Documents tabled.

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

Mr SCULLY: The department investigated this matter and the two employees who released unauthorised, incorrect—

Mr Brogden: Were counselled?

Mr SCULLY: They were, actually. If staff are told by a director that a memo prepared for her is incorrect and unauthorised—and she did not sign it—it should not have been sent out, and it is appropriate for those staff to be counselled and reminded of their responsibilities. They must ensure that material drafted by them for a superior officer is signed and authorised by that person when issued under that person's name. It is appropriate to inform the House why the information went out to tenants when it did. I will read a briefing note prepared by the Director-General of the Department of Housing today. It states:

The 2003 increase was to be combined with the three CPI adjustments to pensions and benefits up to March 2003. This ensured that tenants were not confused with multiple notifications and significantly reduced the bureaucratic administration by having one single rent increase notification.

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

[*Interruption*]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Murrumbidgee will cease interjecting or he will be called to order for the second time.

Mr SCULLY: The briefing note continues:

In addition, the 2003 rent increase was to take advantage of a new Income Confirmation Scheme negotiated with Centrelink. This enabled information on tenants' income and benefits to be confirmed by Centrelink directly ...

It continued:

The Income Confirmation Scheme applies to tenants on pensions and benefits. This makes up the vast majority of tenants. Tenants in receipt of wages or other income were advised of the impact of the increase in rents from 17 March 2003 which was prior to the State Election. In fact, 11,000-odd letters went out well before the State election.

As a result of the Centrelink income confirmation scheme being introduced there was no opportunity to notify pensioners and beneficiaries in public housing before April 2003. The first letters went out to tenants who are pensioners and beneficiaries from the 8 April.

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

Mr SCULLY: I do not recall Centrelink being a State government agency. So, when I am being advised by the director general that the point at which an assessment of income against the 1 per cent increase was going to be realigned to make sure it would fit the income confirmation scheme of Centrelink, I bear in mind that this is a Federal government agency. I have a copy of a memorandum issued today by Centrelink that says:

This is to confirm the content of our discussion and that changes for consumer price increases for Centrelink payments commenced from 20 March, and so the earliest processing date for income confirmation to pick up the rate variations was 31 March 2003.

This is a grubby exercise by the Opposition, attempting to misuse a document that was never signed and never authorised. Shame on you!

Mr BROGDEN: I ask a supplementary question of the Minister for Housing. If in fact the Minister's answer is correct, why is it that in 2000 tenants were told in March, in 2001 they were told in March, in 2002 they were told in March, but in 2003 they were told in April?

Mr SCULLY: I read again from the briefing note today from the Director General of the Department of Housing. The 2000 increase took effect in March 2000. The 2001 and 2002 increases took effect in May of those years.

Mr Brogden: We are talking about the notifications.

Mr SCULLY: Opposition members do not like this answer. So the first year it was in March, the second year it was in May, the third year it was in May, the fourth year it was in June, and I have just, I believe, adequately explained how Opposition members have been very mischievous with the House.

URBAN SPEED LIMIT

Mrs PALUZZANO: My question without notice is to the Minister for Roads. What is the Government's response to community concerns about speeding in residential streets?

Mr SCULLY: I thank the honourable member for Penrith for asking a question on this important issue. The honourable member for Bligh raised it in a notice of motion. The honourable member for Blacktown, in his capacity as chair of Staysafe, long ago raised the issue of urban speed limits. In fact, Staysafe has reported on it. As honourable members would be aware, back in 1997 the Government trialled a 50 kilometres per hour speed limit for residential streets in some urban areas. That was a very successful trial, and as a result the Government made a decision to allow local government authorities across New South Wales to apply a 50 kilometres per hour urban speed limit to residential streets in which they believe it is appropriate.

The facts are quite obvious. A vehicle travelling at 60 kilometres per hour takes longer to pull up than a vehicle travelling at 50 kilometres per hour. About 10 metres is the difference—and that can be the difference between life and death. A child running out onto the road, or darting between cars when crossing a road, or elderly persons taking a little longer to cross the road than they might like, have the possibility of a much safer outcome if a slower urban speed limit applies to residential streets. Some 143 councils of the 172 in New South Wales have adopted a 50 kilometres per hour speed limit in residential streets in their urban areas. The vast majority of residents of New South Wales are covered by urban areas that have a 50 kilometres per hour speed limit.

I believe all who live in urban areas in New South Wales should have the benefit of a 50 kilometres per hour speed limit in appropriate residential streets. The councils that introduced a 50 kilometres per hour speed limit in urban areas did so co-operatively in partnership with the Roads and Traffic Authority, local government authorities and the communities concerned. Given the success and support of this particular aspect of the road safety, I think it is timely that we move forward and similarly cover all urban areas of this State. A number of jurisdictions have already adopted this speed measure. Indeed, it is an issue that will come up at the next road Ministers council meeting later this month in Melbourne, where it will be subject to deliberations. I will be writing to all of my colleagues around Australia seeking an exemption from the Australian Road Rules so that we can move as soon as possible to introduce a default speed limit of 50 kilometres per hour on our residential streets by 1 November this year.

It will take a few months to implement this proposal because a number of 60 kilometres per hour speed signs will need to be installed along some streets in our urban road network. From 1 November a road that is not sign posted will have a speed limit of 50 kilometres per hour. That will achieve a demonstrable improvement in road safety across the State. We will have to change handbooks and some of the questions in licensing tests. Of course, there will have to be an education and information program. I want all drivers and residents across New South Wales to be aware of this initiative. So the Roads and Traffic Authority has been instructed by me to spend the next several months to ensure those signs are installed and ensure that all of the information and education measures and changes to handbooks and testing questions actually take place. I believe this initiative will have the overwhelming support of all stakeholders involved.

In conclusion I would refer to one matter of concern involving the Acting Prime Minister, who is also the Federal Minister for Transport. In the latest issue of the *Wheels* magazine he was quite critical of State jurisdictions for what he calls their obsession with speed, flagging the possibility that he will be going down the path of regarding other issues as being of greater significance. I am happy to continue to have a working relationship with him on any issue concerning road safety that he thinks we can do a little better on, but I will be reminding him in Melbourne that speed is the most significant cause of road trauma, fatality and significant property damage on our roads. We are all entitled to our views, but I think it is inappropriate for a person

currently in the position of Acting Prime Minister to express in *Wheels* magazine a rev-head view that the States have an obsession with speed. That could be misinterpreted as saying that speeding is appropriate. It is not. We will continue to do all we can to get speed down.

PUBLIC HOUSING RENT INCREASE

Mr STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given the documentary evidence that his Minister for Housing deceived this House yesterday in relation to the Government's deliberate withholding of the notification of rent increases in public housing until after the recent election, will the Premier now dismiss the Minister?

Mr CARR: Seriously, I try to be tolerant, to encourage them, to help them. My patience is virtually unlimited. I want a strong Opposition. More than that, I want an intelligent and thoughtful Opposition. Everything I do is designed to achieve this outcome. But they always let me down.

[*Interruption*]

Mr CARR: Oh, Jillian, Jillian, Jillian. Don't be bitter! Be as cheerful and friendly as you were when you first came to the House.

Mrs Skinner: Point of order—

[*Interruption*]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for North Shore has the call. What is the point of order?

Mrs Skinner: Point of order: The forms of this Parliament require you to direct the Premier to refer to me as the member for North Shore. This has gone on for far too long and it demeans every woman in the State. I would ask you to direct him to abide by the standing orders of this Parliament.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! If the member for North Shore contravenes the standing of the House by interjecting in the way she did, she must accept the consequences. There is no point of order.

Mr CARR: Let us talk about this intelligently and let us try to get to the bottom of it with all the excitement being evinced by the Opposition. It strikes me as a very important fact that the Department of Housing, I am advised, sent out 11,556 letters in the week before the State election seeking information on income to allow the new rents to be determined. It is difficult to see how there was a conspiracy to deny something that, after all, as the Minister said, had been announced as Government policy by a press release and newsletter to everyone in the Department of Housing accommodation in 1999. The Government said in 1999 that rents would increase at these times and by these amounts. It was out there in the media in 1999.

The Leader of the Opposition was too busy giving public affairs advice to PricewaterhouseCoopers to take account of this. It is his only excuse. It was announced by way of newsletter, press release and probably skywriters. It was Government policy discussed and reported on in the media, and it was the subject of comment on the byways and highways of New South Wales. It was out there as a public announcement. Moreover, in the week before the election, 11,556 letters were sent out seeking information. Talk about beat-ups! The Opposition has a scrap of paper that we now know was not signed by the person whose name appeared on it, not authorised by the officer whose name appeared on it and not cleared by the officer whose name appeared on it. I smell a rat, and that is whoever cobbled this together.

I cannot make any further comment on who was responsible, but I understand the motivation. A lot of people had high hopes for the Leader of The Opposition in the last State election. The narrative they wanted from the election was a new Liberal leader fighting from some distance behind, clawing back Liberal support and showing that the public attitude had changed. But the people of New South Wales were too discerning for that. They carefully assessed what was on offer from the Opposition and weighed it against the substance of the Government. The Coalition vote dropped. The Leader of the Opposition came in with two seats fewer than Kerry Chikarovski had. Let us talk about the statewide result. Let us talk about the actual figures. Kerry Chikarovski did better than the current Leader of the Opposition

Mr Page: Point of order: I ask you to bring the Premier back to the nature of the question, which was about this memo that says, quite specifically, that the notifications were delayed because it would occur one week prior to the State election. It is in your memo.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Premier will resume his reply.

Mr CARR: It was not signed by the officer and it was not authorised by the officer. Therefore it is very suspect. What is the motivation? Precisely what I had begun to suggest: the boiling frustration at the Coalition not being able to win seats against this Government has led people to do some very suspect things.

HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS

Ms BURNEY: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Health. What is the Government's response to the increase in the number of visits to hospital emergency departments?

Mr IEMMA: New South Wales has an outstanding network of emergency departments. The staff are among the best in the world. Demand in our emergency departments has never been higher. Last year, for the first time, 2 million people presented at New South Wales emergency departments compared with 1.8 million in 2000-01 and 1.6 million in 1996-97.

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

Mr IEMMA: Our emergency departments are coping with this massive workload. However, the proposed changes by the Commonwealth to both Medicare and the health care agreement will only increase pressure on our emergency departments and hospitals. Two weeks ago the Prime Minister announced proposed changes to general practitioner [GP] services as part of the so-called Medicare package. Last Friday the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, Kaye Patterson, provided the detail for the new Commonwealth health agreement. I regret to advise the House that the detail revealed last week shows that the Commonwealth has decided to pay for the \$974 million GP package announced two weeks ago by taking \$1 billion out of our public hospital system.

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

Mr IEMMA: Friday's meeting revealed clearly and unequivocally that the Commonwealth Government is in the process of dismantling Medicare.

Mr Debnam: It was in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, too.

Mr IEMMA: Yes, absolutely. I wish the honourable member had looked at this morning's poll. Medicare rests on the principle of universal access. For a very long time it has guaranteed the Australian people three basic things: free health care in the public hospital system; subsidised visits to general practitioners and specialist medical services; and access to free or subsidised medicines. Following the plan outlined by Senator Patterson on Friday, it is clear that these principles are in the process of being abolished. The Commonwealth proposal will make it harder for middle Australia to access basic medical health care.

First, the package will result in a decline in GP bulk billing, which will affect up to 4.3 people in New South Wales; second, it will increase the cost of basic health care for middle Australia, as GP and specialist fees rise for people who do not have health care cards; and, third and most importantly, it will place further pressure on our public hospital system. Many people who cannot afford higher GP fees will seek basic treatment from emergency departments at public hospitals. Already one in five people attend emergency departments for basic GP-type services. For example, last financial year 9,000 people went to emergency departments for treatment of coughs, colds and sore throats; 2,800 attended for treatment of earaches; and 900 attended for treatment of ear wax. The decline in bulk billing will make this position much worse. Instead of an increased schedule fee for all general practitioners the Commonwealth Government will pay an incentive only to those GPs who bulk bill health cardholders and pension cardholders.

Medicare will become a system of health care only for people who hold a pension card or a health care card. Doctors will be free to charge what they like for everyone else. In other words, this marks the end of bulk billing, and the commencement of a two-tier health care system. It is time that the Prime Minister admitted what millions of Australians already know, that is, that they will be paying more for health care services that

previously they received free. The people who will pay the most will be middle income Australians—people such as the Finos family who live at Mortdale in Sydney's south in the Georges River electorate. Mr Finos earns approximately \$65,000 a year by working in a suburban bank. He is married with three children aged three years, two years and one week respectively. His wife has been a full-time carer since the birth of the couple's first child. On average, each of the children visits the local GP once a month.

Mr Hartcher: Point of order: I draw attention to Standing Order 137 (5), which states:

Questions cannot anticipate discussion upon an Order of the Day or other matter.

The House has been given notice of an urgent motion by the honourable member for Kiama on the very subject that the Minister is now addressing in his answer. I draw attention to Standing Order 137 subparagraph 5. The Minister's answer contravenes the standing orders. Mr Speaker, you should rule the answer out of order.

Mr Scully: To the point of order: It is no wonder that the honourable member for Gosford does not look after the Opposition's business in the House. The House has not yet determined which urgent motion will come before the House and then becomes the business of the House. Therefore the answer is not anticipating debate.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the House is entirely correct.

Mr Hartcher: How did we know that that would be your ruling?

Mr SPEAKER: Because it is in accordance with the standing orders. Notice has been given of two urgent motions, but the House has not determined which motion will be debated. There is no point of order.

Mr IEMMA: For the Finos family and other ordinary families like them, the changes will mean that they will be out of pocket by between \$700 and \$1,100 a year based on an average of between 35 and 45 visits to their local GP. That is a huge slug for them but it is also a huge slug for our hospital emergency departments. This will mean longer waiting times in emergency departments and more stress on nurses and doctors. Amazingly, last Friday Senator Patterson asserted that emergency departments in public hospitals are not as busy as people think. Even worse was the funding formula that was revealed on the same day for the new health care agreement for our hospitals. It asserts that emergency departments and hospitals are not as busy as all people know them to be and official figures show them to be. The Commonwealth intends to pay for the GP package, which it announced two weeks ago, by ripping more than \$1 billion out of the public hospitals system.

General practitioners should be paid more, and the Commonwealth should live up to its responsibility and pay them all by increasing the scheduled fee. However an increase in the scheduled fee should not be paid at the expense of the public hospital system. I will provide additional figures that indicate just how busy our public hospitals are.

Mr Brogden: What about the code reds?

Mr IEMMA: The Leader of the Opposition should continue to listen. Our emergency department network access system monitors hospital capacity across the Sydney metropolitan area. Code green means that the hospital is managing its patient workload comfortably. At the other end of the activity scale is code red. The system has been devised by a group of clinicians, including Dr Tony O'Connell who is Chair of the New South Wales Critical Care Council. When a hospital goes on code red, it requires ambulances to access other hospitals, except for life-threatening cases. In March, I announced figures on emergency departments in our hospitals. The six busiest emergency departments had the following periods on code red: St Vincent's, 240 hours; Westmead, 171 hours; Campbelltown, 170 hours; Liverpool, 111 hours; Royal Prince Alfred hospital, 109 hours; and Prince of Wales hospital, 102 hours.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is too much conversation on the Opposition frontbench.

Mr IEMMA: That does not mean that these emergency departments are closed. Emergency departments never close. It simply means that that ambulance cases that were not life threatening were directed to the next appropriate hospital. Thankfully the network system that is in place ensures that we can best utilise available emergency department capacity. But the Federal Government's proposals will make that job even more difficult. The fact is that the Commonwealth's proposal fails to keep pace with increased health care costs,

which are rising at approximately 8 per cent per annum. The Commonwealth's proposal of just over 5 per cent represents a massive \$1 billion in funding that will be taken out of our hospital system—something that the Prime Minister did not reveal two weeks ago when he made the big announcement of \$42 billion that supposedly was on the table.

When Senator Patterson explained the detail on Friday, it was revealed that under the proposal, \$1 billion would be taken out of the new agreement for the public hospitals system. The funding arrangement is based on the false premise that our hospitals are not as busy as people think, despite the reality that they are as busy as everybody knows them to be. Our public hospitals system needs the Commonwealth to pay its fair share. The State Government pays \$1.60 for every single dollar of Commonwealth funding. It is time that the Commonwealth Government paid its fair share to support our public hospital system.

CREDIT CARD FRAUD

Ms KENEALLY: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Police. What is his response to Strike Force Venlo?

Mr WATKINS: I thank the honourable member for her question and congratulate her on her election to this House. The security of financial transactions in an increasingly electronic world is a major concern for all of us, whether we are buying a pair of shoes, paying for a meal or paying for insurance online. We all want to be assured that our financial data is protected. We also want to know that when organised crime sees a new way to rip people often, the police will be working hard to close loopholes and chase down offenders. Today I am pleased to advise the House of the outstanding work being done by NSW Police to prosecute those involved in the relatively new crime of credit card skimming.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is so much conversation on the Opposition frontbench that it is almost impossible to hear the Minister. Most of that conversation is silly, childish chatter. Those on the Opposition frontbench will listen to the Minister in silence.

Mr WATKINS: Credit card skimming is a new type of crime that is becoming more common in our community. Yesterday NSW Police, through Strike Force Venlo, arrested a 36-year-old woman on alleged credit card skimming. Skimming occurs when the data from a magnetic strip on a credit card or an automatic teller machine [ATM] card is copied by another electronic device. The information is stored and downloaded onto a blank fake credit card. A duplicate card then is created which is used to access the unwitting victim's account. The first time that many victims know they have been targeted is when they receive their credit card statement at the end of the month showing that thousands of dollars worth of debts have been run up on that card. Obviously I am unable to say anything more about yesterday's case because the matter is before the courts. But I am able to issue a warning to credit card skimmers and anyone who thinks that it is a good business to get into: New South Wales police officers are on your tail, are getting results and soon will have even more powerful laws to stop your illegal activities.

Credit card skimming is the latest species of fraud. Each year credit card fraud costs the community and financial institutions millions of dollars. Strike Force Venlo commenced eight months ago, after the creation of the State Crime Command. It is a proactive, intelligence-based strike force investigating organised credit card fraud. Venlo is operating with the co-operation of the banks, financial institutions and retailers—and it is getting impressive results. Since Venlo was established it has made 17 major arrests of key figures who are believed to be linchpins in the skimming game. I congratulate the members of Venlo on their work to date and inform them and the House that the Government is currently finalising plans to help them to get on with the job.

The Government strongly acknowledges that the law needs to keep up with new technology. We must do all we can to provide police with the tools they need to better target what is becoming very sophisticated crime. That is why I am pleased to advise the House that new skimming laws are currently being finalised. New laws will make it illegal to manufacture, repair, traffic or possess any device adapted to be used in connection with forging or falsifying credit cards. It will also be an offence to unlawfully possess, use or traffic in credit card data. These matters are also being progressed at the national level. A national committee is working to promote a common law across all jurisdictions.

The re-establishment of the specialist squads within NSW Police means that our police force is more capable than ever of tracking down organised fraudsters. However, I urge consumers to take care, to be vigilant, when using credit cards. We all want their convenience, but credit card users should follow the advice of NSW

Police to always keep watch on their credit cards when buying goods, and to report anything untoward, especially if their card has been swiped twice. I urge everyone to carefully check their credit card and bank statements at the end of each month and report any irregularities to their bank.

PUBLIC HOUSING RENT INCREASE

Mr PAGE: My question without notice is to the Deputy Premier. Did the Deputy Premier, as the former Minister for Housing, his office or anyone on his behalf, give any instructions to anyone to delay notification of rental increases in public housing until after the recent State election?

Dr REFSHAUGE: No, but the honourable member for Ballina must realise that he got this so wrong that he has been absolutely devastated by the response of the Minister for Housing.

PRIMARY SCHOOL CLASS SIZES

Ms D'AMORE: My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. What is the progress on the Government's commitment to reduce class numbers in kindergarten, year 1 and year 2?

Dr REFSHAUGE: Honourable members would be aware that previously it would have taken a loss of 2.5 per cent of the vote for Labor to have lost its majority, but at the recent election it would have required 9.1 per cent, quite a change for us. At the recent election the Government gave a group of carefully costed, carefully planned commitments. Unlike the Opposition's policies, which relied on tearing \$700 million out of the child protection budget, our commitments were fully costed within existing expenditure and on future surpluses. Among the most important promises was our commitment on class sizes, involving a four-year plan worth \$329 million. Our plan means hiring nearly 1,500 new teachers and capital funding of \$107 million to build and install additional classrooms. That means that by 2007 we will reduce class sizes to an average of 20 in kindergarten, an average of 22 in year 1, and an average of 24 in year 2.

In thinking about this question, I recalled a comment made by one teacher to the Vinson inquiry, who said "Teachers need the chance to make each student feel successful and treasured." There is no better way to do that than by saying to a teacher, "Here are smaller class sizes to help you make that difference." That is exactly what is happening today at Warwick Farm Public School, one of the 63 schools involved in our class size reduction pilot initiated by the former Minister for Education and Training, my colleague the current Minister for Police.

Last year Warwick Farm Public School had two kindergarten classes of 22 and 24 students respectively. This year, the normal staffing formula would have provided for a larger kindergarten class and a larger combined kindergarten and year 1 class. Instead, the trial has provided an extra teacher, so the school has been able to offer two kindergarten classes of just 16 and 17 students respectively. Now after just one term of smaller class sizes, the benefits are becoming clear: demonstrably more time for each student, a better understanding of each child's individual needs, and more scope to encourage a deeper love of learning. As we know from this trial and from the international research, those are lifelong benefits. International research shows that children from smaller classes are more likely to gain a higher grade, take more challenging courses, and attend university.

The results from Warwick Farm school are a tremendous encouragement to me and to the education professionals on whom we rely to implement the policy. I refer in particular to the specialist team we have set up in the Department of Education and Training: the Class Size Reduction Unit. That unit is planning the recruitment and employment of up to 1,500 new teachers and the extra classrooms. We have also established a Class Size Advisory Committee, which will hold its first meeting next week. This committee will include representatives from the Primary Principals Association, the New South Wales Teachers Federation and the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of New South Wales. That means our policy will be based, as always, on thorough consultation with teachers, principals and parents. This is a big commitment, which cannot, as with anything this size, be delivered in one go. It is a staged plan, with the most disadvantaged communities the first to benefit from the start of the next school year.

The program will begin with the reduction of kindergarten class sizes in schools that are part of the Priority Schools Funding Program. We are not just going to make those changes out of the blue. The trial I mentioned earlier is providing a rich source of data to guide our policy. I am proud to say that the pilot is being reviewed independently by Professor Bob Meyenn of Charles Sturt University. Recently the professor met with

the department to plan the next phase of the pilot evaluation. The evaluation includes developing case studies to show how schools are making use of their extra teacher to reduce class sizes, developing ways to assess the benefits of lower class sizes, and gathering data to allow students' achievements to be compared over time.

Information gained from the trial will form the basis for the longer term evaluation of the program because we want to see measurable improvements in student performance as a result of this very large investment of public funds. Our class size policy stands to provide students with benefits that will last them a lifetime. I am pleased to say that only a month after the Government was sworn in, this policy is being diligently and thoughtfully implemented. I am sure the dedicated professionals who are doing it have the encouragement and support of both sides of the House.

SYDNEY WATER CUSTOMER INFORMATION AND BILLING SYSTEM

Mr HAZZARD: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Energy and Utilities. What action will the Minister take against the directors of Sydney Water, including Michael Costa, who signed off on the failed \$61 million information technology billing project?

Mr SARTOR: Last week I gave a comprehensive answer to this question. Unfortunately, Opposition members were not listening. I do not intend to repeat the answer that I gave last week on the basis that in future Opposition members might listen to my answers.

REAL ESTATE INDUSTRY REFORMS

Ms HAY: My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Fair Trading. What is the latest information on the real estate industry?

Ms MEAGHER: I take this opportunity to congratulate the honourable member on her election to this House. Buying a home is, without question, the biggest investment that families will make in their lifetime.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I remind members that question time has not concluded. The calls to order I have noted against members stand. The Minister will be heard in silence.

Ms MEAGHER: Over the past few years property prices have risen steadily and it does not appear that there will be any let up in the near future. Australia-wide, half a million dwellings worth around \$124 billion changed hands last financial year—an increase of more than \$34 billion on the previous financial year. Last year this Parliament passed the most significant reforms in the real estate industry that it has passed in the last 60 years. The main area of our reform involves properties that go to auction. In New South Wales 20 per cent of residential property sales are by auction. We have all heard stories about the practice of dummy bidders—representatives of the vendor who make bids at an auction in an attempt to artificially lift the sale price. It is a frustrating practice that cheats genuine buyers out of a sale. It is not only unfair; it is also unethical. Under our new reforms, it is illegal.

Prospective bidders will now have to register with the agent prior to an auction. They will have to provide proof of their identification and other information that can be tracked by the Office of Fair Trading to investigate complaints of dummy bidding. Each bidder will be given a number and, on auction day, only those bidders with a number will be allowed to bid. Honourable members will be interested to hear that today I will release an 84-page draft regulation statement—the next important phase of these reforms.

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

Ms MEAGHER: The regulation also makes it an offence to influence someone's bid by inducement and it provides for warnings about this to be included in the conditions of sale for the auction. To try to prevent someone from making a bid, or perhaps influence them to bid at a certain price, carries a penalty of up to \$11,000 for an individual and \$22,000 for a corporation. Other measures in our package of reform include a comprehensive code of conduct for agents, which will provide a clear guide to the professional and ethical standards expected by the public, particularly in the conflict of interest area. For example, agents cannot offer inducements to gain a client, engage in high-pressure tactics or harass a potential client. An agent who breaches the code can be fined up to \$2,200 for each offence.

Further reform measures include: ongoing professional education for agents and auctioneers to raise standards across the industry; the disclosure of commissions, including any secret fees to the client; a one-day

cooling off period for agency agreements to ensure that people are not pressured into a sale; and giving consumers access to a public register enabling them to check whether an agent is licensed and what, if any, disciplinary action has been taken against them. Finally, there are new powers for the Fair Trading Commissioner to act quickly against illegal and unethical operators, getting the shonks out of the business. Most agents do a good job, but they want the shonks out of the industry just as much as we do. They are interested in protecting the good name of the industry in which they work.

The draft regulation is now out for public comment. Submissions will be received until 6 June, with reforms anticipated to commence on 1 August. Those reforms will be backed by a rigorous compliance package and education campaign. Last year more than 16,000 residential auctions were held across New South Wales. Obviously, it would be impossible to have a Fair Trading inspector at every one of those auctions. However, inspection of property auctions, as conducted in the past, will be unannounced and usually covert. Every agency will be notified in the coming months to ensure that they know their rights and responsibilities under the new Act. I invite people to make submissions to this important reform so we can have a system that protects consumers and, at the same time, improves standards in the industry.

Questions without notice concluded.

CONSIDERATION OF URGENT MOTIONS

Federal Government Health Funding

Mr BROWN (Kiama) [3.26 p.m.]: My motion deserves priority because of the serious concern of many families in the Kiama electorate and in New South Wales. They are aware of the investment that the Carr Labor Government has made in health infrastructure across this State. They are concerned that the Federal Government's proposals to change the Medicare system will impact negatively on the way in which hospitals and health services are funded. This issue, which has generated a lot of media comment, should be debated urgently.

Sydney Water Information and Billing System

Mr HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [3.27 p.m.]: The motion proposed by the honourable member for Kiama was the subject of extensive discussion during question time. The Opposition's motion, which is far more urgent, should be considered today as it reflects on the operation of Sydney Water and this Government. This motion is urgent. This is not the first time that Sydney Water has cost New South Wales taxpayers millions of dollars. All honourable members will remember the cryptosporidium water contamination scare in 1988 which caused community outrage and resulted in millions of dollars being thrown away in lost productivity. The Government was forced to pay millions of dollars in compensation to affected businesses and households because of Sydney Water's incompetence and the mismanagement by this Government of Sydney Water. This motion is urgent because the board and the Government have acted in the same way—ignoring repeated warnings that the information technology [IT] billing system was haemorrhaging millions of dollars to the detriment of New South Wales taxpayers.

Mr Stewart: Point of order: The honourable member for Wakehurst is aware of standing orders which require him to indicate why his motion is urgent. At the moment the honourable member is arguing the substantive motion; he is not indicating why his motion is urgent.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Chair has not heard sufficient from the honourable member. I cannot uphold the point of order.

Ms Moore: Point of order: The honourable member for Bankstown, who took a point of order, is wasting time and detracting from the speaking time of a non-government member. Non-government members should be able to present their case. Government members should not raise trivial points of order and thus waste the speaking time of non-government members.

Mr HAZZARD: This motion is urgent. Sydney Water's 1999-2000 annual report showed that the IT project had already blown out by \$14.2 million and that the completion date had been pushed back by three months. Sydney Water's 2001-02 annual report showed that the IT project would cost another \$14 million and that the completion date would be pushed back another three months. So it was pushed back yet again. This motion is urgent because no-one acted to avert the \$61 million loss—nobody from this Government or from

Sydney Water—despite the fact that the Auditor-General's 2001 report warned that the project was "significantly over budget and behind schedule". Sydney Water was apparently much too preoccupied with increasing the dividend that it pays to Treasury by almost 80 per cent—from \$60 million to \$110 million.

This motion is urgent because the Government continually shifts the blame for its shortcomings while doing nothing to address the real problems for which it is ultimately responsible. This motion is urgent because this blame-shifting sent \$61 million in taxpayers' money down the drain while this incompetent Government and Sydney Water ignored the problem. This motion is urgent because the Government was the major shareholder in Sydney Water at the time of the IT debacle but did absolutely nothing to avert the losses. This motion is urgent because if it is not debated today it is only a matter of time before New South Wales taxpayers' funds are wasted yet again by the combined incompetence of Sydney Water and this Government. The Minister for Transport Services, Michael Costa, was a shareholder and a director of Sydney Water when the decision was taken to adopt this billing system. Time and again the Government says that company directors should be held accountable for their actions. It is time that the Government made Michael Costa and the other directors accountable.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 52

Ms Allan	Mr Greene	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Amery	Ms Hay	Mr Pearce
Ms Andrews	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Mr Bartlett	Mr Hunter	Mr Price
Ms Beamer	Mr Iemma	Dr Refshauge
Mr Black	Ms Judge	Ms Saliba
Mr Brown	Ms Keneally	Mr Sartor
Ms Burney	Mr Knowles	Mr Scully
Miss Burton	Mr Lynch	Mr Stewart
Mr Campbell	Mr McBride	Mr Tripodi
Mr Collier	Mr McLeay	Mr Watkins
Mr Corrigan	Ms Meagher	Mr West
Mr Crittenden	Ms Megarrity	Mr Whan
Ms D'Amore	Mr Mills	Mr Yeadon
Mr Debus	Mr Morris	
Ms Gadiel	Mr Newell	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gaudry	Ms Nori	Mr Ashton
Mr Gibson	Mr Orkopoulos	Mr Martin

Noes, 37

Mr Aplin	Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Roberts
Mr Armstrong	Mrs Hopwood	Ms Seaton
Mr Barr	Mr Humpherson	Mrs Skinner
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Kerr	Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Brogden	Mr McGrane	Mr Souris
Mr Cansdell	Mr Merton	Mr Stoner
Mr Constance	Ms Moore	Mr Tink
Mr Debnam	Mr Oakeshott	Mr Torbay
Mr Draper	Mr O'Farrell	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Fraser	Mr Page	
Mrs Hancock	Mr Piccoli	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hartcher	Mr Pringle	Mr George
Mr Hazzard	Mr Richardson	Mr Maguire

Pair

Mr Carr

Mr J. H. Turner

Question resolved in the affirmative.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Urgent Motion: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders**

Mr SCULLY (Smithfield—Minister for Roads, and Minister for Housing) [3.40 p.m.]: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow seven members to speak for the motion, including the mover, and seven members to speak against the motion for urgent consideration for up to five minutes each.

Mr TINK (Epping) [3.40 p.m.]: The Coalition opposes the suspension of standing and sessional orders. The usual number of speakers should contribute to debate on the urgent motion. As the honourable member for North Shore has already said, this motion relates to a Federal matter. If any extra time is available, the honourable member for Wakehurst should be allowed to move his urgent motion, which relates to the disgraceful loss of \$61 million of State—I know that word "State" is anathema to the Government—taxpayers' money. The Government has been re-elected to be accountable for State taxpayers' money, not Federal money.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in this Chamber. The honourable member for Epping is entitled to his full speaking time. Members will listen to him in silence.

Mr TINK: If the House has time to allow extra speakers to debate this motion, it has time to debate the motion foreshadowed by the honourable member for Wakehurst. The Government will not give us time in which to debate the honourable member's urgent motion. In addition, as was carefully and fully pointed out by the honourable member for Bligh, the Government does not give the Independents or the Opposition a chance to establish urgency during the debate on consideration of urgent motions. In fact, the Leader of the House gets more time to speak about suspending standing and sessional orders in relation to a Federal issue. This is part of the Premier's campaign to undermine Simon Crean. They do not like Simon.

There are many topics on today's program. In the ordinary course of business, all members should have a fair go and be able to debate them. If it comes to the equity of one motion against the other, putting aside the issue of numbers, the Coalition wants to discuss State issues. We understand that we are in a State Parliament. The Government wants to discuss a Federal issue to in some way undermine Simon Crean and bring on a leadership challenge. Despite the travails and troubles of the past couple of days in this Chamber, I think this motion is part of the succession plan of the Leader of the House. The motion of the honourable member for Wakehurst is urgent because he—in his inimitable, robust and never-say-die style—sought to get some answers out of the new Minister responsible for Sydney Water. What happened?

Mr Martin: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. The matter before the House is the number of speakers who will contribute to the urgency debate, not the detail of the urgency motion foreshadowed by the Opposition. The honourable member for Epping should get back to the point—whether the Coalition is prepared to defend John Howard's changes to Medicare.

Mr TINK: I will put the honourable member for Bathurst down as a backer of Simon Crean. During question time the Minister responsible for Sydney Water avoided any comprehensive answer—or, dare I say, any answer at all. The Opposition is entitled to a fair go. If the Minister will not answer our questions and be accountable, we have to put our case forward the best way we can. The fact that the Leader of the House wants to add extra speakers to a debate on a Federal issue shows how hard and fast the Labor Party is backing Simon Crean, and how hard and fast it is running away from Michael Costa's responsibilities as Director of Sydney Water.

Mr Scully: What a bizarre performance. I do not think he believed a word of it.

Mr Hartcher: Point of order—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The standing orders make no provision for the Minister to speak in reply on a motion to suspend standing and sessional orders.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 58

Ms Allan	Mr Greene	Mr Orkopoulos
Mr Amery	Ms Hay	Mrs Paluzzano
Ms Andrews	Mr Hickey	Mr Pearce
Mr Barr	Mr Hunter	Mrs Perry
Mr Bartlett	Mr Iemma	Mr Price
Ms Beamer	Ms Judge	Dr Refshauge
Mr Black	Ms Keneally	Ms Saliba
Mr Brown	Mr Knowles	Mr Sartor
Ms Burney	Mr Lynch	Mr Scully
Miss Burton	Mr McBride	Mr Stewart
Mr Campbell	Mr McGrane	Mr Torbay
Mr Collier	Mr McLeay	Mr Tripodi
Mr Corrigan	Ms Meagher	Mr Watkins
Mr Crittenden	Ms Megarrity	Mr West
Ms D'Amore	Mr Mills	Mr Whan
Mr Debus	Ms Moore	Mr Yeadon
Mr Draper	Mr Morris	
Ms Gadiel	Mr Newell	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gaudry	Ms Nori	Mr Ashton
Mr Gibson	Mr Oakeshott	Mr Martin

Noes, 31

Mr Aplin	Ms Hodgkinson	Ms Seaton
Mr Armstrong	Mrs Hopwood	Mrs Skinner
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Humpherson	Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Brogden	Mr Kerr	Mr Souris
Mr Cansdell	Mr Merton	Mr Stoner
Mr Constance	Mr O'Farrell	Mr Tink
Mr Debnam	Mr Page	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	
Mrs Hancock	Mr Pringle	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson	Mr George
Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire

Pair

Mr Carr

Mr J. H. Turner

Question resolved in the affirmative.**Motion agreed to.****FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HEALTH FUNDING****Urgent Motion****Mr BROWN** (Kiama) [3.55 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) condemns the Federal Government's proposed changes to Medicare, which would result in an increased demand on hospital emergency services and in general practitioners' fees for the majority of New South Wales families;
- (2) further condemns the proposed level of funding by the Federal Government for public hospitals in New South Wales, which will fail to meet the cost of service delivery over the next five years;
- (3) supports the New South Wales Minister for Health in his bid to get the Federal Government to increase the offer under the new five-year Australian Health Care Agreement; and
- (4) calls on the New South Wales Coalition to state its position on the current negotiations.

The New South Wales Liberal Party and National Party did everything they could to try to stop this motion being brought on for debate in this House today. It is just as well that the Labor members of this House are concerned about the health of the families in their areas and want to use this debate to air their concerns about the Commonwealth Government's proposed changes to our health care system. Universal health care as we know it will be a thing of the past if the Commonwealth Government's proposal to damage our health system proceeds. Little by little the Federal Government has been chipping away at the heart of our health system. The Federal Government is very sneaky. Little by little it is trying to erode something that all Australians regard as sacred. It has made life difficult for general practitioners, and it is making life difficult for the residents of this State.

Members do not have to go far in their electorates to hear doctors say how difficult the Federal Government has made life for local general practitioners, especially those in regions such as the Illawarra and Shoalhaven. Put simply, the mums and dads in the electorate of Kiama—indeed, across New South Wales—will be forced to make tough choices about where their hard-earned dollars go. In addition to the expenses that family life brings—such as mortgages, car loan repayments, not to mention clothing and feeding the kids—middle Australians considered too well off for government concession cards will now add escalating health costs to their household budgets. Quite simply, when their local doctor stops bulk billing—and, quite frankly, why wouldn't they—these families will turn to their local hospital emergency departments for primary health care.

While most mums and dads know that they will face long waits for treatment of their non-urgent complaints, still they will wait, because the Commonwealth Government will see that they have no choice when it comes to the health of their families. They will join the more than two million people in New South Wales who last year came knocking on emergency department doors for treatment. Last year two million people chose to go to the emergency rooms of their local hospitals to receive treatment. This is a clear indication that the Federal Coalition Government, though purporting to look after the families of this State, is taking us all on a ride and putting massive stresses on the staff and resources of the public hospitals of this State. Many of these people tapping away at the emergency department door—

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: My point of order relates to the reading of speeches. Previous occupants of the chair have made the observation that the Chair should encourage members not to read speeches verbatim as otherwise that would always bring into question whether speeches have been written by those members or by a member of the Premier's media unit on their behalf. I suggest that the honourable member has gone beyond simply glancing at his notes and has been reading a prepared speech verbatim. I ask that the rulings of previous Speakers be upheld.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Kiama is referring to several documents on the rostrum in front of him. At this stage there is no point of order.

Mr BROWN: Again we note that the Opposition is trying to stop as much of this debate as possible in the Chamber. The Opposition is using every trick in the book to try to stop this information from being debated today. Opposition members know that this is a killer for them. They know that their colleagues in Canberra do not care about families across this State. The Opposition is yet to announce its position. Opposition members are scared, which is why they are trying to slow down the debate. The New South Wales Government has shown its commitment to looking after the health of the people of this State. The Government contributes \$1.64 to public hospitals and community health services for every \$1 paid by the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth has a responsibility to join its State counterparts to ensure fair and free access to basic health care in this country.

The Opposition has remained eerily quiet in relation to the proposal to destroy Medicare, as put forward by its Federal counterparts. For once Opposition members have an opportunity to do the right thing by this State. People have a right to know where the Opposition stands in relation to looking after the health of the residents of this State. But still I hear nothing. While the New South Wales Minister for Health joins with his interstate colleagues in a bid to increase Federal health funding for New South Wales, Opposition members say nothing. They will not be engaged. The Opposition has never been so quiet in the Chamber. It is not good enough. Opposition members do everything in their power to highlight the plight of our emergency departments when they are busy and when waiting times for surgery lengthen, but when they have the opportunity to contribute to debate on a proposal that will impact directly on the things they are most likely to complain loudly about there is only silence.

While clinicians offer sensible ideas on reforms to the health system, the Opposition lies low and its Federal colleagues ignore the veritable encyclopaedia of expertise offered by the National Public Hospitals

Clinicians Task Force. The maximum funding offer from the Commonwealth to New South Wales shortchanges us by \$600 million compared to funding if the existing agreement were to continue. Some \$600 million buys a lot of health care. For example, it would cover the running of three major metropolitan hospitals for one year. The Carr Labor Government has achieved much in the Illawarra. It has invested \$80 million to rebuild Wollongong Hospital to make it a world-class teaching hospital linked to the University of New South Wales.

The emergency department of the Shellharbour Hospital has been upgraded. Kiama Hospital, a very important regional and local hospital that was closed under the Coalition Government, thus denying health services to the people of Kiama, has been reopened. The Shoalhaven hospital, the hospital in which my son was born, has received a massive commitment of funds for rebuilding. We are investing heavily to ensure that our health infrastructure is world class. Obviously, many doctors and nurses will be required to staff the hospitals. The money the Federal Government is ripping out of the health care system will create a lot of panic and concern for people right across this State, but particularly for those in the Illawarra and the electorate of Kiama.

The New South Wales Government is continuing to provide record funds for health—more than \$80 billion—but the Federal Government is shirking its responsibility. This House must make it clear to the Commonwealth Government that its offer is unacceptable. The Opposition has been embarrassingly silent on this important issue. The Opposition might like to refer to media articles generated today, such as the one in the *Sydney Morning Herald* headed "PM's Medicare fails to win voters", with the subcaption "Not Happy, John". Only 12 per cent of the 1,400 people polled believe that they will be better off under the new system, 40 per cent believe they will be worse off and 49 per cent do not know and will make a more informed decision when they see the facts contained in the reports. Today Ross Gittins reported how John Howard has, for years and years, hated the concept of Medicare.

Mr O'Farrell: Point of order: I am loath to raise this, but reading newspapers is against the standing orders of the House.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I uphold the point of order.

Mr O'Farrell: He could have photocopied the article.

Mr SPEAKER: As the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has done on many occasions.

Mr BROWN: The Prime Minister is turning Medicare into a safety net for the poor, which will ruin our universal health care system. Does the Opposition support the cuts to hospital funding, or will it do the right thing and talk to John Howard? [*Time expired.*]

Mr O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [4.05 p.m.]: In his last few contributions to this debate the honourable member for Kiama gave the game away. This is classic Labor, driven by polls not by what is right. The honourable member spent most of his time referring to the opinion poll on the front page of today's *Australian*. I have news for the honourable member for Kiama and for the Government: the public wants this Parliament to concentrate on State issues, not Federal issues. I certainly endorse the comments of the honourable member for Epping in opposing the extension of this debate today to fill in the Government business program. The New South Wales Labor Government is trying to make up for the appalling Labor Opposition in Canberra. The poll that I am more interested in, if we want to talk opinion polls—parliaments would be better off getting on with the job that the community is concerned about and maybe that is something we can agree about—is the appalling lack of rating of the Federal Australian Labor Party and Simon Crean's appalling position in Canberra.

I do not know that I have heard more lies spread by the Labor Party than I have in the past week in this debate. It is important to put on the record what underpins the approach of the Federal Government's reforms to Medicare. Nothing in the package, contrary to the claims of Simon Crean and others, requires doctors to increase their fees. No means test is involved in the proposals announced by the Federal Government. It will not introduce a co-payment. The universality of Medicare is not under threat. Everyone will continue to have access to the Medicare rebate when they visit a general practitioner. As is currently the case, doctors will be free to bulk bill whoever they choose. One of the great lies of Labor since Medicare was introduced, one of the great lies repeated by Simon Crean and others in this debate, is the suggestion that somehow or another doctors fees have been capped. Doctors' fees have never been capped under Medicare in any of its iterations, from Neal Blewett to Kay Paterson.

For the first time the Federal Government is seeking to strengthen the availability of bulk billing for concession cardholders, particularly those in outer metropolitan and rural areas, an initiative that should be welcomed in this House, not condemned and pilloried as the honourable member for Murray-Darling did last week in this Chamber. Last week the honourable member for Murray-Darling, despite his comments about the Murrumbidgee electorate, ignored what the Chairman of the Murrumbidgee Division of General Practice, Dr Bob Byrne, a member of the Labor Party, said about the Medicare reforms of the Federal Government. Dr Byrne, a country practitioner in the Murrumbidgee and an associate of the honourable member for Murray-Darling, welcomed the package. The National President of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia, Ken Mackey, welcomed the reforms to Medicare. He said that his association was generally happy with what had been offered and stated:

So there'll be better access to medical services. We will have more medical students and there'll also be more GP training places—we're going from 450 to 600 training places nationwide.

So there are advantages that will translate into more doctors and more access to doctors and medical services in rural areas.

I say to the community of New South Wales—God forbid they ever have to read this debate, given the contributions that will follow me—do not listen to politicians. Clearly, State politicians cannot be trusted on this matter because, as the honourable member for Kiama has demonstrated and set the tone for the debate, they are more interested in playing politics than finding solutions and better health care for the citizens of New South Wales. The community should listen to practitioners, to Dr Mackey of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia, and to Dr Bob Byrne who is a member of the Labor Party and, more importantly, Chairman of the Murrumbidgee Division of General Practice.

The reforms put forward by the Federal Government seek to obviate the need for people who consult a doctor who chooses not to bulk bill to pay a full fee up front and obtain a Medicare refund, which is currently what happens. People complain about outlaying up front and then having to line up at a Medicare office to obtain a refund. Under the new package, people will only have to pay the gap. They will be able to leave a doctor's surgery with no more to pay and without having to join a queue for a refund. I am surprised that the honourable member for Kiama, whose electorate is in the Illawarra, followed the line taken by honourable member for Murray-Darling, who last week attacked the package and its impact on medical services in rural and regional areas. If those members are as concerned as they evince they are in this House, they would do something more positive. Therefore, I move:

That the motion be amended by leaving out all words after "House" with a view to inserting instead the following words:

"this House calls upon the State Government to put an end to its cynical cutbacks to surgery at the State's public hospitals and to constructively resolve the Federal Government's proposed new Commonwealth-States health agreement to ensure better funding for public hospitals across New South Wales".

The thrust of that amendment should be the centre of the debate in this State Parliament, namely, the future funding of State hospitals in New South Wales. Inevitably under any Liberal or Labor Federal Government or any Liberal or Labor State Government there will be argy-bargy about health service packages, but at the end of the day we must never forget that no principle of politics is worth adversely affecting the health of people living in the cities, the regions or the country areas of New South Wales.

Since the recent election campaign, the Government has made the most cynical attack on health services, particularly in country areas, that has ever been witnessed in New South Wales. Within two days of the conclusion of the election campaign, additional funding that was allegedly made available to reduce surgery waiting lists at hospitals across the State began to disappear. Within two days of the conclusion of the State election campaign and Labor being returned to office, the funding that Labor had been trumpeting from the ramparts for six months suddenly seemed to dematerialise, and people across the State saw surgery times being cut back and surgeons resigning. Four orthopaedic surgeons resigned in Lismore. That is devastating for a community that has a full range of age groups but a large population of seniors. More importantly, it does not have full access to the medical, hospital and surgery services that are available in other parts of New South Wales. Last Friday in Armidale, surgeons resigned over the same issue.

In those circumstances, I suggest to members opposite that if they want to do something positive about improving the health services of people who live in rural and regional areas, they should ensure that the Minister for Health does something about putting an end to surgery cutbacks. The new Minister for Health has simply washed his hands of the whole issue and has instead blamed administrators. At the end of the day he may think that is acceptable, but the result of his political approach, an approach honed by successive Ministers for Health

under this Government, people in country and regional areas have to wait longer for surgery and people in country and regional areas having the quality of their hospital and health services diminished by a Government that is prepared to sit on its hands. That is not acceptable.

My plea today is that the Government stop playing politics over health issues, roll up its sleeves and get to work on fixing funding arrangements and the provision of health services. It is simply unacceptable for the former Minister for Health to announce additional funding in December to reduce waiting lists in country hospitals, with appointments of more than a year ahead, and then to preside over the drying up of funding after 22 March this year, immediately after the election campaign concluded. It is simply unacceptable that surgeons are being forced into taking serious action such as resignation, a step they reluctantly took to try to get their message across.

Even surgeons understand that the only way to get things fixed under successive Labor Ministers for Health is to make a public fuss about it. That is simply unacceptable. Until members opposite get that into their thick brains and until they begin to put some effort into lobbying the New South Wales Minister for Health to deal with matters within the State health system that come under State health administration—matters that can be, must be and should be improved, and matters that Labor promised during the recent State election campaign would be improved—the people of New South Wales will condemn the types of political attack that the Government has undertaken today.

I conclude my remarks where I began: political parties that live by opinion polls ultimately end by them. The New South Wales community and communities throughout the rest of Australia want policies that are based genuinely upon their needs. They want policies that will ensure that services that are being offered to them deliver what is expected. They do not want the cynical exercise that was undertaken by this Government before, during and after the recent State election campaign.

Mr WHAN (Monaro) [4.15 p.m.]: It is nice to hear the Deputy Leader of the Opposition speaking in this House. I notice that this week he has not asked any questions. Perhaps the Opposition is worried that he might overshadow the leader. Many years ago John Howard told us that he would dismantle Medicare, and bit by bit its dismemberment is now taking place. Last week's farcical meeting of Ministers for Health was just the latest step in the Coalition's drive to destroy universal health care in Australia. In the Monaro electorate local public hospitals are constantly overstretched as a result of Federal Government neglect. That is also the case in many other country areas. The Federal Government's approach is characterised by Medicare bulk billing, a shortage of aged care beds, and a shortage of places for nurse training. The list goes on. All those deficiencies are adversely affecting New South Wales hospitals and communities. As a result of bulk billing, \$129 million a year is being spent in New South Wales hospitals to provide services that should be provided by general practitioners. In the Monaro electorate, most bulk billing disappeared years ago.

Mr O'Farrell: I hope that is photocopied.

Mr WHAN: It is indeed. It is fortunate that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition mentioned it because I did not know the rule. The disappearance several years ago of most bulk billing caused hardship to many families in the southern region. It is not fair for a low income earner in a country area to have to wait for payday to be able to see a doctor. Can honourable members imagine how elderly people feel when they have to leave a doctor to find the money to pay the bill? The Federal Government wants to shift costs back onto the States. In country New South Wales people use public hospitals at a rate that is 60 per cent higher than the use of public hospitals in towns that do not have bulk billing general practitioners. I represent an area in this State that has the second lowest rate of bulk billing in the country—just 38 per cent. That is a disgraceful figure in a country that used to be proud of its universal health care system. I was told by administrators of a hospital in my electorate that more than 50 per cent of visits to the emergency department were being made by people who could have gone to local doctors. Those huge resources could be used to treat elective surgery patients. The policy of the Howard Government will do nothing to improve their position. Indeed, it will make matters worse.

I refer to a photocopy of a recent article in the *Queanbeyan Age* citing Dr Ross Bills, a local general practitioner, who described the changes as being "too little, too late, too bad". He suggested that many medical practices were likely to simply ignore the changes and continue operating as usual. In country areas that means that there will be no bulk billing. The Australian Council of Social Service [ACOSS] recently commented that the Federal Government's proposed changes would lead to pensioners and health care cardholders being treated as second-class citizens. Aged care is also being neglected by the Federal Government and is creating additional burdens on the public hospital system. Every single hospital administration in the Monaro electorate has

complained bitterly to me about bed shortages being caused by patients who should be in nursing homes. How can elective surgery be increased when nursing home patients are occupying local acute care beds?

The rural health implementation group conducted a census of hospital patients in New South Wales that showed that 792 older patients occupying acute beds should have been in residential aged care. Nearly 600 of those were in country New South Wales hospitals. That represents a massive burden on rural hospitals that has been caused directly by the failure of the Federal Coalition Government to adequately fund aged care. Another example of Federal Government neglect in the Monaro electorate is the medical indemnity crisis. A national problem has been stripping away the income of local hospitals. At Cooma hospital and many others, doctors have responded to the indemnity problems by admitting their patients as Medicare patients; they have stopped admitting them as private patients. An estimate I have seen indicates that that is costing the Cooma hospital alone almost \$50,000 a month in income that could otherwise have been used for public patients. Because of the proactive position adopted by the Carr Government during the recent State election in undertaking to cover indemnity costs for private patients, the funding will now be allocated for public patients.

Another matter I wish to mention in the time I have remaining is nurse training. The State Government cannot undertake primary nurse training; it is undertaken in universities. The Federal Coalition Government is responsible for our tertiary system and my local university, which trains nurses, is the University of Canberra. This year 500 people applied to do nursing courses at the university, and it would have been great if they had been able to flow on to our local hospitals. Unfortunately, only 160 applicants were given places, because that was all that the Federal Government would fund. That was a tragedy for those who had the sort of commitment that nursing needs and for nurses in Queanbeyan, Delegate and surrounding areas. In New South Wales the Labor Government is funding hospitals. In my area, the Southern Area Health Service budget has increased by more than 60 per cent since the Government came to office. It is disgraceful that the National Party will not stand up for country hospitals. [*Time expired.*]

Ms BURNEY (Canterbury) [4.20 p.m.]: This issue cannot be shunted off with the breezy notion that Medicare is a Federal matter. Whether we like opinion polls or not, the people of New South Wales are clearly saying that they do not want the changes. Last night in my inaugural speech I referred to a number of initiatives of which Labor can be proud. One was the introduction of Medicare. In Australia Medicare is synonymous with rights and equity. With a shortfall of \$1 billion if existing agreements were continued nationwide the Government's hands are tied. In other words, the agreement between the Commonwealth and the State should be a partnership, and the Commonwealth cannot say that the State is responsible for health.

Medicare is a Federal initiative. We must take a united position in our commitment to a universal system of health care that does not discriminate according to a person's ability to pay. My electorate of Canterbury is a poor one, and the Federal Government's proposal will have devastating effects on its people. My doctor, whom I have been consulting for 22 years, spoke to me of his distress at the proposed changes. He has been in practice in Newtown for more than 25 years but is distressed because he cannot provide the equity that he previously provided. He told me that the proposed changes will not affect only low-income earners but will affect many of our voters.

Mr O'Farrell: That's the point.

Ms BURNEY: The proposal will also affect the constituents of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. It will affect people from all walks of life. It seems that all the players understand the principles needed to underpin the Australian health care agreement except the Commonwealth Government. The Commonwealth's moves to dismantle Medicare and cut real funding to the States deserves nothing but scorn. Hospital emergency departments will be absolutely full of people who simply will not be able to afford to take their children to a doctor. I will repeat that: they simply will not be able to afford to take their children to a doctor. It is no laughing matter to realise that the people in this State will have to make the decision about whether their kids are sick enough to be taken to a doctor and whether they can afford to do so. That is completely unacceptable if equity is what we are on about in this place.

Universality means universality. Equity and access are simple concepts. With these proposed changes those concepts, which are part of the way of life in this country, will be eroded. The agreement must encompass these concepts and maintain and develop Medicare, sustainable public hospital services, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, aged care services and, finally, the public health system in general. The Commonwealth must face up to the fact that its policy decisions do not exist in a vacuum: they have serious consequences for State and Territory health services and place them under significant financial pressure. Last weekend I was in Alice

Springs visiting a friend who is a health professional. She told me what health services are like in her area. The same will apply in country areas in this State if this dramatically dreadful scheme is implemented. My friend does not want to have to sit for hours and hours in a remote emergency ward waiting to see a doctor. The Commonwealth must move to ensure fair and free access to basic health care in this country.

I will dwell on access and universality for a moment: They are not just words, they are realities for all the people in our electorates. This issue should not and must not be about politics: it is about the people in our electorates, those for whom we are responsible. The Opposition should not remain silent on this point, it should not change the subject. Does the Opposition support the Commonwealth proposals or not? Where does it stand? Or do the people in our electorates not matter? I ask the Opposition to join with the Government to demand a fair deal for public hospitals for all of our constituents. I urge the Opposition to oppose the changes to Medicare that will see non health care cardholders have to pay for general practitioner services. In turn, that will put pressure on our already stressed accident and emergency departments. [*Time expired.*]

Mr BARR (Manly) [4.25 p.m.]: I am totally opposed to the Federal Government's proposal for Medicare. Most honourable members, except the ideologues of the right, would accept that the provision of adequate services to the community in certain areas of government activity such as health, education, welfare and policing are the domain of the State. The Federal Government is playing a pea and thimble trick with health by shifting the costs from the tax base to the private sector, that is, back to private individuals. In so doing it is crueiling the whole concept of universality. One of the great strengths of Medicare was its universality. With access and equity people pay their tax and in return they know that they can afford health care for their family, they can visit the family doctor who bulk bills and they do not have to worry about forgoing other things because of health problems with their family. It is a fundamental matter.

While the Federal Government has been in office, the health budget as a percentage of gross domestic product has increased from 8.4 per cent to 9 per cent. One major reason for that is the \$2.3 billion private health insurance rebate, which is nothing short of a scandalous waste of money. In the past, more than \$700 million a year has been spent on lifestyle rebates from private health funds for items such as running shoes or tennis rackets. That is a scandalous waste of scarce resources. Those funds would be better used in public hospitals and in buttressing the health system. That money should have gone to increasing the schedule fee, which has not been adequately increased. That has put an enormous strain on general practitioners. The Government then decided that the issue had become so involved that the whole system was falling down and changes were needed: in essence, what was needed was privatisation.

People with concession cards and people with private health insurance will be covered. More and more people will have to pay for private health insurance. That is merely switching people from paying taxes to paying for private health cover directly out of their pocket. That amount then comes off the Government's budget line. However, people who do not have concession cards or who may not be able to afford private health insurance will be caught in between and will not be covered. That has happened in the United States of America. That is the system towards which we are heading. It has been pointed out that the proposed system is not a two-tier system but a three-tier system. People will lose out.

The proposal is ideologically driven. It is not driven by pragmatic economics; it is not driven by looking for the best use of the health dollar. It is driven by a notion of privatising the health scheme and by ideology. When the Fraser Government was in office it changed the then Medibank scheme five times until the whole scheme collapsed. This proposal will have the same result: this is the beginning of the end of Medicare.

The Federal Government's proposal has been mooted for some time. The situation is becoming drastic. It will not be long before the whole system collapses in a heap and we are left without Medicare. The Federal Government deserves the utmost condemnation for what it is doing. Socially it is unhealthy and economically it makes no sense. It is a poor proposal from the point of view of health delivery, maximising the health dollar, social planning, social welfare and ensuring that all Australians have health cover, irrespective of their incomes or where they live. This is a fundamental access and equity issue. We are moving away from universality, which is to be condemned in the strongest way.

Mr BARTLETT (Port Stephens) [4.30 p.m.]: I support the comments made by my Country Labor colleagues in debate on this urgent motion. The motion has a number of paragraphs but I want to refer to the first paragraph, which states:

That this House:

- (1) condemns the Federal Government's proposed changes to Medicare, which would result in an increased demand on hospital emergency services and in GP fees for the majority of NSW families.

Those members who were present during the Fifty-second Parliament would be aware that for the past two to three years I have been asking for changes in the way doctors are provided to country areas. I have referred in previous debates to Dr Soraya Felix from Medowie, a doctor I have tried to help. Two and a half years ago she told me that if I could not help her she would have to close her practice. When she finally closed her practice she said:

Unfortunately, like so many other solo practitioners, I have found that the rising cost of medical indemnity insurance and staff payroll tax have made this practice not viable any more.

Karuah has lost the services of its doctor. For the past 18 months we have been trying to obtain the services of a doctor. The ambulance, which is stationed at Raymond Terrace, provides services for Raymond Terrace, which has a population of 15,000; Medowie, which has a population of 7,500; and Karuah, which has a population of 2,000. It also provides services to other areas. That ambulance service is overloaded. Recently a patient had to be transported by ambulance from Karuah, through Raymond Terrace and then to John Hunter Hospital. A prescription was obtained from the emergency department and the patient was then transported back to Karuah. Talk about shifting the costs from the Feds to the State!

The whole issue is bewildering. If Karuah is not able to obtain the services of a doctor for a period of 12 months, under the New South Wales health system it will become an area of need. At present there are 18 unfilled positions in areas of need and seven vacant accredited training positions in the Hunter region. That poses a significant threat to key services such as general medicine, emergency services departments and plastic surgery, as there will be no general practitioners to work as visiting medical officers in hospitals. The Federal Government, through the Rural and Regional Metropolitan Area Scheme [RRMAS], determines which doctors are to be sent to country areas. Doctors in Karuah, which is a RRMAS 2 area, receive \$17.85 for every patient visit.

Areas of need are now being sent overseas-trained doctors. Ignoring the moral argument about whether we should be obtaining the services of overseas-trained doctors, as Karuah is only a RRMAS 2 area an overseas-trained doctor would be allowed to remain in that area for six months and then would have to move to a RRMAS 4 or RRMAS 5 area. Doctors in Noosa, a RRMAS 5 area that is located in Queensland, receive \$25 for every patient visit. No wonder we cannot obtain the services of doctors in areas surrounding the Hunter. The RRMAS scheme needs a major overhaul.

I will be able to discuss these issues in depth tomorrow, when a motion of which I have given notice relating to health services is listed for debate. Every year 400 doctors are being trained in Australia, but 450 doctors are leaving the health system. That problem is compounding. Under its new Medicare proposal the Federal Government is promising an additional 247 doctors over a seven-year period, but we are losing 450 doctors every year. It is ludicrous. The Federal Government's proposed changes to the Medicare scheme will not assist those country areas that cannot now obtain the services of doctors. [*Time expired.*]

Ms ANDREWS (Peats) [4.35 p.m.]: I congratulate the honourable member for Kiama on moving this important motion. Medicare and the concept of universal health care are important to constituents in my electorate of Peats and to communities living on the Central Coast. Under the Howard Government there has been a severe decline in the rate of bulk billing on the Central Coast. Over the two years to December 2002 the bulk billing rate has dropped by 17 per cent to just 59.8 per cent. Over the same period average patient contributions increased by almost 19 per cent to \$10.58 per visit. Howard's package effectively cuts New South Wales hospital funding by a massive \$1.3 billion. The Howard Government's intentions are clear. It wants to bring to an end Medicare and universal health care in New South Wales.

This plan would deny bulk billing to around 4.3 million people in New South Wales. It will increase the costs of basic health care for middle Australians and place further pressure on our public health system. That is probably the most concerning part of the Howard Medicare plan. As winter is fast approaching New South Wales emergency wards can ill afford to be inundated with people who cannot afford to go to the doctor. Howard's spending cuts in the public health system have already put more than enough pressure on doctors and nurses working in our emergency wards and in our health care system generally. The Federal Government's offer is a slap in the face for them and an insult to their diligence and dedication. I take this opportunity to thank them for their hard work in caring for others.

Families earning a little over \$32,000 will have significantly reduced access to bulk billing. As I said earlier, the 4.3 million residents in New South Wales who are without health care cards will be left out of pocket every time they visit a doctor. A significant number of those people reside on the Central Coast and in the Peats

electorate. Universal and inexpensive health care are things that all New South Wales residents deserve. That is not provided in the Federal Government's package. The Federal Government certainly deserves the most harsh criticism for its latest attempt to dismantle yet another social initiative of a Federal Labor government—Medicare.

The people of New South Wales have said time and again that they like Medicare and that they want it to remain and flourish. Since coming to office in Canberra in 1996 the Howard Government has been trying its hardest to find ways and means to dismantle Medicare. This motion will send a powerful and strong message to the Prime Minister, the Federal Minister for Health and their cronies in Canberra that we in New South Wales want Medicare to stay. In addition, we expect the Federal Government to come up with something vastly better than the disgraceful plan that it announced recently. An article in the *Central Coast Herald* of 29 April under the headline "Coast doctors slam the \$917 million Medicare plan" states:

The move sparked concern among Central Coast doctors who accused Prime Minister John Howard of "being good at fighting wars but knowing nothing about health issues on the Central Coast."

The comments came from Central Coast Division of General Practice Chairman, Dr Ian Charlton—

who also happens to be President of the parents and citizens association at Gosford High School—

during a scathing attack on the Government's plan to rescue the ailing Medicare and bulkbilling systems. "It's all too little and a little too late", Dr Charlton told the Herald yesterday.

The same newspaper states that these changes are likely to be blocked in the Senate. I think Medicare deserves far better treatment, and the people of New South Wales certainly deserve better treatment than that which the Howard Government is dishing out to them. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr TRIPODI (Fairfield) [4.40 p.m.]: I am disappointed but not surprised that Opposition members are hiding. They refuse to speak against the motion because they know it is correct. The amendment moved by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition is an apology to the New South Wales people and their Parliament for the Commonwealth's attempted imposition. The amendment asks the House to try to "constructively resolve" not to support the Federal Government's policy. That is disappointing. In moving this motion—which the Opposition opposed—we are trying to resolve the issue constructively.

Mr O'Farrell: How?

Mr TRIPODI: By having a debate. It is a great shame for the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that all his colleagues have fled the Chamber. They are in hiding and they have left the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to make their argument. He sought to oppose the motion by moving a half-baked amendment, which is the State Opposition's apology to those who rely on health care in this State for the Commonwealth's actions. On behalf of the Government, I accept the Opposition's apology. We will continue to fight the Federal Government on this issue and try to secure a better result.

In his defence, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition simply read a press statement issued by Senator Kay Patterson. That is the Opposition's best effort so far in this debate. I suppose it is embarrassing for Opposition members because there are no logical arguments to advance in support of the Federal Government. The Commonwealth intends to rip \$600 million from this State and to steal good health care from its people. It is farcical for Opposition members to pretend that this is not a matter of urgency for the people of this State—especially the sick, who rely on health care services. As we saw just 1½ months ago, people recognise a farce when they see it. The proposed reforms to Medicare will hurt the Federal Government. It will be dealt a big blow because the people are not being fooled.

The Commonwealth intends to starve the New South Wales health system of funds while increasing pressure on that system by reforming bulk-billing arrangements. People in my electorate and throughout south-west Sydney rely extremely heavily on bulk-billing, and the Commonwealth's proposed reforms will hurt people like them the most. The new system will compel the good doctors of south-west Sydney who are offering bulk-billing and who are doing the hard yards and attempting to deliver services to those with health needs to close shop. Boutique surgeries will pop up like mushrooms on the lower and upper North Shore and on the northern beaches area, where doctors can charge top dollar for their services. Contrary to the Commonwealth's claims, the proposed reforms will force general practitioners all over Australia to close their surgeries and move to the richer suburbs, where they will provide boutique services for people who can afford to pay a little extra. That would be a great shame and an indictment on the Commonwealth Government.

These Medicare reforms represent a fundamental attack on the universality of the health system. People have woken up to this fact and will oppose these proposals. I hope the Senate will block the reforms and blunt the Federal Government's attack in Parliament. The reforms are not necessary. The present Commonwealth Government is the highest-taxing government in Australian history. Liberal members claim that their party is about low taxes, but it is not. The goods and services tax has delivered bucket loads of money to the Federal Government, which has responded by cutting services and transferring responsibility. The \$600 million must be returned to the health system and used to care for the sick. [*Time expired.*]

Ms GADIEL (Parramatta) [4.45 p.m.]: The universal health care of working Australian families is under threat from John Howard's Medicare reforms. John Howard has squandered an opportunity to make some positive reforms to Medicare and has instead signed its death warrant. Working families in Western Sydney will be among the losers under Howard's package.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills): Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will remain silent. He may seek the call when the honourable member for Parramatta has completed her contribution.

Ms GADIEL: Some people care about working families. The average working family with a yearly income of between \$35,000 and \$45,000 will miss out on free visits to their doctor. People without a health care card will have to battle to see a general practitioner [GP], and then they will pay through the nose for the privilege. People will have to pay at least \$40 every time they step into a doctor's office. Add to that the cost of prescriptions, and many working Sydney families will not be able to afford to get sick. The message that John Howard is sending to Western Sydney families is: Do not get sick. The pressure on our hospital emergency departments falls squarely at John Howard's feet. Our hospital waiting rooms are exploding with people who should see a GP but who cannot afford to do so. John Howard has been attacking Medicare since he came to office. When was the last time that he or any of his Ministers had to sit in a hospital waiting room because they could not afford to see a GP?

This happens every day in my electorate of Parramatta. Families are spending too much time in hospital waiting rooms because John Howard is not spending enough money on Medicare. I doubt that the Federal member for Parramatta has taken the Prime Minister to task on behalf of local families. Western Sydney families deserve the best health care available. I hope the Opposition has the stomach to support the motion today. Western Sydney needs a Federal government that represents working families, not one that forgets middle Australians.

Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [4.47 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the honourable member for Kiama and oppose the amendment proposed by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. The only thing that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition said with which I could bring myself to agree was his comment that no amount of politics is worth affecting the health of the people of New South Wales. For once I agree with him. The regrettable fact is that the Federal Government's policy—which by implication the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who has now re-entered the Chamber—

Mr O'Farrell: Finally some brain cells have entered the debate.

Mr LYNCH: That is perhaps the second thing about which I agree with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition today. The melancholy fact is that in advancing his position—which is a de facto defence of the Howard Government—he is playing politics and adversely affecting significantly the health of the people of New South Wales. The present Federal Government is the most class-based, the most concerned to protect and enhance the position of the affluent and the most biased in favour of the rich of any Commonwealth government since that of Stanley Bruce. The Federal Government introduced a consumption-based indirect tax—a profoundly regressive tax—that allows the super rich to pay the same tax on a loaf of bread as do the poor. The recently announced series of changes to Medicare are very much in the same tradition.

As the honourable member for Manly said, they are driven by ideology. The changes are part of what the Howard Government offensively and dishonestly calls a fairer Medicare package. The regrettable fact is that if this package is adopted it will lead to the end of bulk-billing. Much discussion has taken place about how universal Medicare is, or whether bulk-billing is universal. The spin that the Prime Minister puts on it is that whilst Medicare might be universal, bulk-billing is not meant to be universal. The truth is that in south-west Sydney bulk-billing is as close to universal as it is anywhere in Australia.

South-west Sydney has the highest rate of bulk-billing in this country. The introduction of these proposals would be a direct attack upon the living standards of the people whom I represent, and an onslaught

against people in south-west Sydney. About 80 per cent of people in some areas of south-west Sydney are bulk-billed, and Howard's proposals are a direct attack upon those people. Apart from being an attack upon individuals, it comes down to whether we want to live in a society in which the rich get health care but the poor do not. In that sense it is a broadly ideological question and it is perfectly appropriate to deal with it in terms of ideology.

Members on this side of the House believe that people should live in a society in which health care is a right, not a privilege that is afforded to those who have the money to pay for it. Members opposite are driven by a very narrow economic rationalist ideology: If one has the dough one can get health care. People who live in Vaucluse or Ku-ring-gai and who have the money will get health care, but as far as the Opposition is concerned, those who do not have money are not entitled to health care.

The honourable member for Kiama referred to opinion polls. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition had a crack at him and said that he is driven by opinion polls. Coming from a paid official of a political party that used Mark Textor and push-polling, that is over the top. The point is not whether politicians are driven by opinion polls but what the figures show. The honourable member for Kiama quoted some figures from the *Sydney Morning Herald* poll—the *Australian* also conducted a news poll. Only 10 per cent of respondents thought they would be better off; 46 per cent thought they would be worse off; and 23 per cent were uncertain because, frankly, they are still trying to work out the complications. That means, amongst other things, that the majority of respondents in that poll have a lot more sense than members opposite; they understand the implications of Mr Howard's policy.

I suggest that all honourable members who are interested in this topic read the speech of Kerryn Phelps to the National Press Club today. Amongst a number of other interesting things, she talked about the Howard package as being full of lots of sticks with very few carrots, which is perhaps an accurate description. She also made the very useful point that doctors who see pensioners in areas where there is no bulk-billing will lose money to buy into it. [*Time expired.*]

[*Debate interrupted.*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Urgent Motion: Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders

Mr SCULLY (Smithfield—Minister for Roads, and Minister for Housing) [4.53 p.m.]: I move:

That standing and sessional orders be suspended to enable two additional Government members to speak to the urgent motion for up to five minutes each..

It is important that we hear from other members on the motion moved by the honourable member for Kiama. It is shameful that members of the Opposition did not make a contribution. We want to know their views on Medicare. It is very important that additional speakers convey their views to the House about the shameless dismantling of Medicare.

Mr O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [4.53 p.m.]: The Opposition will oppose this motion because if the Leader of the House had been in the Chamber he would have heard me speak. The Minister lied his head off in the House again when he said that he has not heard from the Opposition in this debate. I spoke for 10 minutes. He lies over the Millennium trains, he lies over Menangle, he lies over housing rental increases, and he has lied his head off again today.

Mr Ashton: Point of order: The issue before the House is not Menangle or trains, but whether there will be an additional two Government speakers. It is a simple matter.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills): Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition may make passing reference to those matters to buttress his case.

Mr O'FARRELL: I appreciate the support from the honourable member for East Hills, who made a simple point. This is a motion to suspend standing and sessional orders, and I can refer to any matter.

[*Interruption*]

We would not take the Minister's word after his experience. He should not be sitting on the front bench. Blood on his hands from the accident. Menangle Bridge—there but for the grace of God goes anyone.

Mr Ashton: Point of order: This is a robust Chamber, but no-one has ever said anything quite as outrageous as that. I ask you to direct the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to withdraw that comment.

Mr Scully: To the point of order: I want to put on the record that that is the most disgraceful thing the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has said in all his years here. He ought to be ashamed of himself.

Mr O'FARRELL: The Minister ought to be ashamed of his record on rail transport—no black boxes, no independent safety regulator, and the Menangle Bridge cover-up. He is a disgrace. He should not be on the front bench.

Mr Scully: It should be recorded that the comment that I have blood on my hands is a disgraceful reflection on me. A royal commission is conducting an inquiry into that accident, and it is shameful for the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to make such a comment. He ought to be embarrassed.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER: Order! Is the Minister asking for a withdrawal?

Mr Scully: Yes.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER: Order! The Minister has asked for the comment to be withdrawn. I ask the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to withdraw the comment.

Mr O'FARRELL: I am happy to withdraw the comment, but I am also happy to debate these issues because his record on rail transport is a disgrace. No wonder he runs from this House. He simply cannot defend it.

Mr Gaudry: Point of order: The forms of this House are available to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition if he wishes to launch a substantive attack upon any member.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER: Order! I have heard enough. That matter was settled by my earlier ruling.

Mr O'FARRELL: As the honourable member for Epping said earlier, there are important matters before this House. Today this Government has failed to allow debate on a loss of \$61 million of taxpayers' funds, which could do an enormous amount of good. That is a \$61 million loss by directors, including Michael Costa.

Mr Brown: Point of order: The House has decided which motion will be granted urgency. The motion refers to Medicare, not Sydney Water. The Leader of the House has moved a motion to suspend standing and sessional orders to enable two additional members to speak to the motion.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER: Order! Past practice dictates that a response to a motion to suspend standing and sessional orders may be reasonably wide ranging.

Mr O'FARRELL: It should come as no surprise to members of the Opposition that the honourable member for Kiama continues to languish on the back bench. Other matters could have been debated today but the Government has stretched out this debate.

[Interruption]

If the milkman, who saved the job of the Minister for Education and Training, wants to talk about important issues, such as 1,400 jobs being threatened by the National Park Estate (Reservations) Bill—

Ms Saliba: Point of order: It has been ruled on several occasions in this Chamber that honourable members should refer to one another in the appropriate manner, that is, as the honourable member or the Minister. The Minister for Mineral Resources should not be referred to as the milkman.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER: Order! I uphold the point of order.

Mr O'FARRELL: I withdraw my reference to the milkman. I understand that he is concerned about being one of the few working class people on that side of the House. The Opposition opposes this motion, which is another political stunt. It does nothing to resolve health services in this State.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

[In division]

Mr Armstrong: Mr Speaker, I draw your attention to the fact that after you called for the doors to be closed, a number of members, namely six members of the Government, moved from one position in the Chamber to another.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Chair is not aware how many members were moving about, although I did note some movement. I also noted that members were moving from the seat that is normally reserved for the Independents. That may cause confusion as to which side of the House those members are voting with. To resolve any confusion, I will ask the attendants to unlock the doors and I will allow members another minute to find their places.

Mr Armstrong: Point of order: It is a longstanding principle of this House that once the doors are locked no member shall enter or retire from the Chamber and no member shall stand or move from his or her position. That convention has been in place since day one. Are we now, in 2003, going to change the procedure? Does that mean that members can come and go after the doors have been locked? Can members move across the Chamber in future? I seek your ruling on this matter.

Mr Scully: To the point of order: The rules are correct only so far as the honourable member for Lachlan referred to them. A member is not entitled to enter or leave the Chamber or cross the Chamber after the doors have been locked. The two individuals did neither.

Mr Humpherson: To the point of order: There have been previous rulings by Speakers Kelly and Ellis that members cannot change sides once the doors have been closed. More recently, Speaker Murray made a ruling when the honourable member for Bligh sat on the wrong side of the Chamber and attempted to cross the Chamber once the doors had been locked. She was forced to leave her seat and sit in the position she was originally and her name was recorded as voting where she was originally sitting. I ask you to rule accordingly. I ask you to ask those members who changed sides to be honest and vote accordingly.

Mr Scully: Further to the point of order: The forms of the House are quite clear.

Mr Armstrong: Further to the point of order: I am prepared to name some of those members. They are the members representing the electorates of Heffron, Strathfield, Granville and Kogarah.

Mr Gaudry: To the point of order: There may need to be a change to the standing orders, because given the number of members wishing to vote with the Government on this issue it is obvious there are insufficient spaces on the Government side of the House to accommodate them.

Mr Armstrong: Mr Speaker—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I have heard enough on the point of order. The decision I made stemmed from confusion arising from the fact that this is still a new Parliament.

[Interruption]

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Ballina to order. I am aware of confusion among new members regarding the somewhat peculiar seating arrangements. It was for that reason that I made my decision to allow members an additional minute to decide where they wished to sit. It was not because I saw members sitting on the wrong side of the Chamber, although I did observe some members standing in the passage between the two sets of benches.

Mr Armstrong: Mr Speaker—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Does the honourable member for Lachlan seek to take a further point of order?

Mr Armstrong: I rise on a point of clarification consequent upon your ruling. I point out that the honourable member for Kogarah and a former Minister are not new to this Parliament.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order. I have ruled on the matter. I remind honourable members that it is their duty to maintain order while the House is in division.

Ayes, 57

Ms Allan	Mr Greene	Mr Orkopoulos
Mr Amery	Ms Hay	Mrs Paluzzano
Ms Andrews	Mr Hickey	Mr Pearce
Mr Barr	Mr Hunter	Mrs Perry
Mr Bartlett	Mr Iemma	Mr Price
Ms Beamer	Ms Judge	Ms Saliba
Mr Black	Ms Keneally	Mr Sartor
Mr Brown	Mr Knowles	Mr Scully
Ms Burney	Mr Lynch	Mr Stewart
Miss Burton	Mr McBride	Mr Torbay
Mr Campbell	Mr McGrane	Mr Tripodi
Mr Collier	Mr McLeay	Mr Watkins
Mr Corrigan	Ms Meagher	Mr West
Mr Crittenden	Ms Megarity	Mr Whan
Ms D'Amore	Mr Mills	Mr Yeadon
Mr Debus	Ms Moore	
Mr Draper	Mr Morris	
Ms Gadiel	Mr Newell	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Gaudry	Ms Nori	Mr Ashton
Mr Gibson	Mr Oakeshott	Mr Martin

Noes, 29

Mr Aplin	Mrs Hopwood	Ms Seaton
Mr Armstrong	Mr Humpherson	Mrs Skinner
Ms Berejiklian	Mr Kerr	Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Cansdell	Mr Merton	Mr Souris
Mr Constance	Mr O'Farrell	Mr Stoner
Mr Debnam	Mr Page	Mr Tink
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	Mr R. W. Turner
Mrs Hancock	Mr Pringle	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hazzard	Mr Richardson	Mr George
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire

Pairs

Mr Carr	Mr Brogden
Dr Refshauge	Mr J. H. Turner

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Pursuant to sessional orders business interrupted.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MITTAGONG AND BARGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS UPGRADE

Ms SEATON (Southern Highlands) [5.15 p.m.]: I raise an issue that is very important to my electorate: the need for upgrade and maintenance of two excellent public schools in the Southern Highlands electorate, Mittagong Public School and Bargo Public School. On a number of previous occasions I have raised these matters in the House but to date have received very little response from the Carr Government to meet those very pressing needs. Firstly, a year or so ago the Mittagong Public School parents and citizens association put together a fine concept plan and prepared a submission, on which I gave some assistance, to the Government for

an overall plan for the upgrade of the Mittagong school. It took 18 years before a permanent library replaced the demountable library, and the school and students were very pleased to receive that.

However, the school has identified between eight and 10 temporary demountable classrooms that require replacement with permanent classrooms. We put to the Government a very strong case for their upgrading. We also made the point that the old, original part of the school, which suffered from lack of maintenance and degradation, also needed an overall upgrading. After we made those points last year, the Government announced that it would replace two of the demountable buildings with two new permanent classrooms. Those two classrooms satisfy only a quarter of the need for permanent classrooms overall.

To make matters worse, the Government announced it would delay commencement of the classrooms. Whereas students were expecting to walk into those classrooms in term three this year, it now appears that it will be some considerable time before those classrooms can be occupied. Southern Highlands weather means that any students in demountables either freeze, get flooded or fry. They will have to endure another winter in demountables. The students in demountables that will not be replaced will suffer similarly for a very long time because the Government has given no indication at all of when it will replace the rest of those demountable classrooms and complete the overall plan.

I raise also a very important project at Mittagong Public School under the direction of two very hardworking local artists: a mosaic wall. The playground has a rather unattractive but functional brown brick wall where children play ball games. These two artists have done a wonderful job of helping students decorate a panel of the wall with a mosaic. But there is now space for another four or five mosaic panels. The funding for the first project has been well and truly expended. I wrote to the Minister before the last election seeking some form of ongoing project funding so that the students, teachers and artists can continue to fill in the remaining panels. The effect is not only to raise the level of student pride in the school and display the excellent art work; it has had the effect that people generally are much prouder of the school. I am told by the principal and the artist that the result has been a greater interest, and a reduction in vandalism and other malicious damage.

The other issue I raise relates to Bargo Public School. I have raised this matter in the Chamber on a number of occasions. Bargo Public School still needs massive investment in a long-term infrastructure upgrade to ensure that the school will no longer require, on an almost weekly basis, attention to the plumbing system or the assistance of State Emergency Service volunteer staff, as well as the principal and teachers, to sandbag the entrance to classrooms that are at risk of flooding. The existing classrooms require many more features such as power points so that modern technology can be used. A permanent library is needed.

The present library is in a demountable building that leaks and is infested with insects. I am told that on some occasions the insects can be heard crunching through the material of the building. The school also needs a permanent hall. They are just two of the issues in my electorate that need immediate attention. If we truly value public education and want to provide facilities worthy of the teachers and students, we have to invest in those facilities and make schools places that we can be proud of, not only intellectually but also physically. There is a lot to be done at Mittagong and Bargo public schools before we reach that stage. [*Time expired.*]

LIVERPOOL TO PARRAMATTA TRANSITWAY CONSTRUCTION HOMES DAMAGE

Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [5.20 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House issues surrounding the Liverpool to Parramatta transitway. The transitway in general is a very positive development for Western Sydney and for Liverpool in particular, and the Government and the Minister for Roads ought to be congratulated on it. However, some of my constituents believe that their properties have been damaged through construction of the transitway. Mr and Mrs Lyons are constituents of mine who live in Rundle Road, which is immediately adjacent to the transitway. In early 2002 their property was inspected prior to any construction commencing. Shortly thereafter heavy machinery and rollers went to work to construct the transitway.

After that the Lyons started to notice cracks appearing in the ceiling and cornices of the house. The couple also noticed cracks in concrete slabs at the side of the house. A number of internal doors had also tightened. A crack was observed near the bathroom skylight. A council-owned footpath in front of the house was also noticed to have cracked. Mr and Mrs Lyons complained to Barclay Mowlem, the contractor for the project. Barclay Mowlem arranged for its consultant, Abacheck Consulting Pty Ltd, to attend upon the Lyons's home. The Abacheck report confirmed that the defects as reported existed subsequent to the first inspection but prior to the second: the consultants concluded that the defects did exist and had appeared after construction commenced. However, the consultants said that the road construction would not have caused the cracks. They concluded:

We do not believe that the cracking is due to construction of the transitway but to natural movements in the substrata due to climatic conditions.

Barclay Mowlem's letter to Mr and Mrs Lyons dated 19 November 2002 said in part:

Based on the findings of the consultant, Barclay Mowlem confirms that construction of the transitway would not have caused any cracks in your building therefore does not accept any liability for your reported damages.

Two other constituents of mine, Mr and Mrs Hay, live in Banks Road at Miller. Considerable earthmoving was carried out in their area and a pre-work inspection of the house was carried out. After the major work commenced on the transitway Mr and Mrs Hay noticed a number of problems, including cracked brickwork on the house, subsidence of a footpath slab and binding on a bathroom door. My constituents complained to the contractor, Barclay Mowlem, which once again arranged for Abacheck Consulting Pty Ltd to inspect the house. Abacheck confirmed the existence of the issues complained about by Mr and Mrs Hay. However, it concluded:

We do not believe that the works being undertaken opposite by Barclay Mowlem would have caused any great impact so as to cause such cracking. We believe the cracking is due to expansion and contraction of clay foundation materials and that it should not impact to any great degree on the structural integrity of the house.

Interestingly enough, however, Abacheck recommended monitoring on a monthly basis during the transitway's construction to see whether there is any substantial change in the cracking. A letter from Barclays Mowlem to Mr and Mrs Hay dated 21 June 2002 advised that monthly monitoring would not be carried out. So Barclay Mowlem has chosen its own consultants to investigate these situations and then ignored the recommendations of those consultants. Two other constituents of mine, Mr and Mrs Fitzpatrick of Sanderling Street, Hinchinbrook, have a property that backs onto the transitway. An inspection of the Fitzpatrick property occurred before construction commenced in February 2002. Since construction commenced a crack has appeared in one of the walls of the premises. Mr and Mrs Fitzpatrick complained and Barclay Mowlem Constructions once again retained Abacheck Consulting Pty Ltd to inspect the premises. Abacheck confirmed that there was no cracking prior to the transitway's construction commencing. It confirmed that there is now a staggered vertical crack from the top of a wall of the house to within six courses from the slab at the base. The crack was three millimetres wide at the top. However, Abacheck concluded:

We are of the opinion that the work associated with the transitway has little or no relationship to the cracking brickwork...

The company denied liability. Other cases involving constituents of mine sustaining damage to houses have been reported to me. The residents believe that the damage is related to the construction of the transitway. A number of common features of the cases cause one to pause. In every case damage to properties has occurred only after construction of the transitway commenced. There is clearly a connection in time between the damage and the construction. Prima facie, one might be entitled to think that they are connected. Barclay Mowlem, however, denied liability. In each case it relied upon its consultant, which in each case was the same company. It is unsurprising that my constituents have developed a degree of cynicism about this process. The alternative for my constituents is to initiate court proceedings. That would be very lengthy and probably very expensive. My constituents cannot afford that sort of expense—indeed, even the cost of engaging their own consulting engineer would be beyond their financial resources. I accordingly ask Barclay Mowlem to review the situation to see whether a more satisfactory mediated process can be pursued to assist my constituents.

TRIBUTE TO MR JOCK CROOKS

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [5.25 p.m.]: In the electorates of all members there are stories of recognition by and service to Rotary clubs. Tonight I speak about a function to recognise Jock Crooks, a member of the Rotary Club of Casino. On 24 March everyone in the community celebrated a special evening by joining to celebrate 50 years of continuous service with the Casino Rotary Club by their past president, Jock Crooks, who today is still an active member. District Governor Ross Smith and President Dennis Blunt attended. Casino Rotary Club is very active and has certainly contributed to the building of the Casino community. I am proud to be an honorary member of that club. A pen sketch of Jock Crooks that was issued on the night referred to the contribution by Jock. I will quote some parts of it:

Jock a son of Joseph John and Ida May Crooks (nee Robertson) was born in Melbourne.

He completed his secondary education at the Casino Intermediate High School. In 1932 he gained the Leaving Certificate but owing to the "Great Depression" jobs were extremely difficult to find. It was considered more practicable to repeat Fifth Year and Jock received the certificate again for 1933.

The first job was as a casual worker for an electrical contractor.

Jock's first full time permanent position was with the Casino Co-operative Dairy Society for over 12 years where he worked in various sections at the factory, rising to the position of accountant.

For the next 31 years he conducted his own business as an Agent for the Texas Oil Coy (Caltex), located on the corner of Dyraba and Walker Streets. The agency was sold in 1978 to Mr Bob Roache.

In 1960 Jock commenced an electrical business on the oil agency site. The same year [Jock] started an electrical branch at Armidale where it operated for 25 years.

When the Heathwood building in Walker Street became available for leasing Jock held a significant section to manage his electrical commercial affair for nine years to 1989.

Jock married Veronica B McGivern (Mac) on the 12 March 1942 and they had three children namely John [who was pleased to be there on the night] Judith (decd 1961) and Margaret May [who lives in Canberra and is commonly known as Meg].

On the 23 March 1953 Jock Crooks became a member of Rotary at Casino when Club President Richmond... Manyweathers [a past member of the upper House] inducted Jock into the Club that evening along with Lance Nicholls, Jim Small and Don Graham. Richmond's son Bill is proud to represent the family at this auspicious occasion.

In 1957 the Crooks's Rotary saga took an important turn when he was elected as president. The other club positions he held include president elect; immediate past president; secretary to Jeff Jeffreys, a renowned person in the Casino area; treasurer from 1986 to 1988; and directorships in the various avenues of service. Over the years Jock has attended international conferences at Sydney, the 1956 Asia and Pacific Rim conference, world conferences held in Sydney in 1971 and in Melbourne in 1973, and he has registered for Brisbane in 2003. I want all honourable members to note that Jock has registered a staggering 46 years of 100 per cent attendance made up in five States of Australia, plus overseas clubs in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Malaysia and the United States of America. His civic service included election as an alderman to the Casino Municipal Council in December 1959. He retired from the council in 1980. Jock served six terms as deputy mayor. He was also a Casino delegate to the North East Local Government Association, an organisation of which Jock was president for six years. Well done, Jock Crooks. You have contributed to the community. To achieve 100 per cent attendance over 46 years in any organisation speaks for itself. I compliment Jock Crooks.

BREASTSCREEN NEW SOUTH WALES NORTH COAST

Mr NEWELL (Tweed) [5.30 p.m.]: I pay tribute to BreastScreen New South Wales North Coast, which has its headquarters in Lismore. The service, which recently celebrated its tenth anniversary of operation, covers the whole of the North Coast from Port Macquarie to Tweed Heads. The service has performed 209,000 mammograms, the results of which have assisted 1,200 women to be diagnosed and treated for breast cancer. I understand that the tenth anniversary celebrations in Lismore involved a morning tea featuring, amongst other things, a breast-shaped cake baked especially for the occasion. The first mammogram was performed in 1993 when Beth Trevan was in charge of the breast-screening service for the North Coast. Beth was supposed to retire from the service on 20 May last year, but she worked on until July to assist the incoming chief executive officer, Denyse Hodgson, fit into the position.

Beth Trevan was responsible for setting up the breast-screening service. Although it is celebrating only its tenth anniversary, Beth's work started in 1991 following discussions around her kitchen table. She certainly went into bat to put together an organisation and, in 1992, was successful in obtaining funds to make the service available to the people of the North Coast in 1993. The service included the northern mobile unit, which went into operation in December 1994. The service was then expanded to the Mid North Coast Area Health Service. In the Northern Rivers area 131,190 mammograms have been performed. On the mid North Coast, on what I would call the lower North Coast, 77,749 mammograms have been performed. The southern mobile unit commenced operation in 1995. A bus mobile unit began operation in 1997.

The future for BreastScreen New South Wales North Coast includes the completion of fixed-site buildings at Coffs Harbour and, later, Port Macquarie and Tweed Heads. I look forward to assisting Denyse Hodgson with the necessary work to establish those services, particularly in Tweed Heads. Women in the area whose mammograms were performed in the mobile unit and who require follow-up service have to travel to Lismore or seek private service on the southern parts of the Gold Coast. I look forward to the expansion of the service to a fixed site in Tweed Heads. During the 10-year operation of the service more than 1,200 women had their breast cancer diagnosed early, which enabled them to access better treatment options and enjoy longer survival rates. I encourage women to avail themselves of the service. I know that most women aged between 50 and 69 are called in every two years to have a free mammogram. Women over the age of 40 are also encouraged

to have a mammogram, particularly if their family has a history of breast cancer. I commend the great work of Beth Trevan. I intended to make a tribute to her last year, but other things intervened and I was not able to do it. I certainly pay tribute to her for her great work in getting BreastScreen New South Wales North Coast under way.

Ms BEAMER (Mulgoa—Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister for Western Sydney, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning (Planning Administration) [5.35 p.m.]: I commend the honourable member for Tweed for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. It is vital that women have access to free mammograms in their local areas. Early diagnosis gives women a much greater chance of overcoming the disease. Many of us have been touched by people who have suffered from breast cancer. Last year a good friend of mine passed away as a result of this scourge. Although in her case it had been diagnosed very early, it was virulent and she was unable to overcome it. She was in her late 30s. It is vitally important to call on women to undergo breast screening. I commend the honourable member for calling on women in his area to attend breast screening; it is something every one of us should do in our local areas.

LA MANCHA CARA-PARK SITE REDEVELOPMENT

Mrs HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [5.37 p.m.]: La Mancha Cara-Park is situated in my electorate within the Berowra community. For many years it has been a caravan park and a place for long-term permanent residents to purchase and live in mobile homes. It has also been a place where caravan dwellers could seek out a holiday as part of being close to areas such as Brooklyn or as keen bushwalkers. Last November life altered for 43 of the permanent residents and mobile home owners when notice was given to them to the effect that they would be required to leave the cara-park by 9 June 2003. The reason for this sudden news was that the current owners of La Mancha were in the process of selling the land for further development.

The 34 site homes, housing 43 people, had to be either relocated or sold, with ensuring concerns over where they could find alternative sites, if at all. Without warning these people, who believed they were located in a permanent home, faced the prospect of losing what they had become attached to. Their familiar surroundings and comfortable way of life would soon be changed forever. Some had local jobs and others were truly retired. A number had illnesses that required regular medical visits and, as a result, they had become well-known patients of doctors whose practices were nearby.

The land in question is zoned residential and had been so for quite a long time. As a caravan park and base for mobile homes it operated under existing use arrangements. The owners, businesspeople, were entitled to sell the area to developers because of the zoning, but this did not help the people who would bear the brunt of the unintended consequences of such a sale. I attended a public meeting with members of the Affiliated Residential Park Residents Association and listened to the concerns raised and tried to put into place a realistic path for these now vulnerable people to follow. First and foremost, they wanted to stay where they were. If this was not possible they wanted to move to another site close to the Hornsby area, or receive a fair amount of money for their homes if selling was the only option. Every person at the meeting—100 per cent—raised his or her hand and said yes when asked if they would agree to move into public housing if that were possible.

Concurrently, the then Minister for Urban Affairs and Planning, and Minister for Housing imposed a moratorium on the rezoning of caravan parks because of the potential social impact of removing homes from under the feet of residents who would probably have very few options for future accommodation. The caravan park in my electorate fell outside that action because it had already been rezoned. La Mancha residents received very little assistance from the Minister's office and are still waiting for some realistic options to deal with their concerns. Vacant possession and homelessness stare them in the face and no compensation is assured for people such as Maryanne Miller, Eileen Jones and others who are in the gallery this evening.

This is a housing issue. As I said, every person faced with eviction from the caravan park would move into public housing if it were an option. The only problem is that 1,000 people in my electorate are already on the waiting list for public housing. The permanent residents of La Mancha should be placed at the top of the priority housing list and given homes in which to live in the local area. This Government and the new Minister should recognise the emergency situation that has been created. These people all face exceptional circumstances when caravan parks are sold and they are left high and dry.

Precedents have been set in Queensland, and the New South Wales Carr Government should follow suit. In 2001 a caravan park in the Cairns area was suddenly closed. Even though the closure circumstances were different, the effect was the same: people were left homeless. The Queensland Minister for Housing

arranged for five out of the 20 people left stranded by the park closure to be placed into priority public housing. At the moment, between seven and nine people out of 43 in La Mancha still will have no alternative accommodation when the caravan park closes.

I call on the New South Wales Minister for Housing to give a guarantee that any person who is unable to find housing—that is, no other site can be found within the prerequisite 300 kilometres, or his or her mobile home cannot be moved—should be placed in public housing. That would be the compassionate way to relieve the La Mancha residents of the misery associated with their sudden upheaval and possible bleak future. Other parks within reasonable distance will not permit some mobile homes to be moved to their facilities because of the homes' age or size, or the lack of sites. I have petitions signed by local residents in support of the people who could be left homeless in a few short weeks.

There appears to be a trend to alter the use of caravan parks, and older and vulnerable people are the victims of such changes. La Mancha has already had its zoning changed, but governments must be insightful about the effects of sudden loss of tenure on supposedly permanent residents of such parks and ensure that their interests are protected. I again urge the Minister to place the remaining residents into public housing immediately.

MANNING RIVER ENTRANCE

Mr OAKESHOTT (Port Macquarie) [5.43 p.m.]: I raise an issue of great significance and relevance to the Manning Valley: the entrance to the Manning River, which many people consider to be the most underutilised river in New South Wales. For some time at Harrington debate and planning have been under way to decide what to do to achieve a safe recreational and commercial boating entrance to the river. Due to one of the quirks of bureaucracy and bad planning more than 100 years ago, only one breakwall was built, on the northern side of the entrance to the river. The northern drift creates a catchment of sand across the river mouth and makes for a very dangerous situation. The Waterways Authority of New South Wales recently said that river users can cross the entrance safely on only eight days a year, which limits all activities on the river up to Wingham.

Planning has been under way for some time. Although it is an ongoing and long process, and it has frustrated many people, we are getting to the pointy end at which State and Federal government involvement is required. It is time for the dollars to hit the table. Various environmental impact studies, a computer modelling of the river entrance, and an economic study of the benefits of spending more than \$50 million on building the second breakwall have been undertaken. It has been established that the economic benefits far outweigh the initial costs.

For example, Stebercraft, a Manning boat manufacturer, has said that it would significantly increase its activities if it could increase crossing days to 240 days a year, which is the figure the Waterways Authority has said will be achieved if the second breakwall is built. A significant increase in commercial activity would flow from companies and manufacturers of recreation and commercial boats such as Stebercraft which do business in the area. It would also encourage other businesses, such as charter boat operators and businesses using the Wingham wharf, to expand their operations.

The construction of the second breakwall will result in not only industry and tourism benefits but also an increase of \$75 million in property value in the Manning Valley, which, of course, has significant flow-on benefits for everyone in the community. The Roche Group is constructing a significant residential development at Harrington, including a marina. However, it has said that if the second breakwall is not built it will build only 22 of the proposed 72 berths. That will have a significant impact on long-term activity on the river.

It has been demonstrated that if the breakwall is not built the area could suffer \$5 million of flood damage. That must also be added into the economic equation. That information was recently put to the Taree Chamber of Commerce, which has passed an excellent motion asking the State and Federal governments to become involved. The planning and economic and environmental studies have been completed and the State and Federal governments must come through with the dollars. There can be no more hiding behind committees or studies. All the information stacks up and the ball is very much in their court. As the local member I strongly support this project, and I urge the State Government to become involved in the planning and delivery process.

FRUITS OF BATLOW VOLUNTARY ADMINISTRATION

Ms HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [5.48 p.m.]: Batlow, which is renowned as one of the most successful apple growing areas in Australia, with a well-deserved international reputation for producing some of the best cool-climate fruit in the world, has an urgent problem. In 2001 the township of Batlow had a population

of about 1,200. Unfortunately it has suffered two significant company failures in the past 15 months. In January last year the well-known food and beverage manufacturer Mountain Maid was placed into voluntary administration and offered for sale. Unfortunately the company was unable to trade its way out of difficulty and on 27 February last year the decision was made to close the factory, resulting in the loss of 30 jobs.

On the day the closure was announced I spoke with the former Minister for Regional Development in Parliament House and urged him to act to provide all possible assistance to Batlow. I place on the record my appreciation for the Minister's rapid response to my urging. The following day he announced in this House that a regional economic transition scheme would be approved for the Batlow area.

The failure of Mountain Maid has cost Batlow not only 30 jobs but also a significant amount of debt to local unsecured creditors. Most distressingly, some of the former Mountain Maid employees obtained work with another Batlow company and their new jobs are now under threat. On 13 January this year a further three Batlow companies operated by the Bowden family were placed into voluntary administration with combined debts of about \$38 million. The majority of that debt—some \$34 million—is owed by the Fruits of Batlow Company. The group employs 145 locals on a permanent basis and also offers seasonal employment to many hundreds of others. At times the Fruits of Batlow group has employed up to 1,000 seasonal and casual workers. The businesses are still trading and it is possible for them to regain their financial viability under certain circumstances. About \$2.7 million of the debt is owed to the Office of State Revenue for outstanding payroll tax, and about \$2.5 million is owed to the Australian Taxation Office.

I met recently with the administrators, who are confident that these three companies are capable of trading their way out of difficulty. The final meeting of creditors will be held on 26 May this year. As no purchaser for the group has come forward, on that date the administrators will have to decide whether to wind up the companies or enter into a deed of company arrangement. If the companies are wound up there will be further unemployment in Batlow, which is still reeling from the loss of the Mountain Maid jobs. The deed of company arrangement will allow these three companies to continue trading and at the same time reach a compromise with their creditors. If the Fruits of Batlow companies are wound up, those jobs will be lost to the local community. This must not be allowed to happen.

One of the measures necessary for the deed of company arrangement to succeed is for the State Government to forgive the outstanding payroll tax debt. This is not as large a sacrifice as it first appears to be. As an unsecured creditor, the Office of State Revenue [OSR] will receive a minimal, if any, return on the debt if the companies are liquidated. The jobs will be lost and the OSR will also forgo any future payroll tax income from these companies. A commitment by this Government to forgive an already lost debt will at least give the workers of these companies a shot at continuing employment.

To be successful, the deed of company arrangement also depends on similar actions being taken by the Australian Taxation Office, and the agreement of the major debtor, Rabo Australia Ltd, to restructure at least part of the debt. The administrators are working hard to achieve that aim. I have already written urgently to the Treasurer outlining these circumstances and strongly urging him to act in the best interests of the employees of the Fruits of Batlow companies. Put bluntly, Treasury has little if anything to gain from these companies being wound up. Conversely, Treasury has much to gain from future payroll tax revenue if these companies are able to continue to trade. However, Batlow, as a small but vibrant community, has much to lose from the closure of these companies.

Employment prospects aside, the community has also lost its rugby league team, the Adelong-Batlow Bears. This fantastic team won the group nine premiership on at least one occasion during the 1990s, but sadly has been forced to wind up. At the moment, small country towns are doing it very tough. The drought has hit country areas very hard. Dam levels at Blowering and Talbingo are very low and the Burrinjuck Dam is at an all-time low. The administrators estimate that the Fruits of Batlow have forgone an estimated \$2.1 million in income this year because of volume shortfalls owing to the drought. The season has been particularly bad. Batlow needs a helping hand; it is crisis time in Batlow. I call on the Treasurer to urgently commit to forgoing the payroll tax debt owed by the Fruits of Batlow companies.

WYONG SHIRE COUNCIL DEVELOPMENT APPROVALS

Mr CRITTENDEN (Wyang) [5.52 p.m.]: It is my sad duty to draw to the attention of the House some of the planning problems on the Central Coast. One of the usual methods adopted by the Wyong Shire Council and the Gosford City Council when land has to be rezoned is to make a new local environment plan [LEP]. The

ridiculous stage has been reached in Gosford whereby there are 470 local environment plans, and there are several hundred in the Wyong shire. The plethora of LEPs in local government areas has created a minefield for people who wish to ascertain the planning requirements in their area. The Central Coast generally is a rapidly growing area and the Wyong electorate in particular is experiencing great growth. As honourable members would be aware, when there are high rates of growth, issues such as overdevelopment and the provision of infrastructure arise, and very often the two issues are linked.

Honourable members may recall that during the last session of the previous Parliament, I referred in the House to a development proposal received in August last year by the Wyong Shire Council from a Sydney developer for the construction of a seven-storey block of units in Fraven Street, Toukley. Approximately 2,300 people objected to the proposal. Fortunately it was possible to stop the development and the Wyong Shire Council has moved to implement a residential strategy in Toukley to overcome similar problems. During the recent election campaign a similar problem arose in the new Mardi subdivision. For the benefit of honourable members who have only a passing acquaintance with my electorate I point out that Mardi is a residential estate opposite the Westfield development at Tuggerah. Without using parliamentary resources at all, I made sure that the good citizens of Mardi were made aware of the proposal for a twin towers development with a height ranging from nine storeys to 11 storeys in Woodbury Park Drive, Mardi, near the Wyong Road roundabout.

The proposal is for 64 two-bedroom units and two levels of car parking. Like the Toukley proposal, it is completely out of character with the surrounding community and would set a dangerous precedent for future high-rise applications throughout the Wyong shire. After admitting that the Woodbury Park Drive application exceeded the current height controls at The Entrance by 11 metres, or three storeys, Wyong Shire Council officers suggested that the current height limit at The Entrance is acceptable. In other words, the developer wanted to construct a block of units that would have been three storeys higher than buildings at The Entrance, and the council thought it was acceptable for Mardi to end up looking like The Entrance. I oppose massive overdevelopment. Out of the 1,200 people who live in the Mardi area, 600 of them, or roughly half the population, said they did not want that development.

Remarkably but not surprisingly, the same issues arose: people were mainly concerned about the pressure the twin towers development would put on existing infrastructure such as roads, and the increased traffic congestion it would generate. It is the responsibility of authorities to ensure that such problems are avoided by implementing proper planning. I am pleased that the Minister Assisting the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning (Planning Administration) is present. I hope we will be able to sensibly make our way through this minefield of local environmental plans to achieve a good result for the people who live on the Central Coast. I hope the Minister will raise this matter with her ministerial colleagues the Minister for the Central Coast and the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning.

Of even greater concern is a letter I received recently from the Wyong Shire Council to which I responded today. It concerns the creation of another local environmental plan for rezoning land to create stage four of the Woodbury Park Estate, and permit additional residential development up to four storeys high in height covering more than 25 per cent of the site. I wrote to the council's general manager, Mr Dawson, stating that genuine community consultation—not an airy-fairy, cosmetic process—should be undertaken to make sure that people are involved in the planning. More importantly, it is the responsibility of authorities to ensure that a holistic approach to planning is adopted in the Wyong electorate because the area is experiencing a great deal of growth. I hope that the council undertakes appropriate community consultation. If the council is unable to see its way clear to do so, I have offered to undertake community consultation, just as I did for the Mardi and Toukley high-rise proposals.

Ms BEAMER (Mulgoa—Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister for Western Sydney, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning (Planning Administration)) [5.57 p.m.]: I thank the honourable member for Wyong for drawing my attention and the attention of the House to the serious issues confronting his electorate. I look forward to meeting the honourable member to discuss the implications of the matters to which he has referred and to drawing these matters to the attention of the Minister for the Central Coast and the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning. Planning for growth areas must be delicately handled to balance the needs of present residents and future population expansion. A great deal of population growth has been accommodated within the urban area of the Sydney Basin, but population increases are extending to areas of rapid growth, such as the Central Coast. I take on board the comments made by the honourable member and I look forward to having fruitful discussions with him.

RAILWAY TRACK WHEEL SQUEAL

Mrs SKINNER (North Shore) [5.58 p.m.]: Some of my constituents are greatly concerned about wheel squeal. I notice that the Minister for Juvenile Justice is puzzled by the term "wheel squeal".

Ms Beamer: I thought you were talking about Andrew Tink.

Mrs SKINNER: Nice try, Minister, but this is not a joking matter. If the Minister lived near a railway line and heard train wheels squealing every night when she was trying to sleep, she would not laugh. This is a major problem that has been endured by my constituents for years and years. When I last wrote to Mr Lewis of Wollstonecraft about this matter in April 2003 I stated, "I can't believe that this problem is still ongoing!" In 1997 there was a letter from CityRail in these terms:

Dear Sir/Madam,

You will have received several letters from State Rail in the past advising on progress with investigating the problem of "wheel squeal" in your area and other parts of the rail network.

The study has now been completed. The cause of the wheel squeal noise problem has been identified as a combination of a number of factors including track layout, wheel/rail friction characteristics, wheel and rail profiles and bogie design. Trials are scheduled on the study recommendations offering the best hope of a timely resolution of the problem.

Over many years I have received numerous letters from constituents on the matter. I have made representations to the Government and replies have been received from various Government members and from members of the bureaucracy in charge of the administration of rail services, which keeps changing. The correspondence that I believe spells out the problem is a letter from Mr Victor Lewis dated 15 April addressed to the new Minister for Transport Services, which read:

I have been writing on this subject for about 6 years to the office of your predecessor and/or to various other authorities. I understand that other residents in the area have been pursuing the same authorities for a solution of the problem, for many more years than that.

I can confirm that; they have been writing to me as well. The letter continued:

As the current frequency and level of rail squeal is not improved at all and has not been for the last year or so, I am writing in the hope that your office might institute a re-examination of the situation leading to some remedy.

The letter then refers to several attachments that were extracted from a file of correspondence stretching over many years. The attachments are summarised in the letter as follows:

1. CityRail's circular of 5th May 1997 from which it will be seen that "wheel squeal" is acknowledged as a problem, that a study had been carried out and that trials, hopefully leading to a resolution, were scheduled.
2. A letter from the Parliamentary Secretary for Transport dated the 14th July 1999 to Opposition MP, Mrs J. Skinner, who has taken an interest in the matter, talking of remedial work in process with some improvement—which there was.
3. My letter of the 18th January 2001 to the then Minister for Transport seeking further assistance. By then the temporary improvements were no longer of any effect.
4. The Parliamentary Secretary for Transport's letter of the 26th March 2002 in which is expressed disappointment by, amongst others, the Rail Infrastructure Corporation in the failure of efforts to alleviate the wheel squeal problems.

Mr Lewis's letter continued:

This subject may not be headline news such as derailments and accidents but its effects are nevertheless quite seriously detrimental to many people.

Mr Lewis is absolutely right. I cannot imagine anything more debilitating than trying to go to sleep at night amid the constant squeal of wheels as trains hit the curve on a track that is not aligned properly and has various other problems. In fairness to rail services, they have tried to fix the problem. Obviously, the problem has been improved at times but it has re-emerged. I do not know whether that is because the remedial work has worn away or the rail tracks—or the wheels themselves—have worn down. On behalf of Mr Lewis and many other constituents who live in that area, I ask the Minister to bring the matter to the attention of the appropriate Minister. The problem has been ongoing for long enough, and it is imperative that a permanent solution is found.

Ms BEAMER (Mulgoa—Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister for Western Sydney, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning (Planning Administration)) [6.03 p.m.]: I will bring to the attention of the appropriate Minister the matters raised by honourable member for North Shore.

TRIBUTE TO MR CHRIS LANG, MRS BILLIE GENNINGS AND MR FRANK McGLYNN

Mrs PERRY (Auburn) [6.03 p.m.]: I take this opportunity to honour the lives of three people, each of whom stands as a great in the life of the Labor Party in Auburn. Chris Lang, Billie Gennings and Frank McGlynn are names that evoke much fond affection, appreciation and sadness in the hearts of many in my electorate. That is understandable because all were wonderful and devoted humanitarians, model parents and citizens, selfless idealists in an increasingly selfish and cynical world and deeply committed members of the party. It is my hope that our brief journey into their lives will bestow them with an honour, albeit late and perhaps inadequate, for such lifetimes cannot be adequately encapsulated in so few words.

I start with Chris Lang, whose association with the Labor Party and history of our State is generally attributed to the family he was born into. One could just imagine—as, indeed, historical accounts seem to indicate—that Chris grew up in a home that was very much characterised by the demands and pressures that his father's life entailed. At the age of 15 Chris entered the family's real estate business as a clerk, in an office that doubled as an electorate office for Auburn as by then Jack was the member. Chris busily attended to learning the ins and outs of the business, and in time assumed a great deal of responsibility. More significantly, he developed a passion for engaging in politics and, most of all, helping people. Indeed, it seems that his happiest and proudest moments came from feeling that he could be of assistance to local constituents. Chris said:

It was like the old family doctor, real personal contact. There would not have been one person in Australia who helped more people fill out old age pension forms than yours truly. I put more into politics and more into helping people—rather than helping myself—than anyone.

In time, and in some respects against his own wishes—for Jack seemed determined that his son follow in his footsteps—Chris went on to become the representative for Auburn from 1946 to 1950. His tenure left the imprint of a service rendered in an undeniably genuine spirit of interest, passion and concern for the people. Unassuming as he was, yet ever in need to engage and serve others, Chris withdrew into a life of quiet devotion to his family and much-loved community of Auburn. As a father, he would take his family on trips to some of our State's most precious environmental destinations, and, as one would expect, took a deep interest in the affairs of all his children and later his many grandchildren.

At age 90, not long before his passing, Chris enrolled in a public speaking course at the National Institute of Dramatic Art, and in no time became the toast of the class. His enthusiasm for life knew no bounds. He respected not age nor convention, but, rather, the simple truth that joy and meaning lie in service to others and openness to life and its many opportunities to grow and learn. Chris was much like Billie Gennings, who, born on 14 January 1919, was barely 18 when she signed up with her first benevolent society and began welfare work. It was a hard time: the world was still in the throes of the Great Depression and need was in abundance. Shortly after, during World War II, in the midst of a life already bursting at the seams with numerous activities and initiatives, she took it upon herself to visit hospitalised seamen being treated in Sydney hospitals. Billie, it seemed, never had a thought for herself: her life was about service, about love, about the other. It was about being all one could be for the sake of higher purposes.

Billie was a life-long member of the Labor Party, having actively engaged herself for 56 years in an extraordinary commitment of time and passion to the interests of the wider community. For those in the party who knew her, affectionate recollections of an unassuming, energetic and colourful personality abound. She was always there, ready and willing to give and serve without expectation of personal reward or recognition. However, in spite of her humble nature, she was elected as secretary of the Birrong branch, and also acted as a delegate to the State Electoral Commission. Billie was also a long-time member of the Order of the Eastern Star. For more than 50 years she remained characteristically devoted to the community welfare endeavours it undertook and faithful to the dual inter-related aims of the order, namely, to provide a personal development framework for women by utilising the examples of biblical women of exemplary integrity, goodness and strength, and through doing so to become "other aware", giving and honourable members of society. Billie was the embodiment of this philosophy.

Billie and husband, Bill, whom she had married at age 18, enjoyed a marvellous marriage; they were in love to the very end. Theirs was a partnership, a friendship of two mutually compatible and loving people. They raised their children—Nadine, Vernon, Corona and Catherine—on firm Christian principles, and nurtured, encouraged and challenged each of them to greater heights. Billie was a person of tremendous warmth, as all who met and knew her can attest to. Her life, like all great works of art, was unique, beautiful and inspiring to be pondered and reflected upon.

Frank McGlynn, the third Auburn Labor Party great, shared many of Chris and Billie's characteristics, and, one could say, in some respects lived a life remarkably similar to theirs. Raised in Auburn and a member of the Lidcombe branch of the party for more than four decades, Frank was a man of great compassion, love and humility. His faithfulness and love for the party was always evident, as was his commitment to such community welfare organisations as St Vincent de Paul, Auburn, of which he was a member for 42 years and president for 15 years. His other involvements, of which there were many, culminated in his receiving recognition by the Premier. Frank also served on the board of the Lidcombe Catholic Club for 27 years, providing for many the gift of vitality, wisdom and good company. He did all this in a life immersed in the rigours of hard work—Frank was a butcher by trade—and the raising of two children Bradley and Karen. As deeply devoted Catholics, Frank and his wife, Pauline, did much to instil sound principles into the lives of their children and loved them faithfully as parents and friends.

Frank was a very generous man. I recall visiting him some time ago, when he was just beginning to enjoy the rewards of his work at cultivating the fruit trees in his backyard. Without thought for himself and in a state of genuine pleasure, he began harvesting and in no time had picked every fruit in sight and insisted that I take them home. Just like Billie and Chris, Frank found joy in creating, cultivating and giving in abundance. Chris, Billie and Frank, may you rest in peace and may the many loved ones you left behind draw comfort in the knowledge of all you have done. [*Time expired.*]

PANANIA PUBLIC SCHOOL FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Mr ASHTON (East Hills) [6.08 p.m.]: Panania Public School, which is in my electorate, is celebrating 50 years of quality public education for the students in the Panania and East Hills areas. The school had its humble beginnings in a hall on the banks of the Georges River. With the massive and rapid growth of the area came the need for a larger, permanent school site. A parcel of land bounded by Lambeth Street and Lawler Street was allotted for the school and in 1945 some of the current K-2 classrooms were established. As the community grew more land was acquired and in 1953 Panania Public School, with its modern two-storey building, was completed and it has served the community well for the past 50 years. Additions have since been made to the infants areas facing Lambeth Street and Lawler Street and there has been an increase in the number of brick buildings.

After World War II my father, along with many others, was looking for work. He became a bricklayer and worked on the Panania Public School: he played a role in the school's 50-year history. As part of the celebration the school is holding a 50-year dinner dance—one does not have to be aged 50 to go to the dance. As part of a grand plan for an imposing entrance to the school, the 50-years Lawler Street gates and memorial pathway have been recently completed. The impressive brick entry will lead students and visitors onto the paved memorial pathway where past and present students and friends of the school have had their names engraved on individual pavers, a concept similar to that undertaken at the Homebush Olympic site.

I, my wife, my daughters, my brother, my father and many relatives and friends have had their names inscribed on the pavers. The cost incurred was not large, but it will help to raise funds to pay for the pavers. The project has given the school a great sense of history. The entrance is worthy of a centre that provides quality education. The Lawler Street gates are not only aesthetically pleasing, but they will lift the profile of public education in general and provide a safe entrance to the school. In the past many students entered the school through the teachers car park, a practice that was not acceptable. Parents, staff and community members deserve great thanks for the countless hours they dedicated to raising awareness of the history of the school.

I do not wish to bore honourable members by quoting the names of all the famous people who have attended the school. However, last night as I listened to the honourable member for Georges River list the many famous people of St George I decided to mention that the Canterbury-Bankstown area leaves St George for dead. Both Steve and Mark Waugh attended Panania Public School, as did the present member for East Hills. Of particular interest to me is the fact that these gates will be enhanced if the Government provides about 28 metres of Diplomat fencing. Honourable members would know that most schools are surrounded by the traditional one-metre Weldmesh fence. While the Government is to be commended for providing dozens, or hundreds, of schools with Diplomat fencing—Picnic Point High School and East Hills Boys High School, in my electorate, are among them—it would be nice if 28 metres of Diplomat fencing could be erected at the Panania Public School.

I will put that proposal to the Minister for Education and Training. That fencing would offset the lovely Lawler Street gates and brick entranceway. On a sour note—and unfortunately this is typical—the brick

structure surrounding the gates had been completed for only a day or two when it was covered with graffiti. The local council and I have provided assistance in removing that graffiti. We have also provided advice on how to prevent it recurring. It is a pity that something good can be vandalised or destroyed. The ceremony for the opening of the gates will be held at the school assembly on 27 May. I will seek extra funds from the Minister to add to those raised by the school community, the parents and citizens association, the school auxiliary and the staff and students for that great project.

Private members' statements noted.

[Madam Acting-Speaker (Ms Saliba) left the chair at 6.13 p.m. The House resumed at 7.30 p.m.]

SPECIAL ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr Scully agreed to:

That the House at its rising this day do adjourn until Thursday 8 May 2003 at 10.00 a.m.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Inaugural Speeches

Motion by Mr Scully agreed to:

That the business of the House be interrupted to permit the honourable member for Camden, the honourable member for Tamworth, the honourable member for Penrith, the honourable member for Charlestown and the honourable member for Coogee to make their inaugural speeches.

INAUGURAL SPEECHES

Mr CORRIGAN (Camden) [7.31 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I begin by paying tribute to my predecessor, Liz Kernohan, and by thanking the people of the Camden electorate for giving me the opportunity to succeed her in representing them. I particularly thank all those who have never before voted Labor in their lives but who have placed their trust in me. I say simply that I will not let you down and I make this promise: I will represent you to the best of my ability. We will go on a journey together that has had a long preparation.

I was born 49 years ago at Gosford Hospital and I grew up in the fishing village of Tacoma on the Wyong River. My dad was a stock food manager for a company called Dummet Brothers and my mum was a housewife who raised me, my late brother, Peter, and my sister, Maree. It is a great source of pride to me that my mum can be here tonight. Unfortunately, my dad has Alzheimer's disease and has not known me for six to seven years now, but I do know that if he knew what was happening he would be very proud.

I attended Wyong Primary School and Wyong High School and was captain of both those schools. My first encounter with the harsh realities of life came whilst I was still at Wyong Primary School and my dad lost his job when Dummet Brothers went broke. Fortunately in those days it was a lot easier to get jobs and he got work on the construction of Vales Point and Lake Munmorah power stations. Ultimately he ended his working days as a cleaner for the Electricity Commission. I know dad losing his job had a tremendous impact on me. He went from being a manager to a tradesman's assistant, to a cleaner. For our family to survive dad worked a second job at Wyong Greyhounds and when my sister, Maree, was old enough, mum worked as a cleaner at Wyong High School. My parents did all this so that we kids would have the best opportunity in life. I take this opportunity tonight to acknowledge the tremendous sacrifices they made for us.

I moved from Wyong to Bankstown in 1972 when I got a job in the State public service. For the first 20 years of my working life I worked in the New South Wales public service and for the first eight of those years I gained an education in life, diversity and tolerance when I worked at the Sydney Opera House. It was whilst at the Sydney Opera House that I first became involved with unions. I attended a Public Service Association [PSA] branch meeting at the Opera House one day when the union was trying to form a branch there. It had staved off an attempt by the Theatrical and Amusement Employees Association to gain coverage. I was elected honorary secretary of the branch. I later took the union organiser aside and said, "Mate, now I'm secretary I guess I'd better join the union!" I have been a unionist ever since whenever I have been eligible. I am currently a member of the Financial Sector Union. After the Opera House I worked for TAFE and I still have many friends in TAFE.

I am proud that the Campbelltown campus, which I helped open, is in my electorate, as is, I might add, the wonderful Campbelltown campus of the University of Western Sydney [UWS] where my good friend John McCallum is in charge. Following TAFE I moved to the Public Service Board and then to the State Superannuation Fund.

If I go on any longer this speech will sound more like a resume, so I would like to mention some of the people who influenced my thinking during that time. I must mention Frank Barnes, the first General Manager of the Sydney Opera House, who had very radical ideas on workplace democracy; Helen Bauer, whom I worked with both at TAFE and at the Public Service Board; Pam Allan, now in this place; and Pat O'Shane, who, when we got into the lift together, always used to tell me that I had a great smile. All of you know Pat now. These people and many others have developed my key interest in public administration, a topic that I will return to later. In 1990 I left the public service to start my own small business. I bought a video shop—Macarthur Video—and it flourished for the first three years. Unfortunately, the buying power of franchises beat the small independents and after five years I closed the business. I got out debt free and still own my home—or at least the bank does under a mortgage.

Since then I have worked on a contract basis initially for the Federal Government and then with Liverpool City Council in business development, and for the past year in a mortgage broking business, Paramount Home Finance. I acknowledge my boss in that business, Dugald Powe, who is here tonight. I have enjoyed my work over the past year and one of my aims is to help establish a regulatory regime of minimum qualifications that are essential for mortgage brokers. Whether this is achieved by putting pressure on the Federal Government or by State legislation is something I will explore. Too many people are still being convinced to take out home loans for amounts that they will not be able to afford. If the industry cannot self-regulate then Government should step in and help those who are perhaps not as sophisticated in financial matters as others. I realise that this concept was discussed last night in debate on a bill but it did not actually address the minimum qualifications that are needed, and that is something that I will take up.

My wife, Sue, and I have lived in Camden since 1980 and part of the reason why I have been elected to represent the people of Camden is my active participation in the community. I have been involved in preschools, the parents and citizens association at Camden South, school councils and a large number of sporting groups. I am happy to say I am still president of the Camden Rugby League Club, last year's group six premiers. Of course I have been a Camden councillor—or alderman as it was when I was first elected—since 1991. During that time I was deputy mayor for three years and mayor for four years. I am sure that my local government experience has prepared me well for my work here.

I was recently asked what I was most proud of in my work on Camden Council. Was it the introduction of tendering for legal services and advertising that saved the council over \$100,000? Was it leading the successful fights against Badgerys Creek airport and the Capral Aluminium Plant? Though these are high-profile success stories, what I regard as the highlights were ensuring greater community participation in council business and the installation of a set of traffic lights. I would like to take a moment to explain these successes as they are consistent with my philosophy of the rights of citizens and community safety.

First, before I was elected to council, matters affecting citizens went to council and were debated in their absence. The citizens were informed after the meeting of council's decision, and that was that. I instituted a policy whereby people were informed on the Friday before the Monday council meeting. This gave them the opportunity to study over the weekend the staff's report and recommendations. They could then make representations to councillors—or aldermen as they were then called—if they were unhappy with the recommendation. I acknowledge tonight a fellow alderman who was elected at the same time, John Murray, who is now a director of Bankstown sports club. He was my coach and I was his coach during those early years on Camden Council. Secondly, I had a set of traffic lights installed at South Camden where previously there had been only a stop sign. I can state categorically that this simple act has saved many lives. My wife was involved in an accident at the intersection—it was not her fault—and this increased my resolve to fix the problem. I knew the intersection was a State responsibility but concerted lobbying produced results.

I have a keen interest in matters such as education, health, roads and transport, and community safety. However, I would like to mention a couple of issues that I hope to be able to pursue during the course of my parliamentary career. First, I have a great interest in public administration—an interest that was forged during my career in the public service. That interest has been enhanced over the past few years as a result of my attendance at Urban Development Institute of Australia [UDIA] conferences. Of particular interest to me was a talk given by Barry O. Jones—honourable members might remember him from Pick-a-Box—on population

policy and what this wonderful country can sustain environmentally, ecologically and economically. I will not go into those results, but I am pleased to be a member of a party in which our Premier raises this issue and the need to consider the impact of migration on Sydney.

Just as important in my view is the tsunami wave that will impact on every aspect of public administration over the next 30 years. That demographic tsunami wave is the impact of the retirement of the baby boomers. David Kennedy of the University of New South Wales—one of the speakers I spoke about at the Urban Development Institute of Australia conferences—argues that the baby boomers have dictated public policy for the past 20 years and will continue to do so. Kennedy defines baby boomers as having been born between 1946 and 1964. Looking around this House, a fair percentage of honourable members qualify. This is what David Kennedy said at a UDIA conference in Perth last year:

Who exactly are the Baby Boomers?

- Those Australians born between 1946 and 1964
- As they move through their life cycle...
- like a “pig through a python”
- The “bulge” between the War Generation and the X Generation—

I was pleased the other night to hear my colleague the honourable member for Parramatta describing it as a post-baby boomer generation and not the X-generation—

- the folks that brought you hula hoops, yellow ties, BMWs, the housing boom of the 80s, and the bull markets of the 90s.

When 1 out of every 4 Australians is over the age of 65, the whole economy will have to change. Baby boomers rule!

He said that they would dictate policy in the areas of learning, health, working and leisure. This is a fascinating challenge for us as public policymakers. I will have more to say about that later. My second interest, which is somewhat related to the first, is in planning, architecture and urban development. I am sure that honourable members thought it applied only to Frank. There seems to be some thought in my community that my views on the Bringelly land release investigations would change now that I am a member of Parliament. I assure the people of Camden that I remain opposed to any land release on environmental grounds. Unless the air quality problems can be overcome, my opinion will not change. However, I will not stand outside throwing stones. My job is to represent all my current and future constituents.

If, after considered debate, the Government decides that land at Bringelly can be placed on the urban development program, I will fight to ensure that future residents enjoy the best possible community with all infrastructure in place—both capital and community—before they move in. I aim to promote the role of agriculture in the Sydney Basin. Agriculture in the Sydney Basin still provides 70 per cent of fresh fruit and vegetables that we consume in Sydney. In addition, it provides the rural backdrop to our great city, which so many of us value. I know in my electorate that the sense of being in a semi-rural atmosphere is greatly valued. I now turn to my electorate. As the name implies, it takes in all of the Camden local government area as well as parts of Campbelltown, Liverpool, Penrith and Wollondilly local government areas. This includes suburbs such as Wallacia, Warragamba, Silverdale, St Helens Park—a suburb south of Campbelltown, half of which I share with my colleague Graham West, the member for Campbelltown—and Rose Meadow.

I thank Graham for the great help he has given me, not just over the past few weeks since I was elected but before that. He has given me invaluable advice. These suburbs present a range of different challenges and opportunities. While visiting one of these suburbs during the election campaign I came to understand why I would be able to make a difference if I was elected. At Silverdale I held a street meeting which was attended by three people, which was a good result. One lady said that she wanted to discuss a delicate matter with me and she asked me whether I would go to her home to discuss that matter.

With my assistant, Prue, who is present in the Chamber tonight, I went to her home. She said to me, "Mr Corrigan, I feel embarrassed about raising this issue with you, but I have a problem that affects all the women in the Warragamba and Silverdale communities. Eighteen months ago the area health service stopped the visits by the female nurse who took pap smears. The service was very well supported and you had to book ahead to get in. The nurse visited once a month and I always felt more comfortable with her rather than trying to go to the only male doctor in the area." She then went on to outline the benefits of this public health service, which was now lost. I agreed with her and I told her that I would do my best to get the service reinstated. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I wrote to the South West Area Health Service and I was told that there had been a dispute with the Wentworth Area Health Service over the provision of the community nurse, that it was related to funding and that this issue would drag on for a while. Thus my interest in public administration. Fortunately for me, during the course of the campaign Craig Knowles, the then Minister for Health, gave me a call and asked me whether there were any problems with my campaign. I launched into a detailed explanation of the loss of the nurse to carry out pap smears and its potential impact on women's health in that area. Craig interrupted me mid-stream and said, "Geoff, I agree with you. It will be fixed." I kept trying to tell him about all the benefits, but he just cut me off.

Last Saturday night at the annual South West Sydney Health Foundation fundraiser I spoke to Raad Richards, the General Manager of Liverpool Health Service—Craig made him responsible for ensuring that this happened—and he assured me that the finalisation of the nurse for Warragamba was imminent. His words were, "It will take place in the next two to three days." I am proud that I have been instrumental in restoring this service to the community. I look forward to making a difference for the people of Camden. Before I conclude I would like to thank the many people who worked hard for me during my campaign. I refer, first, to my campaign director, Denine McGrath, who worked tirelessly for over six months. Thank you for your special effort.

I thank our small but hard-working campaign team—which comprises Nancy Carl, Prue Guillaume, Sophie Cotsis, Peter Rouse, Sally Fennell, Mick Adams and Martin Peebles—that supported her. I thank all the helpers, such as Jenny and Roger Goodfellow, Di Kolkman, Del Cotter, Tony Carl, and Arthur Ching. Arthur Ching, who has a Chinese background and who is a great fellow, was handing out pamphlets for me at Leppington, where all the Chinese market gardeners are. The Liberals objected because he was talking to them in their own language. They said that it was not fair. Arthur took care of them. I thank Doug Cliffe, Marcel Schondelmaier and all the members of the Airds crew who helped on election day. My thanks go to Peter and Jan Primrose for their support.

To Barry Dickinson, who is represented tonight by his son Greg; Dugald Powe, my boss from Paramount Home Finance; Mick Everard, Roy Medich, Tony Perich, Dominic and Arnold Vittocco and all the Italian supporters who organised a great fundraiser for me, I say thanks for your fund-raising efforts and for your moral support. I also thank those Ministers who visited my electorate during the campaign—the Premier, Bob Carr, John Watkins, Craig Knowles, Carl Scully, Carmel Tebbutt, Richard Amery and Michael Costa. I also thank Tony Kelly, who was not a Minister at the time, for his support. I am indebted to all those people at the Australian Labor Party head office. Verity Firth, Joanna Wood, Karl Bitar, Damian O'Connor—the best ever mail campaign—Mark Arbib and Eric Roozendaal all helped. No question was ever too small and no problem too big.

Of course, no-one can get elected without the support of his or her family. My wife, Sue, has the patience of a saint. My sons, Scott, Mark and James, on various occasions offered to sort out people who they considered had insulted me, and my beautiful daughter, Katie, never stops smiling. I thank them all for their love. During the course of the campaign I missed, or did not celebrate, my wife's birthday, our twenty-seventh wedding anniversary, my son James's first five games for West's Jersey's Flegg team, the first anniversary of my brother's death, when I should have been with my mother and my sister-in-law, Chris, who is present in the Chamber, and the burial of my aunt in Ballina. This is already a cost of my political career. I am proud to have such a loving family who are prepared to share the burden with me. To them and to the people of Camden I once again say: Thank you for this opportunity. I am sure that we will achieve a lot on the journey that we are about to take together.

Mr SPEAKER: I congratulate the honourable member for Camden on his inaugural speech.

Mr DRAPER (Tamworth) [7.50 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): It is with a great deal of pride and humility that I rise to deliver my inaugural speech to the Fifty-third Parliament of New South Wales as the member for Tamworth. I am a rather unlikely member, having never been involved in any political activity prior to contesting the election on 22 March. I have never been a member of any political party and I have never participated in local government. I presented myself to the electorate of Tamworth as a person who is passionate about our community and as somebody who is prepared to work as hard as possible with the community to achieve results. I think the results speak for themselves.

I would like to pay tribute to the former member for Tamworth and now Federal member for New England, Tony Windsor, for his faith in my ability, his support throughout the six months of my campaign and

his ongoing encouragement since the election. I also sincerely thank the member for Northern Tablelands, Richard Torbay, for his advice, help and guidance, which continues as I sit in this House representing the electorate of Tamworth. I also recognise the contribution of my predecessor, John Cull, and wish him well for the future.

It is a daunting task to contest a State election as an Independent. After deciding to become a candidate one wakes up the next day with a single thought: "Now that I am running, what do I do next?" I decided that if I was to have any chance of being a genuine contender I would have to quickly build recognition for myself in the many parts of the electorate where I was virtually unknown. On 1 October last year I put on a comfortable pair of shoes and started to knock on doors and talk to people. That was the first of three pairs of shoes that I wore out during my campaign. For the next six months I knocked on doors virtually every day. I recall having two days off in six months.

During the Country Music Festival in Tamworth in January I knocked on doors in Gunnedah in more than 40 degrees. As a contrast, not long after that I walked around Walcha in February when it was less than 10 degrees and raining. That day I spoke to a lady who was kind enough to write to the local paper and give me the thumbs up for persistence. While in Walcha I was made aware of the need to seal a 12-kilometre stretch of road that is the main access road between Tamworth and the coast. I was also made aware of the council's softwood timber strategy to help build the local economy and increase employment in the district. I saw first-hand the state of disrepair of the wooden bridge that links the north and south of the town. I feel rather privileged to have had the experience. As I said at a number of public forums prior to the election, whatever happened on 22 March I would not have swapped that last six months for anything.

I was chased by dogs, I was sworn at by party supporters and I was intimidated and abused. I endured a rather vitriolic letter-writing attack and I had threatening phone calls at home, one of which was fielded by my seven-year-old son. I also met some of the most wonderful people I have ever had the privilege to encounter. I recall very fondly doorknocking in Nundle quite early in the campaign. Nundle is a very picturesque little town, set in the hills about 45 minutes drive from Tamworth. I started early in the morning, and it was late in the afternoon when I came across an elderly lady who was in her front garden watering her roses. The drought was biting rather hard at that stage and she had let the rest of the garden go but she was out with her little bucket watering the roses. She saw the state that I was in and invited me in for a cool drink. I earned that drink. I was subjected to about 40 minutes of very rigorous questioning and I felt privileged to be told that I had just secured another vote.

She said to me, "Peter, you're a lovely young man. I'm going to vote for you, if I'm alive at the next election." I reassured her that she would be still there in March. She said, "Peter, you never know. When I turned 80 I wasn't very well. The doctor came around to my house and he said, 'I'm not sure whether you are going to see your eighty-first birthday.'" She said, "Well, I'm 94 now and that bastard's dead." You would not swap experiences like that for anything.

While I was doorknocking in Nundle I discovered the issues and concerns of the constituents. Roads are a major priority. A new sawmill is being developed in Quirindi and with most of the timber having to be transported through Nundle there is a serious concern about safety. At the entrance to Nundle there is an old timber bridge that most probably will not survive the next flood. The elderly in Nundle were concerned about inadequate health facilities and the young were worried about employment. The doorknocking got me very close to the community.

When I doorknocked in Niangala I discovered that the small school relied on a soak at the rear of the grounds for water and it had dried up during the drought, so all the children had to bring their own water to school. On the rare occasions on which it did rain, the three-kilometre dirt road from the main road into the school was so slippery and dangerous that there were a number of accidents. The road was also shared by timber jinkers. In Curlewis parents were concerned that the water was unfit for consumption. As the drought worsened and the watertable dropped, the salinity rose to a level where it was unpalatable and unacceptable.

In Tamworth parents were desperately concerned by an unwanted and unacceptable alteration to school bus timetables, which resulted in some children arriving at school up to 30 minutes prior to teachers being scheduled to start supervision. It also meant that many children were taking up to 45 minutes to get home in the afternoon when they lived less than three kilometres away. Similar concerns were raised in Kootingal and Nemingha. Community representations to the bus company failed and the company continues to disadvantage students. All those parents are just as concerned today. The doorknocking helped me understand the issues.

In Tamworth, where I was much better known, I had been Regional Manager for Hazelton Airlines. I had adopted a community-first philosophy towards the airline, believing that an airline takes a lot out of a community financially and it has an obligation to put something back into the community. If an aircraft had an empty seat, why not use it for the benefit of the community? I supported many organisations, sporting groups and individuals in that role, and I was delighted that the support I gave them came back to me on election day.

Tamworth is a major regional centre but it did not have a heated swimming pool. While I was with Hazelton I developed a business plan, which the board approved, to increase patronage. This resulted in the airline donating \$5 from every Tamworth passenger to a fund to heat the pool. This scheme raised over \$80,000 before Ansett bought Hazelton, and then that fell over and took us with it. However, I am delighted to say that the pool is now heated. I was fully supportive of a proposal to develop an aquatic centre within the town, and discussions on that project are still under way today.

When I was doorknocking in Coledale, an area of Tamworth with a large indigenous population, I was made aware of a funding crisis at the community centre. I made representations to the Department of Community Services for assistance but I was told that it was waiting on a consultant's report. Instead of throwing my hands up in the air and giving up, or saying, "Elect a Coalition government and then we'll fix your problem", I approached the West Tamworth Leagues Club for assistance through its Community Development Expenditure Fund. In February this year the President, John McLelland, and I presented the Coledale community centre with a cheque for \$12,000. That money has gone into the centre's Aboriginal youth program and it has also helped alleviate a severe space shortage within the building. The centre is still waiting on the consultant's report and the underlying funding problem still exists. Doorknocking teaches you a lot about your community.

In Gunnedah I learned about the need for improved policing resources. I learned about the importance of the Ardglan rail tunnel to improve development and employment prospects within the district. I learned that it is important to support the extension of the natural gas pipeline from Dubbo, going through Gunnedah, Werris Creek and up to Tamworth. I learned of the importance of an ethanol industry to our farming communities and the impact of water sharing plans, and threatened species and native vegetation legislation on our farming families. Doorknocking brings home many opportunities and it also highlights many problems. In Werris Creek I discovered that the community is passionate about the development of our national rail monument and is strongly supportive of an enhanced Werris Creek rail maintenance facility.

I am the first member of my family to be elected to represent an electorate in the New South Wales Parliament. I look up into the gallery and I see people who have supported me throughout my entire life, not just through my campaign. My father, Eric Draper, is a retired public school headmaster and his guidance has shaped much of what I am today. He has taught me empathy for my fellow community members and he has instilled a strong sense of social justice and community involvement into the way I approach daily life. My mother, Betty, has always been there for me, and she is a solid anchor for our family. My brother, Paul, and my sister, Jenean, are united with me in our love and respect for our parents.

Also in the gallery is my grandmother, Mary Riley. She is my inspiration. It is a great pity that my grandfather, Bob, is not still with us to listen to my inaugural speech. My grandmother, Mary Riley, saw a need in the Tamworth community many years ago. Our community had many young people with disabilities living at home with their parents. In those days having a child with a disability was something to hide and, in many cases, something to be ashamed of. My grandmother started something very special in Tamworth. In the 1950s Tamworth's first school for children with disabilities opened in a shed at the showgrounds. My grandmother was the inaugural principal and as a young child I was fortunate to spend considerable time with her at what was then known as the Tamworth Handicapped Children's School.

In my formative years I learned that disability is not something to be scared of. Everybody should have the opportunity to reach their potential, and people like my grandmother devoted their lives to giving kids that opportunity. Mary Riley was principal of that school for more than 20 years and, through her efforts, many parents of children with disabilities moved to Tamworth to take advantage of a privately funded school that treated their children as young people whose disabilities should not prevent them from fulfilling their potential. That school is now funded by the Government and is known as Bullimbal Special School, but the philosophies that my grandmother introduced will endure forever.

Today Tamworth is a centre of excellence at giving opportunities to people with disabilities. As the recently elected member for Tamworth, I intend to work closely with the many organisations that focus on

service delivery for children with disabilities and their carers. During my campaign I met many people caring for children with disabilities. Carers take so much of the burden off government through their selfless devotion to those they are caring for yet government does not recognise the sacrifices they make and does not provide the facilities necessary for carers to lead a life resembling what most of us would consider to be normal. I met many parents who are jeopardising their own health because of a lack of respite facilities in Tamworth—and Tamworth is a major centre, recognised for its empathy towards people with disabilities. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

While overnight respite is available in Tamworth, the fact remains that if a parent requires a longer period of care for a child with a disability that child must be housed outside our city. I met one inspirational lady who has continually postponed an operation necessary for her long-term wellbeing because she does not want her child—who is now over 30 years of age—to be housed in a facility out of our area where he will not know anybody. I support her stance and I believe there is a social obligation on government to provide facilities within regional communities to allow people with disabilities and their carers to have a decent standard of life.

I was fortunate to spend five years of my life living on what was then termed an Aboriginal mission. My father, Eric Draper, was appointed headmaster of the Walhollow School at Caroona near Quirindi when I started high school and he was also the manager of the mission. My introduction to anybody of Aboriginal heritage was at Walhollow, and Charlie White was the first Aboriginal person I met. Charlie taught me how to fish, he offered advice and he taught me respect for the culture and the traditions of indigenous people. I owe Charlie White a great deal. I recently attended a meeting at which Federal Health Minister Kay Patterson opened the rural health facility in Tamworth. An Aboriginal elder from the Kamillaroi mob gave a speech welcoming us to his land. After the official duties had concluded I spoke to the elder, who remembered me from my time at Walhollow. We talked for some time and as I was about to leave for another commitment he pulled me aside, put his arm on my shoulder and said, "Two of us mission boys have made good, eh Pete?" I thought that was lovely. I treasure those experiences.

My wife, Sharon, is also in the gallery tonight. As all honourable members would appreciate, to enter this House without the support of your family is extremely difficult. Sharon is my confidant, my best friend. She is an inspiration because she sets very high standards and you just go along for the ride. She comes from a wonderful family, and I am lucky to have met their expectations—or at least I have so far! She is friend and mother to our children, Ben, who is seven, and Eliza, who is four. She is a teacher at Calrossy Girls School in Tamworth and she works part-time after school for the Department of Juvenile Justice, convening youth justice conferences across the electorate.

During the recent induction process the honourable member for Camden, the previous speaker, commented on how many members' partners thought they would be qualified to fill the senior role in the electorate office. He gave examples of partners who had worked in a bank or run a bookshop as supposedly having the qualifications necessary for the research/media position. A little later that afternoon I asked, "What if you could find somebody who had a Bachelor of Arts majoring in political science and journalism, who had graduate diplomas in economics, education and industrial relations and who had worked for 10 years plus in senior industrial relations roles? Do you think that person would qualify?" I have just described my wife. I am actually still somewhat amazed that I am standing here giving this speech and not her.

After 10 years of Independent representation in the electorate of Tamworth by Tony Windsor, the National Party was returned in the 2001 by-election. After experimenting with the National Party for some 16 months, the electorate has acknowledged that the effective representation needed to achieve results for a conservative rural electorate such as ours can be delivered only through Independent representation. That is why I am standing before the Fifty-third New South Wales Parliament making my inaugural speech. As an Independent who has widely canvassed his electorate, I have identified a number of priorities.

Rural health is of great concern. We need to work towards addressing the shortage of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals in the public system. We need better access to specialists and to public dental services. We must also address the increasing shortage of pharmacists in local public hospitals and the ever-increasing concern of growing hospital waiting lists. We need to attract new young teachers to, and retain them in, the public system and we must invest in professional development for teachers. We also need to develop a new formula to determine teacher numbers for small schools. The electorate of Tamworth needs increased police numbers and more Aboriginal community liaison officers. As the immediate past president of the Tamworth Police and Community Youth Club [PCYC], I would like to see increased utilisation of PCYC programs for young offenders and increased use of PCYCs across the State as part of their bail conditions.

Coming from an airline background, I believe the Government needs to view regional air services as essential, not a luxury. The New South Wales Government holds the key to regional air services through its own travel contract. If that travel contract were shared equitably between Qantas and the smaller regional operators, the small operators would have a decent chance of long-term success. I will work actively to restore air services to Gunnedah and to reintroduce competition to Tamworth and Armidale. As I alluded to previously, a number of road priorities within the electorate—I am looking at the Minister for Roads as I say this—require attention, and two rail bridges are causing a great deal of concern in our community.

Much progress has been made by the equine industry towards building a national equine and livestock centre in Tamworth. For the first time in living memory the key industry players are united in developing a proposal that will secure Tamworth's position as the premier destination for equine events. I fully support the proposal and will continue to work with the industry and the community to progress this development. I look forward very much to the challenges of the next four years. In particular, I look forward to working closely with the Independent members representing the electorates of Northern Tablelands, Dubbo, Port Macquarie, Bligh and Manly and of proving to the electorate of Tamworth that an Independent representative can and will deliver the results that our community is looking for.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I congratulate the honourable member for Tamworth on his inaugural speech.

Mrs PALUZZANO (Penrith) [8.09 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): The walls of this historic Chamber have echoed the words of many inaugural speeches throughout the decades. I am deeply moved to be part of that honoured company. I am humbled by the fact that the people of Penrith have chosen me to represent them—not only to represent them but to look after them, to stand up for them. And that is what I intend to do because I am one of them. I have lived in Penrith and the lower Blue Mountains all my life. I went to school and university there. My husband, Robert, and I are raising our three children there, and I have had the great honour of serving its people in local government. It is no accident that Penrith is where, from the beginning of his party leadership, the Premier has always launched his election campaigns. Penrith lies at the heart and soul of the Labor Government.

I have only one regret today: that Jim Anderson is not here to share my joy. My thoughts and prayers are with his widow, Kathleen, and their children, Rhona and Robert. I will never, ever forget his kindness and support. I pay tribute to my predecessor, Faye Lo Po', a great local member and a wonderful, conscientious Minister. Like her, I will represent Penrith—all the people, whether they voted for me or not—to the best of my ability because I represent the whole community, the whole connected family of Penrith. Earlier I referred to my service on Penrith City Council. I shall give the House some idea of the things I helped to achieve on council because they show the sort of dedication, commitment and standing up for that I bring to my job as a local member.

I worked hard on council to secure a major sponsorship of \$25,000 from Sita International for the Penrith Regional Art Gallery and Lewers Bequest. Visitors now enter for free. I was successful in securing funding for improvements to local parks, play equipment and sporting facilities. I helped secure the beautification of one of the city's key sites, Tench Reserve, which sits on the banks of the Nepean River. I helped introduce section 94 plans requiring developers to help build new footpaths and community centres, and to provide improved library facilities in the older sections of Penrith. I was part of the resident action group which established the Kingswood Neighbourhood Centre, and helped secure \$750,000 in funding for it. I did those things because I am proud of Penrith and I believe in its future.

As a member of Parliament I want to tell everybody about Penrith's strengths and possibilities. I am proud that Penrith has one of the State's finest hospitals, the Nepean, which benefited from a \$168-million upgrade provided by the Carr Government. I am proud that Penrith is home to one of the best centres of drama in New South Wales, the Railway Street Q Theatre. I am proud that Penrith has the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre—one of the nation's finest performance and recording spaces. I am proud that Penrith has one of the nation's finest local galleries, the Penrith Regional Art Gallery and Lewers Bequest. I am proud of the many sports that are played in Penrith. Our mighty Panthers are once again on the prowl!

I am proud that I am not the first female member for Penrith. I am particularly proud of the Penrith Lakes scheme, an initiative of the Unsworth Government—approved by the Premier when he was environment Minister in 1987—which is now being brought to fulfilment under the Carr Government. This massive interlocking series of lakes and parks being built on an old quarry site next to the Nepean River will become a world-class recreation area equal in size to Sydney Harbour—some 700 hectares. I congratulate the companies

involved in this enormous undertaking: Pioneer, Boral, CSR and the Penrith Lakes Development Corporation and its team, especially the Chief Executive Officer, Ian Stainton. As quarrying winds down we must work hard on the creation of new jobs to replace those lost at the site.

Planning is under way for a new housing and industrial estate above the lakes. I promise the people of Penrith that I will do everything I can to make sure that this project is delivered in full and that it is environmentally sustainable. I want the lakes scheme to be something of which the people of Penrith are unreservedly proud. In fact, the whole of New South Wales can be proud of this scheme because it is good for jobs, good for the environment and good for the local community. It is a result of good government. And good government means developing a community where people live in harmony with their fellow citizens. It means access to worthwhile, productive jobs for everyone who wants one. It means world-class medical care for all Australians, no matter how rich or poor. It means access to quality education with no strings attached.

Education is one of my particular interests. I am proud of my vocation as a teacher and a lecturer. I have been privileged to teach at local schools in my electorate and to lecture at the University of Western Sydney, Penrith. I have learnt that the saying "knowledge is power" has never been more apt than in today's ever-changing world. Knowledge is one of the key attributes of a quality education. How appropriate then that it is the motto of my primary school, Glenbrook primary. The mottos of my two other schools encompasses the key attributes of quality education: "Explore and achieve" to explore a great skill; and "Aspire the heights", aspiration a lifelong value. There is no longer any doubt how important education is in the life of any community and any nation.

Phrases such as "the clever country" must become a reality if we are to match our competitors, because another key reality of the world in which our children are growing up is that when it comes to international trade there are no friends, only rivals. I am proud to be part of the Government that has taken up that challenge. The upgrading of local schools, connection of all Penrith's schools to the Internet and the new plan to broadband all schools are proof of that commitment. But more needs to be done. That is why I will spend the next four years relentlessly pushing for more resources: more teachers, programs and facilities. It is only by doing things better that we can hope to stay abreast of world trends and to create better, more fruitful lives for all Australians.

I will also work relentlessly to save and protect the ribbon of gold that flows through my electorate, the Nepean River. The health of the river is a pressing issue. The demands on it are great, from recreational users, run-off and pollution. It is not just an environmental issue. The health of the river is a vital economic issue for Penrith due to its importance for tourism and for supporting local attractions such as the Penrith Whitewater Stadium and the Head of the River rowing competition. I pledge tonight that I will be a vocal advocate for the health of the Nepean River and, indeed, all our rivers because they are a natural inheritance that we do not have a second chance to get right.

Another issue that will have my undivided commitment is the Penrith north Army land adjacent to Penrith station. This beautiful 40-hectare site is one of the gateways to Penrith and I want to see it preserved as open public space for all time. There has been considerable debate about whether this should be a mixture of business and housing development. I was a part of that debate, and I am proud to say that I listened to community concerns to shape the views I now hold. So, I make another undertaking tonight: I will fight to save the Penrith north Army land as open space no matter what. I will lobby the owners, the Federal Government, because it is a priceless opportunity we cannot let slip. Like saving our river, we do not have a second chance to get this right. It is a great honour to be here tonight, speaking on the floor of the nation's oldest Parliament, the home of Australian democracy. I am proud to be a custodian of the electorate of Penrith, a place of incredible beauty and opportunity. I promise to do my best for my constituents, my people, as we share our journey and shape our future together.

I am conscious that my journey to this place did not occur alone. There are so many people to thank: my campaign team—Andrew, Tara, Mark, Tim, Guy, Erin, Peter, Ann, Emma, Pat, Freda, Belinda, Tom, Cathy, Peter, Lorraine, Anna-Mum Marg, Alf, Lorraine, Tony, Rhonda, Sam, Mathew, Peter, John, Amanda, Shirley, Ann, Karen, Brendan, Graham, Kendall, Paul, Sumane, Cyril, Geordie and family, Ron, Kylie and Akbar. I thank all the other tireless workers in the local branches of Emu Plains, Blaxland-Glenbrook, Penrith-Glenmore Park, Kingswood and Penrith North; my union comrades in the National Union of Workers, in particular Derrick Belan and the rail station lads, Ron, Steve, Borg, Bob; and the Australian Union of Workers, in particular Russ Collison and Matt Thistlewaite. I thank my friends Robyn, Michael, Sharon, John, Greg, Bonnie, Colin, Peter, John and Carole, Robert, Lodzia, Ronda, Andy; and my EMILY's list mates, Joan, Christine, Julia, Linda and Angela; I thank also all those at the New South Wales Labor Party office, in particular, Eric, Mark,

Joanna, Carl, Verity and Nadine; and my parliamentary colleagues, both State and Federal, who helped during the campaign—Paul Gibson, Roger Price, Joe Tripodi, Morris Iemma, Carl Scully, John Della Bosca, Craig Knowles, Cherie Burton, Andrew Refshauge, Michael Egan, Michael Costa, John Watkins, Kim Yeadon, Bob Carr and Julia Irwin. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

And above all I thank my family: my soul mate and life partner, Robert, whose work, encouragement and guidance I cherish; our beautiful children Edward, Victoria and our little Elizabeth; my parents-in-law Livio and Elda Nassivera—I might add that my win was announced in Italy before it was rung through to me; my mum, Joan, the best friend a daughter can have; my brothers, Graham and Paul; my aunt Judith and her partner Graham. I thank and value the influence of all those people from my family who have died and to whom I dedicate this speech; my father, George, a quiet man, a man of great achievement and integrity; and my maternal grandparents, Clara and William Hugh Henry Burley, whose encouragement in all their grandchildren was never ending. I am deeply honoured by their faith and guidance, and by the faith and guidance of the people of Penrith. Everything I do as their member will be directed at one thing: to return that faith and uphold that confidence. There is an ancient saying of the Darug people, "Mirru Mittigar", which translates to "I walk with a friend". I want the people of Penrith to know they walk with a friend, and that friend will not let them down.

Mr SPEAKER: I extend to the honourable member for Penrith my personal congratulations on her inaugural speech, and wish her well in her parliamentary career.

Mr MORRIS (Charlestown) [8.27 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I wish to first congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election as Speaker of the House, and I wish you every success. I stand in this Chamber, the historic Legislative Assembly of the New South Wales Parliament, as the new member for Charlestown. It is an honour and it gives me immense pride to have been elected to represent the community of Charlestown. I thank the electorate for its vote of confidence. I stand in this Chamber as a proud member of the Australian Labor Party, the oldest political party in Australia: a party which has a proud history representing people, a party which has always been dedicated to building a better quality of life for its constituency.

I joined the Australian Labor Party at a young age, and have been active in the party holding various positions. This experience has provided me with an understanding and knowledge of the party's policies and workings. Politics is about people. The Labor Party is about people. It is a great credit to rank-and-file party members of Charlestown that they stood up for their beliefs in ensuring that the voice of the rank and file was heard. I thank those members immensely for their support. I proudly recognise the loyalty and commitment of rank-and-file members of the party. The people of the Charlestown electorate have entrusted themselves in me and the Australian Labor Party to ensure that the Government of the day manages, delivers and enhances the quality of life and services which are under the direction of State governments. I also wish to acknowledge and congratulate my parliamentary colleagues on their election results, in particular, the Hunter Labor members.

It is an honour to be part of the Carr Labor Government in its third term. This election win has clearly demonstrated that the people of New South Wales have recognised the achievements and the ability of the Carr Labor Government to deliver for the people of New South Wales. I dedicate myself to working tirelessly for the people of Charlestown and this State. Today I acknowledge my predecessor, the Hon. Richard Face, who gave a significant part of his life to working with and for the people of Charlestown. Mr Face leaves the New South Wales Parliament after 30 years service, being the second and longest serving member for Charlestown.

The electorate of Charlestown was created in early 1971 following the renaming of the electorate of Kahiba. The electorate of Charlestown is bounded by the electorates of Newcastle, Wallsend, Lake Macquarie and Swansea and comprises a population in the order of 59,000 people. The electorate is some 53 square kilometres in size and primarily consists of urban areas set on the coastline of the great Pacific Ocean. The electorate also abounds with Lake Macquarie, the largest saltwater lake in the Southern Hemisphere.

Charlestown is home to a small amount of light industry and to an emerging array of tourism and home business operators. The electorate of Charlestown has many crown jewels, one being the Glenrock State Recreation Area. This natural asset would not be if not for the foresight and commitment of Richard Face and the numerous individuals, community groups and organisations who fought to preserve our natural coastal settings. This has ensured that future generations will have the quality of life and the opportunity of access that we enjoy today. On behalf of the electorate of Charlestown, I thank Mr Face and his staff for their commitment and passion to improving and enhancing the way of life for all members of the Charlestown community.

One of the great achievements of the Carr Labor Government is the expenditure of \$100 million on the west Charlestown bypass, the newest piece of infrastructure, which will facilitate the safe movement of our

community by motor vehicle—may I say toll-free. This is another demonstration of the Government's commitment to the Hunter. It is often asserted that Labor governments have not provided the Hunter with its fair share. It is worth recalling that in the last State budget the Hunter received 9.67 per cent of the capital works pie, against the fact that the Hunter has 9 per cent of the population. In comparison, the Sydney metropolitan area has around 61 per cent of the New South Wales population, but received only 48.8 per cent of the capital works budget.

I have lived in the Charlestown electorate for the majority of my life. My schooling commenced at Charlestown primary school and I then proceeded to Whitebridge High School before entering the work force. I say with pride that I am a strong supporter of the public education system. I commenced my working life in the landscape construction industry and advanced to my most recent position of supervisor within the parks and recreation section of Newcastle City Council. This advancement only came after completion of relevant studies and, in particular, the completion of my degree from Charles Sturt University. My working background has given me a sound appreciation of the issues and concerns of grassroots community members whom I now represent in this House. I believe my background will bring into this Parliament another diverse point of view, which will help to guide and influence policy and overall government direction.

My first opportunity as an elected representative came in September 1999, when I was elected to the Lake Macquarie City Council. Local government is responsible for day-to-day services. I am a strong supporter of local government. Local government deserves the status of being recognised within our Federal Constitution. My experience in local government has provided me with a comprehensive understanding of public administration and the need for local authorities to place a greater focus on their core activities. The Charlestown electorate comprises both Lake Macquarie City Council and Newcastle City Council. I recognise the efforts of both local councils. However, I feel this tier of government needs further financial support to continue to improve its focus on service delivery for its communities.

It is not my intention to spell out in every detail the priorities of my electorate. I will do so at the appropriate time. However, I will make mention of some matters relating to Charlestown. The people of the Charlestown electorate have experienced a rapid growth in population and have a heavy reliance on private motor vehicle usage because of the need to travel to their places of employment. Public transport remains high on the agenda of the community, and mechanisms to encourage the use of public transport continue to be a challenge. Elderly residents and the not so fortunate continue to seek improvements to the accessibility of public transport. The Hunter region longs for a fully integrated transport system that can take our region forward by supplying a range of transport services that not only encourage people to use them but that are affordable and accessible.

With regard to education facilities, the electorate is fortunate to have a wide variety of both public and private schools, providing choice for parents and the community. My daughter currently attends Charlestown Public School and I acknowledge the fine efforts of Mr Ken Beckett, the principal, and his staff for their demonstrated commitment to the public education sector, to our children and to our nation's future. It is important to acknowledge the fine efforts of all teaching staff in both the private and public schools in the electorate. I believe education is the critical element in the growth of future generations, to ensure that as a nation we excel. Over the coming months I will visit as many schools as possible in the electorate to meet with staff and parents to discuss and understand their issues, to ensure that I represent them and assist in delivering continuous improvements to all education facilities. With regard to higher education and TAFE, for many years the Charlestown campus of the Hunter Institute of Technology has provided numerous courses of study with a high-level of commitment by teaching staff. This is the campus I chose to attend while undertaking further studies some years ago. I understand the campus has been transferring courses to the Kurri Kurri campus and in the longer term may close due to its inability to expand on the existing site. This is disappointing, when the Charlestown campus is centrally located to support services such as public transport and accommodation.

The primary provider of health services is John Hunter Hospital, which is located immediately outside the northern boundary of the Charlestown electorate. John Hunter Hospital and its professional doctors and nursing staff are leading the way in delivering a diverse range of medical services to the Hunter region. Quality medical services are essential to our community's wellbeing and it is devastating to see the continued degrading of health services by the Federal Government. The Hon. John Howard has never believed in a universal health care system and the people's ability to receive medical attention when in need. The value of Medicare has been in its delivery of a universal health care system. Since the election of the Howard Government we have seen the undermining of bulk billing, which has the flow-on effect of overloading our public hospital emergency departments. There is nothing honourable about this attack on our health-care services. I encourage members of the Charlestown electorate to rally against the Howard Government's destruction of our health system.

The Charlestown electorate is diverse, sustainable and looks forward to future economic growth. We will continue to change, with high-density residential developments and major commercial centre proposals on the agenda. With a diverse range of skills and qualities the region is a leader in best practice principles in the State. The electorate of Charlestown is known for its diversity in its social and economic make-up, yet it has a unique community strength of working together for the benefit of all. One example I will take the liberty of mentioning is the Windale Community Renewal Scheme. The suburb of Windale has for many years been regarded as socially disadvantaged due to its level of public housing, rate of unemployment and a broader negative public opinion. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

During recent years I have become associated with members of this community and have witnessed a significant change in the social structure, social attitude and social pride of many individuals and the broader community. This has caused some embarrassment to the few cynics who still hold negative views of the Windale community. The Windale Community Renewal Scheme is a whole-of-government approach, working with the community to resolve social issues and enhance the quality of life. This program has been initiated by the Premier's Department in partnership with the community, government and non-government agencies. I congratulate the community of Windale and offer my support to its continuation on the path to improvement. I chose to reside in Gateshead, a neighbouring suburb to Windale, some eight years ago and now have a young family.

My family and I are very proud of our place of residence and our community. The Charlestown electorate is host to one of the most beautiful coastlines in New South Wales, and hence requires the careful and active management of these coastal lands. Glenrock State Recreation Area is preserved, with the focus now turned to the coastal wetlands known as the Belmont Wetlands. These wetlands were abused by the former owner, BHP. However, thanks to the Carr Labor Government, it has acquired yet another piece of prime coastal land. I and other members will be seeking the formal gazettal of this coastal land.

Many years ago a private owner gifted land at Dudley to the community for an aged-care facility. The site is known to locals as the Dudley Old Men's Home, which is situated on the ridgeline immediately on the coast, with the Glenrock State Recreation Area to the north and the Awabakal Nature Reserve to the south. Hunter Area Health, which currently has title to the property, has neglected the property. The buildings on site have been vandalised and are now in a state of disrepair. Given the extreme shortage of aged-care beds on the eastern side of the lake and the ageing of our population, the community is strongly of the view that the site should be used for the provision of aged-care services. There is, however, a lack of commercial interest in this proposal. Failing this, I see enormous value to the community in protecting the undeveloped portion of the site and including it in the surrounding State recreation area and the Awabakal Nature Reserve. I place on record my intention to pursue this matter on behalf of the community I represent to ensure that this prime coastal land is saved for future generations.

Another great place to visit is the Fernleigh track, a disused rail line connecting Belmont in the south to the main rail network at Adamstown in the north. The line was originally used to transport coal to the port of Newcastle. However, it was also used as a community line at one stage. Through a partnership between the Carr Government and local councils the track is now being transformed into a shared pathway for cyclists and pedestrians. It will be a regionally significant recreational asset. The Fernleigh track, following completion of stage one, has proven that with the commitment of community leaders and interest groups, combined with funding from the State and from local councils, much can be achieved. I look forward to seeing the further stages of this track being constructed and the connection from Adamstown to Belmont completed.

Any successful society must be built upon the foundations of equality and access to education, health care and employment opportunities. No longer is BHP our largest employer. Rather, it is education. We rely upon the experience we gained from our steel and related industries to reposition our employment base. Since the Carr Government was elected in March 1995 unemployment in the Hunter has dropped from 11.5 per cent to 7.3 per cent. In simple terms, you need employment opportunities to generate income, you need a solid education to achieve your employment and, finally, you need to maintain your health to fulfil your employment. The Hunter Advantage Fund, funded by the Carr Government, has allowed the Hunter opportunities for new employment. I congratulate the small business operators of the Charlestown electorate on their commitment and drive to ensure that choice is provided and that their contribution to economic and employment growth continues.

It is pleasing to note that within the electorate there is a strong commitment to the principles and philosophies of the trade union movement. Community members seek the fundamentals in employment, those

being the pride of being gainfully employed, having security in employment, and having standard working conditions and rates of pay. Having played a role in my relevant union, I support the trade union movement and encourage our working communities to ensure they also preserve their rights as employees and join their relevant unions. The electorate has, over some years, seen a significant change in the housing market, with settings around the commercial centres and coastal environs being subject to substantial increases in property values. While this is good for individual owners, it now places many properties out of reach for those in lower income ranges. Local authorities are aware of affordable housing principles and are looking at opportunities to develop a range of affordable housing types in a number of suburbs.

I look forward to working with, and being part of, the Hunter Labor team to develop and implement strategies to see our region grow and the community prosper. I, as the member for Charlestown, and by delivery of this inaugural speech, commit myself to work to the best of my ability for the electorate and to always represent the interests of the people for the long-term benefit of all. One of the great Labor Premiers spoke these words in 1947:

To improve the State we must improve conditions for the people living in it. We must improve the people's surroundings, professional and economic opportunities, education and cultural outlook. The Government believes that all people have the right to the best education and modern amenities, whether they live in remote country districts or in the heart of Sydney. We want to improve the welfare of the individual and consequently the welfare of the State. The Government needs the co-operation of the people just as the people need guidance by the State administration.

Those are the words of Premier McKell, and they are just as relevant today. In closing I remind the House of the words often spoken by Premier Carr during the recent election campaign:

Labor has achieved a lot, but there's still more to do.

I look forward to the challenges of doing it and to working for the people of New South Wales. I thank you, Mr Speaker. I also thank the Deputy Premier, Mr Andrew Refshauge, for his tremendous support over the last months.

Mr SPEAKER: I extend to the honourable member for Charlestown my personal congratulations and wish him a long and illustrious parliamentary career. I note the presence in the gallery of a number of friends, constituents and family of the honourable member, including the distinguished presence of the Hon. Peter Morris, a former Federal Minister and the honourable member's father.

Mr PEARCE (Coogee) [8.48 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I consider it a privilege to have the opportunity today to deliver my inaugural speech in the New South Wales Parliament, the oldest Parliament in Australia. To the other new members elected to this place in the March elections, I extend my congratulations and look forward to working with them over the coming parliamentary term. I also look forward to working with, and learning from, my colleagues in the Labor Party caucus. I am sure it will be an enlightening experience. I represent the seat of Coogee, in Sydney's eastern suburbs. The seat ranges from Bondi Road, Bondi, in the north to Oberon Street, Coogee, in the south. I have lived in the area for 40 years. I love the beaches, the relaxed cafe lifestyle—and, yes, I do drink latte—and the energetic and engaged and engaging people. Its residents have passion. They marched in great numbers for reconciliation. They marched for peace and they voted for a republic. It is a wonderful part of Sydney. It is an enormous honour to be elected by over 62.5 per cent of the two-party vote. I will return the confidence of the voters of Coogee in me to the very best of my ability.

Coogee is the smallest seat in land area in the State. It has a high population density and all the pressures of high-density urban living: traffic, development pressures due to rapidly escalating land values, and high demand on limited open space. As Mayor of Waverley I am only too aware of these pressures and I sympathise with my colleague the Mayor of Randwick, Councillor Dominic Sullivan, as he too grapples with the social dislocation, especially to lower income earners, occasioned by gentrification and rapid development. Coogee is fortunate to have a richly diverse community, culturally and ethnically. Together with the neighbouring seat of Vaucluse, Coogee has a vibrant Jewish community as well as a Russian-speaking community that is making an increasing contribution to life in our area. It is the birthplace of the great Australian institution of the surf lifesaving movement. I have four lifesaving clubs within my electorate—Tamarama, Clovelly, Coogee and, with due respect to Bondi club, the first club, Bronte.

The Coogee electorate is also the home of the great Randwick Rugby Union Club, part of the catchment for the South Sydney Rabbitohs and, of course, the current league premiers, the Eastern Suburbs Roosters. It also contains the headquarters of horse racing in New South Wales, the world-famous Royal Randwick. This is in addition to the many bowling clubs, swimming clubs, and even a croquet club. All in all, it

is a very sporting electorate. In many ways the seat of Coogee is a cross-section of Australia. It has people who are doing it tough; it has people who are very wealthy. It has residents who have lived in the area all their lives, and residents who have come to the area recently. It has residents of Anglo and Irish heritage whose families have lived in Australia for generations, and it has residents who have recently arrived from all parts of the globe. In short, it has a rich multicultural community living in a reasonable degree of harmony. It is a great place to live and it is a singular honour to be elected to represent it.

I will outline some of my motivation in seeking election to this place, but first a little background. My parents came to Australia from Britain after the Second World War, Dad having been born in Lancashire and Mum in Glasgow, Scotland. Mum came out with her parents; dad's parents came out not long after. My paternal grandfather worked as a laboratory technician at Granville Tech. My maternal grandfather worked as a shipwright on Cockatoo Island. Dad worked in the textile industry in Ararat, having qualified as a textile technologist in England. He later moved into the commercial side of textiles, establishing a successful textile agency. Mum entered nursing and later went into office work. Mum and Dad actually met very close to here—across the road at St Stephen's Church.

I spent the first seven years of my life in Sydney's west—living with my parents and grandparents in Granville, Berala and Merrylands. My early schooling was at Granville public. When I was seven I moved with Dad and my late stepmother to Bronte in Sydney's eastern suburbs and carried on my education at Bronte public. Some years later my son, Thane, was also to attend Bronte public, and I was for a period president of the parents and citizens association at that school. From Bronte public I went to Sydney Boys High School for my secondary education. From my experiences at Granville public, Bronte public and Sydney Boys High comes my belief in and commitment to public education.

It was at Sydney Boys that I developed my earliest interest in politics in the broadest sense. The late 1960s and the early years of the 1970s were a period of ferment in western societies. Australia was not immune. The undeclared war against the national aspirations of the Vietnamese people was causing enormous tension within our society. As a teenager edging towards national service age I could not be unaware of the public debate. I was angered by a lottery system being used to send young men off to fight in an undeclared war.

At the same time a political colossus was beginning to stand astride politics at the national level: Gough Whitlam. He captivated the mood of the nation for change, a desire to throw off the conservatism of the post-war era, and a desire to start bringing substance to the myth of Australia being an egalitarian society. When in 1974 the conservatives under Billy Snedden made their first attempt to thwart the democratic will that the Australian people had expressed in the 1972 elections I, like many of my generation, joined the Australian Labor Party, being "recruited" by my friend and comrade David Patch outside the Fisher library. I was at the time in first year at Sydney university, the first member of my family ever to have had the opportunity to pursue university-level study. It was also the first year that attendance at university was free of fees, a major social reform introduced by the Whitlam Government, and one that as a society we should recommit to.

It is regrettable that by a combination of escalating fees and limiting access to financial support during study, the current conservative Government in Canberra is yet again putting tertiary education out of the reach of many Australians. Joining the Australian Labor Party at the Bronte branch, I met a number of people with whom I have formed lasting friendships and for whom I retain enormous admiration. Jeannette McHugh, later to become the Federal member for Phillip, then Grayndler, and a Federal Minister, was one. Ann Symonds, later a member of the Legislative Council, was another. Both Jeannette and Ann have a deep commitment to the principles of social justice—principles I share.

In my early days in the party I was fortunate in having the opportunity to meet and get to know the State member, Syd Einfeld. My earliest recollections of Syd were many years earlier while at Bronte public. And it was a very happy recollection: Syd would go to the local public schools on what was called Empire Day, arrive during the school assembly, and give all the kids the rest of the day off. Syd was a rare local political representative who was respected broadly in our community. Rarely has a politician left such a lasting mark on society as Syd did.

On becoming a Minister in the Wran Government, Syd introduced legislation to protect consumers from the many sharp practices and the shonks who used them to exploit the vulnerable in our community. This legislation was arguably the most progressive in the world, and certainly forms the core of the consumer protection legislation that has been introduced in Australia over the past 25 years. I also met Ernie Page, who was then the Mayor of Waverley. What Syd was doing to advance social justice at the State level, Ernie was

doing at the local level. By the late 1970s Waverley Council had become involved in the direct provision of affordable housing and was expanding local government involvement in areas well outside the traditional "roads, rates and rubbish".

In 1980 I was Ernie's running mate for council; I was not elected. In 1983, again with Ernie, who had succeeded Syd as the member for Waverley, I was elected to Waverley Council. Between 1983 and 1987 on Waverley Council I saw at close range the ugly side of conservative politics. Ernie retired from Waverley Council at the 1987 elections, when the Waverley community expressed its judgment of the four years of Liberal control of council and swept the Labor team under Barbara Armitage's leadership into office. Waverley has not risked it with the Liberals again in 16 years. Ernie went on to retain the seat of Waverley, and subsequently Coogee, until his retirement at the last election as a very popular and well-respected member.

Between 1995 and 1999 Ernie was Minister for Local Government. Across the political spectrum in local government he is considered to have been the best local government Minister in living memory. As my involvement in the party increased, my early, sometimes unstructured, radicalism—some would say it is still unstructured—crystallised into a coherent democratic socialist philosophy. This was in part as a consequence of having read some of the speeches and writings of Nye Bevan, who, among other achievements as a senior Minister in the post-war Attlee Government, introduced the National Health Service in Britain.

Democratic Socialism is the political philosophy I still adhere to, tempered though it may be by the practical realities of day-to-day politics. I am a person who believes that political decision-making, fostered by necessity responding to ad hoc events, should be underpinned by a consistent and coherent philosophy and ideology. This is the only way to ensure a consistent program of social reform and to advance the cause of social justice. I believe that a basic commitment to social justice is what distinguishes a member of the Labor Party from the Conservatives, for whom inequality is the necessary consequence of their uncritical commitment to the mysteries of the market economy.

I believe that an economic system that needs a level of natural unemployment to survive, promoted under the guise of incentive and significant inequality of wealth and opportunity, and cannot deliver good material quality of life to all members of the community is fundamentally flawed. We live in an unequal society. Within a stone's throw of this Parliament are fellow citizens who are living rough on the streets, or whose accommodation is a boarding house room with no legal protection against the capricious act of a landlord who wants vacant possession to sell or develop. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I will advocate amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act to, as a very minimum, treat boarding house residents and related residents as tenants. Yet, side by side with this poverty are extraordinary displays of affluence. I believe it is the role of the State to intervene to protect the vulnerable and disadvantaged, and to achieve a more equal distribution of wealth in our society. I would like to read a short quote from Nye Bevan:

Where wealth is concentrated in few hands the outcome is ostentatious spending and the meretricious glamour that goes with it. The accompanying social climate lends a certain superficial circumstantiality to the claim that only the competitive society is pervaded by a spirit of "adventure". It is more "adventurous" to have a number of millionaires than it is to spend the money wasted by them, on curing and preventing ill-health. The fashionable magazines and newspapers neon-light the petty foibles of the well-to-do. Through the dazzle it is not easy to see the mass of discomfort and downright misery which is the other side of the picture.

We also live in an economic system that conspicuously fails to value our natural environment. On a macro level we utilise measures of economic growth that actually record, as a positive, activity that causes environmental destruction. To achieve an ecologically sustainable economic system, all costs have to be incorporated into the final assessable outcome. Accounting standards have to be modified so that social and environmental costs are factored into both public and private sector projects. Current methodology, especially for private sector projects, places an insignificant or zero value on social or environmental inputs. In the interests of long-term ecological sustainability, that has to change.

As a species, human beings are not only destroying the habitat of other species on the planet but putting at risk our own long-term survival. The Federal Government's failure to ratify even the moderate Kyoto objectives highlights the lack of recognition of our place in, and impact on, the global ecosystem. I am proud to be a member of the Carr Labor Government that has committed New South Wales to meeting the Kyoto targets despite the Federal Government. The efforts of multinational agribusiness to force Australia to permit the introduction of genetically modified crops is the latest example of private profit being put ahead of public and environmental good. The debate about genetically modified organisms [GMOs] being permitted for commercial cultivation, and thus being released into the environment, is complex. A summary of the key issues cannot really do the debate justice.

However, my concerns revolve around three distinct issues. The first is the impact on human health of modified food products. Little independent assessment has been done of the impact of these products on long-term human health. The bulk of research data has been provided by the promoters themselves or by research centres funded by the biotech industry. The notorious example of the starlink corn, which included a gene of the Brazil nut, is a case in point. The inclusion of this gene had the potential to provoke allergic reaction in some people who consumed this product. It is now, thankfully, not permitted for human consumption. The second is the modification of the genetic make-up of plants, and indeed animals, has been subject to no long-term studies as to their impact on natural species.

The Canadian experience, specifically in the case of modified canola, has shown that buffer zones do not prevent the intermingling of pollen between modified and non-modified crops. The myth that the promoters of GMOs peddle, that genetic modification will lead to a reduction in herbicide and pesticide usage, is demonstrably a nonsense. If the objective is to reduce the use of agricultural chemicals, why did Monsanto develop a product called Round-Up Ready Soy, which is resistant to higher level usage of Round-Up, some of whose component elements are known to bioaccumulate in the environment?

The third is the economic and trade impact of permitting the commercial growing of GMOs. The European Union and major markets in North Asia will not import this product. Last year 15 per cent of our canola crop was exported to Europe. Australian agriculture in general has an excellent reputation for quality and purity. Why would you put that at risk? I have not even touched on the impact of proprietary rights in seed on the Third World and the impact on any concept of fair trade in agricultural products. It is to the credit of the New South Wales Labor Government that New South Wales has placed a moratorium on the commercial planting of what has been described by, as I recall, "one of the heirs and successors according to law" as Frankenstein foods.

I referred earlier to some of the influences on my political development over the years. But any successful election campaign requires not only ideas but also energy and commitment. My branch members in the seat of Coogee have it in bucket loads. They hand-delivered tens of thousands of personally addressed leaflets, and they staffed street stalls and polling booths. I would like to thank Christine, Peter, April, Noel, Sam, Vern, Joe, Barry, Dom, Bruce, Carolyn, Phillipa, Sue, Stephanie, Kerry, Pauline, Paula, Mary and all my very many friends, branch members and supporters. Thanks heaps!

I would also give special thanks to Anthony Albanese, George Campbell, Damian O'Connor, John Graham and Verity Firth—even if we ignored some of your suggestions, Verity. I received valuable support from the New South Wales branch office, especially from Mark and Carl. In addition, I received invaluable support and assistance from the trade union movement, which has a proud history in New South Wales of defending workers' rights. As a trade unionist for more than 25 years I have no doubt about the importance of the industrial wing of the Labor movement, and this will be reflected in my time in this place.

Special mention must be made of the best local campaign director in the Labor Party, Paul Tracey. Finally, I must thank my family: my son, Thane, who has had to put up with me for 27 years—by the age of 10 Thane had attended more Labor Party and union meetings than most people will experience in a lifetime; my stepsons, Blaise and Paris, who adapted to a lifestyle around our home very different to the norm; my dad, who watched me over the years and noticed that running a business was not my strong point, but supported me in my endeavours; my mum, who accepted that her only son was not the easiest person to pin down, even for a birthday dinner; my grandfather, who, at 98, still offers me his forthright opinions; and my lover, friend, and comrade, Ingrid, without whom I am not sure I would have gone the distance. I am honoured to stand here today as the representative of the seat of Coogee.

Mr SPEAKER: I extend my personal congratulations to the honourable member for Coogee on his inaugural speech.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MEDICARE POLICY

Urgent Motion

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Ms SALIBA (Illawarra) [9.10 p.m.]: I support the urgent motion moved by the honourable member for Kiama that deals with the Federal Government's changes to Medicare. In doing so, I reject the amendment

moved by the Opposition. Honourable members opposite should be ashamed of not being in the Chamber today to discuss one of the most important issues facing the people of New South Wales: the provision of health services and their cost. Constituents whose families are similar to mine—I have four young children—know that if one child becomes ill it is guaranteed that the other children will suffer the same illness. Infections spread quickly in families. It will now cost families an arm and a leg to get medical treatment.

Mr O'Farrell: Why?

Ms SALIBA: Because the Federal Government's introduction of a code payment system will force them to decide whether they can afford to have medical treatment.

Mr O'Farrell: Have a look at the package.

Ms SALIBA: The package is cheating my constituents; it is removing health options. Health is an important issue to the people of New South Wales. It is certainly important to the people of the Illawarra. Good health will reflect across the board. It can make a difference to people's opportunities, education and many other aspects of their lives. It is crucial that we have good health and a good health system. Years ago the Federal Labor Government introduced Medibank, but when the Coalition Government came into office that scheme went by the wayside. The same thing is happening with Medicare: the Federal Government is destroying the system. This system works well and it serves everyone. Every Australian has a right to access medical treatment when it is required. The Federal Government's changes will impose an extra burden on accident and emergency departments.

Mr O'Farrell: How?

Ms SALIBA: People will not be able to afford to go to the doctor, so they will go to the accident and emergency department at their local hospitals and wait to get medical treatment.

Mr ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Mills): Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting. He has already spoken in the debate.

Ms SALIBA: If they want their families to be treated, they will find that treatment wherever they can. If that means sitting in an accident and emergency department for hours, that is what people will do if they cannot afford anything else. On the other hand, they might decide not to have their sick children treated. Parents will make decisions about their child's best interests and health based on the cost. Once they have left the doctor's surgery, they may need to have prescriptions filled, which costs a minimum of \$17 or \$18. I am referring to average families, with one or two working parents, who are struggling to make ends meet. They will be severely disadvantaged.

In my region Medicare provider numbers allocated to general practitioners to enable them to bulk bill have declined over the years. I would hate to have this excellent health system go down the gurgler because money is being withheld that could be used in New South Wales. We already pay far more than our fair share in GST. We do not get back our fair share so far as the public health system is concerned. We do not want the Coalition to destroy our public health system. We have a great system in the Illawarra and I want it to survive. I support the motion moved by my colleague the honourable member for Kiama. I hope members of the Opposition will come into the Chamber and join the debate. [*Time expired.*]

Mr GAUDRY (Newcastle) [9.15 p.m.]: Earlier this evening we saw a disgraceful attempt by the Opposition to shut down this debate because it is not prepared to debate the fact that \$600 million is being ripped out of the Medicare system by the Federal Government. Bulk billing will become less available and, as the honourable member for Illawarra said, people on incomes of more than \$32,000 will not be able to afford to take their children to a doctor. If the doctor does not bulk bill—the number bulk billing is declining—families will have to pay an unspecified amount. In effect, that will make health care less accessible and less affordable. Members opposite obviously do not want to hear the comments of a range of people about the Federal Government's proposed changes to Medicare. I will read some of those comments. Francis Sullivan from Catholic Health Australia stated:

This package disproportionately hits the hard-up and the sick and erodes the value of the Medicare entitlement for people without concession cards ... Families and people on meagre incomes will find bulk billing elusive ...

A public rally held in Newcastle today attracted 200 people—trade unionists, ordinary workers and families in the area—who wanted to make it clear that the Federal Government's proposed changes to Medicare are unacceptable. Dr Tim Woodruff from the Doctors Reform Society stated:

Working families with one income will be reduced to taking just one of three sick kids to the doctor and then sharing the treatment in a desperate attempt to afford health care.

Andrew McCallum from the Australian Council of Social Service stated:

The concept that bulk billing should only be for pensioners and health care card holders will lead to many of those patients being treated as second class citizens, left to wait at the end of the queue behind the 'paying' patients.

Martyn Goddard of the Australian Consumers Association stated:

In the wake of these measures, the collapse of bulk billing will accelerate and even more people—including pensioners—will not be able to afford to go to the doctor.

Victoria Gilmore of the Australian Nursing Federation stated:

Working Australians on low to medium incomes will be hit very hard by this package.

Dr Gwen Gray of the Australian Women's Health Network stated:

With an income just a dollar more than the health care card holder cut off level, such families will be faced by huge bills just to see the GP ...

The Minister for Health asked: What will be the impact of this proposal on health care in New South Wales? It will lead to the overloading of our accident and emergency departments. I refer honourable members to the situation in Newcastle. The accident and emergency department at the John Hunter Hospital treats more than 50,000 adults and children each year. It is the busiest accident and emergency department in New South Wales. The accident and emergency departments at the Belmont District Hospital, the Mater Misericordiae Hospital and the Maitland Hospital have also experienced an increase in the number of patients treated each year.

As the Federal Government has wound back its commitment to Medicare, more and more middle and low-income earners have been forced to seek treatment at the accident and emergency departments of our public hospitals. Of course, apart from rebuilding the accident and emergency department at John Hunter Hospital, this Government has allocated an extra \$1 million this year to increase the number of beds from eight to 16. However, we will still be under increasing pressure because of the extraction of \$600 million by the Federal Government from the Medicare system.

The departure from the established system of general practice means that fewer and fewer general practitioners will be willing to bulk bill. The effect on the community will be that there will be reduced access to Medicare bulk billing, higher pressure on the public hospital system and the loss to the Australian people of open accessibility to bulk billing under the Medicare system. That is an absolute disgrace. It is also disgraceful that the Opposition has refused to debate those issues and has done everything possible to prevent the motion from being debated.

Mr BROWN (Kiama) [9.20 p.m.], in reply: I welcome the opportunity to respond to contributions that have been made to the debate. Although I welcome all the contributions made by honourable members who participated in the debate, I particularly welcome the contribution made by the only speaker for the Opposition who was willing to say anything about the issue, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. The only point worth noting about his contribution was that his half-baked amendment does nothing to support the Federal Government's proposal. It merely calls upon the State Government to constructively resolve the Federal Government's proposed new Commonwealth-States health agreement, which is hardly expressing support for it. The point was made during the debate that there is a bulk billing crisis in Australia. That is so, but it is a crisis that in large part has been created by John Howard. He is the person who has not increased the schedule fee for general practitioners in line with the cost of running a practice. The continual reduction in funds for general practitioners has ensured that a bulk billing crisis has been created. That is confirmed by the bringing forward by the Prime Minister of this proposal.

I compliment the honourable member for Monaro on the contribution he made to the debate. It was a terrific speech by such a new member. He is obviously apprised of the issues and knows that there is a nursing

shortage in this State. He pointed out that the Federal Government provided only 160 places for nurse training at a local university whereas 500 people had applied. The Opposition carps on and on about the insufficient number of nurses, yet the Federal Coalition has provided only 160 places for nurse training. I compliment the honourable member for Canterbury on her inaugural speech in which she referred to a Newtown doctor and his distress at having looked after patients under the bulk billing system for 25 years while Labor Governments were in power, but now being unable to do so. She also mentioned the international acknowledgement of Australia's universal health care system. The honourable member for Manly also contributed to the debate. He is a terrific Independent member. He recognises that health is a key government responsibility and that bulk billing under the Medicare system was a key aspect of the universality of Australia's health care system.

Mr Hazzard: Why is he so good?

Mr BROWN: Because he makes sensible points. He pointed out the scandalous waste of rare resources that the Howard Government is putting into refunds for jogging shoes and gym membership and that those resources should be going into hospitals, the training of nurses and health care for our constituents. That is why he is a good member, and that is why he is returned after each election. He shows up all the members who represent electorates on Sydney's North Shore because he cares about his community.

The honourable member for Port Stephens referred to Dr Felix, who practices in his electorate, which is in the northern Hunter region. He also referred to the indemnity insurance crisis and the way in which the Howard Government is shifting costs onto the States while shirking its own responsibilities. He pointed out that wrecking the bulk billing system has created huge demand in the emergency departments of this State's public hospitals while the Federal Government washes its hands and prefers to spend money on jogging shoes and gym membership through the rebate scheme instead of putting nurses into local hospitals.

The honourable member for Peats made an excellent contribution to the debate. Her simple premise is that Australians like Medicare. When John Howard was elected in 1996, he promised to keep Medicare—but he also promised not to introduce a goods and services tax. The Prime Minister is a shifty, sneaky character, and he is responsible for the decline in bulk billing on the Central Coast. The honourable member for Fairfield wants to know where all the doctors are that he is supposed to have. He also wanted to know what the Opposition's intention was in moving its half-baked amendment. He referred to doctors moving out of the south-western areas of Sydney and setting up boutique medical services on the North Shore. I also thank the honourable member for Parramatta, the honourable member for Liverpool, the honourable member for Illawarra and the honourable member for Newcastle, who addressed the significance of the universality of health care in the type of society that Australians want to live in. They pointed out that the universality of health care is of fundamental importance to the education and identity of Australians and the way in which families are being brought up. I commend the motion and reject completely the amendment moved by the Opposition.

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 48

Mr Amery	Mr Greene	Mr Orkopoulos
Ms Andrews	Mr Gibson	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Barr	Ms Hay	Mr Pearce
Mr Bartlett	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Ms Beamer	Mr Hunter	Mr Price
Mr Black	Ms Judge	Ms Saliba
Mr Brown	Ms Keneally	Mr Sartor
Ms Burney	Mr Knowles	Mr Scully
Miss Burton	Mr Lynch	Mr Stewart
Mr Campbell	Mr McBride	Mr West
Mr Collier	Mr McGrane	Mr Whan
Mr Corrigan	Mr McLeay	Mr Yeadon
Mr Crittenden	Ms Meagher	
Ms D'Amore	Mr Mills	
Mr Debus	Mr Morris	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Gadiel	Mr Newell	Mr Ashton
Mr Gaudry	Ms Nori	Mr Martin

Noes, 34

Mr Aplin	Mrs Hopwood	Ms Seaton
Mr Armstrong	Mr Humpherson	Mrs Skinner
Ms Berejikian	Mr Kerr	Mr Slack-Smith
Mr Cansdell	Mr Merton	Mr Souris
Mr Constance	Ms Moore	Mr Stoner
Mr Debnam	Mr Oakeshott	Mr Tink
Mr Draper	Mr O'Farrell	Mr Torbay
Mr Fraser	Mr Page	Mr R. W. Turner
Mrs Hancock	Mr Piccoli	
Mr Hartcher	Mr Pringle	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hazzard	Mr Richardson	Mr George
Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire

Pairs

Mr Carr	Mr J. H. Turner
Dr Refshauge	Mr Brogden

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment negatived.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 52

Mr Amery	Mr Gibson	Mr Oakeshott
Ms Andrews	Mr Greene	Mr Orkopoulos
Mr Barr	Ms Hay	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Bartlett	Mr Hickey	Mr Pearce
Ms Beamer	Mr Hunter	Mrs Perry
Mr Black	Ms Judge	Mr Price
Mr Brown	Ms Keneally	Ms Saliba
Ms Burney	Mr Knowles	Mr Sartor
Miss Burton	Mr Lynch	Mr Scully
Mr Campbell	Mr McBride	Mr Stewart
Mr Collier	Mr McGrane	Mr Torbay
Mr Corrigan	Mr McLeay	Mr West
Mr Crittenden	Ms Meagher	Mr Whan
Ms D'Amore	Mr Mills	Mr Yeadon
Mr Debus	Ms Moore	
Mr Draper	Mr Morris	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Gadiel	Mr Newell	Mr Ashton
Mr Gaudry	Ms Nori	Mr Martin

Noes, 30

Mr Aplin	Mrs Hopwood	Mrs Skinner
Mr Armstrong	Mr Humpherson	Mr Slack-Smith
Ms Berejikian	Mr Kerr	Mr Souris
Mr Cansdell	Mr Merton	Mr Stoner
Mr Constance	Mr O'Farrell	Mr Tink
Mr Debnam	Mr Page	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	
Mrs Hancock	Mr Pringle	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson	Mr George
Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire
Ms Hodgkinson	Ms Seaton	

Pairs

Mr Carr
Dr Refshauge

Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Brogden

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

COUNTRY AGRICULTURAL SHOWS**Matter of Public Importance**

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [9.40 p.m.]: At the outset I congratulate the Royal Agricultural Society of New South Wales on its recent successful 2003 Royal Easter Show. Again, the National Party was honoured to host this year's showgirls and rural achievers at Parliament House. The Miss Showgirl and rural achievers competitions are not possible without input from country shows; that is where the struggle really begins. Country shows are doing it tough. In my electorate the Bonalbo, Woodenbong, Nimbin, Kyogle, Casino and the North Coast National Lismore shows have had to make serious decisions over the past 12 months as to whether they continue holding annual shows.

In recent years, all shows throughout New South Wales have faced tremendous losses and that has resulted in a drop in support. Additionally, the shows have faced rising insurance costs and problems associated with maintenance and replacement of rings, buildings, pavilions, toilets, grandstands, et cetera. Most show societies consist of committee members who are getting older and when they face losses and problems they get tired and in some cases lose their enthusiasm. Many showgrounds societies are only trustees looking after government land. They face the never-ending problem of whether to borrow money to build or replace buildings and deal with paying back the loan.

It takes a lot of hard work by many people to run a country show. An overriding worry over the past twelve months has been the drought. In the past few months the Harness Racing Authority decided that driver-to-driver insurance will not be available to drivers who compete at country shows that do not have a licensed harness racing track. That decision will affect approximately 16 shows throughout the State. Everyone who has an association with shows would realise that harness racing is an important part of the ring events. To the individual rural communities, the annual show means so much more than an annual cash injection. Annual shows provide a focal point for many in the far-flung communities in rural and regional New South Wales.

Shows unite communities and promote community services; it is their window in which they can show local achievements in livestock, sewing, jam preserving and cake making. The decline of shows is of major concern to me and I am sure to every other member of this House. It is becoming difficult to attract girls to enter the showgirl competitions. I have received a letter from John Gibson, President of Group One, North Coast National Agricultural and Industrial Society Inc., which represents shows from the Tweed through to Grafton. The letter stated:

The ever increasing burdens of insurances and maintenance of buildings has over the last few years placed many restraints on our shows, as repairs and the general meanness of these grounds take a large majority of the Society's profits and the remainder disappears in Insurances, Rates, Water, Power. This in turn restricts the promotion of special events at most of the shows' annual presentations. Special entertainment is required to enable us to attract larger crowds.

I know of no other organisation that is supported by such a large number of voluntary workers. As John Gibson stated, communities get behind the shows. His letter outlines the typical problems faced by every show society in New South Wales. Communities raise funds and ask for help by way of volunteer labour, et cetera. However, there is only so much they can do. In close-knit communities people do not have many other places than their showground, if they have one, in which to meet and talk about community matters. The area assistance schemes help with the provision and maintenance of halls and showgrounds in rural areas, but the problem is growing by the day.

I ask the Minister for his support in addressing the problems in country areas. This problem is not isolated to the north but occurs throughout the State. My comments would be supported by all members of this House who recognise the valuable contributions of country shows to local economies and tourism in country areas. A town that puts on a show attracts people from the region to exhibit their livestock. It also attracts

visitors, who inject tourist dollars into the town. We all talk about how much money governments, local councils and other bodies put into showgrounds and local show societies. As a local member it is not uncommon for me to present awards to people for 30 or 40 years of service to showgrounds and the like. The executive members of show societies have given many decades of service to shows.

The Royal Agricultural Society and NSW Agriculture are concerned about the future of shows. Changes in regional economics, competition and other factors have had an effect on many show societies, and they strongly support this call for more assistance to be given to future local shows. I call on the Carr Government to support this matter of public importance by providing the necessary funds and support to assure the future of country shows in New South Wales. Unless we get behind country shows and support them the societies will face the death knell. It is important that the community and the State contribute to the future of country shows.

Shows provide the opportunity for people in small communities to show off their wares and to show off their district to the State and to Australia. I congratulate the Royal Agricultural Society on its recent successful Royal Easter Show, but that show will not be successful in future if the local shows are unable to submit entries to it. It is important to keep country shows viable so they can contribute to the success of the yearly Royal Easter Show. More importantly, we have to start at the grassroots level so that the Chris Munces of the world start riding at pony club events such as those held at Casino, Kyogle and Kempsey. We must provide young riders with opportunities on their own doorstep so that they can contribute to the success of country shows in New South Wales.

Mr PRICE (Maitland) [9.48 p.m.]: I support the matter of public importance raised by the honourable member for Lismore on an issue that is very important for country New South Wales. Each year throughout New South Wales some 200 country shows are held, and they attract about one million visitors and generate about \$6 million in turnover. Country shows perform a vital role in rural areas in a number of ways. Shows are important for social interaction, particularly in times of hardship on the land such as the present drought. Shows are an opportunity for entertainment, education and social support for the whole family.

Country shows showcase various aspects of rural life and farm industries. They do that for local people and for urban visitors, many of whom often have little appreciation of the difficulties of rural life. For example, urban people gain insight into the production systems on farms and the environmental issues and climatic pressures faced on farms every day. The shows also provide an excellent opportunity for farmers to improve their technical knowledge and talk to their fellow farmers. Importantly, the networking is incredibly valuable as farmers often need access to information from agribusiness and government organisations at these shows. Show animals give farmers the opportunity to compare the performance of strains of crops and livestock in their local area.

The competitive arenas at shows are also great training facilities for equestrian and other sports, particularly for the young people in the district. For example, often these competitions have been the incubators of our internationally successful equestrian teams. Show competitions for livestock, farm produce and crafts also provide exhibitors with the opportunity to gain technical expertise and to view excellence in farm production. These competitions also provide valuable experience and practical skills useful in farm management and rural living.

NSW Agriculture has had a long-term involvement with country shows. They provide a major extension opportunity for the department's research and development programs. The department also uses them for promotion of disease control measures and improving general industry awareness about disease control. Country shows also provide agribusiness organisations and other government agencies with an extra opportunity to market products and to improve awareness of policy issues. The shows also provide government agencies with an opportunity to gain feedback from rural and regional communities and agricultural industries. Country shows are also places where new ideas are generated—ideas that lead to new developments and directions in departmental programs. As a result of country shows, there are often embryos of new innovations for products that industry provides to the rural communities.

NSW Agriculture also operates a purpose-designed mobile display unit, often referred to as the Ag Van, at country shows and similar rural events. This van gives NSW Agriculture the opportunity to provide information on a wide range of agricultural issues, from pasture and soil management through to plant pests, weeds, livestock production and natural resource management. There is a strong emphasis on education. This information is also available to people from cities and larger towns who might not have had a chance to learn

about agriculture. The interactive displays and takeaway information on a wide range of agricultural issues is an important source of information about rural issues for those people.

Country shows and the show societies behind them therefore make an important contribution to their local and regional economies in many ways. However, as I stated earlier, country shows are not simply about money, economics and industry. It is no exaggeration to say that country shows encapsulate the qualities of the local town or region in which they are located. They are a showcase for the produce of the primary producers of the town or region; they are a meeting point for the people of the town or region; they are an important communication mechanism for the communities they serve; and they allow old friends to catch up and exchange gossip, yarn to one another.

For these and other reasons it is not exaggerating to say that country shows are a repository for the culture of the communities they serve. However, in recent years many country shows and country show societies have been under serious financial pressure. In recent years declining rural populations and the falling real incomes of show goers in many areas due to drought and increasing running costs have all taken their toll on shows. Some shows have been forced to close facilities, and some have discontinued altogether. The rising cost of public liability insurance has had a major impact on the shows' running costs in recent years. Public liability insurance is a complex issue that the Government has worked to address in recent years, and we now appear to be achieving some results. The Government will continue to work to ensure that public liability costs and the running costs of show societies are kept at manageable levels.

As a country member in this Parliament I have a close association with a number of shows. I had a stand and exhibited at Maitland Show. I understand what the honourable member for Lismore says about the need for the harness racing industry to be maintained in country areas wherever possible. I also understand the concern of the industry about the need for rationalisation. There is a need for rationalisation, but also some thought must be given to the economic impact on the industry itself and on the impact on local areas caused by the use of the showgrounds. Certainly the Government will do what it can to assist in that area, but it is essentially an industry issue and something that must be addressed by the local participants and by the State industry as a whole.

I attended the Gresford Showground Trust luncheon at the last Gresford Show. It was my pleasure to meet with the president of the Royal Agricultural Society, Arthur Bragg, and to be his guest at the Royal Easter Show. I am always amazed at the way the volunteer element in country areas comes to the fore with the organisation and operation of country shows. It amazes me that with fairly meagre assets the local townspeople can put together an event that runs for two days, attracting literally thousands of people, and somehow manage to put on a fireworks display that would put most country show areas to shame. It thrills the kids. The country and western night is something to be seen. If you are my age you make sure you leave by six o'clock, but the kids have a ball.

As well as the camp drafting and the equestrian events we now have the trail bike riding competition. It is a pretty perilous occupation, but young people of 19 feel that they are made of steel, that they are never going to die, and they perform some amazing feats. It demonstrates the calibre of our country citizens and the lengths they are prepared to go to entertain themselves with minimum input from government. Like most other honourable members in country electorates, I have been asked for assistance for country shows. I am pleased to advise that in the case of the Dungog showground, where there was a very serious storm about 18 months ago, the Government has put in \$20,000 to replace a canteen building for the Apex Club and, through grants and loans, has provided another \$5,000 for the restoration of some of the damaged rodeo fencing structures.

The Government gave the Gresford show approximately \$5,000 for a works program to make the buildings comply with the Building Code of Australia and, more recently, money for stock pens. So the Government does supply money from time to time from several avenues. I congratulate the previous Minister for Land and Water Conservation, who in the last few months of the previous Government provided about \$220,000 for projects in this State: in Albury, \$34,000 for the completion of works at Watsons Hall; in Braidwood, \$6,000 for the connection of power supply to the commercial area; in Kempsey, \$4,427 for the installation of emergency lighting and fire protection equipment; in Maclean, \$11,000 for electrical works; in Morisset, \$18,000 for electrical works; and in Parkes, \$12,000 for the installation of bore water supply. The list goes on. The Government has given great assistance, and I believe that assistance will be maintained and expanded.

Mr STONER (Oxley) [9.58 p.m.]: It is wonderful to see the honourable member for Illawarra in the chair. Agricultural shows across New South Wales play an important role in educating people about the

operation and benefits of agriculture as well as providing exhibitors and visitors alike with a significant amount of enjoyment. The Royal Easter Show Great Australian Muster is the largest annual event in Australia. The Royal Easter Show is run by the Royal Agricultural Society [RAS] of New South Wales, a not-for-profit organisation which was established in 1822. This year's Easter show, which ran over 14 days, attracted approximately 900,000 visitors, while the show's web site recorded 120 million hits in just six weeks.

Each year during the Easter show the country comes to the city and, as such, it is a wonderful way of breaking down the city-country divide. Visitors to the show and to the web site are provided with an invaluable insight into the world of agriculture. Providing education about agriculture is becoming increasingly important as more of our young people are born and bred in cities and are not exposed to agricultural activities. The RAS has a proud history of advancing the cause of agriculture in New South Wales. The decision to form an agricultural society was made by a group of Sydney's leading citizens at a meeting in George Street way back in 1822 with the aim of furthering the quality of Australia's primary production by means of contests and competitions.

Since the first show was held in Parramatta in 1823 the RAS has met this objective admirably and has provided millions of Australians and tourists with their only direct contact with farm animals and other agricultural pursuits. Over 20,000 schoolchildren from across New South Wales were treated to a virtual classroom of a different kind when they visited this year's show. With no school holidays falling during the show period almost 200 secondary schools and 117 primary schools took advantage of the innovative schools program offered by the RAS. Primary schools were offered specially themed animal and farm tours, while secondary students had the choice of a range of activities, including designing their own product exhibits, judging fine cheese and meeting young exhibitors at the show.

I commend the RAS for its excellent Rural Achievers Award, which recognises young Australians who have an interest in rural affairs and demonstrate an active involvement in their local show society. While the Royal Easter Show goes from strength to strength, smaller agricultural shows in country centres across New South Wales must not be forgotten. As the honourable member for Lismore said earlier, where would the entries for the Royal Easter Show come from if it were not for country shows?

Last year approximately 200 such agricultural shows were held in New South Wales, attracting around one million visitors. In my electorate of Oxley, the Camden Haven, Comboyne, Wauchope, Kempsey and Macksville shows, which are institutions, make an important contribution to the Royal Easter Show each year. For example, this year 14-year-old Francis Waddell of Bowraville won the Australasian under 25 junior herdsman title—the youngest person ever to win this award. Michael Sultana of Kundabung won the first prize in the K. H. Harris memorial trophy for best bacon type sow under nine months. Daryl and Nea Hosking of Lake Innes, which is near Wauchope, won 15 ribbons for their dairy goats, including the senior reserve champion all breeds award. Hugh Aitken of Macksville won numerous prizes in the poultry section, establishing Nambucca as a centre of excellence for poultry.

Geoff and Mary Butler of Kamawa Santa Gertrudis Stud near Wauchope won the blue ribbon in the senior bull class. Those prizes were awarded to constituents in my electorate of Oxley. What a great contribution to a great show! These shows represent a great day for the whole family, with displays of flowers, farm produce, cooking, art and craft, farm animals, fireworks, sideshow rides, show bags, wood chopping and the grand parade. They provide a valuable boost to local town economies both from the point of view of tourism and the opportunities given to local suppliers of produce and local goods.

There has been and will continue to be problems for show societies with insurance cover, as well as increasing difficulties in attracting volunteers to cover the required workload, and meeting maintenance costs on show society assets. Ageing infrastructure is also a matter of concern to many show societies. This Government must do more to help local show societies continue their important work. The National Party is committed to working with show societies, with the Federal and State governments and with all other interested parties to promote agricultural shows across New South Wales.

Mr GEORGE (Lismore) [10.03 p.m.], in reply: I thank the honourable member for Maitland and the honourable member for Oxley for their contributions to debate on this matter of public importance. After hearing the contribution of the Leader of the National Party I almost became tangled up in the grand parade. His contribution was a good example of what happens at country shows. I thank the Government for recently providing Nimbin Show Society with \$13,000 in funding. After trying to obtain funding for several years the show society finally achieved its goal in the last few months. I am sure that members of the Nimbin Show Society would want me to place on record their appreciation.

The honourable member for Oxley made an important point that must be reinforced. We cannot underestimate the benefits that are to be derived by students living in towns being given an opportunity to visit country shows and experience life in the country. We must continue to provide that sort of education to students in this State. The honourable member for Oxley referred also to the problem of insurance. The biggest single issue facing show societies today is the insurance required to run shows and provide insurance for buildings. I refer to a letter sent to me by Ian Mulligan, Secretary of the North Coast National Agricultural and Industrial Society Inc., which states in part:

Our Showgrounds are owned partly by the Crown [about 18 acres] and the North Coast National Showground Trust [about 65 acres].

The society had to spend money to obtain an evaluation of its assets for insurance purposes. The society believes that buildings located on the showground are worth over \$10 million. Imagine the sort of insurance bill that would have to be paid. It is costing the society over \$1,000 a week in insurance, whether or not there is a show, and the yearly insurance bill is \$50,000. I am sure that every show society is faced with that sort of problem. As many of these societies, showground trusts or public halls are located on Crown land I implore the Government to establish whether it is able to provide blanket insurance cover for all these trusts. Insurance costs are precluding many showground trusts from operating. Those costs are virtually putting these organisations out of business.

The honourable member for Oxley said earlier that we will support any government that attempts to resolve the problem being faced by showground trusts and public halls right across this State. Showgrounds provide the community with a focal point. The Government must address these issues. I thank all those honourable members who contributed to debate on this matter of public importance. We must ensure the future of country shows and country halls.

Discussion concluded.

CITY OF SYDNEY AMENDMENT (ELECTORAL ROLLS) BILL

Bill received and read a first time.

Second reading to stand as an order of the day.

The House adjourned at 10.09 p.m. until Thursday 8 May 2003 at 10.00 a.m.
